Higher Education Review of Bishop Auckland College

March 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Bishop Auckland College. The review took place from 29 February to 3 March 2016 and was conducted by a team of reviewers, as follows:

- Miss Lucy Bannister (student reviewer)
- Dr Paul Ryall
- Mr Robert Saynor.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Bishop Auckland 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 6.

In reviewing Bishop Auckland 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.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk//the-quality-code
[2] Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106
[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 Bishop Auckland College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The wide range of staff development opportunities and the support provided to engage in these, which enhances student learning opportunities (Expectation B3).
- The requirement for Learning Zone Facilitators and the E-learning Facilitator to possess a teaching qualification, which supports students' academic development (Expectation B4).
- The thorough internal verification and moderation processes that support assessment decisions effectively (Expectation B6).
- The detailed programme and module review processes for University of Sunderland awards, which make a significant contribution to the maintenance of academic standards and quality enhancement (Expectation B8).

Recommendations

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

By September 2016:

- clearly articulate the framework for the academic governance and management of higher education provision through the senior deliberative quality committee (Expectation A2.1)
- establish clear procedures for the identification, storage and amendment of all definitive course records (Expectations A2.2 and B1)
- revise the Learner Involvement Strategy to incorporate students as full partners and to ensure the sustainability of the current higher education student representative structure (Expectation B5)
- provide training opportunities for all student representatives (Expectation B5)
- make annual assessment plans available to students at the start of their programme (Expectation B6)
- make external verifier reports available to students on Pearson programmes (Expectation B7)
- ensure that annual course reviews of Higher National awards make more evaluative use of key performance indicators and evidence (Expectations B8 and A3.3)
- make explicit the evidence base used to inform and justify strategic enhancement priorities for higher education provision (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to use the new in-house tracking system to capture assessment decisions for Pearson students prior to assessment boards (Expectation B6).

Theme: Student Employability

The College's mission is stated as the enhancement of the economic prosperity of young people, adults and employers through high quality work-related education and training. The College aims to link its provision to local economic needs, drawing on local market intelligence. Students are confident that their programmes are enhancing their employability and believe that most assignments have an employability element built into them. Students benefit from substantial formal mechanisms for advising them on employability issues. There are strong working links with employers which result in a range of opportunities for developing the employability prospects of students.

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

About Bishop Auckland College

Bishop Auckland College (the College) aspires to be outstanding and to be the first choice provider for developing the skills and workforce of the future in South Durham.

The College's mission is to enhance the economic prosperity of young people, adults and employers through high quality, work-related education and training.

Bishop Auckland College is a small further education college based in the semi-rural area of south-west Durham. The main College campus is located in Bishop Auckland with two community-based learning centres in nearby town centres. The area includes some of the most socially deprived communities in the country with economic activity, earning and skills levels well below the national average. The proportion of people with qualifications at Level 4 and above is below other areas in the country. The College offers vocational qualifications from entry level to higher education, and although the latter represents a relatively small area of the College's activity there has been growth in numbers, rising to 225 students in 2014-15. Higher education is currently delivered in the following curriculum areas: health and social care; counselling; education in care; art; music; performing art; sport; public services; management; and teacher training.

Higher education has been a key element of the College's work since 1993, and is central to its ambition to act as a catalyst for change in the local communities through enabling economic regeneration and social inclusion. The College values higher education as a key driver for economic and social progression, and views it as personally transformational. The College continues to have ambitious plans to increase the availability and accessibility of vocational higher education that will therefore meet the needs of the local and regional population as well as those of business and industry; this is defined within the College's Higher Education Strategy.

The College has a long-standing strategic partnership with the University of Sunderland. The relationship with, and recent accreditation by, Pearson to deliver HND programmes has offered significant potential for further enhancements to both the curriculum and the student experience.

QAA, through an Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review in 2011, confirmed confidence in the College's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offered on behalf of the University of Sunderland. It similarly concluded that there could be confidence in the management of learning opportunities and reliance on the completeness and accuracy of the information it published about itself. Seven examples of good practice were identified. They included the positive relationship with the University, the extensive range of staff development, and the variety of methods used and systematic approach adopted in capturing the student voice. Three desirable recommendations were made. One recommended that more explicit reference be made to the *Code of practice* and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure, superseded by the Quality Code. The second recommended reviewing the observation of teaching to include themes specific to higher education. Finally, the College was recommended to implement minimum standards of content for the virtual learning environment. The team concludes that the College has taken steps to address these recommendations.

Explanation of the findings about Bishop Auckland 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 the degree-awarding body and awarding organisation

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

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) are met by:

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 Ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of programmes offered by the College lies with its awarding body, the University of Sunderland (the University) and awarding organisation, Pearson UK (Pearson), who ensure that the requirements of the FHEQ are met. Relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and qualification characteristics are considered as part of the programme design, approval and review processes operated by the awarding body and awarding organisation.

1.2 Standards for Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes are articulated in Pearson documentation. The College Curriculum Quality and Student Services Committee considers the design of Pearson provision through the College's internal approval process. Standards are confirmed annually by external examiners and verifiers in their reports.

1.3 These procedures would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.4 The review team (the team) reviewed the effectiveness of these procedures and practices by examining policies, regulations, programme specifications, programme handbooks, programme approval documentation, partnership agreements, periodic review documentation, and external examiners' reports, and by holding meetings with staff.

1.5   Members of the College's senior management team have a clear understanding of their responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in partnership agreements. Teaching staff are familiar with the Quality Code and the FHEQ, and have a clear grasp of the distinction between provision at different levels. This is reinforced through internal moderation and verification of assessments and through teaching observation.

1.6   While the University and Pearson have ultimate responsibility through their own regulatory frameworks for ensuring that the relevant external reference points are adhered to, there is evidence that the College is managing its own responsibilities for this effectively, as set out in partnership agreements. This is confirmed through a variety of mechanisms including reviews by the awarding body and awarding organisation and through external examiner reporting. Therefore, the team determines that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.7   The regulatory frameworks of the University and Pearson determine academic standards and award of credit for each programme. In the validation, operation, monitoring and review of its higher education programmes, the College is required to work within the academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding body and organisation as set out in the partnership agreements.

1.8   For Pearson provision, the College also applies its own regulations for assessment malpractice, internal verification, academic appeals, mitigating circumstances and reasonable adjustments. An examination board is held at the College at the end of the year to confirm marks for Pearson provision. For programmes leading to awards of the University, module boards and progression and award boards are held at the University with College staff in attendance. The College is also required to adhere to the University requirements in designing, developing, assessing, monitoring and reviewing programmes. The academic regulatory arrangements are clear and the College processes comply with the requirements of the University. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.9   The team reviewed the effectiveness of the College's practices and procedures by examining academic frameworks and regulations, partnership agreements, policies and procedural documents, partnership reviews, external examiners' reports, student handbooks, and assessment board minutes. The team also met senior staff, teaching and support staff, and a representative of the awarding body.

1.10   Reviews conducted by the University and Pearson demonstrate that the College meets its obligations under the agreements that it holds with its awarding partners. The team found the local regulations, which the College applies to Pearson provision, to be clear and fit for purpose.

1.11   Staff are clear about the respective responsibilities between the College and the University. The College's senior leadership team and programme teaching staff are aware of, and make use of, relevant documentation provided by awarding partners. Teaching and support staff also have a sound understanding of awarding body, awarding organisation and local procedures. Student programme handbooks draw attention to partner University or local regulations and procedures as appropriate and the College makes these available via the student portal. Assessment boards are properly attended and conducted.

1.12   Changes to the management infrastructure of the College over recent years have affected the committee structure of the College, in particular the function of the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee. The team found that there is a lack of clarity concerning the function of the Committee. The minutes of meetings do not always accurately reflect the business that the team was told should be conducted through the Committee. Given that the Committee is considered to be the core deliberative forum for managing higher education provision within the College there is a need for clarity about its function and operation. The team concludes that this Committee could be used more effectively and therefore **recommends** the College to clearly articulate the framework for the academic

governance and management of higher education provision through the senior deliberative quality committee.

1.13   The awarding partners have responsibility for academic frameworks and regulations. The College operates effectively within the context of the partnership agreements with its awarding body and organisation but there is a lack of clarity about the way in which the academic governance framework is supposed to operate. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met but the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

1.14   The University of Sunderland and Pearson have academic frameworks and regulations that outline responsibility for standards, quality and enhancement. The University and Pearson take the lead in setting standards and the College takes the lead in maintaining standards. The responsibility for maintaining a definitive record of programme approval, monitoring and review rests with the University for its awards and with the College in the case of Pearson provision.

1.15   The College uses the programme handbook as the definitive programme record. It contains programme specifications and module information. Programme handbooks are maintained at a programme level and not held centrally within the College. There are College and University-devised templates for the creation of the programme handbooks, which ensure that they are consistent across the College's higher education provision. The College's processes are appropriately designed to allow the Expectation to be met.

1.16   The team tested the Expectation by considering documentation produced by the College, including a responsibilities checklist produced by the College, frameworks provided by the awarding body and organisation, programme handbooks, and templates provided by the College, to ensure that these are consistent across all courses. The team also met awarding body representatives, and senior and academic College staff.

1.17   Programme specifications are available in programme handbooks. These include details of learning outcomes and the specified number of credits. The University provides a framework in the University Quality Handbook for the maintenance of definitive module records, which the College follows explicitly. The College holds internal approval events for its Pearson provision; however, it is unclear how much control is asserted as a result of these events and the Pearson approval forms are generic in terms of qualification, and include no details of unit content or resources.

1.18   For the Pearson provision, there is no centralised, secure system to ensure the control of the definitive record of each programme and qualification that the College offers. Programme teams are responsible for ensuring that accurate versions of programme specifications are maintained; however, this leaves open the potential for unapproved changes to be made to programme information contained in the definitive course document. Therefore, the team **recommends** that the College establishes clear procedures for the identification, storage and amendment of all definitive course records.

1.19   The team considers the College's processes for the production of definitive programme records to be fit for purpose and saw evidence of compliance with the awarding organisation's requirements. The team also considers that programme specifications located in the programme handbooks provide a definitive record of the College's provision. However, the fact that definitive course records are held locally and not centrally means that there is a moderate level of risk that changes to the course document could occur without due

process, thereby undermining the definitive nature of the course record. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: **Met**
Level of risk: **Moderate**

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

1.20 The University and Pearson are responsible for ensuring that the academic standards of their programmes, individual modules, learning outcomes and assessment strategies comply with the FHEQ, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, professional benchmarks, and the Quality Code. The College is diligent in applying the academic standards and module guidance as defined by the University and Pearson to the quality assurance, delivery and assessment of the programmes it delivers on their behalf.

1.21 The College delivers the University franchised provision in partnership with a number of other further education colleges in the region. The University has processes and procedures in place to approve programmes offered at the College and to approve major amendments during the life of a validated programme. Alignment of such provision with the FHEQ is checked in the course of the University approvals processes. Detailed specifications for Higher National qualifications, which align with the Quality and Credit Framework (QCF), are provided by Pearson.

1.22 The team finds that the policies and processes in place for programme approval are designed to ensure the alignment of content and assessment with the UK threshold standards contained within either the QCF or the FHEQ. These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.23 The team looked at University and College policy and process documents relating to programme approval and modification. The team met staff with responsibility for programme approval and ongoing review. The team also read documents relating to recent approvals of new programmes and changes to existing programmes.

1.24 The programme approval for University awards is led by the awarding body and there are clear procedures and processes in place for the development, design and approval of programmes, which are well understood by staff. Awards are designed and developed by the University and led by the University programme leader. The programme leader has a key role in organising the design and combination of modules, and there are opportunities for wider consultation and engagement with partner colleges. The University awards delivered by the College are built on a suite of bespoke modules developed in partnership with College staff and the University programme leader. The awards are designed in partnership with collaborating colleges, and staff are involved in the design and development of modules.

1.25 The partnership relationships between the College, partner colleges and the University are effective and support the sharing of good practice, which contributes to the enhancement and quality improvement of the student experience.

1.26 Recent examples of programme approval and review demonstrate that the processes described above operate effectively and as intended. Attention is paid to standards throughout the preparation and approval of new programmes and modification of existing ones.

1.27   Pearson HND programmes are designed by College programme teams using modules within permitted groupings and regulations, guided and supported by the Director of Industry, Innovation and Skills and the College Quality Nominee using College programme development procedures. For the approval of Higher National awards, the College informs the awarding organisation of the chosen units within the required rules of combination.

1.28   The approval of Higher National awards is through a two-stage process. A centre qualification approval application is submitted to Pearson. Once approved, an internal course approval document is completed by the academic team and submitted for approval by the Curriculum Quality and Student Support Committee as an exceptional item on the agenda. This is then reported to the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee. The College has recognised that greater formality would be beneficial to the final approval of future Higher National awards and would assist in the embedding of standards and development of a higher education ethos. The formal recording of these decisions is limited in detail and the College recognises that further improvements are required in the recording of key committees. See also paragraph 1.12 and the associated recommendation.

1.29   Throughout the approval process attention is paid to alignment of curricula, learning outcomes and assessment to external frameworks. The processes for programme approval and amendment are discussed further in section B1.

1.30   The team concludes that the College, with the support of the University and Pearson, has appropriate policies in place for the approval of programmes that ensure they are set at a level that meets UK threshold standards. Processes are also in place to ensure that UK threshold standards continue to be met after programmes have been amended. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.31   The College works within the frameworks for assessment provided by the University and Pearson. The frameworks provided by the University are aligned to the FHEQ. The University maintains oversight of learning outcomes and assessment through the implementation of their assessment regulations and procedures. Implementation is also checked and monitored through programme approval, annual review, and the work of external examiners. Pearson supplies expected learning outcomes and processes for assessment and internal and external verification of their achievement. Pearson's programmes are aligned to the QCF.

1.32   The team considers that the College has overarching systems, processes, policies and procedures in place designed to implement the frameworks provided by its awarding organisation and awarding body in relation to the achievement of learning outcomes. These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.33   The team looked at documentation setting out assessment requirements, including programme specifications and handbooks. Examples of internal moderation and external examiners' reports were reviewed. The team read operations manuals, responsibility lists, and minutes of examination and assessment boards, and general guidance on assessment available to staff. The team talked with staff about assessment processes and the conduct of examination and assessment boards.

1.34   The team examined the assessment processes for University programmes and confirm that these are in line with University regulations, with module assignments agreed at the start of each academic year. The University requirements are set out in the Assessment Policy, Generic Assessment Criteria, Assessment of Off-Campus Students, and Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct – A Guide, which are contained in the University Quality Handbook, in addition to a range of documents to support assessment practice.

1.35   The College has in place clear and comprehensive policies and procedures to support Pearson awards. These include documents that clearly set out assessment and verification processes.

1.36   The team found that there is an effective system for the assessment of students, which requires them to demonstrate they have met learning outcomes that meet UK threshold standards. Robust systems of internal and external moderation are in place and implemented thoroughly. Guidance, support and development are provided to staff to ensure that assessment is appropriate and effective. The processes for assessment and verification of student performance to ensure that they meet the learning outcomes are discussed further in section B6.

1.37　　The University and Pearson provide processes and guidance on the handling of reasonable adjustment, mitigating circumstances, academic malpractice, recognition of prior learning, academic appeals, and the conduct of assessment boards.

1.38　　The University and Pearson also provide frameworks, policies and procedures for assessment and the award of credit and qualifications that are designed to ensure that UK and awarding partner standards are met, and which the College is required to follow. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.39   Responsibility for the monitoring and review of standards is shared between the College and the relevant awarding body or organisation. Systems for internal and external moderation, as discussed in detail in section B6, ensure that programmes are delivered as approved and that standards aligned with the QCF and the FHEQ are met. The academic health of individual programmes is addressed through annual monitoring. Programmes delivered with the University are subject to periodic approval, which checks that standards are appropriate. There is no requirement for periodic review of the Pearson provision. The external verifier provides ongoing assurance of the standards of this provision, and the College undertakes annual monitoring of programmes.

1.40   The team finds that the policies and processes in place for programme monitoring and review are designed to ensure that standards are aligned with those of the College's partners and, through them, with UK threshold standards. These policies and processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.41   The team considered a range of documents concerning the monitoring and review process, including those relating to recently approved Higher National programmes. In addition, it met with teams of academic and support staff, senior staff, the Partnerships Liaison Manager from the University, students and employers.

1.42   The team found that the processes for the monitoring and review of programme delivery, assessment and moderation operate effectively. External examiners and verifiers are asked specifically to comment on achievement of threshold standards and, where issues are identified, remedial action is taken. Partners Annual Reports (PARs) are produced by the University programme leaders for provision offered in conjunction with collaborative college partners. This process is also supported by the external examiner reports. The process of annual monitoring is discussed in detail in section B8, including the identification of good practice in the detailed programme and module review processes for University of Sunderland awards, which makes a significant contribution to the maintenance of academic standards and quality enhancement.

1.43   Pearson programmes completed a full cycle of delivery in the 2014-15 academic year and the process of annual programme review (APR) has been introduced, which replicates the University model of PAR. These annual programme reviews are informed by unit annual reports, external verifier reports, and student performance data. However, the content of the Pearson unit and annual reports lacks the level of detail evident within the University PARs and does not clearly link to key evidence. This has led to a recommendation in B8 that the College should ensure that annual course reviews of Higher National awards make more evaluative use of key performance indicators and evidence (see paragraph 2.92).

1.44   The team concludes that the College, with the support of its awarding body and organisation, has the appropriate policies in place for ongoing monitoring and review of the standards of approved programmes, which ensure that they meet UK threshold standards.

Staff are aware of these policies and processes and implement them effectively.
The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.45   The awarding body and organisation have ultimate responsibility for making use of external and independent expertise in the setting and maintenance of academic standards through validation, revalidation and periodic review procedures.

1.46   External examiners' reports comment on whether academic standards have been achieved and maintained successfully by the College. External examiners are appointed and trained by the awarding body and organisation. Externality is enhanced by the experience of academic staff, many of whom have current or recent experience in the sectors in which they teach. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.47   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation on programme design and review, and external examiners' reports. The team also held meetings with senior and teaching staff and employers in which the topic of externality was discussed.

1.48   The University's periodic review of taught provision regulations requires the appointment of external members on review panels. The College recognises the lead role of the University in ensuring that external expertise is used for programme development, maintaining academic standards and appointment of external examiners for its courses. However, there is also provision for College academic staff to contribute to these processes. The University programme leader organises and responds to external examiner reports for University provision. The Learning Area Managers (LAMS) have similar responsibility for Pearson provision.

1.49   The College consults and involves local employers effectively in the development of its Pearson Higher National awards provision. Pearson is the most significant external reference point for the College's HND provision, with external verifiers and regional support staff helping, via feedback documentation and meetings, to assure the quality of the College's organisation and delivery of programmes.

1.50   Overall, the team found the processes in place to work effectively. External examiners' reports illustrate satisfaction with the maintenance of academic standards. External panel members are used in validation and periodic review processes and employers are involved in programme design and development.

1.51   The team concludes that the College makes effective use of external expertise in the assurance of standards. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body and awarding organisation: Summary of findings

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

1.53   The College follows effectively the requirements of its awarding body and organisation to maintain academic standards. These processes are supported by the College's own internal procedures and guidance.

1.54   All seven of the Expectations in this area are met. Two recommendations are made. One relates to a need to articulate governance structures clearly. There is no evidence that academic standards are or have been compromised as a result of the lack of clarity, but the security of standards is best served by clear and transparent arrangements for governance. The team therefore assesses the level of associated risk as moderate. The second recommendation is associated with the need to have a more secure process for the maintenance of definitive course records. The level of associated risk in this instance is assessed as moderate, since without a greater degree of central management the security of the definitive record is potentially at risk. There is no evidence that definitive records or changes to them are not formally approved; therefore, the relevant Expectation is judged to be met overall.

1.55   The team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body and awarding organisation at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1   The University awards are all 'mature' programmes and the College has had a single partnership relationship with the University since 2006. The programmes have been continually developed through engagement in periodic review cycles and this is undertaken in line with University processes. The University has a well-established committee structure which oversees the approval and management of its collaborative provision. University provision is led by the programme leader from the University, and supported by the University Partnership Liaison Officer and associate programme leaders at the College. University programmes have clear quality assurance processes in place, which are supported by the University Quality Handbook and associated regulations.

2.2   Through discussion with staff and employers, the team was able to establish that those involved with programme development are aware of, and take account of, the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*.

2.3   The College has in place a Quality Nominee for Pearson awards. They are the main point of contact for information related to quality assurance and the first point of contact for Pearson Standards Verifiers and Centre Quality Reviewers. Operational responsibility for new programme development of Higher Nationals rests with the LAMs supported by the programme team. The addition of the Higher National programmes has required the College to implement new internal quality and standards procedures at programme and College level in order to design programmes that meet threshold standards and comply with Pearson regulations.

2.4   The team considers that the College's processes and procedures for programme design, development and approval would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.5   The team considered a range of documents concerning the programme design, development and approval process, including those relating to recently approved Higher National programmes. In addition, it met teams of academic and support staff, senior staff including the Partnerships Liaison Manager from the University, students and employers.

2.6   The College higher education academic structure and processes are based on the experience of managing the delivery of University programmes. The College works closely with its awarding partners and contributes to the process when new programmes are being developed. The College recognises the need for progression opportunities for its own further education students who may wish to study higher education locally, and undertakes and responds to student feedback and student focus groups to support progression. Academic staff have worked closely with local employers and partner organisations in the development of the Pearson Higher National awards. In the case of the HND in Sport (Coaching and Development), the academic staff have consulted with employers to identify skill needs for the programme and visited College and University partners to identify good practice and progression opportunities for graduating students.

2.7   Academic staff take an active role in the development and ongoing review of University programmes. Academic staff are also involved in a range of partnership meetings to support the ongoing design and development of awards validated by the University. These have resulted in a range of modifications and enhancements to programmes. Examples include implementing changes to assignments on the counselling programme, which has resulted in reducing the number of assignments issued and increasing the quality; feedback from teacher education students requesting more direct opportunity to visit the University, which resulted in the introduction of the 'Super Saturday', giving students the opportunity to go to the University to participate in a range of sessions including topics on Action Research and educational policy; and the enhancement of the Reflections, Action Planning and Target Setting booklet which plots students' development over the year to now include clearer criteria for observations. This latter development arose out of discussion between the University and other partners. The counselling course team has also been involved in the mapping of the professional body (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy) competencies for dissemination across the partnership. Moderation meetings with partner college and University academic staff are also an opportunity to share good practice.

2.8   The College has its own internal approval processes for Pearson Higher National programme development. These include making application to Pearson to offer new awards. This requires the College to report on senior and academic staff details, student support, programme specifications, processes for staff continuous professional development, resources, and assessment and verification procedures. Once approval has been granted by Pearson an internal College course approval document is completed by the academic team and submitted for approval by the Curriculum Quality and Student Support Committee as an exceptional item on the agenda prior to reporting to the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee. However, from the records of the internal approval process the team was unable to confirm the definitive record of the programme. See also paragraph 1.18.

2.9   The evidence presented to the team demonstrates that the College has effective processes in place for the design, development and approval of programmes. The team confirms that the Expectation is met, with a low level of associated risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.10   The College has a comprehensive Admissions Policy which adheres to the principles of fair admission, and which is made available to applicants on the College website. The policy outlines the application process, from enquiry and making an application through to registration and enrolment. Provision is also made for appeal against admission decisions, with contact details and timeframe information made prominent.

2.11   Recruitment, selection and admission of students is managed by the Head of Student Services. The College seeks to recruit, select and admit students who meet appropriate entry criteria. These are set by the College for Pearson provision and by the University of Sunderland for the franchised University provision. The Admissions Policy and associated processes are clear, detailed, transparent and inclusive, and would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.12   In considering the Expectation, the team examined key documents relating to recruitment, selection and admissions, including the College admissions policy, various letters that communicate the process and outcomes to applicants, the higher education application form and accompanying guidance and published information regarding admissions, provided on the College website. Aspects of the admissions process were also explored through discussions with students and staff.

2.13   Applications to the College are made on a direct application basis. The College website has an 'apply now' feature and a higher education application form, and corresponding guidance is made available by the College on request.

2.14   Applicants are communicated with effectively throughout their application to the College. Example template letters seen by the team covered application acknowledgement, invitation to interview, offer and decline and were all expressed clearly. Students whom the team met were largely positive about their experiences of applying to study at the College. Students are content with the information provided to them prior to applying to the College; they reported that the website is helpful and they feel that the information they had received prior to studying on their course was an accurate reflection of their experience so far.

2.15   The College does not provide staff conducting admissions interviews with specific training. However, staff recruiting for Pearson programmes rely on a standard interview form as a common framework for the fair admission of students. Staff conducting interviews with applicants to the University provision receive specific guidelines on how to carry out interviews. In some instances the College conducts group interviews or assesses applicant capability by setting interview tasks.

2.16   Opportunities to declare a specific learning difficulty are provided at application, interview and arrival, in order to ensure that support is in place as quickly as possible. The Admissions Policy outlines the procedure at the interview stage for an applicant who wishes to declare a disability or specific learning need, to enable the College to determine the level of support required in readiness for the commencement of the programme.

2.17   The process for making an appeal against an admissions decision is clearly outlined within the College's admissions policy. Staff and students are aware of where to find information and guidance on admissions appeals.

2.18   The College has clear and comprehensive policies and procedures for the recruitment, selection and admission of students, which are underpinned by appropriate structures and processes. Practices are fair, transparent and supportive. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.19   The College sets out clear aims for learning and teaching in its Strategic Plan for 2013-16. It offers a strategic approach to learning opportunities and teaching practices in support of achieving its strategic priority to provide outstanding vocational learning that engages and inspires students. The College's Teaching and Learning Strategy 2014-17 articulates key priorities in support of the strategic goals, which include creating confident independent learners, providing exceptional learning resources and staff, nurturing talent in all and developing skills for jobs. The strategy for teaching and learning for each award is set out in programme handbooks.

2.20   The management and delivery of staff development to support learning and teaching involves a combination of College, University partner and staff-directed activities. Staff development needs are identified through observation of teaching and learning, teaching walk-through meetings, and annual staff appraisal. Peer reviews, learning walks and graded observations underpin the College's quality assurance checks on the quality of teaching. The College has mechanisms that report on the quality of teaching and learning through the annual monitoring process and learning area reviews. The College's processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.21   The team examined the effectiveness of teaching and learning procedures by reading pertinent documentation including the College's Strategic Plan 2013-16 and other strategy documents, staff training and continuing professional development (CPD) documentation, programme specifications, programme handbooks and learning area reviews. The team also held meetings with students, the Principal, senior staff, teachers and support staff.

2.22   The strategies and procedures for teaching and learning work effectively in practice. There is a high degree of student engagement and satisfaction with the learning and teaching environment. Students generally have confidence in their tutors, although a minority reported concerns about staff ability or the appropriateness of staff qualifications. External examiners are also satisfied with staff qualification, experience and expertise, which were considered fully appropriate. Students who did report areas for concern confirmed that these had been dealt with appropriately by staff. Information about teaching and learning is clearly set out in programme handbooks. Students are provided with individual learning plans on the College's bespoke student progress tracking system. The College uses its virtual learning environment (VLE) to provide learning resources for programmes. Students confirmed that they make significant use of the VLE and find it very useful, particularly those studying part-time. Use of the VLE is monitored by the College and the information obtained is used to support development and achievement. Students can access support for their learning through the College's HE Gateway and Learning Zone. Staff of this facility provide a range of sessions on academic skills development. The HE Gateway is a facility provided collaboratively by the College and the University. Its facilities are available to University students. The Learning Zone provides a range of learning resources and facilities for all higher education students at the College.

2.23   Advanced practitioners support the development of teaching, learning and assessment practices for all staff involved in teaching or supporting student learning. The annual graded observation process during 2014-15 was inclusive of all teachers. It provided senior staff with a measure of teaching and assessment performance across all types of provision using a graded observation process. The College sets performance targets for grade profiles of teaching and learning observations across learning areas.

2.24   A learning area review process replaced the standards team review procedure in 2015-16. This ensures that a wider evidence base of teaching, learning and assessment activity is evaluated using an expanded range of metrics; however, learning observations are no longer graded in this process. The learning area review process identifies actions to be taken with regard to any concerns about inadequate teaching practice.

2.25   The College's Teaching and Learning Strategy 2014-17 places strong emphasis on staff development to enable student learning. The College has a weekly CPD hour in which all staff are expected to engage. Staff undertake a range of industrial engagement activities to refresh their knowledge of current industrial practice and the College expects all teaching staff to undertake a minimum of two days' industrial updating per year; in meetings with staff the team established that this is occurring. Staff are allocated four professional development days to facilitate this and other CPD activities.

2.26   Teaching staff whom the team met discussed examples of where development activities have had a direct impact on their teaching. These include studying for higher degrees and engaging in events organised by the awarding body and the College. There is a requirement that staff undertake scholarly activities and they are supported to do so. Examples given to the team included pedagogy research and conference attendance. Staff evaluate and assess their development activities and discuss the impact on teaching practice in APR reports, and at events for the awarding body and organisation.

2.27   Staff members have responsibility for improving their own practice and completing individual development plans based on records of teaching observations. In doing so, staff agree the support needed to address development needs with their line managers and can request additional support from College advanced practitioners. Line managers review individual observation records and the themes identified in the learning area review report, and liaise with the advanced practitioner assigned to their area to agree individual and team CPD actions.

2.28   New members of teaching staff are well supported by LAMs, the College Quality Nominee and advanced practitioners, who together ensure that all key processes are followed.

2.29   The team concludes that there is an extensive range of appropriate CPD activity and that staff are actively facilitated to engage in these through the provision of opportunity, time and financial support. The wide range of staff development opportunities and the support provided to engage in them, which enhances student learning opportunities, is **good practice**.

2.30   The team concludes that the College has effective processes and procedures in place to manage the quality of learning and teaching and support students effectively. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.31   The Principal, together with the College Directorate, are responsible for the strategic allocation of resources to support and enable students to develop their potential. The College offers a range of specialist support to students, including welfare, counselling, careers advice and academic support. Students have access to both group and individual tutorials and have a comprehensive induction at the start of their programmes. The College facilitates student transitions to higher level study and employment through links with the University, alumni and employers. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.32   In testing this Expectation, the team checked the effectiveness of arrangements for student development and achievement through an evaluation of programme handbooks, and documents setting out additional support and guidance, and through meetings with staff, students, alumni and employers.

2.33   Resources to support students are developed, monitored and reviewed by the Principal and Directorate, supported by appropriate staff. Students are encouraged to comment on resources, teaching and facilities through the Higher Education Learner Involvement Focus Group and the Higher Education Student Representatives meetings.

2.34   There are examples of where the College has responded to student feedback and resource issues during the academic year. For example, a resolution to problems with the issue of library books at the Learning Zone has been resolved and the HE Gateway has recently been reconfigured.

2.35   Programme handbooks explain to students the services and support that they can expect and what the College expects of the student. Students understand their rights and responsibilities and the support mechanisms available to them.

2.36   The College's Student Services provide advice on a range of topics such as financial matters, disability support, and access to counselling. Academic staff are the first contact point for academic-related issues.

2.37   Following student feedback, concerns have been identified about students feeling overburdened with induction information at the start of their studies. The College has attempted to address this by staggering the provision of information to students over a longer period of time, providing information at points where it is most appropriate to the students' current experience.

2.38   The College's Learning Zone staff provide targeted learning resources and induction and support sessions to enable students to access both College and University electronic resources efficiently. College students studying on University courses are able to access College facilities before they can access University resources, so College induction now precedes University induction to ensure that students understand the different resources available and to ensure that all students can access different systems appropriately.

2.39   The College makes use of a VLE to support teaching and learning and promote student development and achievement. The Learning Zone page on the College VLE

provides a range of electronic information about learning and teaching. College staff working with University colleagues examine patterns of access to the VLE and monitor this. College students on University provision have access to University electronic resources such as journals and e-books.

2.40   The College monitors the quality of the content of its VLE using the 'Going for Gold' standard and improvement in this metric is a target in the College's Strategic Plan. Progress against this standard has recently been made. Students confirmed that they use the VLE and value it.

2.41   The Learning Zone is a supportive environment where students participate in facilitated and independent learning. Staff within the Learning Zone provide group workshops and facilitated individual sessions on the topics of study skills, referencing, accessing resources and assignment layout. Students find the services provided by the Learning Zone to be useful to their studies and staff in the HE Gateway and Learning Zone are helpful when students experience problems.

2.42   All Learning Zone facilitators and E-learning facilitators must possess a teaching qualification. This College policy, which provides greater understanding of the academic needs of students among support staff, strengthens the provision of academic skills support to students. The requirement for Learning Zone facilitators and the E-learning facilitator to possess a teaching qualification, which supports students' academic development, is **good practice**.

2.43   The HE Gateway is a spatial resource provided by the University at the College, which is available to students on University provision and in which staff from the University provide support to students on a part-time basis.

2.44   The College's Job Zone staff provide seminars to improve student employability and their VLE page provides information on careers opportunities. Academic staff also provide advice on careers. Students confirmed that they access careers advice through the College. Careers advice staff visit classes and University staff organise and attend progression events. HND students rely solely on College services. Students report that guest speakers add to ideas about potential careers pathways. Curriculum vitae writing and interview practice sessions are available to students through the Student Services Team. Students can use the College's bespoke student progress tracking system to create their own career ladder, mapping out future career aspirations.

2.45   Transition into higher education and employment is supported in a variety of ways. Students on Performing Arts and Music courses engage in local community arts projects and participate in performance events at local arts festivals in a partnership link with a local arts company. On the HND Sport course a local employer in the leisure industry gives a guest lecture on career opportunities and provides insights into job requirements and interview and selection processes. Another local entrepreneur in the leisure industry provides placement opportunities and guest speakers and alumni provide realistic careers information and insights to students.

2.46   Support for students while studying addresses a range of needs. Students praised the accessibility and willingness of College teaching staff, University staff in the HE Gateway and Learning Zone facilitators. Effective liaison between teaching teams and support staff is evident and underpins support for student development.

2.47   The College has a systematic approach to ensuring that students have access to the support and resources they require to develop their potential. Students have opportunities to provide feedback about support and resources and they are content with

the provision made available by the College. The team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation 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

2.48   The College has a Learner Involvement Strategy, which is an overarching higher education and further education strategy. However, the strategy covers the period 2013-14 and had therefore lapsed at the time of the review visit. Senior staff whom the team met acknowledged that the policy is no longer current and is due for review.

2.49   Higher education students studying at the College fall into two distinct categories in terms of modes of study. Pearson students attend full-time programmes and University franchised students attend part-time programmes. The different modes of study present challenges when designing inclusive approaches to student engagement.

2.50   The College makes use of a number of surveys as a means of capturing student views from the wider student body. In addition, all programme years have at least one active student representative, who is generally selected on a volunteer basis. An external survey company is used to analyse data received from student surveys and to benchmark against similar providers as well as distance travelled from previous years' data. The outcomes of surveys are discussed at operational and strategic level.

2.51   The processes and procedures for managing student engagement in quality assurance are hampered by the lack of an up-to-date Learner Involvement Strategy which fully accounts for the current and future context of the College's higher education provision. In particular, the lapsed strategy, while accounting for the collection of student views and reactively addressing any concerns, does not take account of the requirement of Expectation B5 of the Quality Code to engage with students as partners. The absence of a current guiding strategy would mean that the Expectation is not met.

2.52   In considering this Expectation, the team examined relevant documentation such as the Learner Involvement Strategy 2013-14, committee terms of reference and minutes, responses to student surveys and action plans. The team tested its findings in meetings with senior management, academic and support staff, students and student representatives, including the President of the Students' Union.

2.53   The absence of a current strategy for learner engagement raises concerns about the College's oversight of this particular aspect of the Quality Code. The College has a reactive approach to student engagement rather than proactively engaging students. While the current student representation structure is managed by the Students' Union and operates effectively, the lack of current College strategy raises concerns about the sustainability of the structure for long-term higher education student engagement, especially given the transient nature of Students' Union leadership.

2.54   While students hold meetings with other representatives across various programmes, there are no students present on any of the key academic deliberative committees where aspects of partnership working might reasonably be expected to be evident. The views of the student body do feed into the deliberative committees through consideration of survey outcomes and through informal discussions with staff who are members of those committees. However, this is indicative of the reactive approach referred to above. Therefore, the team **recommends** that the College revises the Learner

Involvement Strategy to incorporate students as full partners and to ensure the sustainability of the current higher education student representation structure.

2.55   The College has two separate student representation structures, one for University franchised provision and one for Pearson programmes. Any issues or matters for discussion regarding the University's franchised provision are raised via the HE Gateway staff through informal and formal meeting mechanisms and reported back to the University's Students' Union. However, evidence seen by reviewers highlighted that formal meetings conducted with students are not recorded consistently.

2.56   In terms of the College's Pearson provision, the College has an active and effective Students' Union with an executive structure in place, which includes a Students' Union President and Vice President. The Vice President also acts as the higher education student governor, which enables the higher education student voice to be heard at a governance level. However, there is no requirement for a higher education student representative on the board of governors. It is incidental that currently the Vice President happens also to be a higher education student.

2.57   The Students' Union is responsible for the Student Council, which consists of a tiered representation system that includes class representatives, corporate representatives, and super representatives. These last representatives have a role to relay student views directly to the Principal. However, student representatives do not currently receive training to carry out these roles. The College provided evidence of course representative training material for University students but it is unclear how many students attended the training sessions, which were delivered at the University campus, or whether representatives had accessed the training materials. Students whom the team met were unaware of the training opportunities available. The team **recommends** that the College provides training opportunities for all student representatives.

2.58   The College operates 'You said, We did' areas, which are located within learning spaces, to communicate actions taken in response to issues raised. Students whom the team met stated that they feel the College takes their views seriously and that their voices are heard.

2.59   The absence of a current Learner Involvement Strategy, taken together with the lack of a consistent and coherent approach to the training and support available for student representatives, and the lack of student representation on College deliberative committees, inhibits students' potential to contribute as full partners in their higher education student experience. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.60   The College processes for assessment operate in accordance with the academic frameworks and regulations of the University and Pearson. The University provides clear and transparent guidance in their respective academic regulations for the management of assessment and assessment moderation. Pearson's BTEC Guide to Assessment Levels 4 to 7 provides the framework for the assessment and internal verification of the College's Higher National programmes. External examiner reports confirm that the College complies with the University and Pearson requirements for assessment and feedback. Programme specifications and handbooks set out the intended learning outcomes for each programme and module, with clear assessment requirements.

2.61   The College's Assessment Policy, guidance and process, and University assessment documentation and regulations, are comprehensive in their coverage of assessment processes. The information provided to staff and students makes clear reference to the need for programmes to comply with the University and Pearson assessment regulations. Assessment regulations for all higher education programmes are referenced in programme handbooks.

2.62   The procedures for assessment and the approach to the College's compliance with its awarding body and organisation regulations would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.63   The team examined the effectiveness of the approaches and procedures through scrutinising assessment documentation, partnership agreements, and student and programme handbooks. In addition, it met teams of academic and support staff, senior staff including the Partnerships Liaison Manager from the University, students and employers.

2.64   College assessment policies and procedures are in place to support Pearson awards, which are clear and understood by staff and students. The policies and procedures clearly align with the Quality Code and with Pearson regulations. Adherence to these policies and procedures is scrutinised as part of the Pearson Quality Management Review and visits by Pearson external quality reviewers. Annual review and updating is overseen by the College Quality Nominee and Higher Education Centre Coordinator. The Framework and Regulations for Pearson Higher National awards applies to all Pearson Higher Nationals and is delivered and assessed in accordance with the guidance and regulations set out by Pearson. Links are also made to key documents including the Centre Guide to Assessment (Level 4 to 7), the UK BTEC Quality Assurance Handbook, Standards Verification and External Examination (Level 4 to 7), and Quality Management Review.

2.65   The assessment procedures and associated documentation to support the implementation of University regulations are comprehensive and align with *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code*.*

2.66   The College has in place procedures to be able to recognise prior learning of students, and these operate in line with those that govern University students under the agreements and regulations which are available online and are valid and reliable. The

College also has in place procedures on assessment malpractice for all students, which refer University students to information regarding malpractice in the appropriate module guides or by accessing the Academic Misconduct Regulations and Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct documents.

2.67   Students are made aware of the regulations for assessment and feedback during admission and induction, through the VLE, and in programme handbooks. University award handbooks have links to University assessment regulations. Students confirmed that they are made aware of the range of assessment methods used, how they would be assessed, and information concerning assessment appeals and associated regulations.

2.68   The internal verification and moderation processes that effectively support assessment decisions are comprehensive for University and Pearson provision. The College has in place an Internal Verification Moderation and Internal Quality Assurance Procedure document for Pearson awards, which also refers to University assessment being moderated using the University Marking Policy. The College and University undertake a range of verification and standardisation activity to ensure assessment decisions are valid and reliable. College module staff are responsible for initial assessment and grades are agreed before an internal verification process organised by the University. This is a collaborative process with cross-College sampling and agreement of final grades. Samples of assessed work from across the partnership are scrutinised and reported upon by University-appointed external examiners, whose comments on assessment are responded to by programme teams via the University programme leader.

2.69   The College LAMs complete an Assessor and Internal Verifier Categorisation Sampling Requirements document for each staff member involved in the assessment and internal verification process to monitor their competence in undertaking their role. This is in line with awarding partner requirements. The team looked at a range of assessment verification records across University and Pearson awards and the records were comprehensive and valid, and demonstrate the extent to which students have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought. The thorough internal verification and moderation processes that effectively support assessment decisions are **good practice**.

2.70   The College has in place annual assessment plans for University and Higher National programmes. These show key dates for issuing assignments to students, student hand in dates, formative and summative feedback, and internal verification. Assessment plans are not, however, included within student programme handbooks, or made available to students at the start of the academic year or each semester. The team **recommends** that the College makes annual assessment plans available to students at the start of their programme.

2.71   The National Student Survey (NSS) data indicates a year-on-year increase in assessment and feedback satisfaction from 81 per cent to 91 per cent. The College submits a response to the University to address any areas of concern that arise. The College also uses internal higher education student survey data to identify actions.

2.72   Staff demonstrate commitment to devising assessments that link theory to practice, are industry relevant and promote active learning. This was endorsed by students, who indicated that they found the assignments relevant, and that they provided stretch and challenge as their programme developed. The College uses a range of external expertise, placements, personal networks and simulated experiences for students to generate evidence for assessment.

2.73   Support is available through the College Learning Zone for academic study skills and referencing, which helps to develop students' academic practice and understanding of

assessment methodologies. Students confirmed that they value the additional academic support provided by the Learning Zone staff, who are appropriately qualified (see also paragraph 2.42).

2.74   Staff confirmed that pre-scrutiny of assessment decisions is undertaken prior to formal presentation at assessment boards. The College uploads University student assessment decisions directly to the University, and Pearson assessments are maintained by programme teams prior to verification at assessment board. External examiners report that assessment boards are conducted in an appropriate manner and with due regard to academic regulations. The evidence the team tested indicates that the formal arrangements for the approval of assessment outcomes are carried out in line with the relevant awarding body and organisation regulations and operate effectively. The assessment decisions for University students are captured directly onto the University database and held securely by the University. The College has recently introduced an in-house student tracking system to capture assessment outcomes, with the intention to use this system fully for all Higher National awards. The team **affirms** the steps being taken to use the new in-house tracking system to capture assessment decisions for Pearson students prior to assessment boards.

2.75   Overall, the College's processes provide students with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes for the award of credit or qualification. There are clear processes and procedures for assessment which are well understood across programme teams and students. Assessment methods are designed or approved by the awarding body or organisation to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. Criteria and expectations for assessment are clearly presented to students. Effective internal verification and moderation processes are in place to ensure that standards are being met. External examiners and verifiers, and student feedback, provide evidence of appropriate assessment practices. 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

2.76   External examiners or external verifiers are appointed by the College's awarding body or awarding organisation, which also determines the format of their reports. For University provision information on the role of the external examiner is provided to students in programme handbooks and in the University External Examiners – A Guide For Students document. External examiner reports are made available to students on the University's VLE. The awarding body is responsible for responding to the external examiners after consulting the programme team. In the case of Pearson provision, College programme leaders respond directly to external verifiers.

2.77   LAMs have ultimate responsibility for oversight of programme level responses to external examiner reports. Reports are sent to the College Quality Nominee. The report, together with a further action form (if any actions are recommended), is then sent to the LAM who will document any actions taken to improve provision. A deadline is set for the return of the further action form to the College's Quality Office so that the College Quality Nominee can review whether the LAM has addressed the external examiner concerns. Pearson external verifiers visit the College and meet students and programme teams who ensure that they are provided with relevant materials to view. These procedures would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.78   The team examined the effectiveness of these procedures by examining a range of documentation including policies and procedures, external examiners'/verifiers' reports, responses to the reports and annual monitoring reports The team also held meetings with students, teaching staff and senior staff.

2.79   Overall, the team found these processes to work effectively in practice. External examiners' reports indicate satisfaction with the maintenance of academic standards and confirm that assessment practices measure student achievement rigorously.

2.80   University external examiner reports identify partner college-specific issues and these are discussed by the University programme leader and College staff, and actions are followed up appropriately.

2.81   For Pearson provision the College has a clear and robust process for responding to external verifier recommendations. LAMs have ultimate responsibility for oversight of programme-level responses to external verifier reports. The College responds speedily and effectively to the recommendations of external verifiers. Staff fully understand the processes for responding to Pearson's external verifiers.

2.82   The University responds to its external examiners after consultation with partner providers and staff whom the team met fully understood these procedures.

2.83   External examiner and external verifier reports inform annual monitoring reports such as the College Higher Education Subject Area Review, PARs, Pearson annual Quality Management Review and the University annual monitoring processes.

2.84   The awarding body makes external examiner reports available electronically on its VLE, and students are made aware of the location of these and the process of external examining in University documentation and College programme handbooks.

2.85 For Pearson provision external verifiers meet students and discuss the process of external verification with them. However, the College does not currently make its written reports available to students. The team **recommends** that the College makes external verifier reports available to students on Pearson programmes.

2.86 The role of external examiners is fully embedded in the quality assurance systems and the College makes effective use of reports. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.87   The College follows the University and Pearson processes for programme monitoring and review and has its own internal processes. These arrangements are set out in the University regulations for periodic and annual review, which are replicated within the College procedures and processes for annual review of Pearson programmes. Oversight is maintained by the relevant University programme leader for University awards and by the relevant College LAM for Pearson awards.

2.88   The team considers that the College's processes and procedures for monitoring and review of programmes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.89   The team tested the effectiveness of the College's arrangements for discharging its responsibilities for programme monitoring and review by examining relevant documentation, including University academic regulations for review and monitoring of partner provision, the University Quality Handbook and College procedures for Pearson awards, recent annual and periodic reports, partnership agreements, reports from awarding partners, and quality improvement plans. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and professional support staff, employers, and senior staff including representatives from the awarding bodies.

2.90   The team found that the processes for the monitoring and review of programme delivery operate effectively. PARs are produced by the University programme leaders for provision offered in conjunction with collaborative college partners. The annual review of University awards is clearly described within the APR process documentation. College assistant programme leaders are engaged in the process throughout. This includes participation at module and programme studies boards. Module leaders at the University evaluate their modules at the end of the academic year and report on the strengths and development points arising. This process is also supported by the external examiner module and programme reports, which are responded to following consultation with partner college academic staff.

2.91   The PARs are detailed and use a range of quality indicators to identify good practice and areas for improvement. These are discussed with partner colleges and inform the planning of development events and changes to programmes to enhance the student experience. See examples in paragraph 2.7. The detailed programme and module review processes for University awards, which make a significant contribution to the maintenance of academic standards and quality enhancement, are **good practice**.

2.92   The College APR processes and documentation for Pearson awards follow a similar format to those used for University programmes. The process was introduced recently with the approval of Higher Nationals. The College undertook only unit reviews for the first academic year with a full APR at the end of the first full cycle of delivery. External examiner recommendations and good practice are referenced within the APRs. However, in the majority of reports this refers the reader to the verifier report and does not include details of good practice or recommendations reported. The team explored the effectiveness of APRs and the resulting action planning process and found some inconsistencies across the provision. This included undertaking an analysis of APRs completed over the previous

academic year for music, sport, performing arts and business. The audit undertaken by the team identified that the information reported in the 'Quality of the Student Experience', 'Academic Standards' and 'Good Practice and Action Plan' lacked detailed references to key evidence indicators. The team **recommends** that the College ensures that annual course reviews of Higher National awards make more evaluative use of key performance indicators and evidence.

2.93   Overall, the evidence from documentation and meetings shows that the College is managing its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the programmes delivered on behalf of its awarding partners. The team has, however, made one recommendation which requires the College to ensure that annual course reviews of Higher National awards make more evaluative use of key performance indicators and evidence. The College does recognise the need to review its APR implementation for Higher National programmes. The team identified that the detailed programme and module review processes for University of Sunderland awards is good practice, and should be disseminated within the College. Although the Expectation is met, there are some weaknesses in the operation of the APR process for Higher Nationals, and as such the level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.94   The College's complaints procedure is overseen by the Quality Assurance Manager and students are made aware of how to raise a complaint during the induction process. The complaints policies are made available through the programme handbooks and Student Portal, as is information relating to academic appeals. Students are aware of how to find information relating to making a complaint or academic appeal. Both College and awarding body policies outline the stages for the progress of an appeal or complaint, the grounds of a legitimate appeal or complaint and the timescale for the process. The College's policies and processes and the accessibility of this information to students would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.95   The team examined documents that included the College's policies and procedures for complaints and appeals, and explored how these are made available to students in meetings with staff and students.

2.96   The College has a comprehensive academic appeals procedure, which is predominantly used by further education students and those studying on Pearson courses. For University-franchised provision, the College uses the awarding body appeals policies. These policies are included within the programme handbooks or linked to the appropriate awarding body policy online. The College uses a template, which ensures that all programme handbooks include information on academic appeals and other awarding body-specific information. Students are also informed of complaints and appeals information during their inductions, although students stated that they would probably approach their tutors in the first instance.

2.97   University students access their appeals and complaints information mainly through the programme handbook, which provides links to the correct University policy online. The nature of their complaint influences which complaints policy students should use. Complaints of an academic or course-related nature would be escalated via the University complaints procedure, and complaints of a resources or facilities nature would be escalated via the College's complaints procedure. Students studying for University awards were very clear about how they would access the correct appeals and complaints policies should they require it.

2.98   The College has clear complaints and appeals procedures which are accessible in several different ways, and staff and students demonstrate awareness of the relevant processes. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.99   Work placement provision is available for full and part-time higher education students.

2.100   The Work Placement Team has strong employer engagement and liaises with more than 500 employers in south-west Durham and beyond. Contacts cover a range of vocational sectors such as childcare, health and social care, construction, sport, public services, music, art and design, ICT and business to offer external work placements.

2.101   For each new course with a work placement element incorporated into the programme, the work placement officers attend each class to complete an induction with students. The induction covers the work placement procedure and options available, learning objectives and how placements are relevant to individual students' career aspirations. Work placement guidelines for students are provided. These guidelines outline the common principles of a high quality work placement. Once placements are arranged, students must arrange a pre-visit to their placement provider, to complete a placement induction.

2.102   All employers are visited by work placement officers to complete a health and safety assessment and are also provided with guidance on the requirements of placements and how they can support students while they are on placement with them. Students on placements are assessed by their tutors but placement providers provide observation reports which are used in the assessment process.

2.103   The College's stated approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.104   In testing this Expectation, the team examined the College's arrangements for supporting and managing provision with others through scrutiny of programme handbooks, guides and work placement documentation. The team also held meetings with employers, alumni, staff and students.

2.105   The Cross-College Work Placement Coordinator is responsible for coordinating the provision of external work placements across all curriculum areas. This role is supported by a Cross-College Work Placement Officer. Together, they secure work placements with employers across vocational areas and continually source new employers. LAMs and tutors are responsible for incorporating work placement within curriculum planning. All College staff are responsible for continually promoting work experience placements with students and employers.

2.106   The Cross-College Work Placement Coordinator liaises with LAMs, tutors and the Work Placement Officer to ensure that work placements are coordinated effectively and consistently across all curriculum areas. LAMs and tutors choose an appropriate model and determine the mode of attendance, taking into consideration the flexibility of placement timing to fit around schemes of learning, assignments, examinations and stages in the academic year, as well as considering employer needs. Placement attendance is agreed with employers and confirmation provided.

2.107   Tutors visit or telephone students on placement to assess and check progress. Assessment involves direct observations of students, highlighting skills demonstrated and applied. Employers are also involved in the observation of students and their inputs feed into assessments.

2.108   Comprehensive details of learning objectives and self-assessment are recorded in the work placement booklet for students. Work placement details are also recorded on students' individual learning plans.

2.109   Work placement records, feedback and employer engagement is included in the wider evidence base for learning area reviews. This is evaluated through a risk rating system for each curriculum area, on an annual basis.

2.110   The team found that systems are in place to monitor the quality of the student work experience. If there are any concerns about the quality of the placement or student professionalism, these are raised in the first instance with the programme tutor. The programme leader is responsible for ensuring that at least one formal visit is undertaken to the placement to continue to gauge the suitability and quality of the relationship between all parties. Feedback from students on placements and from employers is positive. Students feel the experience helps them to develop professional skills and put academic theory into practice. They also value the opportunity to gain experience, which increases their employability chances. Some College students had been employed subsequently by their placement providers.

2.111   The team concludes that the College has effective procedures in place to manage work-based learning provision in collaboration with employers. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.112   The College does not deliver research degrees, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.114   The College has effective systems in place for programme approval, admissions, learning and teaching, student support, assessment, programme review, complaints and appeals, and working with others. The team does, however, conclude that the College's approach to student engagement in quality assurance does not meet Expectation B5.

2.115   Nine of the 10 relevant expectations are met. One of the met Expectations (B8) has a moderate level of associated risk. The unmet Expectation (B5) is also associated with moderate risk. Four instances of good practice have been identified in four separate Expectations. Overall, there are five recommendations and one affirmation associated with this judgement area.

2.116   There are two recommendations relating to Expectation B5. The two recommendations taken together led the team to consider that the level of risk was moderate in this area. The College is recommended to revise its Learner Involvement Strategy because it is out of date and does not account for students as full partners in their education, nor does it make provision for the sustainability of the current student representation structure. The second recommendation is associated with the fact that not all student representatives have been effectively trained for their role.

2.117   The recommendation made under Expectation B8 led to an assessment of moderate risk for the Expectation as a whole. This recommendation relates to the need to make more evaluative use of key performance indicators and evidence in the annual course review process associated with Pearson programmes. The risk is considered moderate because the annual monitoring review process is a key process for enabling College oversight of the ongoing academic health of its provision and while it is broadly adequate it has some shortcomings in the rigour with which it is carried out.

2.118   The two remaining recommendations were assessed as having low levels of associated risk because they relate to minor omissions or oversights that can readily and promptly be addressed. The first recommends that existing assessment plans are made available to students at the start of their programmes (Expectation B6) and the second asks that external verifier reports be made available to students on Pearson programmes (Expectation B7).

2.119   The team also affirms steps being taken to use the new in-house tracking system to capture assessment decisions, which addressed a weakness identified by the College itself.

2.120   Taking into account the balance of good practice, recommendations and affirmations and the associated levels of risk, the team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3   Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1   The College provides a wide range of information about its higher education provision to students, staff and external stakeholders in a variety of ways, including print and digital formats. Communications are underpinned by a comprehensive and embedded marketing and communications strategy, which aligns with the College's strategic plan and outlines the strategy for staff, student and stakeholder engagement, communication channels and tactics, and accessibility of information.

3.2   The College provides information about its higher education provision principally through the College website and the Higher Education Guide. The College Prospectus is available digitally from the website but can be supplied in printed format. Programme leaflets provide course-specific information. Programme teams are responsible for checking the accuracy of programme-related information. Course information regarding the College's franchised provision is approved by the University of Sunderland before publication.

3.3   College policies and procedures for staff and students are made available through internal intranet facilities such as the staff portal, student portal and the VLE.

3.4   The policies and procedures in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.5   The team tested this Expectation by reviewing policies and procedures together with a range of published information, including web-based information about the College and its validated and franchised provision. The team looked at the content and accessibility of the staff and student portals and had a demonstration of the College's new student progress tracking system. The team also discussed the effectiveness of the College's practices and procedures for the publication of information with students and senior, academic and professional support staff.

3.6   The College website is the key information source for potential applicants and the general public. A digital copy of the Higher Education Guide is made available to students and individual programme leaflets are devised and printed in collaboration with programme teams and distributed generally at College. The website contains pages that provide general information on higher education including funding and careers advice. Overviews of specific higher education programmes, including entry details, are also available. The information also includes the provision of the KIS (Key Information Set) widget to ensure stakeholders are aware of NSS outcomes specific to a particular programme. Website accessibility features are available and feature tools such as text enlargement, read-a-loud and a ruler to help follow lines of text. The College has a comprehensive higher education publication schedule which incorporates all of its key publications. A sign-off sheet for proofing published information is used for accountability purposes.

3.7   Programme information provided on the website is clear and includes an overview of each programme, course requirements, module titles, materials required and potential end destinations. Students confirmed that the information on the website prior to joining the College was accurate and useful.

3.8   The College produces information for students studying on higher education programmes. A key document is the programme handbook. The University programme handbooks are initially produced to University minimum standards by programme leaders and then customised by College associate programme leaders by replacing University information and links with information and links for University students studying at the College. Pearson programme handbooks are produced by programme teams to College minimum standards. These minimum standards are communicated using a programme handbook template.

3.9   For University awards, public information, including publicity and promotional activity produced by the College, must be approved by the University. During the cycle of annual visits by the University, further checks are made on the materials being distributed. For Pearson provision the College Marketing Department is responsible for preparing materials for publication. Programme teams contribute to this process by checking materials for accuracy of content.

3.10   The student portal provides access to the College policies, VLE, handbooks, assignment briefs, hand-outs, and other learning support materials such as videos, reading lists, work placement arrangements, and personal development plans. Improved access to the student portal through a single login and clearer links to information has been introduced, which has streamlined the experience for students. To ensure that VLE usage by staff achieves minimum standards, and to encourage staff to use the full potential of the system, the College uses a 'Going for Gold' rating system.

3.11   For external stakeholders the College website provides links to the College mission, vision and values, partnerships, policies and procedures, and governance arrangements. There are also links to its Freedom of Information polices, which provide an indicative list of the type of information available from the College under its Freedom of Information commitment.

3.12   The team considers that the College provides information that is clear, accessible and fit for purpose. Information is judged by those accessing it to be helpful and trustworthy. The College has robust systems in place to assure the accuracy of its published information. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.14   Expectation C is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations, affirmations or features of good practice located in this area.

3.15   Given that the Expectation is met, the level of risk is low and there are no recommendations, the team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College is committed to enhancing the learning opportunities and experience of its students, and has in place an annual process to inform quality improvement within the College, including the identification of enhancements for higher education students. The College undertakes a range of quality monitoring activities within a culture of continuous improvement. Enhancement initiatives stem from quality monitoring activities. These include the overarching Strategic Plan, Higher Education Strategy, College and Higher Education Self-Assessment Reports, and Quality Improvement and Operational Plans. Each activity generates a range of information which is then evaluated by the Directorate Team and then through the College committee structure, and informs individual learning area developments and enhancement activity. The College views the quality improvement planning processes in place as building enhancement within the College operations, and for the benefit of students rather than just addressing deficits identified through quality assurance.

4.2 The procedures the College has in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.3 The team considered the effectiveness of the approach to enhancement by reviewing a variety of documentation including the College Strategic Plan, College and Higher Education Self-Assessment Reports, Quality Improvement Plans, minutes of the Senior Management Leadership Team, and programme reviews. In addition, the team met senior staff including the Partnerships Liaison Manager from the University, academic and support staff including the University Partnership Liaison Officer, students and employers.

4.4 The overarching Strategic Plan, College Self-Assessment Plan, key higher education annual reports and operational plans, the revised Higher Education Strategy, and minutes of key meetings demonstrated the College's approach to being effective in driving forward and regularly reviewing and monitoring higher education strategies and operational policies and procedures. It was clear that the enhancement of learning opportunities is influenced through this process, which staff understand clearly.

4.5 The key forum at which enhancement is strategically managed is the College Directorate, which meets on a weekly basis. Through the Directorate, specific enhancement initiatives have been identified and taken forward. Examples include promoting a focus on employability skills into work progression, such as developing a strategic partnership with a health organisation to support links with the health and social care team; counselling students gaining supervised placements within the College counselling service to gain practical skills; and targeted higher education information technology developments including improvements to the library management system, which was not previously appropriate for higher education students. While there is clear evidence that enhancement activity is undertaken it was not clear what, or how, data and other evidence is used by the College senior management to determine and substantiate strategic priorities for enhancement. To provide clarity of decision making the team **recommends** that the College makes explicit the evidence base used to inform and justify strategic enhancement priorities for higher education provision.

4.6 During the review, the team heard and saw evidence that the quality of the student learning experience, set within an appropriate higher education ethos, is being enhanced through these mechanisms. Students spoke positively regarding their experience at the

College. Students reported that they are satisfied with the various enhancement activities that the College has put in place. There are some differences between facilities and services available to University and Pearson students. For example, University students have access to the HE Gateway and University Partnership Liaison Officer, while Pearson students have access to separate designated areas to work independently, and dedicated teaching facilities. Students reported that they are appreciative of the resources and facilities available, and also use the wide range of resources and services available from the College Learning Zone, including workshops on research skills and academic study skills training.

4.7   The team has confidence that the College is progressing to embed its strategy for enhancement fully and to improve the quality of the student learning opportunities. While the team has seen evidence to show that the College's enhancement approach is effective, it **recommends** that the College makes explicit the evidence base used to inform and justify strategic enhancement priorities for higher education students. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.9   The Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

4.10   There is one recommendation only and no features of good practice or affirmations in this judgement area. The recommendation that the College makes explicit the evidence base used to inform and justify strategic enhancement priorities for higher education provision is not considered to carry a high level of risk but would allow the College to meet the Expectation more fully.

4.11   Given that the Expectation is met, the 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   In its Strategic Plan the College states its mission as the enhancement of the economic prosperity of young people, adults and employers through high quality work-related education and training. The College aspires to design courses and services that enhance the social, economic and physical well-being of young people and adults across South Durham, providing a broad range of learning to maximise the skills and knowledge of students so that they become economically active citizens, and engaging with local employers to meet the needs of businesses and non-commercial partners.

5.2   Three of the College's six strategic priorities include providing courses and services that respond to market needs and help to build prosperity in south Durham; the provision of outstanding vocational learning that engages and inspires; and the preparation of young people and adults for social and economic success.

5.3   The College aims to link its provision to local economic needs, drawing on local market intelligence, which it commissions through programme inception and design as well as from its membership of the North-East Local Enterprise Partnership and contacts with local employers.

5.4   Students are confident that their programmes are enhancing their employability and believe that most assignments have an employability element built into them. They cited, as an example, music and performing arts, which include not just performance elements but also organisation, business and venue management. Arts students on HND programmes also conceive and enact performances and work with schoolchildren and the community.

5.5   Some employers and students have developed mutually beneficial relationships, with one placement provider linked to the Foundation Degree in Counselling course in which a charity provides supervised work-placement opportunities. This partially satisfies professional body requirements for new entrants to that profession and, in return, placement students provide volunteer counselling services.

5.6   Students benefit from substantial formal mechanisms for advising them on employability issues but also from less formal routes because some staff are still active practitioners in their field and provide very topical advice on careers opportunities. Examples of this exist in the music, creative arts and counselling courses in particular. These activities assist in maintaining the industrial knowledge profiles of staff.

5.7   The College has strong links with local employers who provide guest speakers and work placements and employ students after completion of their courses. These include leisure organisations and charities active in providing counselling services.

5.8   The College places strong emphasis on developing transferable employability skills. The HND Sport programme recognised the need to enhance students' employment prospects by broadening the coaching element of the course to cover a wider range of sporting activities. Students on the course are encouraged to, and are facilitated in, the acquisition of different externally recognised coaching qualifications to enhance their employability. Students on creative arts and music courses are given experience of the logistics of event organisation and management by participating in arts exhibitions and performing arts festivals.

5.9   College staff place great emphasis on the potential employability of students in the planning and development of new provision. Course teams engage with employers to develop course content that will enhance student employability.

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* (FHEQIS).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

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

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

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