

Higher Education Review of Bridgwater College

May 2014

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Bridgwater College. The review took place from 29 April to 1 May 2014 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Glenn Barr
- Dr Mary Meldrum
- Dr Christopher Stevens
- Ms Kanyanut Ndubuokwu (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Bridgwater 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 threshold academic standards
 - the quality of student learning opportunities
 - the information provided about higher education provision
 - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

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

In reviewing Bridgwater 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 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106#.U8U94HhwY-J.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Bridgwater College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at Bridgwater College **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **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 Bridgwater College.

- The integrated approach to transition from entry to higher education, through to further study and employment (Expectation B4).
- The embedding of employability into the curriculum (Expectation B4).
- The extensive engagement with employers, including work-based learning (Expectations B4, B10).
- The clear and comprehensive information available to prospective students on employment opportunities relevant to their programmes (Expectations C, B4).

Recommendations

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

By October 2014:

- ensure that the procedures for the return of assessed work are applied fully to enable consistent and timely feedback to students (Expectation B6)
- adopt a more consistent approach to sharing external examiner reports with students (Expectations B7, C)
- revise the College's appeals procedure to secure alignment with awarding body procedures (Expectation B9).

By December 2014:

- articulate more fully its approach to higher education enhancement, ensuring that its strategies for continuous improvement are brought together and underpinned by the evaluation of its quality procedures (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The actions being taken to increase the number of higher education-specific teaching observations (Expectation B3).

- The actions being taken to work with students to enhance dedicated higher education learning facilities on both sites (Expectation B4).

Theme: Student Employability

Student employability is central to the College's Strategic Plan and the College is achieving its strategic goals through three main mechanisms: a portfolio of professional and vocational programmes, strong employer relations, and embedding employability skills in the curriculum. The College provides clear and comprehensive information to prospective students on employment opportunities relevant to their study and has developed approaches to support students through the transition into employment, thus making employability a key feature of the students' learning experience from pre-entry to the completion of their programmes.

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

About Bridgwater College

Bridgwater College (the College) is a medium-sized tertiary college formed in 1973. The College's mission is to 'inspire the people of the local, national and international communities we serve to achieve success by providing the best possible opportunities for learning and skills development; a creative and exciting partnership with our staff; and a welcoming, safe, inclusive and supportive environment'.

In 2012-13 there were 310 full-time and 247 part-time higher education students studying a range of vocationally related subjects located on two campuses at Bridgwater and Cannington. The majority of the College's higher education students are recruited from Somerset and the surrounding counties. A minority are recruited from outside the locality on a national and international basis.

The College works in partnership with six universities and Pearson under both validating and franchising arrangements. It is in the process of reducing its university partners to four (Oxford Brookes University, the University of Central Lancashire, the University of Plymouth and the University of the West of England), based on academic fit, and is consequently withdrawing from its partnerships with Bournemouth University and the University of Bath.

Since the last QAA review the College has seen a significant change in leadership, with the appointment of a new Principal in 2011-12; however, strategic continuity has been maintained through the promotion of senior staff internally.

Although financially stable, one of the key challenges faced by the College in aiming to grow its higher education provision is the need for capital funding to support major projects, such as the development of a Higher Education Centre. The College's recruitment has not been significantly affected by the introduction of the student number control, and it sees itself, with its multiple partnerships, to be in a strong position to capitalise on the removal of the student number control.

The College identifies a further challenge as the need to engage with its awarding body quality procedures while developing a distinctive Bridgwater higher education experience for its students. To this end it has created an Academic Partnerships and Marketing area to extend its capacity to manage its partnerships and the student experience and is committed to implementing changes that will improve the learning experience for its students.

The outcomes of the last QAA review in 2010 were positive, with one 'advisable' and one 'desirable' recommendation. The College produced an action plan and has broadly addressed the first recommendation (although a review is planned under the new internal review method for higher education) and completed the actions against the second recommendation.

Explanation of the findings about Bridgwater 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: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

Expectation (A1): Each qualification (including those awarded through arrangements with other delivery organisations or support providers) is allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*.

Quality Code, Chapter A1: The national level

Findings

1.1 The College delivers its higher education provision in partnership with Bournemouth University, Oxford Brookes University, the University of Bath, the University of Central Lancashire, the University of Plymouth, the University of the West of England and Pearson. The mapping of qualifications to the FHEQ for higher education awards run by the College is the responsibility of the degree-awarding bodies and Pearson. Programme specifications indicate that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ and the validation processes of the awarding bodies establish the appropriateness of the level and volume of study.

1.2 The College has established systems and procedures for designing new programmes to ensure that proposals put forward for validation meet the qualification descriptors on the FHEQ and that an adequate volume of study is provided to address the learning outcomes. The Higher Education Quality Team (HEQT) takes a key role in supporting programme teams in meeting the requirements of the different accrediting partners in the validation, revalidation and monitoring of programmes. The College's policies and procedures therefore enable this Expectation to be met.

1.3 The team reviewed the effectiveness of these policies and procedures by looking at the minutes of meetings, validation and other reports, and by talking to academic staff, support staff, senior staff and employers.

1.4 The evidence indicates that the policies and procedures used by the College are effective in practice. Validation reports show that proposals made by the College to accrediting partners were well received and only minor modifications were required to meet their validation requirements. Validation reports and meetings with academic and support staff confirmed that relevant guidance is available to staff regarding academic levels, and that the characteristics of programmes and learning outcomes had been mapped to appropriate benchmark statements and integrated into programme design. The College's strong links with employers are evident in the design and development of programmes.

1.5 Academic staff acknowledge the support offered by the HEQT and partner institutions in writing programmes that align with the FHEQ in the form of staff development events provided by both the College and the partners. Examples of College events and support include the annual Higher Education Conference at the College and the Higher Education Programme Managers' meetings, and there is evidence of extensive engagement with events at partner institutions. Academic staff confirmed their knowledge of academic levels and their significance for designing, implementing and assessing programmes.

1.6 The College effectively carries out its responsibilities, within its partnership agreements, for allocating qualifications to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. Academic staff receive appropriate training, guidance and support to assist with programme design and understanding academic levels. These processes are backed up by strong links with

employers and awarding bodies. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A1: The national level* is met both in design and operation and the associated risk level is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2): All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

Quality Code, Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level

Findings

1.7 The College's agreements with the seven awarding partners include clearly outlined responsibilities for designing and maintaining validated programmes with learning outcomes that are referenced to subject benchmark statements and informed by the requirements of the relevant vocational sectors.

1.8 The College's approach to programme development and maintenance is to construct or identify vocationally relevant qualifications for its areas of higher education provision. Reference to subject and qualification benchmark statements is required by the university partners at the time of validation as a key feature of their programme specifications. For Pearson, reference is incorporated into the unit specifications they provide. The FdA Early Years with Plymouth is a sector-endorsed programme. The College's approach to the design and development of programmes enables this Expectation to be met.

1.9 The review team tested the College's approach to programme development and the inclusion of subject and qualification benchmark statements by scrutinising documentation for a range of approval events and in meetings with staff, employers and students. The operation of the College's internal approvals policy and procedure was identified in the documentation and followed through in discussions with senior and academic staff.

1.10 Validation processes confirm the matching of outcomes with subject and qualification descriptors. Periodic review and minor modifications maintain the curriculum and learning outcomes in line with appropriate benchmarks and sector requirements. The HEQT regularly reviews the relationship between learning outcomes and subject benchmark statements and liaises with Programme Managers as necessary. The College consults employers through a variety of mechanisms to ensure that Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) and other requirements are considered in the design or redesign of modules and learning outcomes. The team heard from employers about the College's commitment to vocationally relevant programmes.

1.11 The team considers that the College carries out its responsibilities effectively to ensure that its programme design processes rigorously take account of relevant professional and subject benchmark statements and therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level* of the Quality Code is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3): Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study.

Quality Code, Chapter A3: The programme level

Findings

1.12 The College follows its university partners' approval and review processes, including the production of definitive information about the programmes of study which includes the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements. This information is normally defined in the programme specification but may, depending on the partner, feature in other core documentation. For Pearson programmes, the College is responsible for publishing the correct information in accessible formats and for producing programme specifications designed internally and built from the unit specifications in line with Pearson regulations. Programme specifications are available to students through programme handbooks which are published on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE). Monitoring and review processes are determined by the awarding bodies and the College's adherence to these processes enables this Expectation to be met.

1.13 The review team read relevant documents including partnership agreements with awarding bodies; minutes of monitoring meetings, including internal Higher Education Review meetings; and programme specifications in handbooks. The team also examined the results of student surveys on the College website and the VLE programme information published for students. The team checked their understanding of these documents and their outputs by talking to senior, academic and support staff; students; and employers.

1.14 The College is effective in providing programme information to its stakeholders. The HEQT monitors the content of programme handbooks and ensures they are aligned with awarding body requirements. Current students have access to a programme handbook which contains key information from the programme specification, and prospective students can access information that relates directly to the programme specification via information on the College's website. Students confirmed that they had good, clear information about the core aims of the programmes and employers agreed that programme information was sufficient.

1.15 The College meets the monitoring and review requirements of its awarding bodies by adopting an umbrella approach that encompasses the various processes. The HEQT acts as coordinator between the awarding bodies and the programme teams to ensure compliance with any changes to the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements of the programmes. The direct engagement of programme teams with awarding bodies is also a strong source of support and Programme Managers confirmed that this involvement enables them to understand and meet their awarding body requirements.

1.16 The team considers the design and operation of the mechanisms used by the College for preparing, disseminating, monitoring and enhancing information on its programmes of study to be sound and aligned with *Chapter A3: The programme level* of the Quality Code. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A4): Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter A4: Approval and review

Findings

1.17 The College's awarding bodies have clear processes in place for programme development, approval and review. While the College follows these procedures, it also has its own procedures for the approval of new higher education programmes before they go forward to the final stage of the awarding partner approval processes. In the case of periodic review, the College follows the university partners' processes. The College also consults with employers for both validation and periodic review. Together, the procedures for new course approvals and periodic review enable this Expectation to be met.

1.18 The review team examined Programme Meeting minutes, Higher Education Review Group minutes, and validation and revalidation reports. The team also met with senior, academic and support staff, and employers.

1.19 The evidence shows that the College has in place clear and effective processes for the validation, revalidation and periodic review of its programmes. An internal approval panel scrutinises programme proposals and assesses them for 'fit' to College strategy and relevance to the market before submitting the documentation to the awarding body for approval. The composition of the internal approvals panel is broad and ensures appropriate consideration of curriculum and resource requirements. Awarding body requirements ensure that there is an external member on panels for the approval of new programmes and on-programme periodic review panels, and there is clear evidence of employer engagement in the design of programmes. The annual Self-Assessment Monitoring (SAM) process monitors responses to partner approval and review conditions and recommendations, as well as to external examiner reports.

1.20 The team found that the programme approval and review procedures work effectively. There is evidence of externality within the programme development and approval processes and staff are aware of the relevant procedures. The team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A4: Approval and review* is met and the associated risk level is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A5): Higher education providers ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards.

Quality Code, Chapter A5: Externality

Findings

1.21 The College's partner universities and Pearson are responsible for ensuring the appropriate use of independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards, as set out in their formal agreements. The awarding bodies have varying requirements regarding the use of external expertise when developing and periodically reviewing programmes. Externality is provided by the awarding body, both in relation to programme approval and monitoring, and in approving the appointment of external examiners. These procedures enable the Expectation to be met.

1.22 The review team met with academic staff, support staff, students and employers and examined programme development and review and annual programme monitoring meeting minutes; Area Review Group minutes; Senior Management Team (SMT) minutes; and external examiner reports.

1.23 The needs of the relevant employment sector are taken into account in designing the curriculum and there is strong employer engagement on many programmes. Sector Employer Advisory groups inform the curriculum and employers provided numerous examples of their input into curriculum design, development and assessment. Most programmes have a work-based learning element with students undertaking placements, supported by effective contact with employers. There is scope on some programmes to develop further employer links and this is being taken forward systematically through the Bridgwater College Higher Education Advantage initiative. There is evidence of effective engagement with external examiner feedback and in following up on actions, which are monitored by the HEQT. There is also evidence of ongoing interaction with partners. Staff mentioned regular contact with the host departments at Oxford Brookes University, the University of Plymouth and the University of the West of England, for example attending partner-run conferences.

1.24 The review team considers that the processes adopted by the College, over and above the requirements of its awarding bodies, ensure externality at all levels. Employers are closely involved in curriculum development, and actions from external examiners' reports are acted upon and carefully monitored. The review team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A5: Externality* is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A6): Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Quality Code, Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes

Findings

1.25 The College operates in accordance with the assessment policies of its awarding bodies. On many of its programmes the College is responsible for the design, verification, marking and feedback of all assessments delivered on behalf of its partners. In those instances where the same programme is delivered at multiple partner colleges, the assessment design and marking are partner university-led, for example the BA (Hons) Early Years Care & Education Top Up with Bournemouth University; FdSc Engineering Systems with the University of Bath; FdA Business, Management and Communications with Oxford Brookes University; and FdSc Mechanical Engineering with the University of the West of England. These arrangements can include common assessments designed for (and sometimes with) the College partners. Assessment alignment can include common approaches and meetings for marking and verification of marking. Where the College is responsible for marking and verification, the procedures followed are outlined in the College Higher National Assessment Regulations. The College's assessment procedures enable the Expectation to be met.

1.26 The review team tested the College's assessment procedures by reviewing a range of documents including programme handbooks; validation reports; external examiner College processes and reports and responses to these reports; and staff development events. The team also met with academic and support staff and students.

1.27 The College has developed procedures aligned to partner requirements for the moderation of assessment briefs and marked scripts and these are also applied to the Pearson programmes. External examiners confirm that assessment is at the correct level, robust, reliable and valid.

1.28 Assessment strategy and content are considered during both validation and periodic review and staff are supported by the HEQT and partner universities when preparing for these events. Where the College is required to produce assignments, partner universities mentor staff in writing them to the appropriate level. The College also has its own procedures for mentoring staff new to higher education, for example the Advanced Practitioner role has a remit to support colleagues in devising assessments and ensuring an understanding of the level and type of assessment required. Students confirmed that information on assessment requirements and marking criteria are clear.

1.29 The College Assessment Framework provides clear guidelines for the conduct of assessment and this leads to consistency of approach across the higher education provision. There is considerable support for staff in ensuring that assessment is set at the appropriate level of the FHEQ. Students are clear about the marking criteria against which they will be assessed and external examiners confirm that marking is appropriate. The team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation in *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes* of the Quality Code and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.30 In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. All Expectations for the maintenance of threshold academic standards are met with the associated level of risk low in all instances. The College's responsibilities for maintaining threshold academic standards are to ensure that it adheres to the policies and processes set by its university partners and Pearson, and staff are well supported to do this.

1.31 There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this area. In summary, the team found that the College is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities to its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The review team concludes, therefore, that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme design and approval

Findings

2.1 As noted in paragraph 1.1, the College provides academic programmes in partnership with six universities and Pearson. Programmes offered include degrees, foundation degrees, higher national certificates (HNCs) and higher national diplomas (HNDs). Programmes are offered in full-time and part-time modes and some of the latter are delivered for employers through block release. The College confirmed that it intends to consolidate these arrangements and work with a smaller number of awarding bodies, looking outside these only where support for a specialist programme is required.

2.2 The design and approval of higher education programmes offered at the College is ultimately the responsibility of its awarding bodies, except for Pearson programmes, where the College produces its own programme specifications. The College is, however, an active participant in the design and development of its higher education programmes and has its own approval processes in place. Together, these procedures enable the Expectation to be met.

2.3 In testing the College's procedures, the review team met with a range of College staff, including the chairs of approval events, and looked at a range of programme documentation, approval reports and minutes, including those of the awarding bodies.

2.4 There is evidence of the College working effectively with its awarding bodies to ensure that procedures are robust. The College's arrangements for the design and approval of programmes are detailed in the document *Higher Education: Programme Approvals: Policy and Procedure* and overseen by the Higher Education Review Group (HERG). This is chaired by a Governor and reports to the Governors' Standards Committee. Its membership includes the Principal, the Vice Principal, the Heads of the three academic areas, the Head of Staff and Quality Services, and the Head of Student Services. A review of its minutes showed that, while not an executive body, HERG provides strategic oversight of the College higher education portfolio, and acts both critically and supportively in the design and approval of higher education programmes. These processes are supported by the HEQT.

2.5 As noted in paragraph 1.19, prior to a new programme undergoing the formal validation process with an awarding body, the College holds an approval meeting, conducted by the Higher Education Programmes Approval Committee. The membership, function and terms of reference of this body are set out clearly in the College's Programme Approvals: Policy and Procedure document. The approval meeting is chaired by the College Principal and enables the College to consider market needs, understand the level of resource and ensure that the intended programme will be delivered in such a way as to meet the Expectation of the Quality Code. The terms of reference empower the Committee to deny the programme permission to proceed to approval by the awarding body. Meetings held with both senior and academic staff demonstrated their awareness of the process of programme development and the importance of the Quality Code. The team's review of the minutes of the approval meeting shows that it operates in line with its terms of reference.

2.6 Although the team saw no indication that the College carried out an evaluation of the working of its design and approval processes, it saw no evidence that this inhibited the effectiveness of these processes. The team concludes that the College policy and

procedures for programme design and approval meet the Expectation in *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval* and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

Quality Code, Chapter B2: Admissions

Findings

2.7 The College's admissions policy is available on the website and is updated annually. The policy provides the basis for the Expectation to be met.

2.8 The review team met with senior staff, Programme Managers, support staff and students to test the operational effectiveness of the College's admission policy and processes.

2.9 The Information and Guidance Team liaises with university partners, with support from the Higher Education Coordinator, who carries out ongoing checks to ensure the consistency of published admissions criteria between the College, its partners and UCAS.

2.10 The admissions procedure is clear, comprehensive and transparent. In 2012-13, the College implemented a pre-engagement site to make detailed information such as student handbooks, higher education bulletins, higher education employment data and the Higher Education Student Engagement Policy available to prospective students to help them decide which programme to enrol on. The team met French students who were pleased to have had the opportunity to meet some College staff in France before starting their studies. The College communicates the outcome of students' applications via automated letters and postcards, and introduced a supplementary email communication in 2012-13.

2.11 The College undertook a higher education student survey in 2012-13 as part of their monitoring and review processes to determine the usefulness of the pre-engagement site and the response was largely positive. Most students progress internally from level 3 which enables the College to monitor and review its admission process for the subsequent academic year. The evidence indicates that the admissions process is effective and that students find the information on admissions accurate and helpful. Furthermore, the SMT monitors the application data from the College's recruitment cycle to strategically plan its provision.

2.12 Staff regularly attend events and training on admission policies and processes at their awarding body partners. Meetings with senior, academic and teaching staff confirmed their knowledge of the Higher Education Admission Policy.

2.13 The team concludes that the College has consistent procedures in liaising with its awarding body partners and clear admissions policies which are understood by students and staff. Therefore, the Expectation of *Chapter B2: Admissions* of the Quality Code is met and the 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

2.14 The College has a Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy which was developed through collaboration between Programme Managers and teaching staff. The whole College uses SMT-approved documentation to standardise and improve the quality of its teaching and learning across all levels. SMT then systematically reviews and evaluates its processes to enhance teaching practices and the provision of learning opportunities. The outcomes are communicated to staff through the annual Staff Conference. The College therefore has an effective processes in place to meet the Expectation.

2.15 The review team checked the College's approach to teaching and learning and its functions by meeting with senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students, and by considering relevant documentation such as the Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy, and teaching observation feedback.

2.16 The Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy is clear and comprehensive. Students state that they have a good learning experience and are taught by experienced and well qualified teachers, whom they describe as dedicated and helpful. The College has an effective recruitment procedure for all staff which includes students. Students are involved in the appointment of senior staff during the interview process, and in the recruitment of teaching staff through the 'Microteach' scheme. Students who participated in Microteach felt that the College listened to their views and that they had an impact on the selection process.

2.17 The College supports teaching staff to understand and deliver against specific learning outcomes in a number of ways. For example, Advanced Practitioners and mentors engage new staff in formal and informal staff development activities; more established staff are encouraged to work in pairs and trios to explore teaching and learning issues as part of a peer coaching scheme. The efficacy of these schemes was endorsed by participants. University partners support College staff when a new programme or level of study is introduced; for example, the University of Plymouth met with College staff to discuss the requirements of level 6 projects; and Oxford Brookes University invited College staff to sit in on level 6 lectures in Motor Sport. The College has joined the Higher Education Academy and Programme Managers spoke enthusiastically about their learning experience at a recent conference.

2.18 Teaching observations are conducted regularly by Programme Managers or peers and the feedback includes individual development plans. Although the records are detailed and staff derive benefit from the process in that it is linked to continuous professional development, the samples of teaching observations provided show that the processes are not differentiated and that there are no specific higher education criteria. The College recognises that only 8 per cent of the observations conducted are at higher education level and the team **affirms** that actions are being taken to increase the number of higher education-specific teaching observations.

2.19 In meetings, students said that the VLE is one of their main learning tools. The site contains programme handbooks, programme information and learning resources. If students cannot attend a lesson, they are able to access the notes and other resources on the VLE, sometimes in advance of the session, which they find particularly helpful. The majority of students confirmed that they were able to find the information they needed in their handbooks. A few part-time students, notably those on day release, were not familiar with the handbook, but knew how to engage in their learning and did not find it an issue.

2.20 The team concludes that the College has an effective strategy in place to deliver and systematically review its learning and teaching provision. It also demonstrates the capacity to identify and address issues for development. Therefore the Expectation in *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* of the Quality Code is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement

Findings

2.21 As part of its Strategic Plan, the College has developed a number of individual strategies and policies for specific functions and services such as the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy; Tutorial Policy; Professional Development Strategy; Technology Strategy; Accommodation Strategy; and Learner Involvement Strategy to deliver and support the student learning experience from pre-entry to employment. The College gathers student feedback regarding the support provided through both informal focus groups and surveys. These strategies, policies and processes enable the Expectation to be met.

2.22 The review team met with senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students to test how the support, learning resources and facilities provided to higher education students are maintained and developed in practice. The team also scrutinised documentation relating to the mechanisms used to support students.

2.23 The College works closely with both staff and students to support a smooth transition between levels of study. The team met a number of students who had progressed internally from level 3. Information about higher education programmes and support services was provided on completion of their previous programmes, supplemented by talks with higher-level students, higher education careers fairs, open days and evenings, and progression newsletters. Support staff commented that ensuring students applied for the programmes which matched their preferences and aptitudes was more important than recruiting numbers. To this end, a wide range of guest speakers and employers are brought in across all programmes and at an individual level, the Marketing team provided a student with a placement to help determine whether it was the right career choice. The College recognises the challenges in preparing level 3 students for higher-level study and aims progressively to increase their capacity for independent learning. A Higher Education Academic Development Scheme (HEADStart) was introduced to improve students' academic writing and referencing skills to aid the transition from level 3. The College also differentiates the learning experience at programme level by dedicating certain resources and equipment for higher education students only, for example the higher education study room. The team found that the College's integrated approach to the transition from entry to higher education through to further study and employment is **good practice**.

2.24 Employability skills are a key feature of all the College's higher education provision and were the focus of the Higher Education Conference held in February 2014. From the outset, the College provides clear and comprehensive information to prospective students about the employment opportunities relevant to their programmes on the pre-engagement section of the website and this is good practice recorded under Expectation C (paragraph 3.4).

2.25 The College has embedded employability into the curriculum by developing the Bridgwater Higher Education Advantage, an initiative that feeds employability into the design and management of programmes and also develops employability skills that enable students to compete in the employment market. Students confirmed that employability skills are well embedded into their programmes and some have whole units focused on generic employability skills and work experience which students find very useful. Most programmes also have connections with local industry. Where there is no compulsory work experience, many students still find a work placement, some with the support of staff, and some by

themselves. The team found that the embedding of employability into the curriculum is **good practice**.

2.26 The College, in conjunction with employers, effectively integrates work-based learning or placements into the design of its programmes. Employers provide the opportunity for students to acquire, explore and develop employment-ready skills through real-life projects, such as those offered in HND Computing and Systems Development. In addition, the feedback from employers contributes to the redesign and improvement of programmes. Students noted the positive impact on their personal development of work-based learning and its usefulness in converting theory into practice. The integration of work-based learning and the extensive engagement with employers is good practice identified under Expectation B10 (paragraph 2.63).

2.27 A strong tutorial system ensures that students receive support from their tutors and Programme Managers which the majority agree is prompt and very helpful. The College has addressed the desirable recommendation identified in the previous review to embed personal development planning by building on the tutorial programme. Additionally, there is a function on the VLE which enables students to monitor their own progress and the Learning Resources Centre (LRC) supports the development of academic skills such as referencing.

2.28 The College has invested significantly in its LRC and has made many upgrades to its IT equipment. LRC staff help to ensure that resource levels are meeting programme needs and student expectations by organising a termly event for staff to assess the resources available. The HEQT has a central role in ensuring that all curriculum resources are up to date by liaising with awarding body partners and feeding back to the programme team concerned. The HEQT also picks up resource requirements from student meetings and Programme Managers' meetings. Students noted that the LRC is adept at resolving issues with the supply of books and that the latest editions are usually available on the VLE through the E-Library. In addition to online resources, the College provides dedicated higher education study rooms on both sites for higher education students.

2.29 Despite the many developments, students expressed the view that facilities are not proportional to current student numbers and noted that the issue is regularly raised in Higher Education Forums. However, students are aware that plans for development are in place, including a Higher Education Centre scheduled to open in 2015. The College recognises the importance of providing appropriate higher education space and the team **affirms** the actions being taken to work with students to enhance the dedicated higher education learning facilities on both sites.

2.30 The review team concludes that the College has a coordinated approach to student transition onto higher education and through to employment, and offers a high level of student support. It integrates work-based learning into programmes and embeds employability into the curriculum. Furthermore, the College reviews and has plans to enhance its support, therefore the Expectation in *Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement* is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student engagement

Findings

2.31 The College's approach to student engagement is defined in the Student Engagement Policy, which is available to all students on the VLE. The policy was established with contributions from students through the Higher Education Forum and underpins the College's commitment to working in partnership with students to improve the learning experience. The College's mechanisms for obtaining the student voice include the Higher Education Forum; focus groups; student representatives; and surveys at national, awarding body and College level. In 2012-13, the College launched a dedicated higher education email address as a means of improving student perceptions of the organisation and management of higher education.

2.32 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's approach to student engagement by talking to support staff and students, and checking the Higher Education Forum meeting agendas, minutes and action plans.

2.33 The College continuously encourages higher education student participation and aims to engage them both when they are on and off-site, using the VLE. All higher education students have access to the Higher Education Forum through the VLE, which provides comprehensive information, including the agenda, minutes and current action plans. Students make extensive use of the Higher Education Forum to communicate with fellow students and to voice their feedback to the College. The College monitors and reviews student comments, and uses them to plan and continuously improve the learning resources to meet higher education student expectations. Several examples of improvements that were implemented as a result of monitoring and responding to the student voice were cited and were acknowledged to have had a positive impact. These include the establishment of a Higher Education Room on both sites; the revision of the Higher Education Induction Process; the introduction of an induction for Higher Education Representatives; allowing students access to social media in the LRC; and the creation of the Lead Student Representative role in October 2013.

2.34 Higher education student representatives are fully trained and supported in their roles and higher education students generally know who their representatives are and how the representation system works.

2.35 The team concludes that the College actively engages students and provides appropriate platforms for them to communicate with each other and the College. The majority of students understand clearly how the representation system and other mechanisms operate and the College monitors and responds effectively to the student voice. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B5: Student engagement* of the Quality Code is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.

Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning

Findings

2.36 The College sets out the general principles underpinning its approach to assessment across its whole provision in the College Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. These principles are amplified in its Assessment Framework, which in addition has a higher education section, drawing together assessment strategies for its higher education programmes. Assessment is designed both to ensure that students meet the learning outcomes of their programme of study and to ensure that assessment makes an effective contribution to student learning.

2.37 The regulatory framework for assessment is determined by the awarding bodies, whose staff chair Boards of Examiners, with the exception of the College provision for Pearson, for which the College has its own detailed procedures. In the latter case, subject boards are chaired by appropriate College academic staff and the Assessment Board is chaired by the Head of Staff and Quality Services.

2.38 The College undertakes a wide range of responsibilities with regard to assessment, including managing the amount and timing of assessment, production and verification of assessments, scheduling examinations, invigilation, first and second marking, providing timely and adequate feedback, and if necessary implementing assessment malpractice policies. These are undertaken within guidelines set out by the awarding bodies for university programmes, and following its own procedures for Pearson programmes. A College Examinations Office is charged with ensuring the smooth running of examinations. The Examinations Office and the HEQT have responsibility for ensuring that the correct awarding body policy is applied. The College therefore has appropriate procedures in place to enable the Expectation to be met.

2.39 The review team met with senior staff, academic staff, and professional service staff involved in supporting assessment, as well as full-time and part-time students. The team also reviewed appropriate documentation, including the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and the Assessment Framework.

2.40 Meetings with staff and students demonstrated that there was a strong understanding of the College's approach to assessment and the operation of its assessment and examination procedures. Grading criteria are clearly articulated and communicated to students; feedback to students is generally of high quality; and there is evidence that assessment briefs and marked coursework and examinations are assessed using transparent and appropriate criteria and moderated before they are confirmed by external examiners. Staff also confirmed that assessment is supported by staff development.

2.41 The team saw well designed assessment briefs, and an effective internal moderation and verification process, using standardised proformas. External examiners verify assessment briefs and examination scripts. Where it became evident on one programme that marking was overly generous, the College took swift action to ensure that the issue was resolved satisfactorily prior to the Board of Examiners.

2.42 The College has a policy that marked work should be returned within three weeks with feedback that enables students to develop and progress. Meetings with staff and

students confirmed that this policy is well known across the College, and action has been taken in at least one instance when feedback was slow. Despite this, there was evidence from the meetings with students and employers indicating that feedback was not always returned within this timeframe. In the light of this, the review team **recommends** that by October 2014 the College ensure that the procedures for the return of assessed work are applied fully to enable consistent and timely feedback to students.

2.43 Overall, the review team concludes that the College's approach to assessment is robust. There is support for staff involved in assessment and the underpinning procedures are well known to staff and students. The team therefore confirmed that the College meets the Expectation in *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning* 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

2.44 External examiners are nominated by the College within specified timeframes and are appointed by the awarding bodies, which define the role of external examiners and provide clear policy and procedural documents. The role of the College in relation to external examiners is to provide information and materials, arrange visits, provide sufficient evidence of assessment and access to students, and ensure that external examiners can be present at Assessment Boards for final consideration of student profiles. The processes are overseen centrally by the HEQT. The College's approach to external examining therefore allows the Expectation to be met.

2.45 In testing the College's procedures, the review team met with senior and academic staff and students. It looked at external examiners' reports, response reports, the minutes of programme meetings, and programme monitoring and annual review materials.

2.46 The evidence shows that external examining procedures are generally well known and well embedded. The HEQT ensures that external examiners are in place for all programmes, attend Boards of Examiners and submit reports. The College has clear and transparent procedures for receiving and responding to external examiner reports: reports are received and logged by the HEQT; viewed by the Principal and the Head of Staff and Quality Services; and then shared with relevant academic staff. A centrally devised response form for all external examiner reports ensures that feedback is standardised for all awarding bodies, while meeting the internal needs of the College and enabling the HEQT to monitor responses. External examiner reports are considered as part of the annual monitoring and review process. They feed into College SAM, annual reports for awarding bodies and the College annual evaluation. Student handbooks offer information about the programme's external examiner; some, but not all, of those seen by the team give the names and institutions of the external examiners.

2.47 The College does not publish external examiner reports in full, but programme handbooks explain the role of external examiners and information on the VLE informs students that reports are available on request. Student representatives are able to consider external examiner reports as members of programme meetings. Student representatives and programme leaders can feed back details of external examiner reports to classes, but the practice is not universal and the College is working to improve the accessibility of external examiners' reports through this process. Meetings with students indicated that students' familiarity with external examiner reports is limited, even among student representatives, and that part-time students in particular were unsure of how to access these reports. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College adopt a more consistent approach to sharing external examiner reports with students.

2.48 The review team considers that, overall, the College has robust processes for the use of external examiners and for monitoring and actioning issues from external examiners' reports. The team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation in *Chapter B7: External examining* and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review

Findings

2.49 The College holds termly or biannual programme meetings to monitor the operation of programmes. These review the College's SAM report, which requires programme teams to review progress against targets, including student retention, attendance and progress. These procedures enable the Expectation to be met.

2.50 The review team tested the periodic review procedures by meeting with College staff, including those with senior academic and professional service roles, and with students and external stakeholders. The team also viewed periodic and annual review reports prepared for partner universities and for Pearson, as well as SAM reports.

2.51 The annual monitoring of programmes, other than for Pearson, is conducted through the processes established by the awarding bodies, which retain responsibility for the effectiveness of the annual monitoring process, and are supported by action plans. These annual monitoring processes use the College's SAM process and the same core data. The SAM process and partner meetings are chaired by the same people, thus enabling consistency and continuity. Oxford Brookes University now allows its partners to use their own annual monitoring processes, in an effort to reduce duplication. The College's SAM process is used for the annual monitoring of and reporting on programmes for which Pearson is the awarding body. A standard agenda for meetings was introduced in September 2013 and the minutes show that a range of stakeholder views, including student views, are taken into account, and that where necessary, reporting triggers an appropriate intervention. The annual monitoring process feeds systematically into the College's annual evaluation. As part of this process, a reflection on the Bridgwater Higher Education Advantage would now be appropriate.

2.52 The periodic review of programmes is overseen by the awarding bodies/organisation, and for university programmes, it is normally agreed with the awarding body at validation. The periodic review process is supported by the HEQT.

2.53 The College has appropriate procedures for supporting prospective and current students in the case of a programme being withdrawn and the team was able to confirm that such an eventuality is well managed.

2.54 The team saw clear lines of responsibility and timescales for completing annual monitoring, clear templates as to what such reports should contain, and the use of action plans and quality improvement procedures. The team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation in *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals.

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals

Findings

2.55 A clear College procedure, modified for higher education students, applies to complaints about the quality of learning opportunities. Guidance leaflets for staff and students clearly outline the procedures and timescales and the leaflets for students are available on the VLE. Students approach their tutor as a first step in any complaint but also have College and student union email addresses to raise issues. Initial responsibility for complaints lies with the Area Head to investigate, with appeal to the Principal and ultimately Governors. Students who are still dissatisfied can take the complaint to the awarding body and thereafter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. College procedures apply to appeals relating to Pearson programmes whereas awarding body procedures apply to appeals relating to programmes franchised or validated by them. The College's procedures regarding complaints allow for the Expectation to be met in principle; however, there is not the same clarity regarding appeals.

2.56 To test the effectiveness of the College's procedures, the review team scrutinised SMT and Standards Committee minutes and the Annual Complaints Log. The team also met with senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students. The team examined the policy and procedures available to students on the VLE, in student handbooks and through links to awarding body regulations.

2.57 The evidence confirmed that the College has a clear and accessible procedure for handling and monitoring complaints. The College's strong relationships with students allow for the informal resolution of issues before they become formal complaints. Students stated that they would first approach their tutor for guidance. Support and representation for students is available should they wish to pursue a formal complaint or appeal. The College maintains a log of complaints and appeals, although complaints and appeals relating to higher education programmes are few. The SMT and Governors' Standards Committee consider the log of cases to identify issues and inform future action. A review of the College's complaints policy and procedure is underway to improve recording and more effectively secure improvements.

2.58 The policy and procedures for handling appeals are less clear. The College appeals procedure, available to students on the VLE, states that it applies to all programmes, rather than indicating when awarding body procedures apply. The document concentrates solely on appeal against an assessment decision, contrary to the procedures of the awarding bodies which do not allow for appeals against academic judgement. Consequently, the document does not provide students on awarding body programmes with accurate information on appeals. The document does not mention grounds for appeal such as discrimination, administrative error or mitigating circumstances not taken into consideration. The College appeals procedure is the only one available to students on Pearson programmes. In not specifying the grounds for appeal, the procedure disadvantages Pearson students in comparison to students on university-franchised and validated programmes. The team **recommends** that the College revise its appeals procedure to secure alignment with awarding body procedures.

2.59 The team found that the complaints system operated by the College is effective but that the appeals procedures lack clarity and consistency. Overall, however, the team concludes that the College meets the Expectation in *Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals* of the Quality Code 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

2.60 The College does not have any provision delivered with third parties as part of a delegated arrangement with an awarding body except for the management of work placements and work-based learning. The College offers a range of foundation degrees, which conform to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. The Foundation Degree in Early Years is sector endorsed and the Foundation Degree in Mechanical Engineering, developed by the University of the West of England, conforms to PSRB requirements and may form part of a Higher Apprenticeship.

2.61 The review team tested that the College effectively manages higher education provision with others by examining the documentation provided for students and employers and by meeting with senior staff, academic staff, support staff, employers and students. The team also examined completed work experience portfolios to confirm that the College's quality assurance procedures for managing placements work effectively.

2.62 The previous review advised the College to undertake further work in relation to the assessment of work-based learning. As part of the work conducted, the College developed very detailed work-based learning handbooks for students and providers underpinned by a clear policy. The handbooks are useful and informative with practical advice for students and employers. Health and safety issues and the assessment of risks entailed in each placement are central to the process of agreeing a placement. The handbooks set out the respective responsibilities of each party, providing advice on how to prepare for the placement, how to tackle any problems mid-placement, and how the employer will conduct the final performance review. Detailed log sheets ensure the efficient management and recording of the placement.

2.63 The College effectively integrates work-based learning and placement into its programme design. Foundation degrees clearly conform to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Employers in the areas of Nuclear Engineering, Motorsport and Media Practice praised the relevance of the College curriculum offer to their employment needs. The HNC Vehicle Operations Management, delivered on a distance-learning basis, uses residential weeks to secure the practical elements of the programme, drawing on experience from the student's workplace. Further evidence in support of the College's engagement with employers can be found in the commentary on the theme (see section 5) and under Expectation B4 (paragraph 2.25). Taken together, the team considers the extensive engagement with employers including work-based learning to be **good practice**.

2.64 Overall, the team found that the College has effective policies and procedures in place to manage work-based learning and work placements delivered through employers. Students and employers commented positively on the support they receive from the College. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* is 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

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

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.66 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area were met and the associated level of risk in each case was low.

2.67 There are three features of good practice: the support for student transition to higher education and on to further study and employment; the embedding of employability into the curriculum; and the extensive engagement with employers. A fourth feature of good practice located under *Part C*, relating to the quality of information available to prospective students on employment opportunities relevant to their programmes, is also relevant to this area. The team made three recommendations. The first relates to the consistency with which College procedures for the return of assessed work are applied to ensure consistent and timely feedback to students. The second refers to securing alignment between College and awarding body appeals procedures. The third relates to the sharing of external examiner reports with students and is also applicable to *Part C*. There were also two affirmations where the team recognised the actions being taken to enhance the dedicated higher education learning facilities on both sites, and to increase the number of higher education-specific teaching observations.

2.68 The review team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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 main channels for dissemination of information about higher education provision are the College website, the VLE and programme handbooks. To ensure accuracy, a detailed chart describes the type of information, key responsibilities, the stages of checking and final sign-off, and these processes enable the Expectation to be met.

3.2 The review team tested that information was fit-for-purpose, trustworthy and accessible by scrutinising the College website and VLE, and examining relevant documents such as the prospectus and programme handbooks. The team also met with senior staff, academic staff, support staff, employers and students.

3.3 The College website provides a comprehensive range of publicly accessible information. The College's mission, values and overall strategy are available in the Annual Report and the Higher Education Student Charter. Minutes of Governors' meetings provide a detailed insight into the workings and performance of the College.

3.4 Prospective students can access detailed information about the College's higher education offer through the website. An electronic prospectus illustrates the full range of programmes and is also available in hardcopy. The website provides information on entry requirements, course length, assessment methods and possible employment opportunities for each programme. It also contains extensive information on being a higher education student at the College. There is an informative video, and sections of the website explaining higher education and its benefits; details on university partners; facilities; and student support. Each subject section contains contributions from alumni and lists of potential job roles. A notable feature of the website is the section on the employability objectives of the College and how the College addresses them. The clear and comprehensive information available to prospective students on employment opportunities relevant to their programmes is recognised by the team as **good practice**.

3.5 Programme specifications are not published or available as links from the website, but the pages relating to each qualification provide sufficient detail for students to make informed choices. Once enrolled, students can access programme specifications through the programme handbooks, which either contain the programme specifications or links to them.

3.6 After acceptance onto a programme, students are able to access comprehensive pre-arrival information, including timetable, handbook and awarding body documentation. Handbooks, either created by the College or in partnership with awarding bodies, provide detailed programme-level information.

3.7 The VLE effectively supports students throughout their time at the College. It is instrumental in supporting teaching and learning and the management of the assessment process. It is also a vital tool in the communication process through the online magazine 'The Voice'. Students confirm the utility of the VLE in supporting their learning. VLE usage statistics show frequent student use of the site. The College uses a range of social media to

communicate with students and encourage their interaction. Some students also find the College app a useful source of information.

3.8 As noted under Expectation B7, the College does not publish external examiner reports in full, but student representatives can feed back details of these reports to fellow students. However, students were generally unaware of external examiner reports and this led to the recommendation in paragraph 2.47 to adopt a more consistent approach to sharing external examiner reports with students.

3.9 Procedures for ensuring accuracy of published information are thorough. Final approval of most web and published material is by the Marketing Manager with the exception of Key Information Sets which the Principal approves. Programme Managers are responsible for course details for the prospectus and webpages to ensure conformity to the validated programme. Programme Managers are also responsible for the VLE content and programme handbooks, to ensure that responsibility rests at the appropriate level of detail and knowledge. A focus group of students evaluates publicity information and a question on the student survey gathers opinion on its accuracy. Students confirm the information to be accurate.

3.10 LRC staff help to ensure that reading lists are up to date and resources are sufficient. Updating of programme handbooks and information takes place annually. The HEQT oversees the production of handbooks, checking for awarding body approval where required. The University of Central Lancashire approves the course publicity documentation as part of the annual monitoring process.

3.11 Although checking processes are thorough, minor omissions are evident in website information. The website does not identify the awarding body for programmes in Media Practice and Creative Audio Technologies as a result of the withdrawal of Bournemouth University validation. Neither the prospectus nor the website entries for the Foundation Degree in Early Years state the minimum number of hours of relevant employment required to successfully complete the programme in addition to College attendance.

3.12 Overall, the College provides sufficient and relevant information for prospective and current students and for those with responsibility for academic standards and quality. It has in place effective procedures for checking the accuracy of information about its higher education provision. Staff and students confirmed that the main sources of information are fit-for-purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Part C: Information about higher education provision* is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Quality of the information produced about its provision: Summary of findings

3.13 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk was low.

3.14 There is one feature of good practice: the clear and comprehensive information available to prospective students on employment opportunities relevant to their programmes. A recommendation referring to a more consistent approach to the sharing of external examiners' reports with students, which is located under Expectation B7, is also applicable to this area.

3.15 The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information produced about its higher education provision **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: 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's approach to the enhancement of the quality of its higher education provision is set out in the document, *Quality Improvement: An overview of planning at Strategic and Operating levels and review through Self-Assessment and Self-Evaluation* (April 2013), which identifies this as through a 'combination of a "top down" and "bottom up" processes'. The College seeks to achieve continuous improvement by taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of its student learning experience, underpinned by integrated quality systems and dialogue with students.

4.2 A key 'top-down' process identified in the document is a strategic framework, setting out proposed aims and priorities established by the Governors and SMT following an evaluation of the College's external environment through SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) and PEST (political, economic, social, technological) activities. Additional 'top-down' mechanisms include a higher education teaching observation programme, monitored by the SMT; the appointment of Advanced Practitioners, whose cross-College role is to set, develop and maintain high standards of teaching, learning and assessment practices and curriculum design; the evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment; a higher education bulletin, recently renamed 'The Voice'; and a Higher Education Academic Development Scheme (HEADStart) to enable students to enhance their academic writing and referencing skills to aid transition from level 3. An annual Higher Education Conference, which brings together teaching and support staff engaged with higher education to reflect on and share good practice, is intended to play a significant role in bringing these strands together.

4.3 The 'bottom-up' activity is centred on the annual monitoring and review process which through SAM and other mechanisms is intended to identify areas for enhancement. These may lead to Quality Improvement Plans, which 'are used to capture the improvements needed as a result of self-assessment processes' and Quality Improvement Meetings to progress these.

4.4 Two mechanisms are central to the College's approach to enhancement. The first is the HEQT, which is charged with identifying good practice, bringing top-down and bottom-up processes together and ensuring that the intended improvement takes place. The second is the annual Higher Education Conference, which provides a mechanism for embedding an understanding of the need for continuous improvement and for the identification and dissemination of best practice. Together, these processes and mechanisms enable the Expectation to be met.

4.5 In testing the College approach to enhancement, the review team looked at both top-down and bottom-up processes, reviewing key documentation including a range of strategies, SAMs, annual reports, external examiners' reports, committee minutes and a Quality Improvement Plan. The team also discussed enhancement in meetings with the Principal, senior and academic staff, employers and students.

4.6 The notion of enhancement was not always well articulated by staff, but there is, nevertheless, strong evidence of a widespread commitment to the continuous improvement of the College's provision and to the mechanisms used to deliver it. There is evidence of the effective working of the SAM process, the effective use of action plans and the operation of

Quality Improvement Plans. These processes are well informed by the use of data, especially proprietary software data. In addition, the College operates termly Higher National Programme Managers' Meetings to bring together the Programme Managers of each of the Higher National programmes to look at common issues and to ensure common processes.

4.7 However, greater clarity could be brought to the articulation of enhancement to identify better how the various processes are integrated and operated strategically. A distinction between quality improvement planning as a response to a perceived deficit in delivery within a specific programme or programmes, and quality improvement planning as a means of enhancing the learning experience of the entire student body, is not always evident. Although the Annual Conference makes a significant contribution to the dissemination of good practice, more could be done to identify how the good practice evident in the institution is routinely identified, disseminated and supported. Evidence that the College is evaluating its procedures as a means of enhancing the student experience is lacking in some areas, such as programme approval and review; admissions; and considering complaints procedures.

4.8 Taking these points together, the review team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College articulate more fully its approach to higher education enhancement, ensuring that its strategies for continuous improvement are brought together and underpinned by the evaluation of its quality procedures.

4.9 Although the College's strategy may not be explicitly understood at all levels, the team is able to conclude that deliberate steps are being taken to enhance the quality of learning opportunities and that this Expectation is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.11 The team identified a strategic approach to the continuous improvement of the quality of learning opportunities, and strengths in many areas of the College's provision, particularly those related to the embedding of employability into the curriculum. However, enhancement is not consistently understood by all staff and strategies for improvement are not yet fully developed or integrated, hence the single recommendation to more clearly articulate its approach to enhancement and bring together its strategies for continuous improvement with the evaluation of its quality assurance procedures.

4.12 The team is therefore able to conclude that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 It is central to the College *Strategic Plan, 2013-16* that it prepares its students for employment, and provides higher education and professional programmes which meet the needs of employers and businesses and support the development of the local economy.

5.2 The College articulates its ambition to produce students who are able to compete successfully in the labour market through the Bridgwater Higher Education Advantage, which seeks to ensure that employability feeds into curriculum design and the management of programmes. In line with this, the College has developed approaches to support students through the transition into employment. This and the clear and comprehensive information available to prospective students on employment opportunities relevant to their programmes have already been highlighted as good practice (see Expectations B4, C).

5.3 The team explored the theme of student employability during its meetings with students, employers and academic staff, and through an examination of programme specifications, programme approval and review processes, and policy and procedure documentation. In doing so, the team saw considerable evidence that the College was achieving its strategic goals towards student employability through three significant mechanisms, a portfolio of professional and vocational programmes, strong employer relations, and embedding employability skills into the curriculum.

5.4 The College has a portfolio of higher education programmes, which is broadly professional and vocational, and aimed at meeting both employer needs and the demands of the local and regional economy. More specifically, there are a growing number of programmes that are aimed at specific employer needs, designed with employers, or developed to meet particular industrial opportunities, and the team recognised that these factors were important in shaping the College academic portfolio and the choice of its university partners. The team, for example, noted that one programme was being delivered with a partner outside the region because that university could offer a specific employment-focused programme, but that that programme had been developed with particular regional needs in mind. The team met with one employer, who gave the example of a bespoke foundation degree which met the organisation's needs and was evolving to include project management. The employer also had students on an HND which allowed successful graduates to progress within the organisation. Another employer spoke of the students being able to link theory and practice and problem solve for the company.

5.5 The team heard of numerous examples of employer engagement with the College. For instance, employers are engaged in programme design and programme delivery. Curriculum Areas engage with employers via their Advisory Panels. Employers sponsor employees on programmes, take placement students, set assessment tasks, define assessment criteria, set business challenges, and give guest lecturers. The employers met by the team were positive about communication from the College and the quality of documentation received. The extensive engagement with employers, including work-based learning, has already been highlighted as good practice (see Expectations B4, B10).

5.6 The College effectively integrates work-based learning or placement into its programme design. The needs of employers are also considered at course validation and review. Foundation degrees conform to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Employers met by the team praised the relevance of the College portfolio of programmes and curriculum to their employment needs. This includes the use of distance-learning materials, block release, residential weeks and drawing on experience from the student's workplace. The meeting with students in employment endorsed such activities. One student

commented on the relevance of the programme's curriculum to her current employment; another noted that a technical activity on his programme had provided an essential transferable skill that has enabled him to solve problems that lay outside the direct ambit of the programme. The embedding of employability into the curriculum has already been highlighted as good practice (see Expectation B4).

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27 to 29 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/about-us/glossary.

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject benchmark statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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