



# Higher Education Review of Barnet and Southgate College

May 2015

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Barnet and Southgate College. The review took place from 6 to 8 May 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Kevin Kendall
- Dr Christopher Stevens
- Mr Ken Harris (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

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

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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

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

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

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

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Barnet and Southgate College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Barnet and Southgate College.

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

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Barnet and Southgate College.

- The strategic planning process that effectively informs programme development. (Expectation B1).
- The planned programme of learning walks that enables teaching staff to share good practice in higher education (Expectation B3).
- The effective support that enables students to progress, and encourages them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Barnet and Southgate College.

By September 2015:

- review the process for appointing the Chairs of Assessment Boards for Higher National programmes to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest (Expectation A3.2)
- strengthen admissions processes to ensure fairness and consistency across all programmes (Expectation B2)
- strengthen the information, guidance and support offered to student representatives to ensure that they are prepared for their role (Expectation B5)
- increase the level of student engagement by including student representation on all higher education committees (Expectation B5)
- ensure that all external examiner reports are made available to students (Expectation B7).

By January 2016:

- ensure that the frameworks for the operation of programmes are consistently implemented to secure parity of the student experience (Expectation A2.1)
- review the use of anti-plagiarism software to support equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment across all programmes (Expectation B6)
- embed the annual monitoring and review process within the new higher education committee structure (Expectation B8)

- develop a more systematic approach to ensuring that opportunities for students on placements are implemented securely and managed effectively (Expectation B10)
- strengthen the formal processes which ensures that all information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (Expectation C).

By March 2016:

- fully articulate the College's strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

By July 2016:

- fully articulate the College's strategic approach to higher education learning and teaching (Expectation B3).

### **Affirmation of action being taken**

The QAA review team did not **affirm** any actions that Barnet and Southgate College is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students. Theme: Student Employability

The review team found that Barnet and Southgate College strongly supports employability for its students through an extensive range of careers support. Local employers are engaged with, and supportive of, the College and are enthusiastic about the quality and commitment of the students that they provide opportunities for. There is currently no clear strategic approach to embedding employability into the Learning and Teaching Strategy or involving employers in the design of programmes or the assessment of learning outcomes.

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

### **About Barnet and Southgate College**

Barnet and Southgate College (the College) is a large general further education college located in the outer London Boroughs of Barnet and Enfield. It became a single institution following the merger of Barnet College and Southgate College in July 2011. It is one of the largest colleges in London and is a member of the 157 group which represents the country's largest further education colleges. The College's vision is: 'To be the most innovative, inspirational and employment focused learning organisation in the education sector'. Its mission is to: 'Provide outstanding learning and employment related opportunities within every market we operate and to offer the highest of expertise and knowledge which will enrich the personal and professional lives of our customers.'

The College has offered higher education since 2008 but has recently taken the strategic decision to increase and widen its higher education provision and work with new partners. The College has 365 higher education students on a range of programmes which are vocational in nature and heavily focused on employability. The College offers a range of foundation degrees, Higher National diplomas, and level 6 study through top ups in Business and Early Years and Childhood Studies. Programmes are offered across the following curriculum areas: Computing, Early Childhood Studies, Child and Youth Studies, Hair, Beauty and Spa Therapy Management, Engineering and Technology, Motorsport Technology, Business, Travel and Tourism, Coaching and Sports Development and Art and Design.

Programmes are validated by the University of Bolton, the University of Derby, the University of Hertfordshire, Middlesex University and Pearson. The College is phasing out its programmes with Middlesex University and moving the majority of its validated provision to the University of Bolton in order to allow for further growth in both provision and higher education student numbers.

The single, major change since the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) of Barnet College in July 2011 is the merger of Barnet and Southgate Colleges. Since the merger there has been a radical alteration of the College's governance structure and a move to a Policy Governance model with a greater focus on teaching and learning at Board level and wider stakeholder involvement and participation. There is a lead governor for higher education on the College's Board of Governors.

The College has made good progress since its IQER. It reviews the quality cycle annually and all staff receive training on quality processes. The College has produced a college-wide Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy which has been widely disseminated. Information on the website is now checked and signed off by Deputy Directors before being made publicly available.

## Explanation of the findings about Barnet and Southgate College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

**a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* 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 Provider delivers its higher education provision in partnership with four awarding bodies, Middlesex University, the University of Hertfordshire, the University of Bolton and the University of Derby, and one awarding organisation Pearson, which retain responsibility for the academic standards of their awards. The recent partnership with the University of Bolton has enabled the College to provide programmes at level 6. The mapping of qualifications to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) for higher education awards run by the College is the responsibility of the degree-awarding bodies and Pearson. Programme specifications indicate that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ and the validation processes of the awarding bodies and organisation establish the appropriateness of the level and volume of study and the credit weighting of undergraduate awards, signpost the correct titling of undergraduate awards and outline the grading and classification thresholds for qualifications. The College's processes enable the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.2 The review team examined a range of documents relating to the setting and maintenance of academic standards, including the partnership agreement between the awarding bodies and the College, the awarding bodies' academic regulations, and approval

documents. The team also met senior staff, programme managers and lecturers during the review visit to explore the use of external reference points.

1.3 The evidence confirms that the College makes appropriate use of external reference points in the design and assessment of programmes, including the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and the Foundation Degree qualification benchmark. During the visit, senior staff, programme managers and lecturers provided detailed examples of how the FHEQ is applied in programme design, with clear reference being made to level descriptors across levels 4, 5 and 6. A few of the lecturing staff differentiated inadequately between levels 3 and 4 and between an award at level 5 and an award at level 6, and it was suggested, in particular, that the level of the delivery of the first year of a higher education programme would be secure if delivered by someone with extensive level 3 experience. The team, however, heard that positioning learning, teaching and assessment within the FHEQ formed part of the staff development offered by the awarding bodies, and recognised that the College staff positively embraced such opportunities.

1.4 The review team confirmed that overall the College fulfils the requirements of the degree-awarding bodies and the awarding organisation effectively and ensures that academic standards are set and maintained with reference to appropriate external benchmarks. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

1.5 The College seeks to ensure that it meets the expectation that its higher education provision is governed by transparent and comprehensive frameworks and regulations by operating its programmes in accordance within the formal arrangements for academic governance, academic frameworks, and assessment regulations established by its awarding bodies and organisation. It does this either directly or, where appropriate, through the development of policies that align with those of its partners. The processes in place enable the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.6 The team explored the use of academic frameworks by reviewing relevant documentation, including policies and regulations, programme specifications and programme handbooks. Meetings were held with programme managers, academic and support staff and students during the visit to discuss their understanding of the academic frameworks and regulations that govern higher education provision.

1.7 Evidence was provided that the regulations and frameworks of the College's awarding bodies and organisation are made available to staff and students directly and through handbooks and module guides, which state programme, level and award pass marks. Meetings with staff and students assured the team that these are generally understood.

1.8 It was noted that in some instances there was over-reliance on awarding body and organisation frameworks and regulations where local arrangements were required. The team saw no evidence, for example, that there were arrangements to enable students on higher national programmes to appeal, as required by Pearson. One significant example of lack of clarity about the nature of regulatory arrangements was noted concerning a rule employed by staff to manage punctuality at classes. The existence of the rule was made clear to students in the module handbook concerned and was generally approved by those students met by the review team. The team was, however, given a number of different accounts of the provenance of the rule. It was told, at various times, that staff have the flexibility to make such arrangements, that it was specific to the programme validation, that it had been adopted as best practice, and that it was embedded in the regulations of the awarding body, none of which were confirmed by the latter. It is therefore, **recommended** that the College ensures that the frameworks for the operation of programmes are consistently implemented to secure parity of the student experience.

1.9 The College operates within the regulatory framework of the awarding bodies and organisation which are transparent and comprehensive in governing how academic credit and qualifications are awarded. The team therefore concludes that Expectation A2.1 is met. The associated level of risk is moderate as there are weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's academic governance structure.

**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**

1.10 The College delivers degree programmes on behalf of its awarding bodies Middlesex University, University of Hertfordshire, University of Bolton (UoB) and the University of Derby (UoD). HND and HNC awards are provided by Pearson.

1.11 The College states that all of the qualifications delivered have programme specifications and handbooks. The definitive records to module level are approved by the relevant awarding partner at validation and re-approved at revalidation. Information about definitive records are contained within course and programme handbooks and on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Internal approval of higher education programmes takes place through the processes leading up to Tariff Planning which involves meetings with staff across all curriculum areas during which the provision for the following year is agreed. Because of these arrangements, the College meets the Expectation in theory.

1.12 The review team tested the Expectation by looking at a range of documentation including programme handbooks for each of the awards which contain definitive records and programme specifications. The team looked at the operations manual for the University of Derby programmes and were able to confirm that the document sets out the collaborative arrangements for the FD Arts and BA (Hons) Child and Youth studies originally approved in 2007 and 2012. The document is current, having been reviewed in 2014. The document shows that the College has a process that provides a reference point for the delivery, assessment, monitoring and review of its programmes of study, and the provision of records.

1.13 The College is involved in the internal approval and validation of programmes. The internal approval of higher education programmes takes place through Tariff Planning and associated processes. Validation documents are available for each of the awarding bodies. The College has a current franchise agreement with the University of Bolton supported by the signed agreement from October 2014. This document sets out academic governance arrangements and responsibilities. The College provides a link tutor, programme team and senior members of staff at validation events for Middlesex University programmes. The team was satisfied that the College has signed agreements and they are current for 2011-17. The College provided annual monitoring reports from each awarding body.

1.14 The College delivers its provision in partnership with its awarding bodies and organisation and operates under their policies and procedures. There are processes in place to provide a documentary reference point for the delivery, assessment, monitoring and review of its programmes of study, and the provision of records. There is evidence of the College managing its responsibilities for the review and monitoring of programmes and the keeping of definitive records for programme specifications for all of its higher education provision. There is also evidence of validation reports for all programmes. Therefore the team concludes that the College meets the Expectation through provision of programme specifications available to staff and students, as required by its awarding bodies and organisation. The management of programme specification for its awards are appropriate therefore, the associated level of risk is low and Expectation A2.2 is met.

**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**

1.15 The Director of Curriculum Development is responsible for the strategic development of higher education at the College. A Deputy Director has responsibility for coordinating higher education and the Director and Head of Quality manage the quality processes. Curriculum Managers are responsible for the standards of the programmes within their areas. There is also a new higher education committee structure containing a Higher Education Strategic Group and a Higher Education Operational Group which will have a role to play in the future. This includes the strategic development of higher education, and the implementation and monitoring of programme delivery.

1.16 The College has an internal process for the development and approval of programmes which is informed by the strategic planning process. New programmes or revalidations of existing programmes are subject to the regulations of the awarding bodies and validation events take place which ensure that the regulations are complied with including the use of externality. There is a comprehensive set of documents showing the development and approval process for University of Derby provision. The College has a set of processes in place supported by those of the awarding bodies that enable it to meet the Expectation in theory.

1.17 The team considered all the relevant documentation and held meetings with the Director of Curriculum Development senior staff, academic staff and employers.

1.18 The College has recently successfully validated a number of programmes with its awarding bodies. Staff understand the validation process and the expectations of higher education which enables them to make a positive contribution to the process. Programme modifications are carried out following awarding body procedures, an example being changes in the structure of the Foundation Degree in Motorsport Technology which is validated by the University of Bolton. When an approved course comes to the end of its approval term it is revalidated through the formal procedures laid down in the regulations of the awarding body, an example of this is the revalidation of the provision with the University of Hertfordshire. There is a robust system of strategic planning and curriculum development in place which can only be further strengthened when the new higher education committee structure becomes fully embedded.

1.19 Overall, the processes for the internal approval and development of new programmes are in place and understood by staff which leads the team to conclude that Expectation A3.1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.20 Validation of programmes is through the awarding bodies' and organisation's procedures and a definitive programme specification is produced for each programme. The latest version of these are available through the awarding body and organisation websites. The College has processes in place which enable it to meet the Expectation in theory.

1.21 The team examined all the relevant documentation, including module and programme specifications, programme and module handbooks, validation reports, external examiners' reports and programme annual monitoring reviews, the team also met a wide range of staff and students.

1.22 Module outcomes are mapped to the programme learning outcomes and assessments are used to demonstrate evidence of achievement of the module outcomes. Assessment practices are governed by awarding body regulations. For university programmes, assessments are checked through the involvement of link tutors, standardisation and internal moderation activities. Assessments are also subject to external examination through the external examiner system.

1.23 The College implements review and monitoring procedures for each programme which also meet the requirements of the relevant awarding body and are informed by external examiners' reports. Assessment Boards are chaired by university staff for those programmes but there is often the lack of an independent chair for Pearson programmes. The College operates an effective internal verification policy for both assessment briefs and students' work.

1.24 The programme and module learning outcomes are effectively validated and meet all relevant benchmarks. Assessments are mapped against these learning outcomes and there are effective standardisation and verification procedures as described in paragraph 1.22 in place to monitor that this happens. There is an effective programme monitoring and review process in place which is informed by staff, students and external examiners' reports. External examiner reports confirm that academic standards have been met. For university-validated programmes assessment boards are chaired by a representative from the university, but for Pearson programmes, they are chaired by the Head of the relevant department. The review team **recommends** that the College review the process for appointing the chairs of Assessment Boards for Higher National programmes to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest.

1.25 Overall, the College has systems in place to ensure that the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable, and that the award of qualifications and credit is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Therefore the review team

concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

1.26 The College has an appropriate self-assessment cycle. An annual monitoring report is produced for each programme and the performance of programmes is monitored through termly meetings between the course team and senior management.

1.27 The universities and Pearson have systems in place as detailed in their regulations which enable them to ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which address whether academic standards are being maintained. The awarding bodies and organisation, combined with the College systems for programme monitoring and review, enable it to meet the Expectation in theory.

1.28 The review team examined documentary evidence showing the university, Pearson and College systems for programme monitoring and review and the recommendations and good practice detailed in external examiners' reports. They also tested the application of these quality assurance procedures in meetings with senior and academic staff.

1.29 The College implements review and monitoring procedures for each programme which also meet the requirements of the relevant awarding body and are informed by external examiners' reports. Validation and periodic review of programmes also takes place regularly according to awarding body regulations. Review documents and external examiner reports from the College are considered through the universities' committee structures.

1.30 Both the universities and Pearson appoint external examiners who visit the College at least once per year and produce an annual report on academic standards for each programme based largely on the scrutiny of assessments and assessment practice.

1.31 The awarding bodies and organisation have sound procedures in place to ensure the maintenance of academic standards. Staff at the College share a common understanding of how programme monitoring works and follow all procedures effectively. External examiners confirm that academic standards are met.

1.32 Overall there are procedures in place from the universities and Pearson to ensure the maintenance of academic standards at the College which are understood and followed by College staff. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation A3.3 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.33 It is the expectation of the College that it can ensure that its academic standards are set and maintained in line with national standards and expectations through the use of a range of external and independent expertise. Externality is employed when programmes are approved or re-approved. There are external examiners and standards verifiers in place for all programmes to ensure that standards are maintained. These participate in the assessment process, attend Board of Examiners and report annually on the programmes. These, in turn, are used to inform the College Self-Assessment Report and the Quality Improvement Plan and enable the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.34 The review team considered a range of documents relating to the recruitment, selection and involvement of external assessors and external examiners, including partnership agreements, validation documentation, external examiner nomination forms and reports and the minutes from assessment panels and boards. The review team also met staff, students and employers during the review to explore the College approach to externality.

1.35 In its meetings with College staff and through its review of documentation, the team was able to confirm that appropriate procedures and processes were in place to enable the College to be confident that its programmes were in alignment with national standards and expectations. It was noted, however, that, except where use is made of external examiners in the annual monitoring process, the College is reactive rather than proactive in this arrangement, seeing it as the responsibility of its awarding bodies and organisation to ensure that the external assessors for programme approval and external examiners are in place. There had been consultation to ensure that programmes in childhood studies were designed to meet occupational standards. Other than this, the team saw no evidence that employers were involved in the design of vocational programmes.

1.36 The team considers that, overall, the College makes appropriate use of external and independent expertise in programme design, delivery and assessment in order to ensure that academic standards are appropriately set and maintained. The review team therefore concludes 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 other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.37 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area were met and the associated levels of risk were low with the exception of Expectation A2.1 which had a moderate risk. In all sections under academic standards, the College is also required to adhere to the procedures of its awarding bodies and organisation. The review team makes two recommendations in this section. The recommendations relate to the following: ensuring that the frameworks for the operation of programmes are consistently implemented to secure parity of the student experience; and reviewing the process for appointing the Chairs of Assessment Boards for Higher National programmes to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest. There are no affirmations or features of good practice in this section. The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation at the College **meets** UK expectations.



## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 New programmes or revalidations of existing programmes are subject to the regulations of the awarding body, a recent revalidation was for the initial year of the Extended Engineering and Technology, which is delivered by several partner colleges and validated by the University of Hertfordshire. The College's Higher Education Strategy focuses on non-traditional learners, employer needs and vocational relevance, the local community and progression pathways. The College has mapped the developmental and approval processes against the relevant section of the code. College plans to embed a new HE Strategic Group into the higher education committee structure should strengthen the process still further by bringing the oversight of higher education strategy under one committee.

2.2 The strategic planning process involving both curriculum and senior staff at the College combined with the development and approval of new programmes through the Universities enable the College to meet Expectation B1 in theory.

2.3 The review team examined documents relating to strategic planning at the College, the College staffing and structure, university regulations on programme development and review, documentation relating to the development and approval process through the University of Derby, the launch review with the University of Bolton, and held meetings with employers and staff concerned at all levels within the College.

2.4 The College adopted existing programme specifications from the Universities of Bolton and Derby and there was a comprehensive developmental and approval process. Programmes undergo periodic review according to the awarding body regulations but it was also decided to undertake a launch review with the University of Bolton following the establishment of this new partnership and, arising from this, course leaders from the College are to share best practice with link tutors from the University. Labour Market Intelligence data is used to help enable the College to meet local, regional and national skills needs. In some areas, for example Motorsport, the College takes advice from an employer advisory group.

2.5 There is a strategic planning process for higher education as part of a College-wide process which effectively embeds an annual cycle of meetings, presentations to the Executive Leadership Group and supporting documentation which leads to the production of a final planning document for the year across the whole College which leads to final sign-off by the Board of Governors.

2.6 Overall, the College's processes for programme design, development and approval work effectively (see paragraphs 1.17-1.19). The College clearly understands its delegated responsibilities and operates appropriate procedures to comply with academic regulations set out by its awarding bodies and organisation, and has successfully completed formal validations. The College has very effective processes in place, as described in this section

for the design, development and approval of programmes and the team recognise that the strategic planning process that effectively informs programme development is **good practice**.

2.7 The internal processes for developing ideas for higher education programmes through to approval are sufficiently appropriate to enable the College to successfully gain validation and accreditation. The College is effective at discharging its responsibilities for the design and approval of programmes and has validated a number of awards recently. The team concludes that Expectation B1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission**

**Findings**

2.8 The College states that it has a transparent, informative and fair recruitment, selection and admission procedure for its higher education provision that is informed throughout by the principle of integrity in recruitment to ensure that only those applicants who can demonstrate that they can complete the programme will be recruited onto them. Applications are processed through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and some through a mixture of UCAS and direct application to the College. The College states that it has an inclusive process that supports widening participation. Students are also able to enrol at the awarding university. Entry criteria are published on Course Information Sheets and the College prospectus. There is a team of admissions staff with responsibility for processing applications; and provision for students to appeal the admissions decision process. The College seeks to monitor and improve its processes by conducting a First Impressions Survey on recruitment, selection and admission. The processes that the College have in place enable the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.9 The team looked at a number of documents including policies relating to admissions such as validation documents, the Equality and Diversity policy, the Single Equality Scheme and the Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) policy. Meetings were held with senior staff and staff involved in the application and admission processes. Applications and admissions were discussed during two meetings held with students.

2.10 RPL is considered and applied appropriately. Applicants are able to appeal admissions decisions but no appeals have been made to date. In meetings held with both staff and students, the team was satisfied that both parties were aware of the process and would be able to access the procedure if needed. During these meetings the College articulated its approach to admissions and advised that it was developing a higher education specific admissions policy. This is currently at an early stage and, due to the lack of a higher education-specific admissions policy, the review team **recommends** that the College take steps to strengthen the admissions processes to ensure fairness and consistency across all programmes.

2.11 Students and prospective students receive suitable information before application and throughout the admissions process and are able to access a variety of information through course leaflets and online and enrolment events at the college which contain course content, types of study, timetables and assessment schedules. Fees information is included in some information but not consistently. The College's marketing plan outlines appropriate admissions content in publicity materials. It was confirmed that all students receive an interview. All staff involved in admissions are appropriately trained and supported in their role.

2.12 The College has appropriate admissions processes in place. Staff are suitably trained and students talk positively about their experiences. There is evidence of reviewing the application and admissions processes. The review team concludes that Expectation B2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.13 It is the ambition of the College to provide learning opportunities and teaching practices that enable students to operate as 'independent, reflective learners and to develop as analytical, critical and creative thinkers'. The College seeks to articulate this goal through the College Teaching and Learning Strategy. At subject level, teaching, learning and assessment policies are outlined in validation documents. Planned programmes of learning and teaching, designed to deliver the objectives and outcomes that students must attain in order to achieve their intended qualification, are shared with students through the programme handbook or the module handbook or guide. The processes that the College have in place allow for the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.14 In testing this Expectation, the review team examined a range of documents relating to learning and teaching, including relevant strategies and policies, survey results, minutes of meetings, handbooks, lesson observation and peer review records, programme approval documents, and information relating to continuing professional development (CPD) and staff development. During the visit, the review team met senior staff, programme managers, lecturers, support staff, student representatives and students to discuss the approach taken by the College.

2.15 It was noted that, in 2011, the Integrated Quality Enhancement Review report (IQER) of Barnet College found it advisable that the College should develop an overarching higher education teaching, learning and assessment strategy to ensure the consistent interpretation of awarding body requirements across schools of study, rather than rely on information in validation documents. The review team concludes that, while a Learning and Teaching Strategy has been developed, both are College-wide and neither gives detailed attention to the articulation of the College approach to learning and teaching of higher education. It was felt that a learning and teaching strategy focused on the needs of higher education would provide greater consistency across the institution and enable the College to bring greater clarity to the requirements of delivery at levels 4, 5 and 6. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College take steps to articulate fully its strategic approach to higher education learning and teaching.

2.16 The College seeks to improve the quality of learning and teaching by supporting lecturers in undertaking academic and teaching qualifications and providing them with continuing professional development, including opportunities to study for academic qualifications. The College expects staff to participate in the Teaching and Learning Coaching Programme. Staff are encouraged to attend development sessions put on by its awarding bodies. The College provides resources for teaching teams to attend higher education conferences where best practice is disseminated and sees that as a means of enhancing learning and teaching, and aligning its provision with best practice nationally. The Record of Work, which all teaching staff are required to keep, sets out the professional standards framework for teachers. The College operates a planned programme of learning walks, as informal mechanisms for staff to observe the practice of others. These are informed by key College priorities relating to the development and improvement of the learner experience decided on by the Executive Leadership Group and coordinated by

the Quality Team. The review team regards the learning walks that enable teaching staff to share good practice in higher education is **good practice**.

2.17 The College takes steps to evaluate the effectiveness of its teaching and learning in a number of ways. It secures student feedback through surveys and other mechanisms. It has a Learning and Development Policy and operates a system of appraisal, peer review, lesson observation and personal development review, in which staff reflect on their performance with their line manager.

2.18 Overall, the team considers that the College articulates, reviews and enhances the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices and that further development and systematisation of procedures will underpin a more consistent approach to and greater clarity of its approach to higher education learning and teaching and therefore concludes that Expectation B3 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.19 The College Strategy seeks to ensure that appropriate support is provided to enable students to progress from further education programmes at the College into higher education with clear and realistic progression opportunities to an undergraduate degree, through a curriculum which meets the requirements of local employers and communities. This strategy informs the approach to the support arrangements and resources provided for higher education learners, particularly with regard to the provision of programmes and embedding employability skills. Resources and support arrangements for programmes are considered by senior management. The College Executive Leadership Group (ELG), in general, and the Director of Curriculum, in particular, plays a central role in ensuring that the College mission, strategic plan and financial priorities are aligned to enable this aim to be met. The Director of Curriculum is supported by a team of Deputy Directors, one of whom also has cross-College higher education coordinator responsibilities, and by the Director of Quality. Curriculum Managers oversee areas of study and, within them, Course Leaders have day-to-day responsibility for the running of programmes. The College Strategic and Curriculum Plans provide the starting point for the development of a Strategic Plan for each support service. Service areas use a self-assessment report, which is approved by the ELG. Each service area produces an action plan which is Red-Amber-Green risk rated. These processes allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.20 In order to test this Expectation, the review team looked at the support provided through the virtual learning environment (VLE) and examined a variety of documents relating to student development, including validation documentation, programme handbooks and module guides, and information on learning support. During the visit, the team met senior staff, students, employers, programme managers, lecturers and support service staff.

2.21 Student guidance arrangements, including pre-entry guidance and induction, are effective. There are open days and taster events. Students confirmed that they found the pre-entry guidance helpful, comprehensive and accurate. All receive an induction to their programme. Support for students while studying addresses a range of needs. There is targeted support for entry into higher education that can be accessed by students at the College on level 3, or by those in higher education wishing to progress on to another award. A budgeting spreadsheet makes students aware of the costs that this might involve and enable them to calculate accordingly. There is also financial information for students. The students and student representatives whom the review team met were aware of this advice and confirmed that it was helpful. There is considerable support for careers development. Careers and employment advice is provided through the Additional Learning Support Team (ALS). This provides help with CV writing, personal statements and interview practice. The ALS refers students requiring specialist subject advice to their academic tutors.

2.22 All higher education students have personal tutors. Ensuring that this happens is the responsibility of the Curriculum Manager and the Programme Leader often plays that role. Students praised the personal and tutorial support and the accessibility and willingness of teaching staff to answer questions and provide support. The take-up of personal tutoring is monitored through student surveys. Students are able to access other sources of support as required. Learner Services provide academic support through access to learning centre resources. This includes study skills, such as motivation and time management. Learning and community advisers offer advice and guidance. Student Advisers offer pastoral support

and make referral to counselling services, when required. Learning advisers deal with academic issues. The team heard that there were plans to work in a different way with higher education students, The College recognised that there would be benefit in developing workshops on subjects such as referencing and plagiarism.

2.23 The College is committed to the principles of equality and diversity, has a well developed Equality and Diversity policy and has achieved provisional accreditation for Investors in Diversity. The College has institution-wide arrangements for ensuring that those with particular learning needs are able to study effectively. The ALS team assesses the support needed, and seek to do at the application stage. Where students do not wish to declare a disability at recruitment, the personal tutor system can help them to access additional support if required. Students met by the team confirmed that their arrangements were effective.

2.24 In light of the extensive support provided for students by academic and professional service staff, the team regards the effective support that enables students to progress, and encourages them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential is **good practice**.

2.25 It was confirmed that students received appropriate handbooks and module guides. There is a strategic commitment to using the VLE to support students. The College makes use of the VLE to support teaching and learning and all students have access to appropriate learning environments. Arrangements with the awarding bodies ensure that their e-learning platforms are compatible with the College's own platform. The team was given a demonstration of the VLE. Programme planning is overseen by the ELG and ensures that additional book stock needs are identified when the programme is approved to run. There is a specific section of the library relating to higher education that is used separately and ring-fenced for higher education students. A review of higher education book usage is planned and the College has spent £10,500 on higher education books this year. The library responds to book requests from students and tutors and receives updates of book and journal requirements from curriculum staff. The College relies on its awarding bodies for access to electronic journals.

2.26 It is considered that the College provides, monitors and evaluates the support arrangements and resources for higher education and that these arrangements enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The College has a comprehensive approach to ensuring that students have access to the resources they require to develop their potential. The team therefore concludes that Expectation B4 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement**

**Findings**

2.27 The College actively engages students, both as individuals and as part of course groups. It does this through internal surveys and the National Student Survey (NSS). Students are able to attend student representative meetings and course representatives are in place. Higher education students also have the opportunity to attend curriculum-area student representative meetings. Most higher education students have their views represented through their representative's attendance at course team meetings and boards of study. The College does not have a Students' Union. The College strategic plan identifies ways to further develop and improve the student voice for higher education learners. The policies and processes in place enable the Expectation to be met in theory and to provide opportunities for students to engage as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

2.28 In testing this Expectation, the review team considered a range of documents, including the student submission, minutes from the various Boards of Studies, College surveys, Student Representative meetings, Student Liaison Meeting minutes, the Higher Education Strategy, College prospectus, course handbooks and the College website. Meetings were held with senior, support and academic staff, students and employers. The team also looked at evidence of training and support provided for students' representatives, along with other sources to identify evidence of the student voice.

2.29 There are examples of issues being raised by students at staff-student liaison meetings and Boards of Study, and action being taken by the College to address these are evident in the minutes. Further exploration of other minutes revealed a wider level of engagement with students raising issues. The Foundation Degree Business Board of Studies minutes recorded examples of students attending and raising issues with some issues resolved and answered during the meeting. Students were not represented on all higher education committees.

2.30 Change had occurred as a result of student comment, such as changes to the catering provision, and the issuing of identity cards and increased library opening hours. The College provided multiple examples of 'You Said We Did' documentation which demonstrated other examples of change brought about as a result of consultation with students. The College uses an internal survey to further capture the experiences and concerns of students.

2.31 Some student representatives are provided with training from one of the College's awarding bodies. There was little evidence to show that students receive formal training or documentation to support them in their role. In a meeting held with student representatives it was confirmed by the group that they had received no formal training or information about their role. In light of the lack of sufficient support materials or training, the review team **recommends** that the College strengthen the information, guidance and support offered to student representatives to ensure that they are prepared for their role. It further **recommends** that that the College increase the level of student engagement by including student representation on all higher education committees.

2.32 The review team was able to see examples of change arising from student representation, student membership on some committees and evidence of the student voice



in action and therefore concluded that Expectation B5 is met. The associated level of risk is moderate as the lack of sufficient guidance, support and training and the lack of student representation on all higher education committees means that are weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's academic governance structure.

**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**

2.33 The assessment practices for higher education programmes in the College are governed by awarding body regulations. Assessments for university-validated programmes are checked through the involvement of link tutors, standardisation and internal moderation activities. The College also has its own internal verification policy which applies to all College programmes and has the stated intention of ensuring that assessment practice meets national standards and providing a continuous check on the consistency, quality and fairness of marking, grading and overall assessment of students' work.

2.34 Processes are in place to ensure that assessment is reliable and external examiners' reports confirm that assessments are appropriate and meet relevant academic standards. These policies and procedures enable the College to meet Expectation B6 in theory.

2.35 The review team examined all the College documentation relating to assessment, including documents referenced in paragraph 2.33-2.34, and held meetings with students, senior staff and academic staff.

2.36 There is a good range and variety of assessment tasks which address relevant learning outcomes and prepare students for employment. Assessments are well timetabled, allowing students to plan their workload, and timely and developmental feedback on performance is provided. Students are also well informed and understand the process of assessment through both written material and briefings by staff.

2.37 Students are provided with an assessment schedule at the start of the year with deadlines for submissions stated. Assessment briefs are internally verified to ensure that, for example, the tasks address the relevant learning outcomes. Students can apply for consideration of mitigating circumstances if necessary but otherwise late submissions are subject to a penalty depending on awarding body regulations. Some university assessments are submitted through anti-plagiarism software. The turnaround time for marking is two weeks and students receive feedback on their performance along with the grade. Assessment Boards are chaired by representatives from the universities for university-validated programmes but by the Head of Department or Deputy Director in the case of Pearson programmes.

2.38 Assessments are also subject to external examination. Assessment practices and processes are articulated through programme handbooks and module guides. The College also has a RPL Policy which applies to all students at the College.

2.39 The College has an internal verification system in place which is used effectively and understood by staff to support awarding body processes such as moderation and standardisation activities. External examiner reports confirm that academic standards have been met.

2.40 The College's policy on the recognition of prior learning is used only rarely and is not fully understood by all staff. It was, however, used effectively to enrol second year foundation degree students from another college when it was unable to sustain a viable programme.

2.41 Students on university-validated programmes have access to university anti-plagiarism software for submission of assessments but this is not used consistently, and students on Pearson programmes do not have access to it. Where it is used, it is for disciplinary, rather than developmental reasons. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College review the use of anti-plagiarism software to support equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment across all programmes.

2.42 Overall, policies and procedures for the assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning are in place and effective. Students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation B6 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.43 As noted in A3.4, there are external examiners and standards verifiers in place for all programmes to ensure that standards are maintained. External examiners and standards verifiers are appointed by the appropriate awarding body or awarding organisation and work to the regulations under that awarding body or awarding organisation. The roles and responsibilities of external examiners are defined by the awarding bodies, which organise initial induction training and monitor performance to verify that they are acting in accordance with requirements. External examiners are normally appointed for a maximum of four years, although one awarding body allows four intakes, if that is longer. External examiners are expected to undertake at least one visit to the College per year. They are required to review assessment briefs, examination papers and samples of marked student work and produce an annual report. Arrangements for the moderation of assessed work are established by the awarding bodies and organisation. For Pearson programmes, standards verifiers sample approximately 30 per cent of the assessed work. Issues raised by external examiners and standards verifiers are considered both by the awarding body or organisation and by the College, where they feed into the annual review process. Programme teams are expected to respond to external examiners. The processes in place allow the College to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.44 In order to test this Expectation, the review team considered a range of documents related to external examining, including the partnership agreements, awarding body regulations, external examiner and standards verifier reports, and annual monitoring arrangements. During the review visit meetings were held with senior staff, lecturers and support staff, programme managers and student representatives.

2.45 In order to make scrupulous use of external examiners, the College, the quality of the delivery of programmes by College staff, and the achievement of learning outcomes by its higher education students, are tested by the process of external examining on an annual basis. With all awarding bodies, the course receives an external examiner report which contains details determined and structured according to the regulations of the individual awarding bodies. Course teams of university-validated programmes in receipt of an external examiner report are required to write a response to the external examiner report and demonstrate how recommendations and actions identified within the report are being addressed.

2.46 Senior staff, programme managers and lecturers, whom the team met during the review saw the role of the external examiner as an integral part of the maintenance of standards and articulated the process of engaging with and responding to external examiner findings. From its review of documentation, it was confirmed that the College was fully engaging with the requirements of their awarding bodies for the engagement with external examiners in the assessment of work and the annual review of programmes. Examples of responses to external examiners, which included extracts from action plans to follow through points raised, were seen. It should be noted that at the time of the review, the partnerships with the Universities of Derby and Bolton had not been in place long enough for the first annual reporting cycle to be completed. However, the team was able to confirm its finding in the confidence of arrangements for these partnerships from the documentation it was able to see.

2.47 Students were asked whether they were made aware of external examiners and had access to external examiner reports. While students were aware of the role of external examiners, there was no evidence that they were made aware of their names and the institutions at which they worked. College staff confirmed that there were no arrangements in place to ensure that external examiner and part A of subject verifier reports were shared with students. It is therefore **recommended** that the College should ensure that all external examiner reports are made available to students.

2.48 Overall, the team considers that the College has robust processes in place for receiving, considering and responding to external examiner reports and makes scrupulous use of this external examiners. It is therefore concluded that Expectation B7 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.49 The College has a Quality Assurance and Improvement Policy, the principles of which are embedded through their Self-Assessment Cycle. An annual monitoring report is produced for each programme, with input from staff, students and the external examiner, and these are used to inform the College Self-Assessment Report and the Quality Improvement Plan. Performance of programmes is also monitored through termly meetings between the Course Team and Senior Management. These include the Deputy Director HE Coordination, the Head of Quality and Directors and Deputy Directors of Curriculum.

2.50 For higher education programmes, the College implements review and monitoring procedures for each programme which are consistent with College policy and also to meet the requirements of the relevant awarding body. This involves completing the reports using awarding body templates which then enter the awarding body quality processes. The annual monitoring reports for the Foundation Degrees in Business, Computing and Early Years, which are relevant to Middlesex University, contain a review of the programme plus an action plan. Programmes validated by the Universities of Derby and Bolton are in their first year so have not yet completed an annual quality cycle. Pearson programmes use the standard College quality processes.

2.51 Periodic review of programmes takes place regularly according to the awarding partner's regulations.

2.52 The College's annual quality cycle together with the production of a programme annual report plus action plan, which is reviewed termly on a rolling basis by senior management, enables it to meet Expectation B8 in theory.

2.53 The team examined university and Pearson quality assurance policies and procedures, and scrutinised College annual monitoring and external examiners' reports as well as discussing the processes during meetings with staff.

2.54 Operationally, the monitoring and review processes are effective, regular and systematic. The programme monitoring reports for the College programmes are embedded within the universities' quality cycles as well as being part of the College quality processes. Some annual monitoring reports are rather brief in places and not all are fully completed but university representatives confirmed that the process is effective. The College Self-Assessment Report does not significantly refer to higher education but the most recent Pearson Quality Review and Development Report did not raise any concerns in relation to higher education. University validation, revalidation and review documents also indicate that the College has effective processes in place. The College has recently established a new committee structure for higher education and the minutes of the early meetings of the HE Strategic and HE Operational Group do not make reference to programme monitoring and review. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College embed the annual monitoring and review process within the new higher education committee structure in order to formally review performance of higher education programmes across the College.

2.55 Overall, there are effective processes in place for the routine monitoring and review of individual programmes. Systems to monitor actions arising from these processes are

effective but could be improved by formally having an oversight of all programmes through the higher education committee structure. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.56 The College uses the academic regulations of its awarding bodies and organisation for academic appeals, and the regulations which inform these processes are made accessible to students via student handbooks and are also available online. The College operates its own complaints and appeals policy and this also covers admissions appeals.

2.57 The College has procedures and policies in place that allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.58 In testing the Expectation the review team looked at a range of documents including the complaints log, examples of complaints, the College complaints policy, the complaints and appeals policy for each of their awarding bodies, course handbooks and the annual Compliments and Complaints report. The Student Submission, on the College website and VLE were also considered. Meetings were held with staff and students.

2.59 No formal complaints have been made by higher education students but in meetings staff and students were able to demonstrate an understanding of both the complaints and appeals procedures and were aware of the differences between an academic appeal and a complaint. The College takes steps to ensure that all students receive clear information about the complaints and appeals process and information is provided to students through a variety of methods including the induction process, information published on the VLE and website, in all course handbooks. Students confirmed that they receive advice and information about the complaints and appeals process and knew how to access if needed. The Student Submission states that students are aware of processes and regulations on plagiarism.

2.60 The College takes steps to review and enhance its complaints and appeals procedures. Although it relies largely on the procedures of its awarding bodies, the documentation shows that all policies are current. The College was able to demonstrate reviewing and enhancement of its internal processes by way of its Compliments and Complaints Annual Report. Overall it serves as a comprehensive document that looks at all complaints, separated by subjects, building and other demographics such as age and ethnicity.

2.61 The review team is satisfied that the College makes its complaints and appeals procedure available. Numerous opportunities are provided to inform students of the process, and both staff and students were able to demonstrate and acknowledge awareness of this. The review team conclude that Expectation B9 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

2.62 The College has responsibilities delegated to it by its awarding bodies and for managing and delivering elements of programmes where these incorporate work experience and work placement. This currently applies to programmes in the areas of business, computing, early years and childhood studies, and sport. In these instances, the College has responsibility for managing the work placement arrangements, and putting documentation in place to ensure that employers, staff, and students are familiar with the responsibilities of each during the provision of a work placement experience in order to address national expectations as well as those of its awarding bodies. The College has processes in place that enable it to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.63 In order to test this Expectation, the review team considered a range of documents and information relating to working with other organisations including the partnership agreement, programme arrangements, placement information, including written agreements between parties, health and safety checks, and risk assessments. The team also met employers, senior staff, programme managers and students.

2.64 In reviewing this Expectation, it was found that the term 'placement' was used by the College to describe a number of occurrences. These include placements that are a formal part of the student learning experience; placement opportunities which students can take in addition to their formal learning; activity to simulate work-based learning provided by the College; work experience provided outside term-time; work-based setting in the early years and childhood studies area which students must have prior to entry to the programme.

2.65 From the documentation that it saw and from the discussions that it had, the team was able to confirm that the College was able to meet the requirements of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation that enable them to take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. It was able to confirm that the College has documentation setting out its responsibilities with regard to managing provision with employers, including a placement preparation checklist for students, health and safety questionnaires for employers, and a student placement evaluation form. The team also saw guidance for internships.

2.66 A meeting was held with employers who had provided placements and work experience for students. They stated that student contribution was valued and that students were able to contribute to and benefit from their work experience. Employers confirmed that they had not been involved in placement design and did not assess students on placement. The team explored what arrangements the College had to ensure that, where placements were required to meet learning outcomes, it could guarantee that all students would receive a placement. This had not been a problem, as the College had the capacity to offer student placement itself.

2.67 In reviewing the evidence available to it, the review team concludes that the College was meeting its obligations under this Expectation. However, it also concludes that the College would benefit from greater clarity about the role that placement plays in the delivery

of learning outcomes. The review team heard from one student that the voluntary placement that the College enabled her to undertake had greatly contributed to her competence on the programme. While opportunities like this are welcome, the College needs to give consideration to the equity of such ad hoc arrangements. The College might also consider whether its due diligence arrangements for placements should be formalised, and how it can build on the good practice in placement activity that can be identified in some areas. In the light of such considerations, the review team **recommends** that the College develop a more systematic approach to ensuring that opportunities for students on placements are implemented securely and managed effectively.

2.68 Overall, the review team concludes that the College has appropriate mechanisms for managing and supporting learning experiences facilitated by external parties. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate because there are weaknesses in the operation of part of the provider's academic governance structure.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

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

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

2.70 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. All of the Expectations relating to the College's quality of student learning opportunities are met with low risk apart from B5 and B10 which are met with moderate risk. The review team makes eight recommendations in this section which concern: strengthening admissions processes to ensure fairness and consistency across all programmes; fully articulating the College's strategic approach to higher education learning and teaching; strengthening the information, guidance and support offered to student representatives to ensure that they are prepared for their role; increasing the level of student engagement by including student representation on all higher education committees; reviewing the use of anti-plagiarism software to support equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment across all programmes; ensuring that all external examiner reports are made available to students; embedding the annual monitoring and review process within the new higher education committee structure, and developing a more systematic approach to ensuring that opportunities for students on placements are implemented securely and managed effectively.

2.71 There are three features of good practice, namely: the strategic planning process that effectively informs programme development; the planned programme of learning walks that enables teaching staff to share good practice in higher education; and the effective support that enables students to progress, and encourages them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The review team concludes that, overall, the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

3.1 The College publishes annual prospectuses for both full and part-time provision. The part-time prospectus is specifically targeted towards higher education and professional development students. Information within these publications is checked for accuracy by the Curriculum Managers and Programme Leaders. Governance documents and the College's mission statement are available online. Students can access information through a variety of media including the website, course leaflets, prospectus, the VLE and course handbooks. The College also makes use of social media to advertise its courses. The College clearly and routinely promotes higher education opportunities to potential progressing further education students. Internal progression events are conducted during the year to promote internal recruitment. The College advertises extensively through the local press. 'Wrap around' adverts regularly feature during application and enrolment periods.

3.2 The website has a dedicated higher education section. Course handbooks and course assessment briefs are checked at the University validation panels for accuracy. The information provided by the College, and the processes and policies it has in place, make the College's information fit for purpose, accessible and reliable, allowing the Expectation to be met in theory.

3.3 In testing the Expectation, the review team reviewed a number of sources of information, including the College website and VLE, printed material, course handbooks, the Student Submission, the College Mission Statement and evidence of accreditation to the matrix Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance. Meetings were held with staff and students.

3.4 Students speak very positively about the usefulness of the information contained in the course handbooks and are confident in the accuracy of information. In meetings held with College staff, including senior staff, it was confirmed that the accuracy of the information is checked as part of the approval process with the awarding bodies and directors of programmes and final sign off is completed by the Executive Leadership Group (ELG).

3.5 Fee information was not available on the College website. In the meeting with support staff, the team was told that students were able to receive accurate fee information via the college website. Further investigation revealed that fee information is provided as part of the tariff planning process. The College was able to provide a statement on the status of the information which advised that it was being updated for the upcoming academic year and would be made available online when this process was complete. Information on assessment, timetabling, module information, entry requirements and progression options is available on the website and is accurate and accessible. Students speak positively about the information provided on the College website.

3.6 The team was presented with a number of documents that identified an informal approach to the checking and updating of course information. In addition to this, the College presented evidence of accreditation to the matrix Standard for Information, Advice and

Guidance. The College was able to demonstrate that it has a process in place to ensure the accuracy of information available on the website, but this lacked consistency and strategic oversight. Therefore the review team **recommend** that the College strengthen formal processes to ensure that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.7 The review team concludes that the College makes available a wide range of information about its provision in both print and digital formats. Students have confidence in the accuracy and availability of information. Expectation (C) is met and the associated level of risk is moderate as processes are broadly adequate but there are some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

3.8 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk was moderate. The team makes one recommendation in this section concerning strengthening the formal processes which ensures that all information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The Strategic Plan 2012-15 is a College-wide document and refers to the College mission of providing outstanding and employment-related opportunities. The College HE Strategic Plan 2011-14 does not refer specifically to enhancement but there is some reference to enhancement in the draft HE Strategic Plan 2015-18.

4.2 Although there is not a specific enhancement strategy, the policies and processes that the College has in place, namely, the Teaching and Learning Strategy, the peer observations and learning walks, the lesson observation scheme, the student feedback mechanisms and the programme annual monitoring and review process, enable the Enhancement Expectation to be met in theory.

4.3 The review team examined key documents including the Teaching and Learning Strategy, the lesson observation scheme and the annual monitoring reports of the programmes and held meetings with both students and staff at the College.

4.4 There is no specific policy or strategy on enhancement but the Teaching and Learning Strategy refers to many aspects of enhancement, for example, sharing good practice through peer observation of teaching and learning walks, and the College's CPD programme. The lesson observation scheme also supports enhancement and has a stated purpose of monitoring, evaluating and improving the quality of the learner experience. The lesson observation scheme also informs the Performance Development Review process which in turn identifies staff development and scholarly activity requirements.

4.5 Each student is allocated a personal tutor and each programme has a student representative who are able to feedback issues relating to learning opportunities to the College staff, for example, the library now opens earlier at the students' request. Feedback from students on placements is also used to make improvements where necessary. The programme annual monitoring and review process is used to support enhancement where an annual course review is written with an action plan and they are monitored through termly meetings between the course team and senior management. A higher education committee structure has just been developed which is also likely to have a role in the enhancement of student learning opportunities in the future.

4.6 Deliberate steps are being taken by the College to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. This is primarily through the programme monitoring and review processes supported by the lesson observation scheme and sharing of good practice through peer observations and learning walks.

4.7 However, evidence of engagement with enhancement in the College Self-Evaluation Document is very limited and the higher education committee structure comprising the HE Operational Group and HE Strategic Group is still new, having only met on a small number of occasions this year. Although senior staff at the College are undoubtedly aware of quality improvement arising from course review and lesson observations, there are limited formal processes where this is discussed and monitored. Therefore the review team **recommends** that the College fully articulate their strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities, which will also involve the role of the higher education committee structure.



4.8 Overall, the team concludes that Expectation (Enhancement) is met and the associated level of risk is low. The College takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities although it recognises that some of the structures and processes need further development. The College has effective processes in place to enhance learning.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

4.9 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The Expectation in this area is met and the level of risk is low. The College has systems to disseminate good practice but there is no specific overarching policy or strategy on enhancement. The Teaching and Learning Strategy makes appropriate references to enhancement. Deliberate steps are being taken by the College to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities but formal processes where opportunities for improvement are discussed are limited and the team made one recommendation in this area which is that the College fully articulate their strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

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

### Findings

5.1 The College is aware of its role within the local and regional community in contributing to economic prosperity, as well as the benefits that higher education can bring to individuals. The College recognises that its three-year strategic plan must enable it to meet employer needs as identified in regional strategy and the Local Economic Plan. Provision needs to align with labour market information. The decision of the College to provide opportunities to study at level 6 is part of this general approach.

5.2 The focus on student employability manifests itself at the programme design stage, where attention is paid to employer need and students' opportunities on programme completion. The College sees the employability of students as a key feature of the strategic mission of the College and sees developing an employability mind-set into all students as a central part of its strategic approach to higher education.

5.3 The College is committed to vocational programmes that meet local employment needs, such as the foundation degree in business, where students engage in an internship as part of the structured programme of employability development or can provide niche market opportunities, such as the Foundation Degree in Motorsports. Students on the Foundation Degree Motorsports have a planned series of activities which enhance their employability through industrial engagement. This includes a visit to FF Corse Racing at their Silverstone headquarters; a visit to the Honda factory; a visit by FC Tuning, visits to Brands Hatch to run the College's own motorsports racing team, workshop visit by the Chief UK Instructor for Ferrari and regular workshop 'walk rounds' of high performance cars. The HNC Hair, Beauty and Spa Management involves students setting up and managing a Graduate Spa business at the College, which mirrors business requirements, with students operating as independent of members of staff. The early years and childhood studies programmes are underpinned by work-based learning. The provision too of level 6 in this area was strategically planned to support the local workforce. The review team met students and employers in all these areas, and from these meetings were able to confirm that both students and employers were of the view that their employability was being significantly enhanced.

5.4 Despite the ambition to embed employability into programmes and the positive outcome noted by employers, there is no clear statement of a strategic approach to the embedding of employability into the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and, as has been noted in Expectation B10, paragraphs 2.65-2.68, the approach to the provision of placement opportunities is not systematic. The employers met by the review team were enthusiastic about the students for whom they provided vocational support, but had not been involved in the design of programmes or in the assessment of learning outcomes. However, employability is strongly supported through the extensive range of careers support, which has been outlined throughout Expectation B4.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 29-32 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#)

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

**Programme specifications**

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

**Public information**

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

**Quality Code**

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

**Reference points**

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

**Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

**Threshold academic standard**

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

**Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

**Widening participation**

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

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