



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of the British Institute of Technology Ltd

October 2015

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the British Institute of Technology Ltd (formerly known as the British Institute of Technology and E-commerce Ltd). The review took place from 20 to 22 October 2015 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Nick Dickson
- Mrs Joanne Coward
- Dr Philip Davies
- Ms Tatjana Lipai (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

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

A check is also made on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) with the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure.

In reviewing the British Institute of Technology Ltd the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability, and Digital Literacy,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanation of the findings](#) is on page 5 with numbered paragraphs starting on page 6.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).<sup>4</sup> For an explanation of terms, please see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859).

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

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about the British Institute of Technology Ltd

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the British Institute of Technology Ltd.

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

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following feature of **good practice** at the British Institute of Technology Ltd.

- The wide-ranging and effective opportunities provided to students to develop their employment skills (Expectation B3).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to the British Institute of Technology Ltd.

By February 2016:

- clearly articulate its quality assurance policies, academic regulations and responsibilities for the EUCB award (Expectations A1 and A3.2)
- rigorously implement its procedures for student record-keeping for Pearson awards (Expectation B2)
- rigorously implement its procedures for the identification of academic support needs for students entering Pearson awards (Expectations B2 and B4)
- ensure that students enrolled on Staffordshire University programmes are formally notified about the arrangements for the closure of their programmes (Expectation B4)
- ensure that the EUCB student handbook is accurate and up to date (Expectation C).

By June 2016:

- strengthen the EUCB programme approval process to ensure full consideration is given to the maintenance of academic standards set by the awarding body (Expectation B1)
- implement a systematic and consistent process for communicating assessment outcomes to students on Pearson awards (Expectation B6).

### Theme: Digital Literacy

The British Institute of Technology Ltd is committed to developing digital literacy as part of the overall Strategic Plan, specified through its Digital Literacy Strategy. The commitment to improving digital literacy emanates from a recognition that technology has the potential to enhance teaching via the use of digital resources.

The Institute recognises the importance of enhancing digital literacy through, and in, higher education, and that this is driven by the expectations of students entering higher education with a range of technological backgrounds, the requirements of employers and professional bodies, and the priorities of the government and funding council.

There is evidence that teaching staff increasingly make use of digital technology in their teaching and learning activities. Opportunities for staff development in this area are adequate.

The Institute takes a student-led approach, and recognises the need for students to have high quality digital literacy skills for the future. Students, particularly those returning to higher education after time away from study, recognise that this approach is becoming embedded in the curriculum.

The review team concludes that the Institute provides its students with effective opportunities to enhance their digital literacy skills.

## **Financial sustainability, management and governance**

The financial sustainability, management and governance check has been satisfactorily completed.

## **About the British Institute of Technology Ltd**

The Institute's mission is to create a fusion of education, research and consultancy to advance knowledge and skills in response to challenging business environments. The Institute seeks to advance and apply this expertise through innovative education in science, technology and business. The Institute aims to establish a diversified and inclusive higher education student population capable of benefiting from a transformational approach to shared learning.

The Institute was created in 1999 and previously ran validated programmes on behalf of a variety of UK higher education providers, including the University of East London, Coventry University, the University of Wales and Staffordshire University. The head office and student campus is located in Stratford in the London Borough of Newham.

The Institute provides an interdisciplinary education, extends research that has been carried out in other higher education institutions, and provides a research and consultancy service with industry and commerce. It promotes and develops robust and strategic partnerships that capitalise on its strengths for the benefit of students and staff.

The Institute underwent a Review for Educational Oversight in February 2014. The review team identified two areas of good practice, five advisable recommendations and five desirable recommendations. The findings from this were summarised in an action plan compiled by the Institute and this was subject to a QAA annual monitoring visit in February 2015. At the annual monitoring visit, the QAA review team concluded that the Institute was making progress but that further improvement was required with implementing the action plan. This was particularly the case on action points concerned with the accuracy of student data and overall student underperformance. Progress on specific action points is discussed in further detail in the findings section of this report.

Current validated programmes consist of: Pearson Higher National Certificates/Diplomas (HN) in Business, and Fashion and Textiles (which ceased recruiting in June 2015); and Staffordshire University awards in BA Business Management (full programme and top-up), MBA (full programme and top-up), LLM International and BSc Computing. These awards are

no longer recruiting. All existing students are now subject to a formal 'teach-out' agreement, signed in October 2015, and are being supported to complete their studies. A new BA Business programme commenced in September 2015 and replaces the previous Staffordshire University award. This programme is validated by the European University College of Business (formerly Poznan University Institute of Business, Poland).

At the time of the 2015 review visit, there were 310 active students - a drop of 89 per cent from the QAA annual monitoring visit in February 2015. This is due to a combination of low student progression rates and lower than planned recruitment. Also, since the last review, there has been a reduction in teaching staff levels to 15 full-time and 13 part-time. The reduction in student numbers and concomitant reduction in staffing levels features appropriately in an action plan set up to manage this situation.

Data provided by the Institute shows that achievement for the HNC/D in Business in 2013-14 was 61 per cent, rising to 69 per cent in 2014-15. Achievement for the HNC/D in Fashion and Textiles was 65 per cent in 2013-14, falling to 55 per cent in 2014-15. Overall, student progression rates in the HNC/D programmes are showing positive signs of improvement. Student achievement on the Staffordshire University provision is significantly higher at above 90 per cent.

In July 2014 the Institute's Tier 4 sponsorship licence was revoked by UK Visas and Immigration, which prevented the recruitment of international students. The Institute no longer has any students who are subject to Tier 4 sponsorship. However, it has recently launched a legal appeal to have the suspension overturned.

QAA received a submission about the Institute to its Concerns Scheme on 12 October 2015. Due to the proximity of the review visit, this was referred to the review team to investigate in parallel with its other planned activities. The submission was from a student making a complaint citing alleged incidents with respect to integrity of the assessment process, covering both assessment feedback and alleged payment to Institute administration staff to obtain assignment passes. After investigation, including a further meeting with staff at the Institute, evidence provided by the Institute and a folder of evidence submitted by the student, the review team concluded that the substantive nature of the complaint was unfounded but that issues around assessment procedure, record-keeping and execution of some policies were in need of attention. These aspects are addressed under Expectations B2, B6 and B9 of this report.

## Explanation of the findings about the British Institute of Technology Ltd

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Findings**

1.1 Programmes provided by the Institute are designed to meet the requirements of its awarding partners. The Institute has extensive experience of working with several university partners in the past, and uses this experience to develop and enhance its programmes with its current partners. These are Staffordshire University (the University), the European University College of Business (EUCB and formerly Poznan University Institute of Business, Poland) and Pearson. Formal memoranda of agreement documentation, the Institute's Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Handbook, and student handbooks specify the various appropriate external reference points, including *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), qualification and level descriptors, and the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.2 The University's undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes delivered by the Institute is now subject to a 'teach-out' agreement. These programmes have been deemed as no longer financially viable by the University, and a mutually acceptable and amicable agreement to cease validation has been reached.

1.3 The recent teach-out agreement had not been formally communicated to students at the time of the visit. The Institute acknowledged that it needs to formally inform students of the change in relationship with the University, and it has plans in place to ensure that all students affected are officially notified as soon as possible (see also paragraph 2.10).

1.4 The Level 5 HNC/D programmes approved by Pearson in Business, Computing and Systems Development, and Fashion and Textiles are covered by appropriate programme specifications and student handbooks, which contain both programme specifications and module descriptors. The HNC/D in Fashion and Textiles is no longer recruiting, and continuing students are being appropriately taught and supported until they complete their programme.

1.5 Responsibility for validation of the award of the BA (Hons) Business Management programme has recently transferred from the University to the Poland-based EUCB, from October 2015. This is a planned strategic change of direction for the Institute. The Institute is currently in discussion with EUCB to develop a formal regulatory framework for this programme. In the interim, in order to underpin the validated provision, the Institute is basing its academic regulations for the new BA programme on that previously approved by the equivalent University provision. The accompanying student handbook is an amended version of that previously offered by Staffordshire University.

1.6 The Quality Handbook clearly outlines the responsibilities in regard to the validated provision offered. In addition, agreements with each of the awarding bodies, except with EUCB, provide effective detail of the Institute's responsibilities. The Academic Board effectively manages its overall responsibility for overseeing the operation of academic provision. The Board is chaired by the Principal, and membership includes students, the Associate Dean, Heads of Department and the Academic Registrar. It receives reports from the Learning and Quality Committee, including an overview of external examiner reports and action plans. The Learning and Quality Committee focuses on the operational management of academic standards, including assessment and the student experience. It also oversees programme approval and review, and annual monitoring.

1.7 A university-appointed link tutor supports the delivery and operation of awards, with a standards verifier undertaking a similar role for Pearson.

1.8 The regulatory frameworks and memoranda of agreements for academic standards of the University and of Pearson, and the appropriate programme specifications, together with the Institute's processes for implementation of these, would allow the Institute to meet the Expectation.

1.9 The review team tested this area by examining documentation supplied by the Institute, as well as meeting staff, representatives of the awarding bodies and Pearson, and students. In addition, the team examined student handbooks and annual monitoring reports.

1.10 The Institute has clear processes in place to support the meeting of this Expectation and is well-experienced in meeting its obligations to each of its awarding bodies. However, the absence of a specific regularly framework for the new EUCB-validated provision containing details of the respective quality assurance responsibilities between the Institute and EUCB needs to be rectified. The review team **recommends** that the Institute clearly articulate its quality assurance policies, academic regulations and responsibilities for the EUCB award.

1.11 The Institute has considerable experience in successfully operating and delivering validated programmes awarded by a number of awarding bodies. Despite the lack of a specific regularly framework for the new EUCB-validated provision, the Institute's considerable experience and expertise in this area indicates that arrangements will be implemented fully. As a result of the regulatory frameworks and memoranda of agreements for academic standards of the Institute's awarding partners, and a variety of appropriate



and robust documentation, together with the Institute's processes for implementation of these, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

1.12 Ultimate responsibility for the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of the programmes offered by the Institute rests with its awarding partners. The award of academic credit and qualifications is made in accordance with the overarching regulations and academic frameworks of the awarding bodies and Pearson. The nature of specific responsibilities varies in ways outlined in the particular partnership documents and is articulated in the Institute's comprehensive academic Quality Handbook.

1.13 Staffordshire University provides the academic governance and academic regulations for Institute students studying on its undergraduate and postgraduate degree provision. Pearson provides the regulatory framework for the HNC/D provision. The Institute is currently using existing University regulations and frameworks to underpin academic governance for the new EUCB provision until specific documentation is established. The programme design and specification validated by EUCB is the same as that validated by the University.

1.14 The Academic Board has overall responsibility for ensuring adherence to the policies and regulations of all of its awarding bodies and Pearson, including assessment regulations. The Learning and Quality Committee is a subcommittee of the Academic Board and is chaired by the Academic Registrar. It also has responsibilities for the delivery of quality assurance policies and processes. As part of this process, the Institute is responsible for the setting, marking and moderation of assessment for the academic provision under the jurisdiction of its awarding bodies and Pearson.

1.15 The University approves and appoints external examiners based on nominations received from the Institute. Pearson appoints standards verifiers, who monitor standards through a standard schedule of visits to the Institute and annual reports.

1.16 The Institute has developed and implemented its own Student Assessment Policy, which it uses in addition to those of its awarding bodies and Pearson. Teaching staff take part in standardisation meetings to ensure the comparability and appropriateness of marking standards across the Institute. These meetings take place regularly, with input from senior management, and use the Student Assessment Policy and exemplars of staff practice as evidence for discussion.

1.17 The University undertakes moderation of its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes through its assessment regulations. Examination boards are chaired by University staff. Approval of assessment, assignment design and marking for the Pearson provision is managed through the internal assessment and verification processes in place at the Institute and is moderated by the external verification process.

1.18 Students are provided with the relevant assessment information in their student handbooks, which are updated annually.

1.19 The Institute has embedded processes for the management and oversight of the academic frameworks and assessment regulations for its validated programmes.

For example, there is a comprehensive Quality Handbook, including an overarching assessment policy, which enables the Institute to manage its responsibilities effectively. However, the relevant processes for the EUCB award are less well developed (see paragraphs 2.8 to 2.10). All staff are confident in implementing policies.

1.20 External examiner and standards verifier reports are considered by the Learning and Quality Committee through the annual monitoring processes. These discussions result in an action planning process.

1.21 The Institute has established transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations with its academic partners that permit it to govern how academic credit and qualifications are managed. These procedures, together with the Institute's own quality assurance processes, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.22 The review team tested the Expectation through close examination of a number of evidence documents, including the Quality Handbook, Academic Board minutes, Learning and Quality Committee minutes, and external examiner reports. The team also met a range of academic and administrative staff, and a selection of students.

1.23 Institute staff are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to the requirements of the awarding bodies and Pearson. Reports from external examiners and standards verifiers for the awards offered confirm that the awarding bodies and Pearson are satisfied with the Institute's management and delivery of their respective awards. For example, Pearson standards verifier reports show that the internal verification process at the Institute is robust and rigorous.

1.24 External examiner and standards verifier reports have also raised concerns, including the variability in moderation processes and the narrow range of marks awarded, which in turn has impacted on student achievement. The Institute has responded positively and proactively to these issues through its annual monitoring processes. For example, it has delivered specific staff development sessions to enhance marking practice. The standardisation meeting process is also rigorous and ensures enhancements in practice.

1.25 Institute responsibilities in this area are both fully understood and embedded in its governance processes. The new award offered by EUCB will be incorporated into these processes. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.26 The Institute is not currently a degree-awarding body, although its Strategic Plan indicates that the eventual intention is to gain degree awarding powers. The BA (Hons) Business programme is now validated by the EUCB, with the first cohort of students starting in September 2015.

1.27 Programme handbooks, programme specifications and student handbooks provide definitive information on course aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements. The Institute makes these available in hard copy and via the Institute's virtual learning environment (VLE). The programme specifications form the central element of the documentation set considered at programme approval events. Module specifications are similarly made available on the VLE. The Institute has developed its own programme specifications for its HNC/D programmes, with customised information about the Learning and Teaching Strategy, units offered, assessment methods and availability of resources.

1.28 The comprehensive programme specifications comprise two parts. The first includes key regulatory material and basic information such as intended learning outcomes, programme structure, admissions criteria and arrangements for assessment. It also includes the outcomes of curriculum mapping exercises, which demonstrate that the programme provides opportunities for students to achieve the learning outcomes and associated key skills. The second part demonstrates alignment with the Qualifications and Credit Framework, Subject Benchmark Statements, and any professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements; articulates the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the Student Assessment Policy; and outlines the arrangements for managing the programme.

1.29 Quality assurance processes at the Institute are designed to complement those of university partners and are used internally to monitor and review programmes against their specifications. Any changes to programmes and modules are considered by the appropriate Institute committee, and updated programme specifications and module descriptors are lodged centrally so that Institute records and online material can be updated. These arrangements would allow for the Expectation to be met.

1.30 The review team examined a range of documentary evidence, including published programme specifications, module descriptors, student handbooks and papers from approval events. It also met a range of senior and teaching staff, and students.

1.31 Student handbooks are generally detailed, clear and contained sufficient material from programme and module specifications to properly inform the students about their programme of study. The exception to this was the programme handbook for the recently validated EUCB BA (Hons) Business degree, which still contained references to the Staffordshire University programme and regulations. The Institute recognised this as being an oversight and is working to rectify the issue.

1.32 The Institute maintains a definitive record of each programme that it delivers on behalf of its awarding partners. These records constitute the reference points for programme

delivery, and assessment, monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.**

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

**Findings**

1.33 The Institute's Quality Handbook explicitly requires that all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are designed to meet standards defined by the level descriptors set out in the Qualifications and Credit Framework, and any relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and national guidelines. The Institute's responsibilities with respect to its validating bodies are also defined. For example, responsibilities for the selection, approval and appointment of external examiners are defined and mapped to Staffordshire University regulations. The Quality Handbook also defines where alignment with the standards of PSRBs is required to meet professional standards or allow for professional registration, and for the use of different awarding bodies and Pearson. The Academic Board and its subcommittee, the Learning and Quality Committee, act as guardians of academic standards and quality of learning.

1.34 Programme approval processes involve external academic and professional expertise. Institute annual monitoring processes are regularly used to determine whether programmes are meeting the defined threshold standards. This is reinforced through periodic programme revalidation processes. The Institute's regulations and procedures governing the design and approval of its programmes provide a comprehensive framework for ensuring that its awards meet UK threshold standards. This framework would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.35 The review team met students and relevant staff and examined a range of evidence to support the Institute's approach to meeting the Expectation. This included regulations and guidelines governing approval processes, reports of programme approval panels and subsequent discussions at the Academic Board.

1.36 Minutes and reports of committee meetings and approval panels show that there is explicit and effective reference to alignment with threshold standards. There is also evidence that external members of the panels have confirmed that relevant Subject Benchmark Statements have been appropriately taken into account. However, there is some detail lacking in the validation report from the EUCEB on how the maintenance of academic standards would be managed by the validating body for the award of its degree.

1.37 For Pearson HNC/D awards there is currently no requirement by the validating body for the Institute to undertake periodic programme reviews other than annually. The Institute is committed to developing a five-year periodic review in the future. There is effective annual monitoring in place that allows the Institute to assure itself that the current programmes are valid and fit for purpose for its students. The annual monitoring report for HNC/D programmes is a proactive approach from the Institute not required by Pearson and reinforces their processes to ensure comparability of academic standards among all programmes.

1.38 The Institute has established, and consistently implements, appropriate and robust processes that fulfil its obligations to its awarding partners for ensuring that academic standards are maintained. Additionally, these processes are in accordance with their own

academic frameworks and regulations. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.39 Student handbooks provide guidance relating to academic conduct and practice, and learning outcomes. Assessment guidelines are included in the handbooks and assignment briefs. External examiners appointed by Staffordshire University approve assessment instruments for degree and postgraduate provision. Internal and external moderation processes assure that the assessment process allows students to achieve the learning outcomes at module and programme level.

1.40 The design, approval and monitoring of assessment strategies at degree and postgraduate level are the responsibility of the awarding body. Collaborative agreements confirm the responsibilities of both parties, with the University having ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of all awards made in its name.

1.41 For Pearson HNC/D programmes, the Institute bases its processes on the awarding organisation's generic guidance documentation, including the BTEC UK Quality Assurance Handbook 2014-15. Standardisation takes place as required by Pearson. Standards verifiers appointed by Pearson visit on an annual basis, and complete the necessary documentation and comment on the effectiveness of internal verification practices.

1.42 As discussed in paragraphs 1.10 and 1.11, the collaborative agreement with the EUCB does not fully indicate the responsibilities of both parties, nor does it make it clear that EUCB has ultimate responsibility for the academic standards for all awards made in its name. This finding supports the recommendation under Expectation A1.

1.43 The Institute has effective internal policies related to assessment and quality, and the accreditation of prior learning. The Institute's own Student Assessment Policy sets out procedures for internal and external moderation, which defines the roles and duties of the Institute. This policy adds clarification to the Institute's practices on assessment, and is subordinate to the awarding bodies' and Pearson regulations, which take precedence.

1.44 The policies and procedures in place at the Institute for assuring the maintenance of standards with regard to achievement of learning outcomes would allow the Institute to meet the Expectation.

1.45 The review team tested the effectiveness of assessment policies and procedures by examining documentary evidence provided by the Institute. This included partnership agreements and procedural documents, minutes of standardisation and other meetings, programme handbooks and collaborative provision reviews. The team also had meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

1.46 There are robust policies, procedures and practice in place for checking and verification of assessment and achievement of intended learning outcomes. Teaching staff



are kept up to date with effective assessment practices through attending regular staff development and standardisation meetings. They confirm that they contribute to discussions about assessment processes derived from student comments, external good practice and issues raised via the effective annual monitoring process. The Institute provides all staff with effective induction, mentoring and written guidance on assessment. This ensures that staff understand the assessment requirements, marking process and grading criteria. For example, issues with the standard of student achievement are being addressed in induction mentoring and staff development.

1.47 Students confirmed that intended learning outcomes are provided via the module descriptors included in programme handbooks, and that marking and grade descriptors are provided in all assessment briefs. All marking is effectively measured against learning outcomes and published criteria, and moderated to ensure consistency. Internal moderation is thorough. The Institute maintains appropriate processes for taking cognisance of standards verifier and external examiner reports, including an effective formal response and action planning procedures for external reports.

1.48 The awarding partners confirm that they are happy with these processes and that assessment arrangements are fair and effective, for example, through annual reports, validation procedures, and external examining and verification reports. The recently EUCB-validated BA (Hons) Business has not run long enough for reviews to have been conducted.

1.49 Students confirmed that they understood the requirements of assessment and confirmed the clarity of assignment briefs. Students are aware of the role of external examiners but have not looked at external examiners' reports.

1.50 The Institute is effectively managing its responsibilities for the assessment of learning outcomes leading to credit and qualifications. It has clear policies related to assessment and quality. The achievement of learning outcomes is robustly linked to assessment and applicable UK threshold standards; the awarding bodies', Pearson and the Institute's own academic standards have been satisfied. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met. However, the academic regulations of EUCB are not explicit and their operation by the Institute is not clear. Therefore, the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.51 The Institute has collaborative agreements with its awarding bodies and Pearson, which define the responsibilities of both parties for monitoring and review. The responsibility for the overall monitoring and review, including periodic review, lies with the awarding bodies and Pearson.

1.52 Staffordshire University and Pearson conduct annual Academic Management Reviews of their validated programmes delivered at the Institute. The Learning and Quality Committee and the Academic Board consider all external review reports. They are responsible for monitoring and approving the progress of action plans created as a result of these reports. The overall aim of this oversight is to enhance quality and inform strategy and policy. The Institute Council, composed of staff, students and external industry experts, meets twice a year to review the Institute's performance.

1.53 The Institute has sound processes for the monitoring and review of programmes. There are programme committees in place for all provision. These review a wide range of aspects of the programme. All programmes are monitored annually, and robust annual monitoring reports are produced for consideration at Institute committees. An effective overarching report is produced that constructs an overall view of all annual monitoring reports. The Institute's Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Handbook provides staff with a detailed view of the monitoring and quality systems. These procedures would allow the Institute to meet the Expectation.

1.54 The review team tested the effectiveness of the monitoring and review processes by examining documentation supplied by the Institute, including partnership agreements and procedural documents, annual monitoring reports, minutes of committee meetings, programme specifications, external examiners' reports, programme handbooks and collaborative provision reviews. Meetings were also held with appropriate staff and students.

1.55 Institute processes for programme monitoring and review are working effectively. There is appropriate and robust annual monitoring in place for all programmes and an effective periodic monitoring process in place for degree programmes. Validation and other review events make explicit reference to appropriate external reference points and, where necessary, professional standards. Validation and revalidation panels involve the use of expert externals both academic and professional. The Institute Council is also used as an external reference, offering advice about programme review. These procedures indicate that review processes are carefully followed, have appropriate degrees of external and employer participation, and that there is appropriate follow through of responses to revalidation conditions and recommendations.

1.56 There is also evidence that the Institute conducts regular and effective development events for staff to maintain and enhance the development and monitoring of higher education programmes. These training events are well attended and appreciated by staff. The quality staff handbook provides staff with guidance and a detailed view of the monitoring and quality systems. The Institute has shown initiative in planning to introduce periodic

review of HNC/D programmes to enhance the continued relevance and currency of these programmes.

1.57 Overall, the evidence shows that the Institute is effectively and robustly managing its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing its higher education provision. It is operating in accordance with the requirements of its awarding partners to ensure that academic standards are being maintained. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.58 Programmes are developed with significant input from employers and industry specialists to ensure the currency of curriculum content and design. This assures that employability skills are firmly embedded within curriculum design and structure. The Institute develops curricula, and programme and module specifications, within the frameworks provided by its awarding bodies and Pearson, including national standards and Subject Benchmark Statements. External input happens through the Institute Council, industry seminars, an industry advisers forum and other specialist events, such as hosting a biennial World Hi-Tech Forum. Institute staff are also involved in conferences and forums, which include contributions from employers and industry representatives. The engagement with employers and external bodies is discussed further under Expectation B3.

1.59 The Institute has effective and rigorous processes in place that enable it to monitor standards continuously so that its programmes and content remain relevant and meet the requirements of employers and its awarding partners. These processes are effective in identifying issues with the lack of variety of assessment instruments used; a seemingly high incidence of possible plagiarism; high non-submission rates; and mark 'bunching'. All of these have been incorporated in a variety of action plans. These procedures and processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.60 The review team tested the Expectation through a review of appropriate documentation supplied by the Institute, and through meetings with staff and students.

1.61 Policy and practice in this area is robust and has been effective in identifying areas for improving student achievement, resulting in effective action being taken by the Institute to address these issues. External examiner and standards verifier reports are reviewed and formally responded to through annual monitoring reports and action plans. The Learning and Quality Committee, as well as the Academic Board, ensure that actions plans resulting from annual monitoring activity are undertaken in a timely and responsive manner.

1.62 There is effective and robust practice at the Institute to ensure that it maintains academic standards on behalf of its awarding partners and that curricula are aligned with national and employer expectations. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

1.64 The Institute has comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern the maintenance of threshold academic standards for awards validated by Staffordshire University and Pearson. These are clearly detailed in the Quality Handbook, validation agreements, student handbooks and academic regulations. The review team saw evidence that these processes were operating effectively for all programmes. The University partnership is concluding, and an appropriate 'teach-out' agreement is in place to cover current students on this provision. There is a new collaboration in place for the BA (Hons) Business degree, which is now validated by the EUCB.

1.65 In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards at the Institute, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area of the Quality Code are met and the associated level of risk is considered low in most cases. There is, however, a moderate risk under Expectations A1 and A3.2, and an associated recommendation covering both of these. The recommendation relates to the need for clearer articulation of the Institute's quality assurance policies, academic regulations and responsibilities for the EUCB award.

1.66 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisation at the Institute **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The Institute has a number of guidelines, templates, policies and procedures in place for all programmes, covering programme design, development and approval of programmes; the Quality Handbook contains details of these. These policies and processes take cognisance of relevant academic standards, and the quality of learning opportunities and resources available to students. There are policies and procedures in place that cover the design and approval of new modules and programmes for university-validated programmes. These are aligned with UK threshold standards and address all relevant aspects of the Quality Code.

2.2 Development and redesign of programmes is a two-tier process. Initial proposals are considered by the Institute's Academic Board, which has the Student President as a member, and the Industry Liaison Council for financial viability. This is followed by a formal external validation process, carried out in partnership with the chosen awarding body or Pearson. The external stage involves academic and professional experts as required.

2.3 All programme development and design is ultimately subject to approval by the Institute Council. The Council receives documentation and advice from the Academic Board, and Learning and Quality Committee, including industry representatives' comments as appropriate.

2.4 External members of approval panels are asked to address achievement of standards and the quality of student learning opportunities. The panel chair is responsible for ensuring any conditions imposed on the approval or review process are completed within an agreed timescale. Where panels make recommendations the relevant staff member is responsible for ensuring that all appropriate follow-up action is taken.

2.5 Programme design and approval processes are clear and effective for UK higher education bodies. Lines of responsibility are clearly defined and appropriately differentiated between franchised and validated awards. The two-tier development process is thorough. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.6 The review team assessed the Institute's methods of course design, development and approval by scrutinising appropriate documentary evidence supplied by the Institute, including reports and recommendations of panels that had reviewed programmes on behalf of its Academic Board. The team met members of academic and administrative staff who had participated in institutional and course approval, and in periodic reviews. The team also met students from across the provision.

2.7 All programme design and programme approval processes follow the detailed guidelines in the Quality Handbook. These processes are comprehensive and well understood at all levels in the Institute, and provide a robust framework.

2.8 The review team found that the approval process for the new partnership with the EUCB has lacked sufficient detail. The approval panel was appropriately constituted but validation documentation was not sufficiently detailed to determine all the potential elements of risk of dealing with an awarding institution in another European country. For example, there was no mention in this document of how the Quality Code would be used by the awarding body to map across to standards in this country, nor how the awarding body would monitor the academic standards of the Institute in the award of its degree. Discussion with senior staff and a representative from EUCB showed that these issues had been recognised and were being appropriately dealt with.

2.9 For example, the department dealing with quality at EUCB is working with the Institute on mapping the EUCB standards to the pan-European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and the Quality Code. Senior staff indicated that they were, in the interim, using the same standards and processes for the BA (Hons) Business award as for the equivalent award previously validated by Staffordshire University.

2.10 These assurances by the Institute and EUCB indicate that progress is being made. However, despite this progress, the review team considers that the Institute should take action to ensure its engagement with EUCB is explicitly specified with regards to the monitoring and enhancement of academic standards. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the Institute strengthen the EUCB programme approval process to ensure full consideration is given to the maintenance of academic standards set by the awarding body.

2.11 In summary, the Institute's processes for designing, developing and approving programmes are mostly robust and effective, and appropriate for its programmes. However, the issues associated with the Institute's developments with EUCB require action to ensure its ongoing engagement with this new awarding body is strengthened appropriately. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.12 The Institute has an Admissions Policy and procedures, including induction, complaints and right of appeal. These are detailed in the Quality Handbook. The Policy relates to all areas of recruitment, admissions and induction processes, including admission of international students. It is reviewed annually and is aligned with the strategic objectives of the Institute. The Institute has begun a process to map its Admissions Policy and procedures against the Quality Code. Additionally, validation agreements with awarding bodies and Pearson cover the general Admissions Policy.

2.13 The Academic Registrar has delegated authority for the oversight and monitoring of the recruitment and admissions process. Programme leaders and subject experts are required to make informed judgements about students' suitability in terms of merit, potential and motivation. The admission and inductions processes involve an interview and skills assessment in written English for all students.

2.14 The details in the Quality Handbook regarding the Admissions Policy, together with procedures for interviewing, induction, skills assessment and complaints, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.15 The review team examined a range of evidence provided by the Institute, including an Admissions Policy, Complaints Policy, and a sample of student records and files relating to Pearson programmes. The team also discussed admissions and recruitment procedures in meetings with students and the senior staff.

2.16 The Institute's detailed and effective Admissions Policy allows for a fair and transparent recruitment process. Students confirmed that they had been interviewed about their previous academic achievements and future aspirations, and were satisfied with the admission process. They also confirmed that information provided at the admissions stage matched their experiences on their programme.

2.17 The Institute intends to further analyse available student data including student records on admission and performance to evaluate the effectiveness of the Admissions Policy to achieve strategic objectives. Further student data analysis will be included in Learning and Quality Committee reviews.

2.18 The review team found that some HNC/D student files contained insufficient details in documentation and concluded that admission procedures were not always being followed consistently. For example, in some cases information such as passport records or certificates of previous academic qualifications was missing.

2.19 This lack of rigour may also leave the Institute vulnerable to student complaints, such as the unfounded one raised under the QAA Concerns Scheme. The review team **recommends** that the Institute rigorously implement its procedures for student record-keeping for Pearson awards.



2.20 Additionally, the sample of student records referring to the assessment of student skill levels during admission and induction showed that some students had problems with written English. Additionally, in some case, there was no evidence that support had been provided to enable these students to perform better in assignments. The review team **recommends** that the Institute rigorously implement its procedures for the identification of academic support needs for students entering Pearson awards.

2.21 Overall, the review team found that the Institute has an effective Admissions Policy in place; practice in the implementation of the Policy is good in many areas. However, as a result of the issues regarding student record-keeping and academic support needs, the review team concludes that these issues may have a negative effect on the learning experience of some students. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.22 The Institute's strategic aim is 'to create a fusion of education, research and consultancy to advance knowledge and skills in response to challenging business environments'. Academic staff, students and employers are all consulted regarding development and review of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and Student Assessment Policy. These documents are aligned with the Institute's Strategic Plan. The Learning and Quality Committee, chaired by the Academic Registrar, maintains oversight of the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

2.23 External industry and commerce members on the Institute Council are regularly consulted on design and review processes for provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. Additional consultation takes place through a variety of means, including seminars, affiliations, visiting lecturers, meetings, and forums, such as the Industrial Liaison Forum and the biennial World Hi-Tech Forum. For example, the Institute is affiliated with the Ethical Fashion Forum, and UK Fashion and Textile Exports, in association with delivery of its HNC/D Fashion and Textiles programme.

2.24 The Institute's engagement with Expectation B10 is considered here via the review of its work with employers, including those on the Institute Council, and significant links with industry on a research and consultancy basis.

2.25 Academic staff undergo a thorough induction and monitoring process with respect to strategies for learning, teaching, and assessment. Additionally, they take advantage of staff development opportunities and conference attendance to enhance their teaching and assessment knowledge and skills. Induction, mentoring and staff development policies and procedures with respect to learning, teaching and assessment practice are informed through a variety of internal monitoring and external examiner reports.

2.26 Evaluation processes also take cognisance of student views. Module leaders, in conjunction with teaching staff and students, complete a module monitoring report within four weeks of completion of each module. Evaluation surveys are completed anonymously by students at the end of each module. These processes provide input to the development and review of teaching, learning and assessment practice.

2.27 Students also provide feedback on their learning opportunities through representation on committees and annual monitoring (see also Expectation B4). The programme annual monitoring process reviews the provision of learning resources, such as access to computers and library resources for all students.

2.28 There are various consultation processes with employers, staff and students with regard to the development and application of the Learning and Teaching Strategy and Student Assessment Policy. These consultations, together with the process of systematic review of learning opportunities, indicate that the Expectation is met.

2.29 The review team investigated the provision of employment-related learning opportunities and teaching practices through scrutiny of relevant documentary evidence, including employer testimonials and meeting students, senior and teaching staff, and the Chair of the Institute Council.

2.30 The Institute's policies and practice indicate that engagement with employers is proactive and effective, and is a strength of the provision. This robust consultation ensures the provision of real-life learning opportunities and contextualised teaching practice is continually enhanced. For example, the use of specific modules within the Institute's programmes that deal with employability highlight the Institute's attention to discussions with industry and commerce.

2.31 Further, teaching staff have introduced relevant teaching activities such as team building presentations, case studies, commercial visits and critical thinking activities designed to enhance their employability prospects. There are also opportunities for student projects with companies such as a high street bank.

2.32 Staff confirmed that the Learning and Teaching Strategy is more operational than strategic in practice. However, employer advice and consultation is used effectively and routinely to inform the review, development and application of the strategy. This consultation ensures that the strategy and its application in teaching practice is embedded with learning opportunities for the development of employability skills. For example, the Institute has also created a scheme called the Institute Graduate that identifies which module learning outcomes specifically enable the student to be prepared for future employment. Additionally, the Institute operates a well-received business incubation centre where several students are currently engaged in setting up small businesses.

2.33 Deliberate steps are also taken to engage employers in programme design. For example, the design of modules includes teaching and assessment activities for the development of employability skills. Students had very positive views on teaching practice overall and the development of employability skills such as communication in particular.

2.34 The Learning and Teaching Strategy has a specific aim to modify programmes in the future so that they include 30 per cent of the student's time in work experience. This aim has been developed through review and discussion with employers, and will enable students to benefit further from these links with employers and industry.

2.35 Overall, teaching and support staff and students clearly place much value on the benefits of the Institute's programmes in enhancing the employability of graduates. Students particularly recognised the usefulness of programmes in preparing them for the world of work.

2.36 The links to industry are proactive, and maintained and developed enthusiastically and robustly. These links provide a strong basis for the design and review of many opportunities for students to develop their employability skills throughout their programmes. The review team considers the wide-ranging and effective opportunities provided to students to develop their employment skills at the Institute to be **good practice**.

2.37 Annual monitoring processes are, in general, robust and have well-embedded opportunities for students to engage with. Students were very appreciative of these opportunities and stated that it gives them effective input into ensuring the adequate provision of learning resources, such as access to computers and library resources.

2.38 The Institute's processes for establishing, delivering, monitoring and reviewing provision in partnership with employers, staff and students are robust and comprehensive. These demonstrate good practice in respect of preparing students for work.

The engagement with employers ensures that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subjects in depth, and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking. Advice gained from employers is used to inform programme developments with real-life examples of the working environment and effectively prepare students for the world of work. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.39 The Institute's Strategic Plan has aims and objectives associated with the provision of resources. There is also subsequent monitoring and evaluation in place to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The Principal has ultimate responsibility to implement and review the Strategic Plan, supported by the Academic Board and with advice from the Institute Council.

2.40 The programme annual monitoring process monitors the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Link tutors, standards verifier and external examiner reports are used in the monitoring process. This is supplemented with end of module evaluation, the outcome of teaching observations, external reports and student feedback.

2.41 Programme committees have oversight of the delivery of learning and teaching at programme level. The development of the student learning experience is also monitored through discussions on academic performance with small group and one-to-one student reviews. It is supported further by staff reviews of academic performance and the learning environment. The induction programme for students covers briefing on learning resources, including library provision; online resources, including the VLE; use of plagiarism-detection software; and academic referencing.

2.42 The recent significant reduction in student numbers has necessitated a change in strategic direction in order to maintain the quality of the student experience. Discussions have taken place within the Institute on this issue and are summarised in an action plan, designed to keep student and staff levels under review. The focus of the action plan is on developing stronger links in Europe - already actioned through the new BA Business programme with the EUCB - and on expanding the amount of consultancy undertaken by Institute staff.

2.43 Formative assessment also facilitates the development of student performance. This is built into the Student Assessment Strategy for all modules, and is used to develop academic skills and early identification of students with particular learning needs or pastoral needs. The development of formative assessment as part of the overall process for assessment of students is discussed further under Expectation B6.

2.44 The library has developed resources to develop students' employability and academic skills. It also provides students with access to information on career development. The Admissions Officer is required to provide regular reports to staff meetings and to the Academic Board on the monitoring of student employability.

2.45 Structures are in place that ensure strategic approaches to staff development benefit both the student experience and student achievement. Implementation of the Staff Development Strategy helps to embed the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Student Assessment Strategy in design, delivery and assessment processes. Design of the staff development programme is informed by the outcome of annual monitoring, student feedback and teaching observation.

2.46 Academic staff are encouraged to undertake staff development activity and maintain currency within their subject areas. Internal staff development sessions take place on a regular basis, and staff also attend external courses and conference sessions as

appropriate. This includes undertaking a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education and to also become members of the Higher Education Academy. There is also a peer teaching observation process in place. Staff also participate in regular micro-lecturing with their peers. This fosters sharing of good practice and eliciting feedback on performance.

2.47 The strategies for staff development, learning and teaching, and assessment, together with the various implementation and review processes across the Institute, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.48 The review team tested the Expectation through the examination of appropriate documentary evidence, including committee meeting minutes, the Learning and Teaching Strategy, Student Assessment Policy and Staff Development Strategy. The team also met both students and staff.

2.49 There is clear strategic direction among the senior management team for the monitoring and evaluation of arrangements and resources, which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Implementation of strategies for learning, teaching and assessment enables the Institute to effectively ensure that there is a clear context for the facilitation of developmental opportunities and, through this, student achievement. Teaching staff enthusiastically take up the opportunities offered to them to attend both external and internal development events. There is a robust and proactive environment that encourages the development and sharing of good practice. This also contributes significantly to the student experience.

2.50 Monitoring of academic performance by Pearson revealed that students on their validated programmes at the Institute have low submission and completion rates. The Institute has reacted appropriately to this and actions are underway to ensure that students' particular needs are identified. In addition, the Institute has developed a policy to ensure consistency of information on the VLE in response to student concerns.

2.51 Students were extremely complimentary about the quality of teaching provided, and the level of engagement and support they receive willingly and comprehensively by all staff. Students are content with library provision. However, as outlined in paragraph 2.20, the Institute should strengthen its support process for student learning through more thorough attention to identification of learning support needs.

2.52 At the time of the visit, students already enrolled on awards offered by Staffordshire University had yet to be formally notified of the change in the validation relationship. The review team **recommends** that the Institute ensure that students enrolled on Staffordshire University programmes are formally notified about the arrangements for the closure of their programmes.

2.53 The review team concludes that the Expectation 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**

2.54 The Institute takes deliberate steps to ensure student engagement at all institutional levels. It has developed a specific Student Engagement in Quality Assurance Policy to support the implementation of its student engagement ethos. Student engagement is governed by this Policy, and includes a formal class representation structure with meetings chaired by the Student President.

2.55 There is a variety of student representation, including membership of all programme committees, the Academic Board and the Institute Council. Student representatives are supported by the Student Welfare Officer and Head of Student Services. There are also opportunities for peer student interaction through a VLE discussion forum.

2.56 Student feedback is collected by a range of methods. For example, informal feedback is collected after lectures and through an open door policy operated by staff. Module evaluation questionnaires are the basis for formal evaluation by students at the end of each module. This includes questions on teaching, support and assessment, and what the students have experienced throughout the module. This feedback is reviewed by the relevant programme leader, who drafts an action plan in response to student views. These reviews then contribute to the annual monitoring reports produced for each awarding body and Pearson.

2.57 The Institute has appropriate policies, procedures and practices in place to would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.58 The review team assessed the Institute's methods for student engagement by examining the student submission and the Student Engagement in Quality Assurance Policy, and in meetings with students, senior, teaching and support staff.

2.59 Policies and procedures to ensure student engagement are robust, and there is an appropriate variety of structures in place allowing student engagement to be realised effectively. The Institute takes systematic and deliberate steps to ensure student engagement on all institutional levels.

2.60 Students feel appropriately involved in the review and monitoring of their programmes and stated that the process acts as extra motivation to them. They are also satisfied with how their views are being collected and used within the Institute. For example, informal feedback at the end of some lectures showed that students were finding it hard to follow the content of the lecture. The Institute has reacted decisively to this by adjusting the teaching approach and through using modern digital technologies, including online case studies.

2.61 Senior staff confirmed that student engagement during lectures is in some cases insufficient; changes in teaching approaches are being made promptly. For example, the Institute has reacted effectively to feedback obtained and taken positive steps to increase mature student motivation on the HNC/D programmes. This has happened through tailoring study patterns to personal circumstances, thus resulting in better motivation.

2.62 Students stated that they also found the induction process at the beginning of each semester very useful in explaining to them how the Student Engagement in Quality Assurance Policy and process worked.

2.63 The review team found that the Institute takes appropriate, deliberate and robust steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. Students are effectively engaged at all institutional levels. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

2.64 The Institute conducts student assessment in accordance with its own and awarding partners' academic regulations. Assessment methods are designed in accordance with the intended learning outcomes in each programme specification. Assessment is also mapped against Subject Benchmark Statements and referenced to external points at the validation process.

2.65 The relevant awarding body approves assessment design for degree and postgraduate provision according to its specified regulations. All assignments go through a robust internal moderation process and the Institute uses second and double-marking processes, which are ultimately checked by the relevant standards verifier or external examiner. All awards are subject to the scrutiny of an examination board. These are chaired by a representative from the awarding body for degree and postgraduate provision and by a member of Institute staff for HNC/D provision.

2.66 The Institute has its own policy on student assessment, which is subordinate to the awarding bodies and Pearson regulations. This states that assessment should be designed to reduce plagiarism and that feedback should comment on strengths and weaknesses in student performance.

2.67 The Student Assessment Policy also outlines the processes for marking, and both internal and external moderation. The policy was developed in order to monitor and enhance the management of assessment processes at the Institute. The Institute uses internal moderators, internal verifiers and the external examiner system to ensure that appropriate review takes place. Assessment practice includes sampling and moderation for all programmes, and results are ratified through assessment and awards boards.

2.68 The summary reports produced by the Institute, which emanate from standards verifier and external examiner reports, augment the overall process of assuring that assessments standards are maintained at the appropriate level. These reports are reviewed by the Learning and Quality Committee and result in action planning as part of the annual monitoring processes.

2.69 The administration department oversees the submission of assignments by students, and students are issued with a signed, dated and stamped (with the Institute official logo) receipt. Submission is also computer-logged at this stage. A hard copy of the assignment is passed to the module lecturer and an electronic copy checked by plagiarism-detection software. After marking, the lecturer returns the marks to administration, who log the marks on the computer record system. The student work is then passed to the second marker and the process repeated. The Institute's Student Assessment Policy requires marked assignments to be returned to students within four weeks, with incorporated feedback.

2.70 A single administrator and their line manager have access to the student record system, and this access is password protected. The accuracy of the logged marks is

ensured by daily checking by the line manager. Marks for Staffordshire University awards are also checked by the awarding body. Students are informed of their assessment results by a variety of methods, including email, letters and, in some cases, by noticeboards.

2.71 The Institute's policies, strategies and procedures for assessment would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.72 The review team examined the effectiveness of the approaches and procedures to student assessment through scrutinising relevant documentation, including the Student Assessment Policy, and Learning and Teaching Strategy; a sample of marked students' work; partnership agreements; the quality staff handbook; programme handbooks; minutes of programmes and other meetings; programme specifications; annual monitoring reports; and standards verifier and external examiner reports. Additionally, the team also held meetings with students, teaching staff and senior staff, and spoke to representatives from the two awarding bodies and Pearson.

2.73 Student assessment is robustly conducted in accordance with Institute policies, and academic frameworks and regulations of the awarding bodies and Pearson. Assessment is effectively designed and specified through the programme specification for each award, and mapped with the appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements, with reference to external bodies at the validation stage.

2.74 The Institute effectively sets its own assessment assignments. These are designed to meet the learning outcomes at programme and module level. All assessment questions are appropriately internally moderated. Degree-level assignments are then sent to the relevant awarding body or Pearson for final approval before being issued to students.

2.75 Students confirmed that they learn of assessments requirements from teaching staff, through the appropriate programme handbook, and on the Institute's website. Assessment guidelines with marking and grading descriptors are also included in all assignment briefs. Students understand the grading criteria for assessments and see their assignments as having vocational relevance. Students were happy with the quality and timeliness of the feedback they received.

2.76 Internal and external moderation is effectively and robustly undertaken by Institute staff and external specialists. Standards verifier and external examiners confirm that assessment arrangements, including those for comprehensive second-marking, are fair and that staff make the subject interesting and are enthusiastic about what they are teaching. If marks differ by 6 per cent or more after second-marking a third marker is used for moderation and the decision added to the student record. This process strengthens the integrity of the assessment process.

2.77 The review team found that, in practice, assessment feedback timeliness and quality was in some cases variable. The Institute is enhancing practice in this area through appropriate staff development events and standardisation meetings.

2.78 Following the raising of a student complaint, made via the QAA Concerns Scheme about the integrity of the marking system, a specific and detailed investigation was made into the recording and administration of student marks (see also paragraphs 2.19, 2.111 and 2.114). Staff and students met by the review team were unanimous in rejecting a student's claim of lack of integrity in the marking, feedback and communication of records process. The team concluded that the student's complaint was unfounded but that there were some potential laxities in Institute processes that left the Institute open to such allegations. Specifically, methods for communicating assessment results to students are not systematic, with considerable variation in methods between modules and sometimes not till the end of each year of the programme. The review team **recommends** that by June 2016 the Institute

implement a systematic and consistent process for communicating assessment outcomes to students on Pearson awards.

2.79 Examination boards are held for all awards. University examination boards are effectively chaired by a member of University staff, attended by teaching staff from the Institute and University appointed external examiners. Examination boards for Pearson awards are chaired by the Principal. The standards verifier is not required by Pearson to attend these boards.

2.80 The assessment process is robustly reviewed through the annual monitoring process, and proposals for enhancement are captured in appropriate action plans. These procedures are effective and well-embedded in practice, and understood by staff.

2.81 In conclusion, the policies and processes for the assessment of students are well-established, robust and transparent, and provide students with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes for the award of credit or qualification. There is an issue regarding the lack of a systematic and consistent process for communicating assessment outcomes to students. The review team concludes, however, that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.82 All programmes have an appointed standards verifier or external examiner. Staffordshire University programmes and the EUCB programme are monitored by external examiners appointed by the respective awarding body. Pearson programmes are monitored by Pearson standards verifiers and Academic Management Reviews.

2.83 The role and responsibilities of the standards verifier and external examiners are defined by the awarding bodies and Pearson, and carry out their duties according to their regulations. Awarding partners are responsible for induction and training of standards verifiers and external examiners, and determining the format of their reports. These appointed experts visit the Institute at least once per year to meet students, and programme teams.

2.84 The Institute recognises the importance of the work of standards verifiers and external examiners through its Strategic Plan, Student Assessment Policy and Quality Handbook. These experts provide an independent check on all assignments and student marks.

2.85 Standards verifier and external examiner reports are received by the programme leader, and discussed and actioned in programme team meetings. These reports and associated action plans and responses are reviewed in annual monitoring reports, and by the Learning and Quality Committee and Academic Board.

2.86 Examination boards review external examiners' reports each semester. The reports are then circulated, monitored and tracked at subsequent meetings. The awarding partners review all standards verifier and external examiner reports, and the Institute's subsequent response to them, and provides their own response. An annual overview of external examiner reports occurs at Institute level, and areas of good practice and areas for enhancement are identified. The Academic Board monitors any action taken in response to good practice and areas for enhancement.

2.87 The role of the standards verifier and external; examiner is explained to students in programme handbooks. Reports are made available to students through the Institute's website, and to the Student President at the Academic Board.

2.88 The Institute's policies and practice for implementation of the standards verifier and external examiner role, and its adherence to the awarding bodies and Pearson regulations, would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.89 The review team examined a range of submitted documentation, including external examiners' reports and associated responses; assessment documentation and marked students' work; minutes of the Learning and Quality Committee, and other committee and staff meetings; and action and improvement plans generated from reports and annual monitoring, and periodic review documents. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and senior staff, and spoke to representatives from the two awarding bodies and Pearson.

2.90 Policies, strategic and action plans, together with the Quality Handbook, show that the Institute fully understands that the fundamental function of standards verifiers and external examiners is to confirm that awards are made at appropriate standards,

benchmarked against levels elsewhere in the sector. The role of the standards verifier and external examiner is effectively and clearly outlined in appropriate documents, such as the Quality Handbook.

2.91 Teaching staff have a clear understanding of the importance of the role of standards verifier and external examiners and their own responsibilities in responding to comments from them. They also fully understand the need for publication of reports to students.

2.92 There is clear evidence that the Institute responds effectively, timely and robustly to examiner comments made through the appropriate annual report. These reports are considered at all levels of the Institute in a well-regulated process starting with programme leaders and going through the various Institute committees. Standards verifier and external examiners' reports effectively inform action plans at both programme and Institute level. Comments requiring remedial action are acted upon quickly and effectively.

2.93 Students were aware of the standards verifier and external examiner role and understood that formal reports from these experts were available to them on the VLE. Despite this, they said they had not, so far, consulted them. Students were also aware that they were not provided with any marks before they have been agreed by the appropriate external.

2.94 The role of standards verifier and external examiners is well embedded in the Institute's quality assurance systems, and the Institute makes scrupulous use of their expertise. The Institute also makes robust use of all external reports. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.95 The Institute has a variety of procedures in place for monitoring and review of all its programmes. The main processes in place are for module evaluation and programme monitoring reports, together with an Institute-wide annual summary report. Students are involved in providing input to these processes as previously outlined under Expectation B5.

2.96 Informal feedback from students at the end of teaching activities is collected as a basis for in-module monitoring. This is augmented through one-to-one and group discussions with staff. Module evaluation questionnaires are the basis of formal module evaluation and these are completed by students at the end of each module. Module leaders are also charged with producing a module monitoring report within four weeks of completion of each module. Each programme leader reviews these sources of feedback and is required to draft an action plan in response to student views. The feedback from questionnaires and the action plans are then reviewed by the Learning and Quality Committee.

2.97 Programme leaders produce an annual monitoring report, working in conjunction with programme teaching teams. Staff gather information from minutes of programme team meetings, award and assessment board results, and staff and student input. Additionally, staff review achievement of learning outcomes, student progression, formal student evaluations, comments from external examiners, and responses to previous action plans. Programme leaders produce the draft annual monitoring report and an action plan, and these are reviewed by the Learning and Quality Committee, by the Academic Board, and finally by the Institute Council.

2.98 Programme annual monitoring reports are combined and summarised into an Institute-wide overarching annual report and action plan. These are reviewed by the Learning and Quality Committee and the Academic Board. Progress against actions is regularly monitored at later meetings of both the Committee and the Academic Board.

2.99 The awarding bodies and Pearson also have a formal procedure in place for programme monitoring and evaluation. Each Staffordshire University-validated programme appoints a member of university staff as a programme adviser, who produces a report each year. HNC/D programmes are monitored by Pearson-appointed standards verifiers and Academic Management Reviews. Pearson also conducts an Academic Management Review of the Institute annually to monitor the academic standards and quality of learning of its programmes. The Institute is responsible for facilitating periodic reviews by the awarding bodies and Pearson by providing any evidence required, and is also responsible for implementing actions within the deadlines identified in the reports to address any concerns raised.

2.100 The Institute has also introduced an internal annual monitoring report, which is over and above the requirements of Pearson. The EUCEB provision is too new to have gone through a whole academic cycle but the Institute plans to use the same monitoring procedures for the newly validated programme.

2.101 The Institute has the necessary procedures and structures in place to operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review of programmes.

These procedures, together with supporting frameworks provided by the awarding bodies and Pearson, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.102 The review team tested the effectiveness of the Institute's arrangements for programme monitoring and review by examining relevant documentary evidence supplied by the Institute, including partnership agreements and regulations, the quality staff handbook, minutes of programme committees and other meetings, and annual monitoring reports. The team also held meetings with students, teaching staff, support and senior staff; as well as with representatives from the awarding bodies and Pearson.

2.103 Processes for module and programme monitoring and review are clear and comprehensive; practice is effective and robust. There is a clear authority structure within the Institute where the annual monitoring process is effectively overseen by the Learning and Quality Committee, the Academic Board, and by the awarding bodies and Pearson.

2.104 Meetings of each programme committee have clear minutes. The effective annual monitoring reports produced through these committees appropriately address relevant issues and areas of good practice. These reports provide a platform for genuine enhancement of the student experience within the Institute. The monitoring process also results in an appropriate quality improvement plan, which is governed by a clearly articulated quality improvement policy. The Institute Council maintains an effective oversight of the process.

2.105 The Student President and student class representatives have ample opportunities to contribute and comment on issues raised through module and programme annual monitoring. Students expressed satisfaction with these opportunities and were able to give examples of where their input had resulted in enhancement of their learning experience.

2.106 There is a systematic and consistent review process in place to maintain standards and quality of learning opportunities. Module and programme monitoring and review processes are well-embedded, effective and provide robust mechanisms to monitor and enhance the provision. The Institute is appropriately managing its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the programmes delivered on behalf of its awarding partners. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.107 The Institute has a Complaints Policy, a procedural flow chart and guidance notes for students. These are accessed on the website and in student handbooks. Students can make complaints about a wide range of issues including the fairness of admissions processes. The policy also contains a right of appeal process.

2.108 The flowchart and Complaints Policy indicates that the Institute aims to resolve complaints in three stages: conciliation (informal), final complaint, and the Academic Appeals Panel. Confidentiality is maintained throughout the process unless students choose to waive this right.

2.109 The Institute, through the Academic Registrar, maintains oversight of the Complaints Policy and monitors all instances of complaints and appeals, discussing these with programme teams and at the Academic Board, which has student representation. Opportunities for enhancement of the policy are discussed at the Academic Board via an annual review report compiled by the Academic Registrar.

2.110 The Complaints Policy and procedures for dealing with student complaints and appeals would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.111 The review team examined relevant documentary evidence supplied by the Institute, including the student submission, the Complaints Policy, appeals chart and complaints guidance. The team also met students, senior staff, and teaching and administration staff. The team also held a separate meeting with senior staff to discuss the issue of a student complaint raised under QAA's Concerns Scheme. This has also been addressed in paragraphs 2.19, 2.78, and 2.114 of this report.

2.112 The Complaints Policy, including the appeals process and the guidance notes provided for students, is clear, well-articulated and known to staff. The formal stage of the process is rarely used and there have been no serious complaints to date. Staff are able to effectively support students with any complaints on an informal day-to-day basis. Programme committee meetings and informal mechanisms such as the effective open-door policy ensure that students are provided with opportunities to raise their concerns without risk or disadvantage.

2.113 Students were fully aware of the Institute's Complaints Policy, and were knowledgeable and appreciative of this and the guidance notes provided. Students stated that they preferred to resolve issues on an informal level with appropriate staff before any formal complaints stage was reached. Students confirmed they were satisfied with how their complaints had been dealt with in the past. They were able to provide examples of instances when changes had been made by the Institute based on an informal student complaint.

2.114 The review team conducted a thorough investigation of the complaint raised by a student under QAA's Concerns Scheme. The evidence mainly consisted of a folder containing letters and other documents supplied by the student to QAA. Senior management, administrative and support staff all confirmed that they were aware of this case. The Institute had not investigated this complaint formally, as the student had declined



the repeated offer to pursue their grievance under the Institute's Complaints Policy. The review team was satisfied that the Institute had conducted a generally effective process in this case and had adequately followed their own policy.

2.115 Overall, the review team found that the Institute has clear and effective policies and procedures to routinely monitor and deal with student complaints and appeals on its higher education programmes, and that it appropriately fulfils its responsibilities to its awarding bodies and Pearson. These are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

### **Findings**

2.116 There are no arrangements in place at the Institute for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the two awarding bodies and Pearson that it currently works with. Therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

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

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

### **Findings**

2.117 The Institute has no involvement in research degrees and has no research students. Therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

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

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

2.119 There are, in general, areas of strength in the quality of the student learning opportunities at the Institute. Staff offer strong support for student learning, which is appreciated by students across the provision. Teaching practice includes instances of links to real-world exemplars and leads to effective development of skills such as critical thinking and presentation.

2.120 The existence of Institute-developed strategy and policy documentation, such as the Quality Handbook, Learning and Teaching Strategy, and Student Assessment Policy, underpin the design, delivery and assessment of student learning. The Student Engagement in Quality Assurance Policy is used as an effective driver for engagement of students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

2.121 Of the nine applicable Expectations, eight are met and one is not met. The Expectation that is not met carries a moderate level of risk (Expectation B2). One of the Expectations that is met also carries a moderate risk (Expectation B1).

2.122 There are five recommendations regarding the quality of student learning opportunities. Four of these are concerned with strengthening quality assurance and one is concerned with supporting student learning.

2.123 There is one aspect of good practice regarding the strength of the Institute's relationship with industry and commerce, which leads to excellent development of student employability skills.

2.124 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the Institute **meets** UK expectations.

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

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

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

##### **Findings**

3.1 The Institute has a policy on published information that sets out the range and standard of information to be made available. The website, the prospectus and the VLE are the main Institute sources of information for both prospective and current students. Students can access policy documents, programme information and entry requirements via the website and the VLE.

3.2 Programme specifications and student programme handbooks are accessible on the Institute website. These set out the programme and module aims and outcomes, and the structure of teaching, learning and assessment. Students are informed at induction where they can access programme specifications, module specifications and policy information. They are also given necessary information about their chosen programme of study and about the resources and facilities available. Programme and module information is also contained in the relevant student handbook. These are updated annually by programme leaders.

3.3 The Institute has reduced the amount of information that is available in hard copy as a means of improving accessibility for those students whose first language is not English. A hard copy of the prospectus is still available on request from the Institute. The prospectus includes information on awarding bodies and Pearson, student testimonials, details of industry awards, student award winner profiles, publications and details of how to apply, with contact details.

3.4 There is a minimum content policy for the VLE. In addition, the IT Manager offers information sessions to staff and students on how to access and use the VLE. Published information is reviewed regularly and is a standing item on the Learning and Quality Committee agenda.

3.5 The Associate Dean is responsible for ensuring academic information is up to date and accurate. The Learning and Quality Committee has a responsibility for overseeing the accuracy of information. The awarding bodies have the final approval authority for academic and academic-related information. All marketing materials are approved by the Principal before being uploaded to the website. The Academic Registrar is responsible for ensuring that only accurate information is published.

3.6 All students receive a full transcript, detailing modules studied and results at the end of their programme. Staffordshire University sends a full transcript of modules passed to its students. Pearson students are informed by a variety of methods, including email, of the results for each module by programme leaders prior to certification being completed.

3.7 Students and staff have regular opportunities to comment on the accuracy and quality of information, and have a role in ensuring that information is up to date. These opportunities include surveys and student representation on the academic governance structure. This would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.8 The review team examined the Expectation through a thorough scrutiny of a number of policies and other documents relating to information, including information published to students. The team also met senior, teaching and support staff, and a range of students.

3.9 Information documentation is effective, comprehensive and readily accessible to all stakeholders, including staff and students. The policy for sign-off and approval of information is well understood and embedded within the organisational structure.

3.10 There are, however, examples where information provided is not fully accurate. For example, the Institute website and the student handbook for the new BA (Hons) Business awarded by the EUCB contain inaccuracies, mainly with respect to the transition from the University to EUCB. The review team **recommends** that the Institute ensure that the EUCB student handbook is accurate and up to date.

3.11 Issues with regard to inconsistency of methods for communicating assessment results to students on the various awards has been discussed previously in paragraph 2.78. The review team accepts that these inaccuracies may have resulted from recent staffing changes and were assured that these would be corrected as a matter of priority.

3.12 Information provided by the Institute for its intended audiences is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Policies for ensuring information provided is accurate and up to date are embedded within the Institute's operations. Despite a limited number of issues with accuracy, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

- 3.13 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.
- 3.14 The Institute has appropriate procedures for ensuring the accuracy and accessibility of information provided to interested parties.
- 3.15 The website contains adequate information about the Institute, its programmes and other opportunities it offers. Programme specifications contained in student handbooks, provide a definitive source of information about programme content and structure, and are available to all students. Quality assurance policies and procedures are clear, detailed, thorough and accessible.
- 3.16 Student handbooks for two of the awarding bodies and Pearson, and the VLE, provide information enabling students to understand how to take advantage of learning opportunities. The handbook for the EUCB provision requires further work. The Institute's public information policy clearly sets out the range and standard of information to be made available and who is responsible for approving the accuracy of this.
- 3.17 There is one recommendation for this Expectation. This is associated with a requirement for the Institute to ensure the accuracy of the student handbook for the EUCB-validated BA (Hons) Business degree.
- 3.18 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the Institute **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The Institute has policies and procedures in place that take a strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning. These include the Learning and Teaching Strategy, Strategic Plan, Student Engagement in Quality Assurance Policy, and the Quality Handbook. The Learning and Teaching Strategy aims to develop a transformational approach to student learning. The Institute's teaching ethos is for each student to develop as an individual and become proficient in the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and be committed to a critical understanding of their own learning and potential professionalism.

4.2 Good practice in teaching and learning is identified during discussions with students, staff standardisation meetings, and the observation of teaching and staff development sessions. Enhancements are discussed and disseminated by the various Institute committees, with reports finally going to the Academic Board, which authorises any necessary changes to policies and practice.

4.3 The Institute also gathers a variety of internal programme management information, which it uses to enhance learning opportunities. This information includes summaries of observation of teaching and reports from professional partners, awarding bodies and Pearson. Additionally, the Institute gathers stakeholder views and information, which it uses to enhance learning opportunities. This includes information from employers, student representatives, the Student President and end-of-module questionnaires completed by students.

4.4 Each programme leader composes a yearly report on a student questionnaire aligned with the National Student Survey. This results in further evidence that the Institute uses to inform its quality assurance and enhancement approaches. The views of standards verifiers and external examiners are also taken into account at this stage. All these sources of information are reviewed by the Learning and Quality Committee, and by the Academic Board.

4.5 Available documentary evidence indicates that the Institute's approach to enhancing the student learning experience would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.6 The review team tested the effectiveness of the Institute's approach to enhancement by examining relevant documentation, including strategic plans and policies, the Quality Handbook, minutes of programme and other meetings, and annual monitoring reports. The team also held meetings with students, teaching staff, support and senior staff, and spoke to representatives from the two awarding bodies and Pearson.

4.7 The approach taken by the Institute to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities is strategic, systematic, thorough and effective. It takes a very deliberate approach to enhancement through various approaches, and these produce observable results by way of improvements.

4.8 The Institute has developed varied teaching approaches capable of adjustment to the different needs of groups of students and has produced a procedure for minimum module content on the VLE. Summary reports of teaching observations result in an effective and comprehensive action plan, which informs improved teaching. As a further example,



the Institute has an agreement with the EUCB that will allow the exchange of students and engagement in collaborative efforts to enhance learning opportunities.

4.9 Enhancement and dissemination of good practice is effectively driven by a range of methods, but primarily through the use of teaching observation, micro-teaching and staff development. Strategic staff development activity, previously discussed in Expectation B3 has a well-constructed programme, is actively attended and has resulted in several improvements in practice. Staff are encouraged to further enhance their practice through membership of the Higher Education Academy and through undertaking a credit-bearing curriculum development programme offered by University College London in order to enhance their approach to teaching, learning and assessment.

4.10 The Institute has also established a number of close and effective industry links, which are used to inform the development of employability skills in the curriculum and further enhance the student learning experience. These also have been outlined in Expectation B3.

4.11 The review team found that the Institute is taking deliberate and strategic steps to enhance learning opportunities for students. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

4.13 The Institute has effective strategies, policies and procedures in place for enhancement, culminating in an aim to develop a transformational approach to student learning. These procedures include the use of teaching observation and staff development, using both internal and external good practice. These procedures are well-recognised and appreciated by students. There is evidence throughout that the Institute is taking deliberate and strategic steps to enhance learning opportunities for students.

4.14 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the Institute **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy

### Findings

5.1 The Institute has a strategic intention to consider digital literacy as part of the overall Strategic Plan. The Institute takes a student-led approach and recognises the need for students to have high quality digital literacy skills for the future. The Institute has a clear strategy and action plan, including the intention for increased use of online media for communication and embedding digital literacy in its programmes.

5.2 The Institute uses a VLE to provide online learning materials for its students. At the moment this is basic in approach, and is mainly a document repository.

5.3 The commitment to improving digital literacy emanates from a recognition that technology has the potential to enhance teaching via the use of digital resources, and there is evidence that teaching staff increasingly make use of digital technology in their teaching and learning activities.

5.4 The Institute recognises the need for its students to improve their digital literacy skills to future-proof their careers. The approach outlined in its thematic element document concentrates mainly on the student and on providing opportunities for digital applications in learning opportunities. Teaching staff indicated that they had received induction training on how to use the VLE, and a recent initiative had improved content on the VLE by introducing standard guidelines for preparing materials for upload. The recently produced digital literacy strategy indicates appropriate plans for staff development activity. There was also evidence from discussion with teaching staff that appropriate learning activities involving the use of digital technology were in place.

5.5 Students reported that they recognised digital literacy was becoming embedded in the curriculum, and they could cite examples of where they had received dedicated support in the library on using word-processing software to prepare assignments. This was considered to be particularly important for students who had been out of education for some time. Students were also able to demonstrate how they used the VLE on their mobile phones, indicating the Institute's engagement in the use of mobile technology.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 22-25 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000  
Email: [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

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