



Higher Education Review of Birmingham Metropolitan College

February 2016

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at [Birmingham Metropolitan College](#). The review took place from 10 to 12 February 2016 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Claire Alfrey
- Ms Dorothy McElwee
- Dr Hayley Randle
- Mr Alam Mahbubul (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 8.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Birmingham Metropolitan College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its 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 Birmingham Metropolitan College.

- The integrative approach to strategic oversight of higher education provision across the College which combines the business and academic planning processes (Expectations A2.1, A3.1, B1, B4, B8).
- The effective partnership with its awarding bodies which underpins academic standards and promotes staff development and student learning opportunities (Expectations A2.1, B3).
- The wide range of teaching and learning initiatives that proactively support the students and staff and enhance the learning experience (Expectations B3, B4, Enhancement).

Recommendations

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

By September 2016:

- Make information on appeals and complaints more accessible for prospective and current students via the College's website (Expectations B2, B9).

By December 2016:

- Make current external examiners' reports available to all students (Expectation B7).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to formalise student engagement across the College at all levels through the relevant Strategic Enhancement Priority (Expectation B5).
- The expansion of the Academic Standards Policy to provide strategic oversight of higher education provision (Expectation B8).
- The steps being taken to provide systematic feedback to students on actions taken in response to module evaluation and analysis (Expectation B8).

- The actions being taken to monitor the scope of complaints and the timeliness of responses (Expectation B9).
- The steps being taken to improve strategic oversight of data analysis across higher education provision to inform planning and decision making (Expectation C).
- The investment being made in staffing infrastructure to embed higher education quality assurance across the College (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

Birmingham Metropolitan College recognises the central importance of employers in enhancing the employability of its students and the quality of their learning opportunities and is committed to improving the opportunities for employability for all of its students from all levels of provision. The College has established strong links with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and works with a wide range of local employers to meet their needs and support strong, sustainable economic growth in the region. The use of work-based and/or placement learning initiatives and opportunities to develop employability skills is integral to the curriculum the College offers. To support this, employability has been embedded in quality assurance processes to ensure that programmes address the need for students to develop employability skills, and to facilitate the greater involvement of employers and industry professionals with programme design, development and review.

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

About Birmingham Metropolitan College

Birmingham Metropolitan College (BMet) is a large general further education college with approximately 25,000 students and 898 staff. It comprises four main sites across Birmingham and the Black Country: James Watt College in Great Barr, Birmingham; Matthew Boulton College in Birmingham city centre; Stourbridge College situated in the Black Country; and Sutton Coldfield College, to the north of the city. These sites were previously four independent colleges that have been brought together through a series of mergers to form the merged college of BMet, the most recent addition in 2013 being the inclusion of Stourbridge College. In 2015 in response to an internal review and consultation exercise with local stakeholders, the sites were renamed as individual 'Colleges' to maintain a local identity under the BMet governance arrangements, each with a Head of College that manages the student experience on each site.

The College's specialisms lie in the areas of high-level technology and advanced manufacturing training, digital, environmental and low carbon technology, construction, creative and performing arts, health, care and early years and medical provision in pharmaceutical, dental nursing and podiatry. The College has a long tradition of delivery in a wide range of higher education provision with 851 full and part-time students, delivered either in partnership with seven universities including Aston, Birmingham City, Coventry, Wolverhampton, Worcester, Manchester Metropolitan and Staffordshire or directly through Pearson Education.

Many of its students are drawn from some of the most deprived areas in the West Midlands with 52 percent of all students classified in the highest band of deprivation, and around a third of learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Student numbers at the College have decreased from 1000 in 2013-14 to 850 in 2014-15; this has been accompanied by a downward shift in the percentage of the overall delivery, which has moved from seven per cent in 2011-12 to three per cent in 2014-15. In line with the national trend the College has also seen a decrease in its part-time student numbers, from 313 in 2013-14 to 239 in 2014-15.

At the time of the review, the College was delivering the following programmes:

Awarding body	Programme
Aston University	BSc (Hons) in Podiatry (2nd and 3rd Year) FdA Business and Education Management
Birmingham City University	HNC Business and Management HND Business and Management HND Fine Art HND Legal Studies HND Media and Communication FdEng Electronic and Control Engineering (year 1) FdEng Electronics and Communications Engineering (year 1) FdEng Manufacturing Engineering (year 1)
Coventry University	FdEng Electronic and Control Engineering (year 2) FdEng Electronics and Communications Engineering (year 2) FdEng Manufacturing Engineering (year 2)
Manchester Metropolitan University	FdSc Dental Technology (FT and PT)
Staffordshire University	FdA Education (PT) FdSc Sports Development and Coaching
University of Wolverhampton	BSc (Hons) in Podiatry (1st Year) FdSc Sport and Exercise Science Professional Graduate Certificate in Post Compulsory Education Certificate in Post Compulsory Education
University of Worcester	FdA Early Years FdSc Football Business Management and Coaching HND Sports Coaching
Pearson	HNC Construction and the Built Environment HND Business HND Computing and Systems Development HND Fine Art HND Health and Social Care HND Graphic Design HND Music (Production) (FT) HND Performing Arts (Performance) HND Public Services

The College's vision is 'inspiring futures, realising dreams'. The BMet Strategic Plan sets out the College's vision, values, strategic goals and milestones. The College values are:-

- Students are at the heart of everything we do.
- We are relentless in our desire to continuously improve our teaching and support for all students.
- We are passionate about working with employers to meet their skills needs and support strong, sustainable economic growth.

- We value and invest in our staff, attracting and developing experts who love what they do.
- We look to the future with confidence, adapting to new challenges and working together as a team to ensure continued strength and stability.

The College is facing a number of key challenges as it plans to reshape its higher education offer, which include the following examples:

- The College has just emerged from a period of substantial change, a restructuring merger and a reduction in staffing resource.
- The College was part of the first Area Reviews in autumn 2015 as set out in the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) publication 'Reviewing Post-16 Education and Training'. The reviews centre around assuring the future financial viability of colleges within the Government's vision of 'fewer, stronger' institutions delivering 'high quality, high level' education. The review is likely to support stronger collaboration between colleges with potential for more alignment around progression and higher education opportunities.
- The College has embraced the challenge of maintaining the quality of direct-delivery higher education within its own internal quality assurance procedures while taking full account of the quality requirements of its seven University partners and Pearson.
- The College has identified an increasingly high attrition across the majority of its programmes and is carefully monitoring this while also developing mitigating actions to improve retention.
- The College has been actively responding to the outcome of its May 2015 Ofsted inspection, which has been used as a catalyst for targeted initiatives to ensure improvement in teaching, learning and assessment across the College. In developing a post-inspection Action Plan the College states that actions taken will impact on all delivery at the College, and this should further safeguard the academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities.

BMet was reviewed by QAA in May 2011 and Stourbridge College was reviewed by QAA in January 2012. Both reviews concluded that there was confidence in the Colleges' management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreements, for the standards of the awards it offered on behalf of its awarding bodies. The teams also concluded that there could be confidence in the Colleges' management of their responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreements, for the quality of learning opportunities that they offered. The teams considered that reliance could be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the Colleges were responsible for publishing about themselves and the programmes that they delivered. The review team found that the College had made satisfactory progress on bringing together the outcomes of its previous separate QAA reviews. While it has completed action taken to address the majority of the recommendations made by previous QAA reviews, some of the recommendations relating to anonymous feedback, thematic audits, consistency of the meetings of Programme Management Committees and support for consistent usage of the virtual learning environment (VLE) are still in progress and have largely been incorporated into the Key Enhancement Objectives for 2015-2016:

- Establishing a systematic policy for gathering anonymous student feedback at module level.
- Further developing the policy for undertaking thematic audits.
- Ensuring that the Programme Management Committee meetings are consistently held.
- Supporting and developing a consistent use of the VLE.

The Ofsted inspection in May 2015 saw the grade profile of the College shift down from an overall rating of 'Good' to 'Requires Improvement'. The College has been in the process of implementing its Post Inspection Action Plan with a view to re-inspection later in 2016.

Explanation of the findings about Birmingham Metropolitan 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 College's higher education provision is awarded by eight awarding partners, including the Pearson awarding organisation. These are underpinned by memoranda of agreement and in some cases programme-level agreements. The College is currently negotiating with Birmingham City University to renew the Institutional Agreement and with the University of Worcester to renew the Course Agreement for all its programmes delivered in collaboration with the College.

1.2 The academic regulations of each awarding body stipulate the requirements of the design and implementation of higher education awards. These ensure that programmes align with the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), take into account QAA-defined qualification characteristics, align with the national credit framework and link to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Similar arrangements exist for the provision awarded by Pearson.

1.3 The College's Business Planning and Performance process ensures the provenance and viability of proposed higher education programmes prior to entering the validation process with the relevant awarding body/organisation. The College has recently reviewed its Quality Manual, which details the programme development, validation and review processes necessary for the quality assurance of its higher education provision. The

College has developed its own internal validation process that feeds into those of the respective awarding bodies.

1.4 Guidance on programme and module design is provided by the awarding body or Pearson. Specific assessment-related guidance and support is also provided by the awarding bodies outlined in the relevant academic frameworks and regulations. These are supplemented by the College's own guidance, available in the Quality Manual and also through communication with Academic Link personnel from the awarding body.

1.5 Programme aims, programme intended learning outcomes and module assessed learning outcomes are checked during the approval/validation process and also during the external examination/verification processes required by the awarding body/organisation and implemented by the College. Programme quality assurance procedures based on a process of annual monitoring are implemented in accordance with the awarding bodies' Academic Regulations. The academic standards of the College's higher education provision are scrutinised during validation meetings and documented in Validation Reports. Once programmes are validated and students enrolled, external examiners are appointed by the respective awarding body in order to ensure that programme subject specificity is maintained and that the appropriate academic standards are achieved through assessment that is conducted at an appropriate level. Academic standards are also regularly audited through periodic review. Cross-College moderation takes place where the programmes delivered at the College are also run by other partners of an awarding body.

1.6 The College has its own higher education Academic Standards Policy, higher education Assessment Policy and higher education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy defining the standards to be met. Academic standards for the Pearson provision are defined in the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment Level 4-7.

1.7 Explicit reference to academic standards is made in the programme specifications, student handbooks and module specifications for all of the provision delivered at the College. The awarding bodies provide templates for these key documents as well as module-level documentation such as module specifications.

1.8 The College uses the regulatory guidance provided by the awarding bodies and Pearson competently to ensure that its programmes are positioned at the appropriate level of the FHEQ and that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor. The College has also developed its own pre-validation process to test the provenance and viability of the proposed provision regardless of awarding body/organisation. The College has processes in place that would enable it to meet Expectation A1 of the Quality Code.

1.9 The review team examined a range of documentation to test how the College secures threshold academic standards for its provision. Documentation included memoranda of agreement, quality assurance processes, manuals and handbooks, student handbooks, programme specifications, module specifications, awarding body academic link tutor reports, and programme-level and cross-College external examiner and annual monitoring reports. The team also met the College Principal, senior staff, awarding body staff, teaching staff, professional and support staff, and students.

1.10 The College works with seven awarding bodies in addition to Pearson. While working with multiple organisations is viewed as a positive challenge, the College plans to rationalise its higher education provision in future in order to secure a viable set of specialised programmes. The College's relationships with its collaborative partners are successfully managed, as staff enjoy productive relationships with awarding body staff, and students across the provision identify strongly with their respective awarding body.

1.11 The College makes effective use of the appropriate awarding body or organisation academic regulations and guidelines when designing and monitoring programmes. Compliance with these frameworks ensures that they are designed in alignment with the FHEQ, QAA-defined qualification benchmarks and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. A similar process is followed for Pearson-awarded programmes. The College's own internal programme development and review process is comprehensive. It incorporates business planning and financial performance measures, and ensures that the viability of the proposed programme is thoroughly discussed and agreed before proceeding to external validation with the particular/target awarding body. Although this process was originally designed to test the provenance of the HND programmes, it has been adapted and is being used successfully across the College in all curriculum areas as a pre-validation process.

1.12 As part of its quality assurance procedures the College is reviewing the structure and operation of its Programme Committees, which take place as part of annual quality monitoring processes in order to articulate the components of the Quality Code more fully (see also outcomes for A3.3, B1 and B8).

1.13 When planning programmes, and particularly programme content, programme teams use awarding body/organisation guidance on academic levels and assessment. The College makes effective use of support provided by the awarding body academic link tutors and has also developed its own guidance published in the College's Quality Manual. Staff responsible for the most recent validations, for example in Podiatry, are evidently more familiar with the Quality Code through its use in programme design in general and award of credit in particular. While not all staff are familiar with the detail of the Quality Code, it is evident that the College's provision is appropriately underpinned through use of, and compliance with, the awarding bodies' and organisation's respective academic frameworks.

1.14 Delivery and assessment at appropriate academic level follows approved programme and module outcomes. Staff conduct teaching and assessment in accordance with a number of higher education teaching and learning policies developed by the College to ensure that students are taught and assessed at the appropriate higher education level.

1.15 A robust admissions process exists for regular applicants and is achieved through established and effective working relations between College and awarding body admissions staff (see section B2). Although applications for prior learning are rare, the College has a system in place to enable recognition of prior learning (mainly university provision) or credit accumulation and/or transfer (mainly the HN/Pearson provision).

1.16 For the College's higher education provision the programmes are designed in accordance with the academic regulations of the awarding bodies, ensuring that appropriate threshold academic standards are secured. Through compliance with awarding body and awarding organisation regulatory frameworks, threshold academic standards are secured for the College's higher education provision. Therefore the team concludes that Expectation A1 of the Quality Code is met in both design and operation for its higher education provision and that 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

1.17 The College has a management structure in place to ensure the appropriate governance of the higher education provision. Management of higher education is devolved from the Vice Principal for Teaching and Learning to the Higher Education Leadership Team, which the College maintains provides an infrastructure for the development, monitoring and enhancement of all higher education provision. Further education and higher education curricula are managed within subject areas by department managers.

1.18 Awarding bodies provide templates for programme specifications which are approved during the validation process.

1.19 The College uses its awarding bodies' academic regulations and frameworks to achieve rigorous and consistent award of academic credit and qualifications. Pearson provides guidance on academic standards and academic credit in the BTEC handbook and guidance to assessment. The College's own Teaching and Learning Policy refers to Teaching, Learning and Assessment processes and the award of credit. The College's higher education Academic Standards and Assessment Policies have been designed to enable a standardised approach to the College's higher education programmes and are operationalised via Academic Standards Board (ASB) and Programme Management Committees (PMC).

1.20 Academic link tutors appointed by the awarding bodies support the College-based teams in delivery and assessment. External examiners help to ensure that the required academic standards are met.

1.21 Academic credit and progression or award of qualification occurs at the end of each academic year through Assessment Boards, chaired by awarding body members. The College holds its own examination board for the Pearson provision/programmes.

1.22 The College uses the regulatory guidance and processes of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation to ensure that academic credit and qualifications are awarded appropriately for its higher education programmes. The College also has its own processes in place to ensure equivalence in the quality assurance of higher education Academic Standards and assessment processes. This would enable it to meet Expectation A2.1 of the Quality Code.

1.23 Documentation examined included memoranda of agreement, quality assurance handbooks, student handbooks, external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports, the College's Teaching and Learning Policy, Academic Standards Policy, Higher Education Assessment Policy, link tutor reports (if they or similar exist) and a range of senior management meeting and Assessment Board minutes. The team met the Head of College, senior staff, awarding body academic link tutors and programme leaders, and teaching staff to discuss award and achievement of academic credit.

1.24 Despite recent restructuring and combining of independent College sites, the College operates an effective management structure that ensures appropriate governance of

the higher education provision within its wider portfolio. The Higher Education Leadership Team, comprising the Head of Faculty Higher Education (cross College), the Higher Education Quality Lead and the Higher Education Coordinator (cross College), undertakes the majority of the management of higher education, devolved from the Vice Principal Teaching and Learning. It is evident that the higher education management structure supports the development, monitoring and enhancement of all higher education provision. In some areas management processes based on established further education procedures are used; however, this does not impact negatively on the quality assurance and academic standards of the higher education provision. The team found that the integrative approach to strategic oversight of higher education provision across the College, which combines the business and academic planning processes, is **good practice**.

1.25 The College works within awarding bodies' academic regulations to ensure that academic credit and qualifications are awarded correctly. Implementation of the College's higher education Academic Standards and Assessment Policies allow a standardised approach to the management of the academic standards to be achieved for its wide range of higher education programmes, irrespective of awarding body/organisation.

1.26 Through compliance with the awarding bodies and the College's own quality assurance processes, appropriate academic standards are met through teaching, learning and assessment. Rigorous use is made of the support provided by awarding body academic link tutors throughout the academic year. Academic link tutors work with College staff in a number of ways, ranging from advisory to delivery and assessment. External examiners confirm that appropriate academic standards are met through teaching, learning and assessment and confirm that sufficient credits have been achieved for progression or award as appropriate. Although the Pearson provision does not benefit from critical friend support, as that afforded by university awarding bodies does, the College's own Academic Standards Policy and associated policies provide sufficient clarity on the academic expectations and award of credit associated with Higher National provision. The review team found that the effective partnership with the College's awarding bodies, which underpins academic standards (and as the team's findings under Expectation B3 demonstrates) and promotes staff development and student learning opportunities, is **good practice**.

1.27 For its university provision the College makes effective use of the awarding bodies' academic frameworks and regulations to determine how it awards academic credit and qualifications. Academic credit confirmed by external examiners is awarded, and progression or achievement of qualification is ratified, by annual examination boards chaired by university representatives. Additional examination boards are implemented for the Pearson provision. Therefore the team concludes that Expectation A2.1 is met in both design and operation for the College's university higher education provision and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.28 The definitive record of each programme is held by the degree-awarding bodies and organisation. The College is responsible for ensuring that students have access to a definitive record of each award that it delivers and to do so the College incorporates this information in the programme specifications. These are included in the course handbooks that are made available to students.

1.29 The College's current processes would meet the Expectation set out in A2.2 as there are clear processes for the accessibility and dissemination of programme information to students.

1.30 The review team tested the College processes for the provision of the definitive record through a review of documentation provided and meetings with staff, awarding body representatives and students.

1.31 The College makes appropriate use of the programme specification, which serves as the definitive record and which has effective mechanisms to disseminate the programme specifications to students. The programme specifications are key documents in the validation process and detail subsequent changes to the programme. They constitute a reference point for delivery and assessment and are effective reference points for the provision of records of study for students. The programme specifications are available in the course handbooks, on the VLE and on the College website, which provides information on each course delivered at the College and the details of the awarding body or organisation.

1.32 Comprehensive information is available to students in the course handbooks. This includes key details of assessment, the resources and support for learning, the course team, and extracurricular opportunities outside of the main programme of study.

1.33 The review team met staff and students who confirmed that the handbooks contained key information on their courses. Staff confirmed that the Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB) notes modifications to programmes and that these are then updated in the programme specifications that are included in the handbook.

1.34 The team concludes that Expectation A2.2 is met and that the associated level of risk is low, as the College has effective mechanisms in place for the provision of the definitive record, which act as a reference point for the delivery and assessment and its monitoring and review, which is, in turn, readily accessible to students.

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

1.35 The College does not have degree awarding powers. The responsibilities of the College and their awarding bodies are set out in the Higher Education Institutional Checklist. This confirms that the approval of taught programmes is the shared responsibility of the College and its partner institutions for six of the eight partners, the exceptions being Manchester Metropolitan University and Pearson, who are wholly responsible for the approval process.

1.36 New curriculum developments take place within the College strategy and take on board the regional context and employer needs, with business planning processes encompassing curriculum discussions, including resource and financial implications. The review team recognised in section A2.1 that this integrative approach to strategic oversight of higher education provision is a feature of good practice.

1.37 The review team found from the evidence presented that the College processes would meet Expectation A3.1 through the provision of clear approval processes, which set their awards at an appropriate academic level, and the associated monitoring and review mechanisms.

1.38 The review team assessed the effectiveness of the College's processes through analysing the awarding body and College programme approval mechanisms and documentation and meeting College staff and awarding body representatives. The review team considered the significant liaison between the College and its awarding bodies as an effective mechanism in the conduct of the approval process.

1.39 All awarding body partners have established and consistently implemented processes for the approval of taught degrees, which are well understood by the College. These processes ensure that academic standards are set at a level that meets the UK threshold standards for the qualification. The processes also ensure that the standards are in accordance with their own academic framework and regulations. The awarding bodies conduct review and monitoring processes, including periodic review and revalidation events, in addition to the internal review processes of the College.

1.40 The College undergoes robust approval processes for the approval of programmes, including validation events involving external expert representatives, to ensure rigour and enhancement of the award.

1.41 The College recently extended its internal validation process for further education to higher education programmes as part of its quality assurance cycle. Internal validations are chaired by a member of the quality team, with panel membership, including a senior manager from an independent curriculum area, to ensure externality.

1.42 The College confirms the support of its partners in the approval of programmes. In the review of documentation and in meetings with staff the review team heard of the strong liaison and support provided by the awarding bodies in the approval process. For example,

Aston University provided staff development for the revalidation of the podiatry degree to facilitate the redesign of the programme. Internally quality and higher education teams provide support for staff.

1.43 In conclusion, the review team considers the processes in place for the design, approval, monitoring and review of provision, and the College's strong liaison with awarding body partners, to be effective. The team concludes that the College processes for the approval of taught programmes at the appropriate academic level meets Expectation A3.1 and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.44 The College operates in partnership with seven degree-awarding bodies and Pearson. Through these partnerships the College offers a range of Higher National Diplomas, foundation degrees, a BSc and postgraduate certificates. The awarding bodies and organisation have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that credit and qualifications are awarded only on the basis of the achievement of relevant learning outcomes, and that both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.

1.45 For programmes validated through awarding bodies, the approach to assessment is detailed in their respective assessment regulations and policies. Manchester Metropolitan University takes full responsibility for setting the assessments; Aston University, Coventry University and Pearson delegate the responsibility to the College; and the other four awarding bodies share the responsibility for the setting of assessments with the College.

1.46 For Pearson-validated programmes, the approach to assessment is set out in Pearson documentation, including the BTEC UK Quality Assurance Handbook and the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment. Pearson is responsible for setting the learning outcomes and assessment criteria attached to each outcome but the College is responsible for setting assessments in compliance with Pearson requirements. These assessments are subject to internal verification prior to their approval. In addition, the appropriateness of assessments is considered by external examiners. The College has its own Higher Education Assessment Policy, which includes assessment arrangements, moderation arrangements and the terms of reference for the Examination/Assessment Boards, and an Academic Misconduct Policy to cover the Pearson provision.

1.47 External subject specialists and examiners appointed by the awarding bodies report on the appropriateness of the proposals in relation to all issues of quality and standards. Learning outcomes and module/qualification credit are agreed through the course approval process of the awarding bodies with whom the College works. These are set through programme specifications and module descriptors and may be amended through the formal processes of the awarding bodies as well as being reported at the Higher Education Academic Board. Further guidance and advice on assessment is outlined in student handbooks.

1.48 The review team finds that the approach taken by the College to ensure that the achievement of relevant learning outcomes are demonstrated through assessment, and that its own and UK threshold standards are satisfied, would meet this Expectation

1.49 The team tested this Expectation by reviewing a number of documents including minutes from external approval events, programme specifications, student handbooks, module descriptors and assessment briefs. Additionally, the team met staff from the College and awarding bodies, as well as students.

1.50 There are effective working relationships between the College staff and awarding bodies. Link tutors attend programme monitoring, at which discussions regarding programme design and assessment take place. Annual link tutor reports, as well as external examiner reports, provide an external view on programmes and on whether or not academic standards have been satisfied.

1.51 For all provision the College is responsible for carrying out the first marking of student assessments. For programmes run with awarding bodies the moderation of work is a shared responsibility between the College and the awarding body. Moderation of work has been a focus of discussion at 'Met Higher' to ensure shared practice and understanding. An internal verification process is held for the Pearson awards in accordance with the College's Assessment Policy.

1.52 Specific assessment briefs are produced, which detail the nature of the assessment, the learning outcomes, expectations and links to assessment criteria. Students reported that although occasionally they find assignment briefs hard to follow, tutors are always supportive in facilitating their understanding. Students overwhelmingly reported that the feedback they received on their work supported them in understanding how they could improve their work. Written feedback, and the opportunity to have one-to-one tutorials with staff to go through their feedback, is felt to be extremely helpful.

1.53 Examination Boards take place at the end of the academic year and make use of external examiner feedback and reports to make decisions about progression and award for individual students. All formal external examiner reports are scrutinised by the Higher Education Quality Lead who then collates a cross-College external examiner report. This is presented to the Higher Education Academic Board. Good practice from across all awarding bodies and Pearson is identified for dissemination.

1.54 The review team finds that practices are operated consistently to ensure that assessment is reliable and appropriate. Learning outcomes are clearly communicated and credit is awarded on achievement of these. The College adheres to the assessment and award regulations of the awarding bodies and Pearson. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.3): 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

1.55 The College's provision is subject to the monitoring and review procedures of its awarding bodies and organisation according to the relevant awarding partner's requirements and regulatory frameworks. Programmes are regularly monitored and reviewed by the universities through annual and periodic review, which explicitly addresses whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual awarding body are being maintained. Pearson are to carry out a review this academic year.

1.56 The College has developed an internal process for monitoring and reviewing programmes which is laid out in its Academic Standards Policy. The Policy includes programme-level, faculty-level and cross-College committees. All reports feed into the Higher Education Academic Board; final reports are approved by the College's Executive and Corporation.

1.57 External examiners are appointed by the awarding bodies to establish, monitor and maintain academic standards. The College produces a cross-College external examiner report which reports on, among other aspects, academic standards, assessment and student performance.

1.58 The review team finds that the procedures and systems adopted by the College would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.59 The review team tested the College's approach to monitoring and review of programmes by examining documents including the Academic Standards Policy, minutes of the Higher Education Academic Board, programme monitoring committees, termly review boards, academic standards boards, programme specifications and external examiner reports, and by meeting staff and students.

1.60 As the College does not hold degree awarding powers it has entered into partnership with seven awarding bodies and Pearson. All awarding bodies have strategic oversight for the monitoring and review of their programmes. Responsibilities for aspects of the provision differ across the awarding bodies. In the case of Manchester Metropolitan University and Pearson the awarding body is fully responsible for programme development and approval. In all other partnerships the responsibility is shared between the awarding bodies and the College.

1.61 The team found that programme specifications outline how the development of the programme adheres to the FHEQ or the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and the Quality Code.

1.62 Monitoring and review processes are outlined in each individual collaborative partnership agreement. The team met representatives from the awarding bodies who reported supportive and close working relationships. They confirmed that they are involved

with a range of activities which include processes to ensure that UK academic threshold standards are being achieved and maintained.

1.63 The College has developed its own Academic Standards Policy requiring programme staff to hold regular programme management committees, which are attended by the awarding body link tutors to consider the overall maintenance of the quality of the programme, including assessment of learning outcomes. These meetings feed into a Higher Education Quality Enhancement process which features a number of levels of review of the programmes' standards and outcomes.

1.64 Periodic reviews are carried out by the awarding bodies in accordance with their collaborative agreements. The periodic reviews have external subject specialist advisers who review course documentation as part of the quality assurance mechanism for the awarding body. They confirm appropriate course content and delivery for the qualification, and the alignment of module assignments with Subject Benchmark Statements and UK threshold academic standards as well as the awarding body's own standards. The team saw evidence of these reviews as safeguarding the operation of the partnerships.

1.65 The team reviewed a number of external examiners' reports as well as the cross-College higher education external examiners' report. External examiners' reports confirm that standards for the awards for this qualification are set at an appropriate level.

1.66 Overall, the review team concludes that the College's policies and processes address the achievement of UK threshold standards and the maintenance of standards required by the awarding bodies and Pearson. The frequent communications that exist between the awarding bodies, Pearson and the College, and the internal processes for programme monitoring and review, ensure that the Expectation is met, with low risk.

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

1.67 The College currently delivers programmes awarded by seven awarding bodies and Pearson. Setting of appropriate academic standards is the responsibility of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation through programme validation processes. External academic and industry professionals are engaged by awarding bodies to confirm suitability of programme content. Programme content for the Pearson provision is primarily determined by the awarding organisation. The College's own validation process is based on the provision of a comprehensive and viable business case, which aligns with the College's strategic direction and intended educational portfolio and also requires external input.

1.68 The College has two higher education programmes that are associated with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs): the FdSc Dental Technology awarded by Manchester Metropolitan University and regulated by The General Dental Council (GDC); and the BSc (Hons) Podiatry awarded by the University of Wolverhampton (first year cohort) and Aston University (completing second and third year cohorts), and jointly regulated by the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) and the Society for Chiropody and Podiatry (SOCAP). Competency-based PSRB requirements are integral to programme design and validation and are assessed and audited through annual quality assurance monitoring and review processes. A number of programmes, for example the FdSc Sport and Exercise Science programme, benefit from alignment with competency-based organisations such as The British Association for Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES), the British Psychological Society (BPS) and Register of Exercise Professionals (REP).

1.69 External examiners are employed and trained by the awarding bodies and play a critical role in ensuring that relevant and current curriculum is delivered to allow programme learning outcomes to be met. External examiners confirm whether the assessment of learning outcomes is appropriate and aligns with the UK threshold academic standards and the degree-awarding bodies' own requirements. External examiner reports are submitted directly to the awarding body, and scrutinised and forwarded to the College for response and use in annual programme monitoring and review. External Verifiers are appointed by Pearson to examine the HN provision at the College and to confirm that required academic standards are met.

1.70 The College sets out a series of strategic goals prioritising the development of employability skills and engagement with employers to secure strong and sustainable economic growth, with an emphasis on continued development of a responsive relationship with industry and its partners. The College has reviewed its annual monitoring process to include employers in programme management committees.

1.71 The College uses the validation and annual programme monitoring processes of its awarding bodies, and its own internal validation and quality assurance procedures, to ensure that external and independent expertise is used at key stages of setting and maintaining

academic standards. The College also makes effective use of its regular quality monitoring procedures to identify Key Enhancement Objectives that, once achieved, will enable cross-College issues to be addressed. These actions would allow Expectation A3.4 of the Quality Code to be met.

1.72 The team examined a range of documentation to test how the College ensures that external and independent expertise is used in setting, delivering and maintaining the academic standards of its provision. Documentation included memoranda of agreement, regulations relating to the appointment and role of external examiners, external examiner reports, Programme Management Committee minutes, documentation relating to Key Enhancement Objective/s, minutes of higher education management meetings, documentation relating to expectations of PSRBs, and employer input to programme design and delivery. The team met the Head of the College, senior staff, teaching staff, employers and students to discuss the use of external and independent expertise in the setting, delivering and maintenance of academic standards.

1.73 The College works closely with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation to secure the academic standards of its higher education provision. Established relationships at a range of levels mean that the College staff are fully aware of awarding body expectations regarding level of content.

1.74 It is the awarding bodies' responsibility to appoint relevant external academic and industry personnel to confirm the suitability of the proposed programme content at the programme validation stage. For the Pearson provision the College staff only have the opportunity to select the programme and are not able to dictate or define its core content.

1.75 The College has its own validation process which is used across the provision and serves as a pre-validation process for the university-awarded provision that is validated elsewhere. The College-based validation process is well structured and makes extensive use of external input provided by industry professionals, employers and alumni. Implementation of the College's own validation process has ensured that there is closer alignment with College's strategic direction and intended educational direction and portfolio.

1.76 The College has two specialist higher education programmes that have associated PSRB requirements. College staff have a clear understanding of the requirements of the PSRBs and ensure that these are comprehensively integrated into the delivery and assessment of the programmes. The College also proactively embeds competency and/or skills-based expectations in the delivery and assessment of its non PSRB-associated provision. The College's annual quality monitoring process takes into consideration competency-based measures and industry-based feedback and the outcomes of this are used to inform quality-related measures at programme level.

1.77 The College makes scrupulous use of external examiners (awarding body provision) and External Verifiers (Pearson provision). College management and delivery staff engage fully with quality assurance processes, using external examiner reports and feedback to ensure that the programmes that the College delivers are fit for purpose. College staff responsible for the management of the higher education provision construct a cross-College external examiner report, which is used systematically to identify common areas of concern and subsequently to maintain or improve the quality of the programmes.

1.78 The College places substantial emphasis on offering employer-responsive programmes. In order to achieve this at programme level, College staff take into account employer/industry needs in determining programme, module and assessment content. A constructive approach to capturing employer and industry needs has been implemented through the invitation of key employers to attend programme monitoring committees that take place through the academic year. This is a relatively new initiative with varying

engagement to date. The emphasis/priority placed upon employer involvement is demonstrated by the College's identification of employer input as a key enhancement objective (for 2015-16).

1.79 At a module level the majority of the College's programmes include a work-based learning element which may be achieved through different means, for example through existing employment or placement. The College has been proactive in ensuring that students are closely matched to employers in order to achieve a successful educational experience for the students.

1.80 Comprehensive use is made of the awarding bodies' academic frameworks and regulations to govern how external and independent expertise is used in the setting and maintenance of academic standards. Achievement of appropriate level is confirmed by external examiners and practical skills/competencies endorsed by PSRBs where required, and this is formally recorded at Examination Boards. Initiatives are being implemented to achieve greater employer involvement in programme design, content and assessment. Therefore the team concludes that Expectation A3.4 of the Quality Code is met in both design and operation for the College's university and Pearson higher education provision and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.82 The College is effective in managing its responsibilities, in conjunction with the degree-awarding bodies and organisation, and is effective in maintaining academic standards. The review team identified the integrative approach to strategic oversight of higher education provision across the College, combining business and academic planning processes, and the efficacy of its partnerships with its awarding bodies in underpinning academic standards, as features of good practice.

1.83 From its scrutiny of a wide range of evidence, and through meetings with staff, students, alumni and employers, the review team found that effective use is made of relevant subject and qualification benchmarks and external expertise in the development of programmes and their subsequent approval and monitoring, with qualifications being set at an appropriate academic level. Furthermore, the review team confirms that effective use is made of input from external examiners and link tutors from the degree-awarding partners.

1.84 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and 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, Development and Approval

Findings

2.1 The College has internal processes in place for the identification, design and development of new provision. As the College does not have degree awarding powers, the programmes that the College delivers have significant input from the awarding bodies in the design and approval of provision. A number of programmes have already been developed by the relevant awarding body, in which case the College seeks approval from the awarding body to deliver these programmes through a validation process. The responsibilities for design, development and approval of programmes are confirmed in the responsibilities checklist and through meetings with staff.

2.2 Awarding bodies and Pearson ensure that awards fully meet the academic framework and regulations of PSRBs by mapping learning outcomes and having external representation at approval and monitoring events.

2.3 Through planning, design and developing provision, and the validation process for new courses, the partner awarding bodies ensure that all course learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor from the relevant framework for higher education qualifications, through the use of module specification templates and programme specification templates.

2.4 The College operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes, which facilitate Expectation B1 being met. The team reviewed documentation on programme design, development and approval and discussed the processes involved with staff, including support staff, and a small number of employers

2.5 External reference points are integral to programme design and development and adherence to these is monitored through the validation process. Employers needs inform the development of the higher education provision; for example, the College has worked with Arqiva to develop the FdEng Electronic Communications Engineering and is currently engaging with Greater Birmingham Professional Services Academy to drive the academic agenda in this sector.

2.6 There is no formal arrangement for student input to programme design although student feedback from module evaluations is sought to inform the College planning processes during programme review. For example, the design of the delivery of a podiatry module was changed to be delivered throughout the year to allow theoretical and clinical components to run in parallel.

2.7 The College is committed to increasing the opportunities for students to be involved with all aspects of the leadership and management of higher education and the College states that all future higher education validations will include a student representative.

2.8 All programmes delivered by the College have gained approval following rigorous scrutiny through the partner approval process and final validation events, with longstanding

programmes gaining continued approval following scheduled programme reviews. All approval events have involved independent external expert representatives to ensure the rigour and enhancement of programme development.

2.9 As noted in A3.1, prior to validation by the awarding bodies, the College has extended its further education internal validation process to cover its higher education programmes and this also assures the financial viability of new provision. These internal validations are chaired by a member of the quality team, with panel membership to include a senior manager from an independent curriculum area to ensure externality.

2.10 For the existing programmes that the College runs, when the validation reaches the end of the agreement, a revalidation event occurs. Their most recent revalidation was carried out in May 2015 for the BSc (Hons) Podiatry course with Aston University. Prior to the revalidation, Aston University provided training on programme design which enabled the podiatry team to redesign the programme ready for the successful revalidation.

2.11 In conclusion, the College and its awarding bodies demonstrate that they have systematic and coherent processes in place for the setting and maintenance of academic standards, and for ensuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities through the effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes. The strategic oversight of higher education provision across the College, combining the business and academic planning processes, has earlier been identified in A2.1 as a feature of good practice. The team concludes that the College meets Expectation B1 and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.12 The College is responsible for the recruitment, selection and admission of students for all the Pearson higher education programmes, while the respective degree-awarding bodies reserve the right to make the final decision on any application and take the responsibility of making offers to the College for a majority of the programmes. The College has the appropriate policies and procedures in place to support the selection of students.

2.13 The College has developed a Higher Education Student Journey project, which outlines the details on accountabilities and responsibilities for each stage of recruitment, selection and admission of prospective students. The College ensures that the procedures in place for recruitment and admission are readily accessible and are followed fairly, consistently and expeditiously, and has appropriate policies in place to support the selection of students to complete their programmes. The College ensures that all promotional materials and activities are accurate, relevant, current and accessible, and provides information that will enable applicants to make informed decisions about their options. Promotional materials are monitored and approved through a robust approval process.

2.14 The College's Admission Policy and the Higher Education Student Journey include the College's commitment in providing opportunities for successful participation within higher education for people from diverse backgrounds. The Policy also specifies that the College should offer a wide range of courses to match national and regional requirements and commits to providing appropriate progression opportunities. The College has mapped its Admission Policy to *Chapter B2* of the Quality Code and the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) Good Practice.

2.15 The College is currently developing a new strategy for increasing its higher education recruitment. In the strategy, the College has made a planned commitment of increasing its higher education recruitment by 50 per cent by 2020.

2.16 The internal recruitment of students is promoted through a range of activities, for example presentations at Level 3 tutorials, inviting students to higher education events, and attendance at the higher education fairs. The College has a very low percentage of students, only two per cent, who progress on to the higher education programmes at the College. The College's target is to increase this number from two per cent to five per cent.

2.17 The College reviews its recruitment, selection and admission policies systematically and updates them if necessary. However, the College has recognised that the policies can be greatly enhanced if it analyses the application data in a more systematic way. In the Higher Education Student Journey document, the College has clearly identified and included the organisational structures together with accountabilities and responsibilities of each partner.

2.18 The review team finds that the policies and processes of recruitment, selection and admission at the College would enable Expectation B2 to be met.

2.19 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements available to meet this Expectation by reviewing the Admission Policy, admission system, higher education student journey document, promotional material validation process, growth strategy, and the review process for recruitment, selection and admission. The review team met two student groups and College staff to discuss recruitment, selection and admission practices.

2.20 The College has an effective appeals and complaints procedure in place to handle issues regarding recruitment, selection and admission. If any applicant feels that their application was rejected unfairly then they can appeal against the decision in writing via email. There is no standard appeals form available for applicants. Details of the appeals and complaints procedures are explained in the Higher Education Academic Appeals Policy and also in the College's Complaints Policy. The appeals and complaints are dealt with effectively within the advertised timeframe. Awarding bodies have their own appeals processes available on their websites; however, the appeal process for applicants for Pearson higher education programmes is not available on the College's website. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the information on appeals should be more accessible on the College's website for prospective students (see also section B9).

2.21 Overall, the students whom the review team met commented on their positive experience of the recruitment, selection and admission processes. The review team concludes that the policies, procedures and operation of recruitment, selection and admission of the College meet the Expectation in Chapter B2 of the Quality Code. As the College has the appropriate and effective policies for its recruitment, selection and admission, and admission-related appeals and complaints procedures are in place, therefore the risk associated in this area 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

2.22 The College's strategic plan focuses on the provision of learning opportunities delivered through the BMC Academic Standards Policy and Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. Ultimate responsibility for the management of the quality of teaching practices and learning opportunities lies with the curriculum Department Management Teams.

2.23 Resources and learning opportunities are reviewed as part of programme-level Annual Monitoring Review and Termly Review Boards and take into account multiple measures of achievement and sources of feedback on resources. A Cross-College Annual Monitoring Report is produced and considered by Higher Education Academic Board. From this the HEAB will recommend specific (referred to as 'Key') enhancement opportunities to be adopted by Teaching and Learning Communities, developed by Teaching and Learning Coaches.

2.24 Awarding bodies require staff delivering on the College's higher education programmes to be appropriately qualified to teach in addition to being subject specialists. All staff are recruited according to the College's Staff Recruitment and Selection Policy. Awarding bodies may be involved in the selection process. New staff are approved by the partner university prior to the start of each academic year and new staff delivering on higher education programmes are approved at Higher Education Academic Board. New staff receive a College based-induction and in some cases an additional induction with the awarding body. New staff work with university-based academic link tutors and the relevant programme leaders/advisers.

2.25 The College provides pedagogic and subject training as required, including mandatory subjects such as PREVENT training, and may be provided by the College or awarding bodies. Wednesday afternoons are kept free of teaching commitments in order to allow time for staff training under the umbrella of the Thematic Network for Higher Education initiative MetHigher. This includes all staff who deliver on higher education and provides a forum for discussion of matters relating to higher education and an opportunity for training. The College encourages staff to gain higher level qualifications, to undertake vocational updating, to engage in action research and to attend conferences.

2.26 Staff training needs are identified via the College's performance management process and appraisal. This process is largely based on the College's further education model and is based on learning observations conducted at least on an annual basis with the primary purpose of identifying individual staff development needs. Observations lead to the identification of areas of enhancement for the delivery of teaching and learning. The outcome/s of lesson observations are used in individuals' annual performance management review to create an individual/bespoke/personal Development Action Plan.

2.27 The College also operates a process of additional regular Learning Walks conducted by peers and/or managers, resulting in immediate feedback via a LW feedback card. The outcomes of all observations (that is regular observations and Learning Walks) are

recorded using specialist software, and the data are used to develop a post-observation Development Action Plan.

2.28 The College has developed a focus on training on Teaching and Learning Communities aimed at identifying strategies to help improve learner satisfaction and achievement. Teaching and Learning Coaches work with senior management staff and support teachers and assessors in order to develop, improve and consolidate their practice.

2.29 There is a College-wide promotion and management of Equality and Diversity by the Quality Team, led by the Quality Director, working with an associated steering group that is responsible for ensuring that the expectations of the Equality and Diversity Policy are discharged appropriately at department level. An annual Equality, Diversity and Equal Opportunities (EDEO) Report is presented to the College Executive Board and Corporation and contains key objectives for the forthcoming academic year. The current EDEO Report concludes that the College has made good progress in reducing the achievement gap between ethnic minority groups and other students. An Equality and Diversity Governor has been appointed in order to contribute to the planning and evaluation of equality and diversity. Evaluation of current practice, sharing of ideas and development of teaching materials for staff and students take place in a termly network meeting attended by managers and staff from departments and support areas. Work is taking place to ensure that KPIs for higher education relating to equality and diversity are monitored independently from the further education provision.

2.30 The College has a range of opportunities to gain feedback from students on the quality of learning and resources (resources outside of staffing covered in B4). Formal feedback can be gained from the National Student Survey, the College-based end of year questionnaire, including the Internal Higher Education Student Survey, end-of-module evaluations, and via attendance at Programme Management Committees and Staff-Student Forums. Feedback can also be given via a cross-College survey for specific subjects such as induction and teaching and learning.

2.31 The College uses the annual programme monitoring process, module review and monitoring processes that it has in place to review and enhance its provision of learning opportunities systematically, to allow its higher education students to develop as independent learners through studying their chosen subject in depth and to enhance their capacity for analytical and critical thinking. This would allow Expectation B3 to be met.

2.32 The Team examined a range of documentation to test how the College systematically reviews and enhances the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices in order to enable every student to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking. Evidence included annual monitoring reports, performance management review, appraisal and staff training documentation, Teaching and Learning Community and Coach information, survey instruments, and student feedback documentation. The team met the Head of the College, senior staff, teaching staff, professional and support staff and students to discuss learning resources.

2.33 The College has a systematic strategic approach to the provision of appropriate higher education learning opportunities based on demonstrable suitable staffing and the provision of appropriate support. This is achieved through the implementation of a deliberate management structure at College and curriculum level.

2.34 A comprehensive set of meetings and boards allow purposeful quality assurance of the quality of the learning opportunities afforded to students for the College's higher education provision. The College has made scrupulous use of its Higher Education

Academic Board to identify targeted areas for further development and enhancement, referred to as Key Enhancement Objectives.

2.35 The College complies with the requirements of its awarding bodies in recruiting staff with integrity and ensuring that they are fully inducted into both the College's, and where possible, the awarding bodies', academic processes, particularly around teaching and learning. The review team identified that this effective partnership with the College's awarding bodies underpins academic standards (as noted earlier in A2.1) and promotes staff development and student learning opportunities. The College's approach of recruiting only staff who are appropriately qualified to teach at higher education level, and who are subject specialists, ensures that the learning opportunities provided for students are appropriate and allows the requirements of the approved programmes to be met.

2.36 The College implementation of a rigorous performance management and appraisal process (including formal observations and less formal Learning Walks) facilitates identification of individual staff development needs, recorded in individual development action plans. The College has started to record outcomes of observations electronically using a bespoke educational software program; however, this is embryonic, and further work/development is needed to disaggregate staff members' higher education performance from their further education performance.

2.37 The College has taken a rigorous and proactive approach to the development of teaching, learning and enhancement of staff through the introduction of Teaching and Learning Communities and Coaches. The College recognises the importance of this role through giving remission for coaches against their direct teaching commitments. While the role of Teaching and Learning Coaches is to work with senior management staff and to support teachers and assessors to develop, improve and consolidate their practice, the process is relatively recent and outcomes appear to be positive.

2.38 Following robust scrutiny of matters that affect the higher education learning opportunities and teaching practice, the College successfully introduced the MetHigher initiative. This is a Thematic Network for Higher Education and provides a forum for discussion, sharing of practice and opportunities for higher education staff training. College management took the judicious approach of making attendance at MetHigher meetings optional in the first instance to encourage engagement. However, as the importance of the work done at MetHigher has become recognised attendance at these thematic meetings has been made mandatory. Staff clearly appreciate the importance of the MetHigher initiative and appear to be uniformly fully engaged with its work. It is clear that staff consistently consider MetHigher fundamental to positive networking and that its work is necessarily operational at the present time.

2.39 In its comprehensive approach to secure appropriate teaching practice, and therefore the quality of the students' learning opportunities, staff are strategically supported to develop their subject areas. A wide range of academic and professional development activities are supported, including funding higher qualifications, professional industry updating and conference attendance, as long as they align with the programme subject areas and the College's strategic educational objectives. The review team identifies the wide range of teaching and learning initiatives that proactively support the students and staff and enhance the learning experience to be **good practice**.

2.40 The College ensures that all of its staff receive mandatory training in key areas such as nationwide PREVENT (anti-radicalisation) training and are cognisant of the expectations of the College's Equality and Diversity Policy, for example.

2.41 The College currently uses a wide range of methods and measurement tools, the majority of which are higher education specific, to gain feedback from students on the

provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The resulting information is collated and discussed at a number of College boards and committees in addition to the formal awarding body programme-level committee.

2.42 For the College's higher education provision the College provides an acceptable level of staff resources, which are reviewed, developed and enhanced in order to support individual students studying on higher education programmes. Staff are employed to enable programme learning outcomes to be met. The College's effective partnerships with its awarding bodies promotes staff development and student learning opportunities and has already been identified as a feature of good practice (see section A2.1). The College has implemented a range of initiatives, including MetHigher and Teaching and Learning Coaches and Communities to support and enhance student and staff experience. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met in both design and operation for its higher education provision and that 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

2.43 Strategic oversight for students is provided by the Director of Student Services, discharged through the Learning Resource Centre Business Plan, and is the responsibility of the Vice Principal Teaching and Learning. The provision of resources that allow and encompass student support is considered in the College-wide (higher education) Annual Monitoring Review process and reported on at Termly Boards.

2.44 The College outlines a Student Journey Timeline, comprising eight stages from enquiry culminating in student experience (enquiry, application and interview, enrolment, induction, study and qualification, progression, alumni, student experience). The College's student services hold the Matrix Standard for the advice, information and guidance provided at all stages. The College aims to produce graduates who are ready for employment.

2.45 All students receive a College induction informing them of the range of support processes, facilities and resources that are available to them. Information provided at induction is also made available in the Student Handbook.

2.46 All higher education students have timetabled group and one-to-one/individual tutorials with a named personal tutor in which they can access academic and/or pastoral support. Tutorials will go through assessment feedback with students in order to identify areas and means of improvement. Tutors also operate an open-door policy, allowing increased access to support when needed. The College's use of educational software to record student progress has been extended to higher education students in order to manage student monitoring (meetings, attendance, marks, targets and performance) and to conduct tutorials online.

2.47 Support for academic progression between levels of higher education programmes is integrated into programmes mainly through content and developed in individual and group tutorials (refer to preceding paragraph) in order to facilitate achievement. A number of programmes contain distinct academic studies/skills, referencing skills, research skills and/or professional practice modules.

2.48 Most programmes contain an element of work-based learning, delivered via placement or employment. Work-based tutors are responsible for the quality assurance of these learning opportunities, based on audit visits. Employers are also invited to attend programme management committees (see text in a previous section A3.4).

2.49 Links with industry exist via Centres of Excellence for the Medical and Health curriculum enabling access to, and training on, state of the art equipment both off and on site. Opportunities exist for industry personnel to locate their technical equipment within the College. The College ensures that delivery and support provided by staff other than those directly employed by the College, such as placement educators and mentors, is conducted appropriately and has funded these individuals to complete Education Assessment modules at the awarding body. A number of industry personnel contribute to the design and support of assessment.

2.50 Programme-level resources, as reviewed on an annual basis through a standardised curriculum planning process, resulting in a business plan outlining the requirements of the programme area. Plans are reviewed by Heads of College and Higher

Education Academic Board, then are approved (or rejected) by the Executive Lead for Business Planning. Identification of staff, training and consumable resources follows to ensure that programmes are sufficiently resourced. The College maintains that it has invested in high quality resources and learning environments of for all of its provision on all sites. Feedback on the sufficiency of programme-specific resource is reported by programme teams to Academic Standards Boards, which allows cross-College themes to be identified and potentially addressed.

2.51 The College has a generally good book stock although some concern exists regarding stock in the library at Stourbridge campus.

2.52 The College uses its VLE as a vehicle for providing information about programmes and also as a repository of materials to support component modules. There is a minimum use expectation and the digital team has implemented a grading system to monitor and assess staff use. This system awards Bronze, Silver and Gold badges. The College has also recently introduced a platinum award for module VLE pages that could effectively be delivered as a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). Students also use the VLE of the relevant awarding body to secure academic resources. College IT staff support the introduction of teaching-related initiatives, such as an internal video-streaming channel.

2.53 The College has put in place higher education-only areas in two of its higher education delivery campuses and is progressing towards installing a third in its four higher education delivery campuses. Differentiation for higher education students is also partly achieved through the issue of different coloured lanyards for student identification cards from those worn by further education students.

2.54 The College has processes in place to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential for its higher education programmes. These processes would enable it to meet Expectation B4.

2.55 The review team examined a range of documentation to test how the College monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Documentation included advice, information and guidance, induction and programme-related materials, programme committee minutes, and the student submission to this review. The team met senior staff, teaching staff, professional and support staff, and students to discuss the College's processes that allow monitoring and evaluation of arrangements and resources, which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.56 The College has strategic oversight of arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. This is achieved through the implementation of a deliberate management structure at College and curriculum level.

2.57 The College purposefully differentiates between eight stages of the student journey that apply to higher education (as well as further education). Higher education students benefit from information, advice and guidance provided by the Matrix Standard-awarded advisory team. The College has strategically invested in the development of advisory team staff (to Level 6) in order to provide the best possible support to its students. The Advisory and Student Services teams are proactive in developing advice and information and disseminating employment opportunities for the College's higher education students, and are working with programme teams in order to provide subject-specific careers advice.

2.58 Dissemination of information to students immediately post enrolment commences with an induction period, supported by information provided in their Student Handbooks.

During induction students are navigated through academic expectations and the regulatory frameworks that govern their programmes of study.

2.59 In addition to timetabled programme-specific delivery the College affords students with ample tutorial support opportunities. The use of a combination of group and one-to-one/individual tutorials allows students to access complete and coherent support from a range of resources if needed. To improve monitoring of higher education student retention, achievement and success and consequently to reduce attrition rates, the College is rolling out the use of educational software to its higher education provision. Although implementation is relatively recent, staff responsible for its roll-out and operation are optimistic about its positive impact on student experience, through improved opportunities for identifying at risk students and, consequently, more responsive implementation of supportive strategies by programme- and professional- staff.

2.60 The College has a rigorous approach to enabling students to progress between academic levels. While this is partly achieved through compliance with the awarding body expectations, regulatory frameworks and the FHEQ, the College takes responsibility for the one-to-one support needed (see previous paragraph). Programme staff also ensure that suitable assessment modes are used to assess the different academic levels. The approach taken to facilitate the development of students' professional and practical skills depends on the subject studied. However, the implementation of a robust work-based learning approach by the College, working alongside industry practitioners, personnel and drivers, means that students develop the skills necessary for employment while gaining their academic qualification.

2.61 The College takes the provision of appropriate resources to support its higher education programmes and students seriously (staff as resources are reported on in Section B3). A systematic approach is taken to the setting up of appropriate resources needed to run programmes. Use of a comprehensive and integrated business-based process, already identified as a feature of good practice, ensures that programmes are sufficiently resourced prior to validation. Programme resources are under constant review by the College, awarding bodies, external examiners, staff and students. The College has appropriate library and VLE resources and has strategically managed resources, with a recently implemented discrete library budget allocation for higher education. The College actively encourages the siting of industry-specific equipment at the College by key industry contacts. As noted in B3, the review team identified as a feature of good practice the wide range of teaching and learning initiatives that support the students and staff and enhance the learning experience.

2.62 Students expressed some concern over the administration of higher education resources, as they would appreciate greater access to facilities during holiday periods, as well as to websites that are blocked to further education users.

2.63 The College has processes in place to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. This is achieved through a strategic and integrative approach to ensuring sufficient resources for the higher education provision. There is substantial emphasis on the provision of student support and delivery that enables academic progression. The College has implemented a wide range of teaching and learning initiatives, including MetHigher and Teaching and Learning Coaches and Communities, to support students and staff and to enhance the learning experience. Therefore the team concludes that Expectation B4 of the UK Quality Code is met in both design and operation for the College's higher education provision and that 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

2.64 The College ensures that students have the opportunity to engage in the quality assurance processes and their own educational enhancement. After the College embarked on a renewed approach to working with students, the level of student involvement has increased. This has manifested itself in student representation at two College leadership conferences. Included in the Key Enhancement Objectives is one objective to increase the involvement of students at every level of the College. The College caters for diverse groups of students spread over a range of sites, which in turn creates challenges for the College in the engagement with the whole higher education student body. The College has recognised that it must address these challenges to ensure that students are at the heart of everything it does.

2.65 The College has increased the number of student representatives at a strategic level. For example, it has expanded the number of student governors from one to two. The second student governor represents the higher education students and has the mandate to contribute to the Corporation on behalf of the higher education students. The student representatives also attend College student committees, where students and staff engage in discussions. These forums discuss issues or suggest initiatives for enhancement.

2.66 A nominated student representative from each programme year group attends the Programme Management Committee meetings. Appropriate training is provided to the representatives to ensure that they are aware of the mechanisms available to them to collect reliable student views that are fit for purpose. Students can provide feedback on their programmes via student representatives. However, not all of the student representatives are aware of the College's training programme.

2.67 In 2014-15, the College conducted its first higher education student survey. The response rate of the survey was 39 per cent. Despite this low response, important information was collected from the survey results. The College gives further opportunities to students to express their views at a modular level via the module evaluation questionnaires.

2.68 The processes and mechanisms of student engagement at the College would allow Expectation B5 to be met.

2.69 The review team examined the arrangements that the College provides to engage its students in the quality assurance process and enhance their educational experience by considering the representative structure, higher education student engagement strategy, student surveys, module evaluation questionnaires, academic committee and subcommittee memberships, and the students on the validation/review panel. The review team met two student groups from the College and alumni, as well as senior and academic staff, to discuss the role of student engagement in quality assurance.

2.70 The College is committed to increasing its higher education student engagement and is reviewing its deliberative structures to identify where students could further be engaged. For example, the attendance of a student representative at an internal validation panel is one such development for 2015-16. Teaching and learning communities have also been selected as ideal opportunities for both students and staff to take part in evidence-based discussions. The HEAB will review the effectiveness of the Student Engagement

Strategy and the outcome of this will inform the necessary updating of policies and procedures.

2.71 The College is committed to improving the level of student engagement as partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The College also has new processes and strategies in place to ensure that student engagement continuously increases at every level. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to formalise student engagement across the College at all levels through the College's relevant Strategic Enhancement Priority.

2.72 Overall, the review team found that the College has appropriate structures, mechanisms and measures of success in place to ensure effective student engagement on different levels. Therefore, the team concludes that the College meets Expectation B5 of the Quality Code and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of Risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.73 The review team found that general assessment procedures align with those of the appropriate awarding body for the university awards. For the Pearson provision the College's own Higher Education Academic Standards Policy is used. The assessment strategies are laid out in the programme approval events with awarding bodies. Student handbooks provide information and guidance on how students will be assessed. Each programme agrees an annual assessment plan at the start of programme. The College's Assessment Policy outlines the required content for assignment briefs.

2.74 Details of submission arrangements and procedures for claims for extenuating circumstances are found in student handbooks. There are stated criteria for acceptance or rejections of claims for extensions based on extenuating circumstances. Student handbooks also contain guidance on referencing, laying out bibliographies and avoiding plagiarism. Plagiarism-detection software is used by awarding bodies to support students although it is not used across the whole College. The College's Higher Education Academic Misconduct Policy sets out the processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice.

2.75 The College's Higher Education Academic Misconduct Policy outlines the process by which the College works with awarding bodies when misconduct is suspected, to determine whether the awarding body policy and procedures are to be followed or whether the College Higher Education Misconduct Policy is to be followed.

2.76 The College defines its expectations of second marking and requires first and second markers to keep a record of marks awarded, with a rationale for each mark. Moderation is a shared responsibility between the College and awarding bodies. Written feedback is provided no later than five weeks after submission unless regulations of awarding bodies state a more limited time frame.

2.77 For the Pearson provision first marking and moderation takes place within the College by programme staff. This is then scrutinised and ratified by the Pearson-appointed External Verifier. Ratification, progression and awards are confirmed at Higher Education Examination Boards.

2.78 Marked work includes a feedback sheet giving details of how marks/grades have been allocated and an indication of areas for improvement. The College's Assessment Policy outlines the required contents of feedback sheets. Standard College assessment sheets are used unless awarding bodies stipulate otherwise.

2.79 Examination Boards confirm marks and agree any resubmissions. For Pearson awards the College's Academic Standards Policy sets out the authority, constitution and operation of exam boards as well as procedures for re-assessment and progression.

2.80 The College does not apply the recognition of prior learning (RPL) for the Pearson programmes; however, it does adhere to Pearson's credit accumulation and transfer policy. The College applies the RPL procedure of each awarding body where required.

2.81 The Expectation is met, as the approaches to assessment arrangements would enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

2.82 The team tested the expectation through meetings with students, a range of staff and employers. In addition, a range of evidence from across a variety of programmes was considered, including programme specifications, student handbooks, assessment schedules, examples of moderation, minutes of exam boards and external examiner reports. The evidence covered the full range of awarding bodies.

2.83 A range of assessments are used including, on some programmes, live briefs. Where there were live briefs the team heard an example of employers' feedback being sought on the relevance of the live briefs to their industry. Additionally, the College is engaging with employers more in terms of module design and assessment.

2.84 Student assessment literacy is facilitated by a range of activities. Tutorials and study skills are built into the curriculum for higher education programmes to provide ongoing support throughout the modules. Education software is used by staff to track student progression and set smart targets where appropriate. In addition, optional drop-in study and assessment support sessions are provided by the College. Students commented that they found this range of support helpful.

2.85 Students commented positively on the opportunities for formative feedback although the approach varied according to the practice of each awarding body. It was reported that tutors are 'very responsive' and supportive in all aspects of students' programmes, including assessment.

2.86 Programme handbooks contain information on the avoidance of plagiarism and the regulations for late submissions. Those students on franchised programmes make use of the plagiarism-detection software, although this is not used consistently across other provision.

2.87 Students confirmed that assessment schedules are produced for all programmes at the start of the year, outlining what is to be assessed and providing timelines that support their forward planning.

2.88 Students reported that the written feedback they receive strongly supports their understanding and development, in terms of both highlighting areas for improvement and identifying what has been done well. In addition to written feedback students are provided with the opportunity to meet with staff on a one-to-one basis to discuss their assessments, which is felt to be very supportive and beneficial. Although students are aware of external examiners they had not seen external examiner reports or responses to the reports.

2.89 Link tutors from awarding bodies confirmed their involvement in the standardisation and moderation processes. Cross-College standardisation is undertaken for the Pearson programmes, there is an internal verification process, and staff mark in pairs for standardisation purposes. The College may wish to strengthen oversight further by collating the themes and trends emerging from moderation and standardisation to inform quality improvement planning and staff development.

2.90 Link tutors from awarding bodies confirmed that there is appropriate oversight of examining boards. There was clear evidence of close working relationships between the College and the link tutors from the awarding bodies across learning, teaching and

assessment activities. For the Pearson programmes the College applies the Academic Standards Policy.

2.91 Any request for consideration of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is identified at the admission stage. The College admissions tutor within the relevant faculty is guided by the relevant awarding body's regulations and procedures. In respect of the Pearson provision the College follows the Pearson national policy and approach. The team heard that the College intends to signpost its RPL policy more explicitly in its Higher Education Assessment Policy. The College reported that it is rare to receive RPL applications. However, as the College wishes to increase recruitment it may be helpful to develop a cross-College mechanism to record RPL applications so that it is able to track and monitor consistency systematically in approach and decisions.

2.92 Overall, assessment is operated in accordance with the requirements of the awarding bodies and Pearson partnership arrangements, and enables students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought. Assessment is designed and conducted in an equitable manner and the College has developed its own Higher Education Assessment Policy to support consistency across all provision. Tutors' written and verbal feedback, as well as opportunities for formative feedback, support students in identifying their achievements and areas for improvement. A range of other formal and informal opportunities is provided for students to access study support and develop their assessment literacy. Moderation, standardisation and examining boards adhere to the regulations of the relevant awarding body or, in the case of Pearson, to the College's own assessment protocols. Staff development is supported by MetHigher, a forum for staff teaching on higher education programmes to discuss and share good practice. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.93 External examiners are nominated according to criteria outlined by awarding bodies and approved by university-based scrutiny panels. External Verifiers are appointed by Pearson to examine the HND provision.

2.94 Awarding bodies require external examiners to visit the College, to speak to students and staff and to review the academic standards and the learning opportunities for the programmes. External examiners undertake moderation of assessment briefs prior to issue, of examination questions and of assessed work throughout the academic year. External examiners are expected to confirm in their formal reports that programmes are taught at the appropriate level, that delivery and assessment at module level allow the programme learning outcomes to be achieved, and that threshold academic standards are met. External examiners are required to provide regular feedback to the College and programme staff during the academic year and formally in their annual report. External examiners are expected to attend the end of year Examining Boards at which marks are ratified.

2.95 External examiners' reports are submitted to the awarding body and undergo scrutiny prior to dissemination to the College. Upon receipt, the external examiner's report is reviewed by the programme team and discussed at the Programme Management Committee and Termly Review Board. The outcomes of external examiner reports are expected to contribute to the Annual Monitoring Review process and associated quality planning processes. Actions taken in response to the reports are recorded in the Programme Committee Meeting minutes, reported on in the Annual Monitoring Report and tabled at Academic Standards Board. Formal responses to the external examiners' reports are drafted by programme teams, approved by the Higher Education Quality Lead and returned to the appropriate awarding body. The response/s to the Pearson External Verifier are sent directly to the External Verifier.

2.96 The Higher Education Quality Lead collates the findings from all of the external examiner and External Verifier reports to produce a cross-College higher education external examiners' report, which is tabled at Higher Education Academic Board. This document feeds into the Cross-College Annual Monitoring Report, which is reported to the Executive Board and Corporation.

2.97 External examiners' reports are generally uploaded to programme-specific VLE pages. The College refers to the need to ensure that all external examiner reports are readily available to students in its Strategic Enhancement Policy.

2.98 The College uses the regulatory guidance and processes of its awarding bodies to ensure that scrupulous use is made of external examiners. It also has its own College-based process for use with the Pearson provision. The College produces a cross-College external examiners' report, which feeds into College-wide annual monitoring processes. This would enable it to meet Expectation B7 of the Quality Code.

2.99 The review team considered a range of documentation, including Quality Assurance Handbooks, external examiner reports, responses to external examiners, cross-College external examiners' report, cross-College annual monitoring reports, and minutes of

Examination Board. The review team met with the Head of the College, senior staff, teaching staff and students to discuss scrupulous use of external examiners.

2.100 External examiners are nominated either by the awarding body or by Pearson, and play an important role in the assurance of academic standards and learning opportunities for students studying higher education programmes at the College. For the university-awarded provision, external examiners receive training from the awarding body and undertake their duties under the awarding body's academic regulatory framework. The College implements its own processes for the Pearson provision, which mimic those of the university awarding bodies.

2.101 The College implements a robust process in which external examiners are able to meet students and to moderate assessment briefs and marked work. External examiners attend the end-of-year Examination Boards that take place at the College, where they confirm academic standards and contribute to the ratification of marks.

2.102 Although external examiners are required to submit reports directly to the awarding body, in some cases they are simultaneously sent to the College. All external examiners' reports undergo rigorous scrutiny through a comprehensive sequence of management meetings. A rigorous process is in place, resulting in formal responses to the external examiner made by programme managers, supported by College management staff.

2.103 The implementation of the Higher Education Quality Lead role has had a positive impact on the processes in place to quality assure the College's higher education provision. The structured extraction and collation of key points from all of the external examiner reports via the production of a Cross-College External Examiners' Report by the Higher Education Quality Lead reflects the strategic approach and ownership that the College has on its higher education provision.

2.104 The College is aware that there is an expectation that external examiners' reports are made available to students; however, although some are uploaded to programme-specific VLE pages, only a few of the students whom the team met confirmed having seen them. The review team **recommends** that by December 2016, the College makes current external examiners' reports available to all students.

2.105 For the College's higher education provision the College makes comprehensive use of the awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's academic frameworks and regulations, in addition to its own internal processes, to ensure that scrupulous use is made of external examiners, in order to assure and enhance the quality of the College's higher education provision. The review team **recommends** that the College should ensure that external examiners' reports are made available to all students. The team concludes that Expectation B7 of the Quality Code is broadly met in both design and operation for its higher education provision and that 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

2.106 The College is required to meet the awarding bodies' requirements for the monitoring and review of programmes. Arrangements are laid out in the respective collaborative agreements.

2.107 The College has developed its own Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education and Academic Standards Policy to assure itself that appropriate quality and academic standards are maintained across all of its higher education provision. The Academic Standards Policy sets out the College's process for the monitoring and review of its provision and defines the roles, responsibilities and membership of the various committees and boards.

2.108 Programme Committee Meetings are held three times a year and annual monitoring reviews are carried out by each programme team, using a set template. The Academic Standards Board decides whether or not the annual monitoring review is suitable for submission to the university or awarding body and provides a written report, to which the programme team responds.

2.109 Termly Review Boards and Quality Assurance Boards as held to consider outcomes from the Programme Committee monitoring meetings, and to implement and monitor actions where required.

2.110 A cross-College Annual Monitoring Report, mapped to the Quality Code, summarises the quality of all higher education provision across the College, including identifying risks, areas for improvement, areas of good practice and enhancement. A cross-College external examiners' higher education report is also produced. Both reports are considered at the Higher Education Academic Board, which has been established and which meets three times a year to consider and advise the Executive on all higher education academic matters. The College's Higher Education Academic Standards Policy supports the College in assuring itself that appropriate quality and academic standards are being maintained in its Higher Education provision by a process of annual review and monitoring.

2.111 In addition to the formal committee monitoring arrangements there are a range of formal and informal opportunities for students to feed back on teaching and learning, which include end-of-module surveys as well as representation at programme management committees and staff student forums. It is recognised that completion of end-of-module evaluations lacks consistency; to address this, the College has identified a Key Enhancement Objective.

2.112 The processes for the monitoring and review of programmes at the College, in association with the awarding bodies, would therefore enable Expectation B8 to be met.

2.113 In testing this expectation the review team examined a range of documents including minutes from Programme Management Committees, Termly Review Board, Annual Standards Boards, Examination Boards, Higher Education Academic Board, Annual Monitoring Reports, the Cross-College Annual Monitoring Review and the cross-College external examiners' review. The team also reviewed evidence of module evaluation and the

Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan. The team also held meetings with staff from the College, awarding body representatives, employers, alumni and students from across the higher education provision.

2.114 The College has developed, and is now operating, an extensive internal process to ensure the complete monitoring and review of its higher education programmes, as outlined in its Academic Standards Policy. The quality assurance processes have been redesigned over the past 18 months and are now operating for the first full cycle. The review team **affirms** the expansion of the Academic Standards Policy to provide strategic oversight of higher education provision. The new approach was clearly understood by staff across the College's higher education provision.

2.115 The Higher Education Academic Board is the strategic College body that prepares and approves key higher education documents. It advises on student experience, learning, teaching and assessment, external relations, new partnerships, and the range of academic subjects and developments. In addition to the representatives from the executive and staff with key responsibilities for higher education, the membership also includes central service staff who have welcomed sitting on the board as it enables them to have a voice. Importantly, staff feel that the Board considers all aspects of the student journey in a holistic sense.

2.116 Scrutiny of the minutes of the meetings of the Programme Monitoring Committees confirmed that the standard agendas are in use, although there is variability in the details of the minutes and in the level of reflection and analysis. The issue of variability is recognised by the College, which has set this as a strategic enhancement priority. There was student representation at some of the meetings but not all. Students reported that they had seen minutes from the meetings and felt that they could have an active input into the meetings, which has led to change, for example specific rooms being set aside for higher education students at two campuses, with a third campus planning to open an area in the near future.

2.117 The Termly Review Boards, again with a set agenda, receive Programme Management Committee minutes and discuss underperforming provision and new provision. Actions are identified from programme monitoring reports, which feed into the faculty's quality improvement plan (QIP). Where underperformance or risk is identified, regular monitoring is undertaken through quality improvement plans, the Termly Review Board and the Academic Standards Board. The team was able to track this process through the relevant committees for one area identified as needing improvement. In the most recent review of the quality improvement plan for this subject area improvements and progress were noted.

2.118 The team confirmed that Annual Monitoring Reports are produced by programme teams, which consider feedback from external examiners and employers. In addition, internal data analysis of areas including outcomes, recruitment and progression, student feedback, good practice and enhancement were considered. An action plan for the forthcoming period, in addition to reporting on the previous year's action plan, is identified.

2.119 Annual Academic Standards Boards review the currency and validity of the programme and confirm that each Directorate has effectively monitored its programmes during the previous year. The team confirmed that this process ensures consistency across the higher education provision as well as enabling high level identification of issues arising across the institution.

2.120 All annual monitoring reports are collated to produce a Cross-College Annual Monitoring Report, which is considered and approved by the Higher Education Academic Board. The structure of the Cross-College Annual Monitoring Report reflects the Quality

Code. The College informed the review team that it will be adapting the programme annual monitoring report template in the coming year to ensure that all aspects of the code are considered. The Cross-College Annual Monitoring Report feeds into the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan to ensure that action is taken to address the issues.

2.121 Consideration of the Cross-College Annual Monitoring Report and the cross-College higher education external examiners' report at the Higher Education Academic Board enables the identification of College-wide enhancement themes. The enhancement themes were included in the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan and the team saw evidence of specific work streams to address the enhancement themes around data.

2.122 The College identified that completion of end-of-module evaluations lacks consistency, and set a strategic enhancement priority accordingly. The team heard from students that although the majority had completed module evaluations not all are familiar with the process. Students are aware that issues they raise are fed upwards and could give examples of changes that had been made in response to their feedback, but in some cases this was through informal rather than formal processes. There was evidence in some student handbooks of feedback on actions taken in response to student issues but this was not a consistent approach. Staff confirmed that account is taken of the outcomes from module evaluations and were able to give some examples of changes which have been made in response to feedback. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to provide systematic feedback to students on actions taken in response to module evaluation and analysis.

2.123 The College is developing an approach to annual planning that unites the finance and curriculum planning processes. The newly established formal internal validation process requires a business case that includes a market analysis, identification and allocation of resources, confirmation of funding, employment opportunities and information on marketing, before programmes are allowed to progress. The investment in key personnel to oversee and coordinate quality in higher education across the College, and the identification of faculty leads and College campus leads for higher education, has led to a matrix management approach and demonstrates that resources are being invested to ensure that the Academic Standards Policy is embedded. From meetings held with staff from across the College it was clear that the structures are understood and are beginning to become embedded. As noted in earlier sections, the review team identified the integrative approach to strategic oversight of higher education provision, combining the business and academic planning processes, as making a positive contribution to the student learning experience.

2.124 Alongside its own procedures, the College adheres to awarding bodies' quality assurance frameworks. Each awarding body works with College staff throughout the year in accordance with the collaborative arrangements. The team saw examples of link tutor reports and minutes of meetings held between the programme teams and awarding bodies that showed discussion of programme issues, including teaching, learning and assessment. The team met with representatives from the awarding bodies who reported supportive and close working relationships, which include a range of activities such as team teaching, moderation, joint action research, and attendance at programme monitoring committees.

2.125 The review team **affirms** the steps taken by the College to provide strategic oversight of higher education provision by the introduction of the Academic Standards Policy, as well as those steps taken to provide systematic feedback to students on actions taken in response to module evaluation and analysis. The team concludes that the College meets the Expectation in the way in which it discharges its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, and operates effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of higher education programmes.

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

2.126 All partners of the College have their own appeals and complaints policies and processes, which are available to students. The College also has academic appeals and complaints procedures. All academic appeals are referred to the relevant awarding body. However, depending on the nature of the complaint, (see B.2 earlier), the majority are dealt with initially by the College's complaints and appeal processes. The College's Complaints Policy sets out the processes by which students make complaints or appeals and contains details of when it is necessary to invoke the relevant university's procedures. While the complaints procedure is available on the College website, however, the appeal process is not available online.

2.127 In 2014-15, the College received ten complaints in total. While the majority of these complaints were actioned within the prescribed timeframe, four complaints were not. The College recognised this area for further development and has instigated regular monitoring of the progress of complaints, which is considered by HEAB on a termly basis. The nature of the complaints is also reviewed in the Termly Review Boards. The HEAB and Executive reflect on these reports and ensure that complaints are dealt with in a timely manner, that trends can begin to be identified, and any areas for future improvement. If necessary, complaints and appeals are also reported to the higher education awarding bodies. Therefore, the review team **affirms** the actions being taken to monitor the scope of complaints and the timeliness of responses.

2.128 The College subscribes to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The College states that if students have a complaint regarding acts or errors caused by the College which cannot be addressed by the College, then they can take their issues to the OIA.

2.129 The College has effective procedures in place for handling academic appeals and complaints. The procedures are fair, accessible and increasing performable within the stated timeframe. Therefore, the College meets the Expectation.

2.130 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements in place to meet Expectation B9 by reviewing the relevant evidence provided by the College and by meeting staff at all levels, two student groups, and staff members from awarding bodies.

2.131 The College regularly reviews its complaints and appeals procedures and the processes are monitored by the College's governance structures. The weekly complaints analysis report is sent to the College's executives.

2.132 The students whom the review team met demonstrated patchy knowledge of the complaints and appeals procedures and some were unaware of the resources available to them to assist them in lodging an appeal or complaint. Therefore, the review team **recommends** making information on appeals and complaints more accessible for current students via the College's website by September 2016 (see also section B2).

2.139 Overall, the review team concludes that the College has effective and appropriate policies and procedures in place to meet Expectation B9 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

2.133 The Higher Education Leadership and Management Team takes the lead on behalf of the College in providing a focal point for the operation of the collaborative relationships with awarding bodies, and in managing arrangements for the delivery of learning opportunities delivered by external stakeholders, such as work-based learning opportunities and placements. The College has a suite of policies for higher education which form a systematic structure for the management of the provision.

2.134 The College works closely with the partner institutions to meet the specific requirements that are set by the awarding bodies. The awarding bodies have accountability and responsibility for overall management and oversight of all the programmes. The partnership agreements between the College and its awarding bodies illustrate that the awarding bodies take overall responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, regardless of where these are delivered and who provides them.

2.135 Regular meetings are held between the College and its partner institutions, at both an operational and strategic level, the outcomes of which are reported at the College External Partnership Board for discussion and subsequent reporting to the Academic Board. A partnership manager is assigned by the College and a link tutor by the awarding body partner, enabling a holistic approach to stakeholder engagement.

2.136 Processes are in place between the College and the awarding bodies that set out how these relationships are managed. The awarding bodies have formalised arrangements through legally binding contracts with the College. The annual renewal of these programme-level contracts and financial agreements are monitored through a formal process by the Director of Finance and the Clerk of Governors for viability, currency and accuracy.

2.137 The partnership agreements and relationships between the College and the awarding bodies, and the policies and procedures that underpin the work place opportunities offered through employers, would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.138 The review team tested the College's arrangements for implementing and managing work-based learning opportunities and placements through analysing programme information and partnership agreements. The review team also considered the information provided to employers and the information provided through meetings with staff, students and employers.

2.139 The College has a range of responsibilities for learning opportunities delegated by its awarding bodies, including the provision of work placement opportunities on foundation degrees and teacher training qualifications. The majority of programmes include a work-based learning element that is provided through employment or placement.

2.140 The College arranges the support and delivery of learning through placements in agreement with the awarding body. For example, the placement arrangements made to ensure that students on the BSc (Hons) Podiatry, the FdSc Football Business Management and Coaching and the Certificate in Post Compulsory Education/Professional Graduate

Certificate in Post Compulsory Education secure the opportunity to meet all of the relevant programme's learning outcomes.

2.141 The College has sound relationships with employers who, in addition to providing work-based learning opportunities, also contribute to live briefs for assessments and access to professional networks. Students confirm the value of these external relationships in enhancing their employability, providing exposure to current professional practices and assisting them in their career choices.

2.142 Students and employers are supported through a strong placement management process, in turn through the matrix management structure. Employers receive a handbook confirming their responsibilities and students are advised of the professional standards expected of them through the relevant module and the programme tutor.

2.143 The mechanisms for quality assurance of the work-based learning opportunities include audit visits by designated work-based tutors and, more recently, a representative employer has been invited to attend the Programme Management Committees, which will allow formal reporting to occur.

2.144 The College is confident that it has a robust and effective structure in place to confirm the arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations and takes cognisance of the needs of employers and students.

2.145 As identified in Expectations A2.1 and B3, the review team found that the College's effective partnership with its awarding bodies, and the underpinning this provides for academic standards and promotion of staff development and student learning opportunities, to be a feature of good practice. Overall, the review team found that the College's sound practices and procedures to manage work-based learning opportunities on behalf of its awarding bodies and with employers, and to provide strong support for students and enhance their employability, enable Expectation B10 to be met, and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.146 The College does not offer any postgraduate research provision, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.148 All the Expectations in this area are met, with low levels of associated risk.

2.149 The review team identified some areas of good practice in the approach taken by the College to managing the quality of student learning opportunities. In particular, the team identified as good practice the integrative approach to strategic oversight of higher education provision across the College, which combines the business and academic planning processes with the wide range of teaching and learning initiatives, which, in turn, proactively support the students and staff; and the way in which effective partnerships with its awarding bodies promote staff development and student learning opportunities.

2.150 The team makes two recommendations: that the College should make information on appeals and complaints more accessible for prospective and current students via its website, and that it should make current external examiners' reports available to all students.

2.151 The team also affirms a number of actions taken by the College in this area, including steps being taken to formalise student engagement across the College at all levels through the relevant Strategic Enhancement Priority; the introduction of the Academic Standards Policy to provide strategic oversight of higher education provision; the steps being taken to provide systematic feedback to students on actions taken in response to module evaluation and analysis; and the actions being taken to monitor the scope of complaints and the timeliness of responses.

2.152 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK Expectations

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 Information about the College, its courses, support, campuses, facilities and College life is made available to the public, including applicants, students, parents, employers, and staff, through the College website and printed materials, including a prospectus and handbook and the VLE.

3.2 The principal mechanism for communication about higher education provision is the College's website, which has a specific higher education page containing the programme specifications. Other mechanisms include the printed prospectus and the web-based e-prospectus and Course Finder.

3.3 UniteE, the academic and student administration record system, drives the data to the website ensuring courses included in Course Finder are those validated by the College and its awarding body partners. Course Finder provides direct links to Unistats and the Key Information Set website for the course that the student is viewing.

3.4 The College web pages provide applicants and potential applicants with guidance on financial matters, including details of sources of financial support. As part of an ongoing nurturing approach, applicants are to be sent information at various stages of the admissions cycle; this is both information about the application process and information specific to the faculty/subject.

3.5 The College meets Expectation C, as it provides information to its stakeholders through a number of channels and understands and complies with its awarding body requirements for the approval and publication of information.

3.6 The review team tested the College's approach to the provision of information through the consideration of its printed and online materials, which were made available, and at meetings with staff, students and employers. The team also met representatives from the College's awarding bodies.

3.7 The College confirms that data management requires further development to inform planning and management decision making, and has identified this as a strategic priority. The validity and availability of data sets for analysis and evaluation are being improved, which enables accurate judgements to be made, with the Director of Data Management leading a work stream to produce a data reporting dashboard for the required higher education metrics. Staff confirm that the availability of reports on key metrics has made an impact, and acknowledge that the disaggregation of higher education from further education will inform their monitoring further.

3.8 The students report that there is a need for greater elaboration on the depth and difficulty of provision in the prospectus and on the website to enable them to make more informed decisions on whether the course is for them, but they found that the information provided was reflected in their experience upon enrolment.

3.9 The College recognises that there is an underutilisation of College-based data in attracting students and more is being done to help prospective students make informed choices about how well a programme is performing, information about graduate destinations, including employment and further study, and about how satisfied students are with the programme. This area has been identified as a key area for enhancement and the Higher Education Coordinator and the Director of Marketing are leading a work stream to drive the necessary enhancements.

3.10 Student Handbooks are made available to all students, and are either distributed in hard copy, posted on the VLE or both. The College states that consistency in the content of the Student Handbooks is being improved by the implementation of a content check list. All Student Handbooks are submitted to the Vice Principal Teaching and Learning, who is responsible for the final check on accuracy. The subsequent report on the standard of the Student Handbooks is tabled at Higher Education Academic Board.

3.11 All public information concerning partner institutions is approved by them prior to publication. There are validation processes in place for the oversight of the accuracy of information and the College considers information on its programmes to be a shared responsibility with its awarding body partners. In-year changes are amended on the website and disseminated to relevant parties through nominated personnel.

3.12 The Programme Specification for each programme is shared with the students through the Course Handbook and the VLE. Students confirmed that there is currently no formal process in place to share reports from external examiners. The College recognises the need for further development to engage students with external examiner reports.

3.13 The review team found developments undertaken to improve data to be positive and **affirms** the steps taken to improve the strategic oversight of data analysis across the higher education provision to inform planning and decision making.

3.14 The team found that the processes in place for checking for the accuracy of information provided were sound and that the College uses a range of mechanisms to convey information to its stakeholders, which is readily accessible. The review team therefore concludes that the College meets Expectation C and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.16 The review team scrutinised a range of documentation (both published in hard copy and electronic versions) made available to prospective, current and former students, and other stakeholders. The College has approval mechanisms in place for ensuring that published information is accurate. The review team also affirmed the steps being taken by the College to improve strategic oversight of data analysis across higher education provision to inform planning and decision making.

3.17 Overall, the review team finds that the College has considered the formal requirements of the Expectation and 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 College is committed to taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. Although there is no explicit enhancement policy, in March 2015 the College instigated revisions to the processes and management of higher education that were designed to improve the College's ability to implement enhancement. These deliberate steps include increased higher education representation at corporation level, with a higher education governor and a higher education student governor; and the introduction of the Academic Standards Policy, which was updated to reflect the necessity to increase focus on the process of enhancement at all levels of the quality cycle and to ensure that there is an integrated approach to linking enhancement with initiatives and outcomes.

4.2 The improvements to the processes and management of higher education include the introduction of the HEAB. This Board has a remit to identify and monitor strategic enhancement initiatives. Communication processes to inform staff of enhancement priorities have been developed. Thematic Audits have been reintroduced to identify further areas of enhancement, and the College has used its Teaching and Learning Communities to enhance the student experience by reducing attrition. The College plans to strengthen further the role of students as partners in assuring quality across the College by introducing a higher education Student Enhancement Forum, with a remit to scope student views in order to identify cross-College themes for enhancement.

4.3 Following the completion of the 2014-15 programme annual monitoring reports and the consideration of the cross-College Annual Monitoring Report, a range of strategic enhancement priorities were identified and approved by the HEAB and the Executive, and these are being taken forward through the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan.

4.4 The College has identified deliberate steps to improve and enhance the quality of the learning opportunities and has expanded the mechanisms by which this is achieved. Therefore, these actions would enable this Expectation to be met.

4.5 In testing this expectation the review team analysed a range of documents including the Academic Standards Policy, the HEAB minutes and the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan. The team also met with students, staff, alumni and employers and heard how the College's Strategic Enhancement Priorities were embedded across the College.

4.6 The organisational development and subsequent changes in the processes and management of higher education have led to the identification of key strategic enhancement priorities. As this is the first full year of implementation of the quality cycle and enhancement priorities it was noted that not all of the initial aspirations have yet been achieved, such as the election of the student higher education governor, although elections were taking place during the period of the visit. The team also heard that plans to operate the Student Enhancement Forum were also in abeyance pending the imminent election of the higher education student governor, who would chair this forum once in post.

4.7 The identification of the strategic priorities arising from the annual monitoring reports were actioned in the higher education QIP and monitored by the HEAB. The enhancement themes, particularly those relating to retention and the VLE, were also mirrored in the faculty-level QIPs and programme-level QIPs, which are reviewed at the

Termly Review Boards. This cascading at all levels demonstrates an integration of enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner. Therefore the review team concludes that the quality assurance procedures are used effectively to identify opportunities for enhancement.

4.8 Specific work streams have been identified around data management and reporting and the use of the VLE. The team was given a demonstration on how College staff are being encouraged to use the VLE, which included a ratings structure to support staff in their understanding and development. Senior staff confirmed that more accessible reports of key metrics are now available, which, in addition to the training of managers in how to use them, will underpin the data improvement initiative. This process is still in progress but managers reported raised staff expectations of the capability of the systems and staff confirmed their increased use of the systems to monitor attendance and track students. While strategic priorities have been identified and progress is evident for some, it will be important for the College to monitor across the work streams and priorities to ensure that appropriate action is taken against all areas identified.

4.9 Senior staff reported that there is regular review of the new Higher Education Strategy and structure, which will include the potential for a designated strategic lead for higher education over and above the current arrangements. The review team affirms the investment being made in staffing infrastructure to embed higher education quality assurance across the College.

4.10 There is a College ethos that expects and encourages enhancement of student learning opportunities. Following the merger that led to the formation of Birmingham Metropolitan College, and to support the changes and culture of higher education, the MetHigher network was established to raise awareness of higher education issues and matters. It was a deliberate step to establish a cross-College higher education community, to discuss and disseminate best practice, and as a forum for discussion and support. Although attendance was originally voluntary, it is now seen as a mandatory element of staff development. The meetings take place on a Wednesday afternoon, which is protected from timetabled teaching across higher education. Staff commented positively on the impact of MetHigher in meetings with the review team. Staff see it as a place to develop common approaches, to support standardisation and to share good practice. In addition, it has been used to provide VLE training and to provide updates on academic standards and the Quality Code, and is considered by senior staff as central to supporting higher education staff development.

4.11 In addition, the College introduced Teaching and Learning Communities in 2015-16. This is a deliberate approach to improving quality and ownership of teaching, learning and assessment in curriculum departments and supports the College's teaching and learning strategy. An action planning template has been devised for the formation of Teaching and Learning Communities, which should include a student member. Each community will identify an area to research to improve student success based on the analysis of the data, student feedback, observations and the QIP. There will be half termly reports on progress and impact. The team heard from staff examples of some of the current projects investigating issues relating to student retention. As part of the MetHigher network, an external expert had been invited to speak to staff on action research in order to support the Teaching and Learning Communities.

4.12 The team concludes that the new approach to quality assurance, in terms of both process and staffing, was ensuring that enhancement opportunities were being identified and are beginning to be acted upon. Additionally, as noted in earlier sections B3 and B4, the team identifies that the wide range of teaching and learning initiatives, which proactively

support the students and staff and enhance the learning experience, as a feature of good practice.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.14 The review team found that the College has taken deliberate and effective steps to develop a culture of enhancement across the College. The review team identified the College's instigation of a wide range of teaching and learning initiatives, which proactively support the students and staff and enhance the learning experience as a feature of good practice. The review team also affirmed the investment being made in the staffing infrastructure to embed higher education quality assurance across the College.

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

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The College successfully supports students from a range of diverse backgrounds to improve their employability through their studies on its higher education programmes. The self-evaluation document offered some detailed examples of case studies, which explored in depth how the College has embedded an approach to employability in the majority of its higher education programmes through placement options, live assessment briefs and sound working relationships with a wide range of employers in the region.

5.2 The College recognises the central importance of employers in enhancing the employability of its students and the quality of their learning opportunities. The College is committed to improving the opportunities for employability for all of its students from all levels of provision. The College has established strong links with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and is using this and other initiatives, such as the Greater Birmingham Professional Services Academy, to work with employers to meet their needs and support strong, sustainable economic growth in the region.

5.3 The Principal confirms that although the College has recently undergone a period of significant change, it is now in the position where it can identify and address problematic areas more effectively. A strong College-wide drive on employability is being used to underpin the restructuring of the higher education provision, with an emphasis on specialist provision in areas such as health care, dental technology and podiatry. In line with the findings of the Green Paper: *Fulfilling our Potential; Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* and its general focus on employability, the College is actively working to widen opportunities, especially for those who are under-represented within the higher education population. The College is keen to provide progression opportunities for all of its students.

5.4 The College defines employability in terms of learners' achievements and potential to pursue a career at a higher level. In order to achieve this the College provides students with opportunities to develop both their academic skills and transferable, personal and professional skills. Some programmes, notably podiatry, develop students' practical skills and competencies alongside academic theory. The podiatry programme team was responsive to students' requests to deliver theory and practical studies in an integrated manner rather than separately and sequentially.

5.5 Some students are already in employment and undertaking the programme of study as part of their work expectations and as required Continuous Professional Development. For some programmes, such as childhood studies, students must be in employment as a prerequisite of enrolment. The College supports these students by various means, including having the support of a College-based tutor and an identified mentor within the workplace.

5.6 As a reflection of its commitment to employability and the development of relevant graduate skills, the College has embedded employability in all higher education programmes, and in all higher education meetings as a standing agenda item. The College is keen to monitor the success of employability-related initiatives and is consequently improving the metrics used to assess employability success through increasing its detailed analysis of admissions, progression and destination data. This will facilitate a better understanding of the ratio of conversion of employability training into employment.

5.7 The College is improving its own higher education validation process through the inclusion of a higher education-specific strand focusing on the development of students' employability skills and evidence that employers have been closely involved with, and have

contributed to, the design and development of programmes. It has also taken proactive steps to facilitate the attendance of employers at Programme Management committee meetings, with varying uptake to date.

5.8 In terms of delivery of employability training, the College uses a range of work-based learning models. These include work-based learning in practice, development of enterprise and entrepreneurial skills, for example by mounting an exhibition, embedding with other qualifications such as Higher Level Apprenticeships, and providing a contemporary industry setting within the College environs to support the programme. As noted under Expectation B4, the College has strategically invested in the development of advisory team staff (to Level 6) in order to provide the best possible careers support to its students. The Advisory and Student Services teams are proactive in developing advice and information and disseminating employment opportunities for the College's higher education students, and are working with programme teams in order to provide subject-specific careers advice.

Glossary

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

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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