



# Higher Education Review of Bury College

February 2016

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Bury College. The review took place from 8 to 11 February 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Elisabeth Cook
- Mrs Elisabeth Downes
- Mr Michael Rubin (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=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 web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Bury College

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

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

### Good practice

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

- The flexibility of the admissions procedure and the personalised level of support and information given to applicants throughout the process (Expectation B2).
- The personalised and collaborative platform provided by the virtual learning environment, which gives students greater ownership of their learning experience (Expectation B3).
- The high level of individualised pastoral and academic support, which enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4).
- The comprehensive and systematic representation structures and support, which empower students to contribute to the enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5).
- The consistent, high quality and timely feedback on assessment, which facilitates the achievement of learning outcomes (Expectation B6).

### Recommendations

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

By August 2016:

- ensure that quality initiatives and activities are evaluated at a strategic level to inform the enhancement of higher education (Enhancement).

By October 2016:

- strengthen the role of the senior deliberative quality committee to ensure that higher education policies and procedures are effectively monitored and systematically reviewed (Expectations B8, B3)
- ensure that self-assessment and quality improvement plans are rigorous at all levels and fully cognisant of key quality reference points (Expectations B8, B3).

## Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to improve and enhance the lesson observation process, and the role of Learning Improvement Leaders in the ongoing support and development of staff (Expectation B3).
- The work being undertaken to establish the Higher Education Forum to formalise the dissemination of good practice (Enhancement).

## Theme: Student Employability

The College considers employability to be a strength of its provision and one of its strategic aims is to create a higher education portfolio that is relevant to the needs of the community and employers. Engagement with employers is promoted through a range of strategic and operational initiatives that create strong links between the College and employers at various levels. Employers are consulted on programme design and student employability skills are enhanced by employer input on programmes and work placements.

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

## About Bury College

Bury College (the College) is a general further education college based in Greater Manchester, which offers further and higher education programmes across a range of subject areas and attracts students from a wide geographical area, including Bury, Rochdale, Manchester and Lancashire. The College has 7,794 students, of whom 317 are registered on higher education programmes, including foundation degrees, Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, BA and BSc (Hons) programmes and a range of teacher education programmes. The main campus is based in the centre of Bury with a separate University Centre located close by.

The College mission has three key tenets which are defined as 'Developing individual potential; Inspiring excellence; Promoting prosperity through knowledge'. Integral to this are the strategic aims for higher education, which are to 'Continue to build higher education and higher apprenticeship routes that deliver high level skills' and 'Work with higher education partners to support participation and progression'. These are underpinned by four strategic objectives: to develop Bury as a university town through the coordinated development of new higher education programmes with key partners; to ensure that Bury College's higher education offer remains relevant to the needs of the community and employers as identified through the external needs analysis report; to provide opportunities for progression onto vocationally relevant higher education programmes; and to ensure continued high quality provision and further improve the higher education experience for learners.

The strategic direction of the College is set and overseen by the Board of Governors and led by the Principal and senior leadership team. The College produces a comprehensive needs analysis each year as part of the development planning cycle. This summarises a wide range of national and local policies and strategies and makes key recommendations for consideration and discussion by the College's senior leadership team. This analysis is used to investigate opportunities for development, investment and change. Two committees oversee the strategy and operation of higher education and facilitate the achievement of the strategic aims set out in the Higher Education Strategy. The Higher Education Strategic

Management and Quality group (HESMQ) oversees the strategic direction of higher education within the College and ensures that higher education programmes continue to meet local and sub-regional priorities. It also manages the development of new higher education programmes and ensures that the requirements of the Quality Code are met. The membership of this group consists of the Principal, Deputy Principal, Director of Higher Education, who is the Chair of the Committee, the Head of Standards, relevant Curriculum Directors and the Higher Education Coordinator. The Higher Education Programme Leaders Group (HEPLG) oversees operational issues relating to quality assurance within higher education programmes which involves reporting outcomes from course committee meetings and reporting on progress of actions from external examiner reports. The membership of this group consists of the Director of Higher Education, who is the Chair of the Committee, the Higher Education Coordinator, Higher Education Programme Leaders and Learning Resource Centre representatives.

Since November 2011, the College's higher education provision has undergone a period of change in terms of how it receives funding and applications from students, the awarding bodies with which it works, the programmes it delivers and the resources it offers to students.

In the academic year 2013-14 the College was allocated 50 student numbers from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) as part of the core and margin student number control (SNC) bid process. These numbers were used to run an FdA in Health Care and an FdSc in Sport Science and Coaching and resulted in the College having a direct relationship with HEFCE. The College also established a direct relationship with UCAS, and from 2013-14 received student applications directly rather than through the University of Bolton's admissions team. This change was beneficial as it promoted a stronger relationship with the applicant throughout the application process, as the admissions team was able to send out targeted communications directly to students. In 2013-14 the College established a new partnership with the University of Salford to deliver BSc Criminology and Sociology, with the first two years taught at the College and the final year taught at the University.

In 2014-15 the College opened the University Centre, which accommodates all non-specialist higher education provision. The Centre plays an important role in raising the profile of higher education among the local community and encouraging Level 3 students to progress onto higher level programmes. The Centre also enables the development of a higher education ethos which supports learning and teaching at Level 4 and above. Since 2014-15 a range of Pearson Higher National programmes at Levels 4 and 5 have been introduced, with the Higher National Certificate forming the knowledge component of two higher apprenticeship frameworks, which the College developed and delivered with funding received from the Local Enterprise Partnership. In 2014-15 a new partnership was formed with the University of Cumbria to offer a BA (Hons) qualification in Working with Children and Families, which meets the needs of students progressing from a Level 3 programme.

The removal of the HEFCE SNC cap in 2015-16 allowed the College to transfer student numbers from the University of Bolton to direct funding status, and programmes awarded through the University of Cumbria and Pearson are also directly funded. As part of the transfer process with the University of Bolton, the College was required to establish an access agreement with the Office of Fair Access (OFFA) due to one programme having a tuition fee of £7,500. An access agreement for 2016-17 is also in place.

The Higher Education Strategy pursued by the College has enabled it to expand its provision by working in partnership with a wider range of universities and Pearson. It has also provided a greater breadth of higher education opportunities that meet the needs of the local community and employers and developed direct relationships with HEFCE and UCAS.

These developments impact on the existing resources of the College in terms of servicing the administrative demands of HEFCE and UCAS and the quality assurance requirements for the University of Bolton, University of Cumbria, University of Salford and Pearson. The expansion of Pearson provision has required the development of assessment regulations that provide parity of opportunity with programmes awarded by a university. The College negotiates annually for access arrangements to learning resources at the University of Bolton. This enables students and staff to supplement the resources available at the College and enhances the student learning experience. However, this arrangement is for University of Bolton programmes only. The development of directly funded student places at the College means that the College must provide a graduation event for graduands. A significant amount of time and costs were involved in arranging and hosting this event; however, the College sees this as worthwhile as the ceremony sends an important cultural message to the community and the College's wider student population. The College is currently part of an area review that involves all further education colleges and sixth-form colleges in Greater Manchester and its aim is to identify efficiencies in a range of areas.

The College has a relationship with three awarding bodies and one awarding organisation. The partnership with the University of Bolton is longstanding and the College delivers 14 programmes comprising foundation degrees, BA and BSc (Hons) degrees, final-year top-ups and a range of teacher education programmes. The partnership with the University of Salford is in its third year, with one undergraduate programme - BSc Criminology and Sociology - while the partnership with the University of Cumbria is in its first year, with a BA Working with Children and Families providing internal progression for Level 3 students. Five Higher National programmes at Levels 4 and 5 are delivered by the College and awarded by Pearson. Two of these are linked to higher apprenticeships: HNC Computing and Systems Development and HNC Engineering.

The College was subjected to an Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) by QAA in November 2011. The review resulted in three areas of good practice being identified, pertaining to actions from external examiner reports, the quality of feedback to students and student support. The College continues to track external examiner comments through a number of committees and acts upon them. It has built upon existing practice through engagement with students, who have the opportunity to access and comment on the reports and monitor progress on actions through the VLE. The quality of feedback continues to attract positive comments from external examiners and students. Student support has been enhanced further through increased access to information for applicants, study skills initiatives and closer links with students through formalised representative processes. The review also noted two advisable recommendations, which related to the need for approval and monitoring processes for changes to programmes and enhancing the higher education quality manual to include systematic consideration of the Academic Infrastructure. In addition, two desirable recommendations were made, which related to staffing arrangements and the need for accurate information to be available to the public.

## Explanation of the findings about Bury College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.1 Validating partners are responsible for ensuring that provision aligns with the standards set out in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). Validation processes are used to confirm that programmes are set at the correct academic level and referenced to Subject Benchmark Statements. Programme specifications are submitted to university validation panels and Pearson specifications are approved by Ofqual. Foundation degree programmes are developed with reference to the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* and include relevant vocational features. As teams develop new programmes, due consideration is given to the requirements of the FHEQ. The higher education lesson observation process assesses indicators linked to this framework and the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Policy commits the College to delivering a learning experience at the appropriate level in relation to the FHEQ.

1.2 Programme specifications indicate the Subject Benchmark Statements to which they are aligned and map programme learning outcomes against modules. Some, but not all, include information on level descriptors; however, the higher education prospectus explains these in an accessible way for students. The recently revised template for annual programme self-assessment includes a section on meeting the expectations across the levels through teaching, learning and assessment, and students report that they are aware

of the increase in difficulty across levels. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.3 The review team analysed the reports of validation panels and external examiners, and in meetings asked senior and academic staff to confirm how academic standards were met and maintained. Particular attention was given to understanding the ways in which lesson observations referenced the FHEQ. Students were also asked to comment on the level of challenge they experienced within their programmes.

1.4 Reports on validation events do not capture discussions about the FHEQ, though panels do receive programme specifications and handbooks. External examiners' reports confirm that qualifications are set at the appropriate level and occasionally comment specifically on the clear appreciation of expectations across different levels. Issues relating to outcomes of achievement in one Pearson programme were addressed promptly by the College.

1.5 Four of the six programme-level self-assessments include a short commentary on meeting expectations across higher education levels. Staff elaborated on this, stressing the benefits of working with Learning Improvement Leaders, university Link Tutors and external examiners, and providing examples of how teaching, facilitation of learning and lesson observations linked to level descriptors. Students confirmed the challenging nature of their programmes and the support they receive to develop independent learning skills.

1.6 The review team recognises that the processes followed by the College, working in conjunction with a range of awarding partners, enable staff to understand the principles of qualification frameworks and to apply these appropriately. The recently revised higher education lesson observation procedure is helping to embed these processes. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low, given the evident level of oversight and support.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.7 The College follows the academic policies of its university partners but produces its own assessment regulations for Pearson awards in line with Pearson guidance. Assessment arrangements for University of Bolton programmes are approved at validation and terms of reference for assessment boards are prescribed by the University. University of Cumbria programmes are governed by the University's academic and quality assurance processes and the University is responsible for assessments and for the confirmation of grades through assessment boards. University of Salford programmes are subject to the University's academic governance as outlined in the regulations for taught awards; assessment materials are produced by a nominated member of University staff and approved by the external examiner. The three university partners provide Link Tutors to advise on the implementation of policies and regulations.

1.8 The College is responsible for maintaining the academic standards of its programmes in relation to the Quality Code, ensuring that programme delivery complies with university academic regulations and policies and making staff and students aware of their responsibilities.

1.9 The College's website provides links to the academic regulations of its validating partners. This information is also included in the higher education quality assurance manual, updated recently to reflect new partnerships, and made available to students through the VLE and seminars held at the beginning of the academic year.

1.10 The Higher Education Strategic Management and Quality Group (HESMQ) oversees compliance with assessment regulations and policies. External examiner reports seek confirmation that assessment has been conducted in line with university policies and regulations. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.11 The review team consulted the programme handbooks and external examiner reports provided, sampled course pages on the VLE and examined the minutes of HESMQ meetings. The team also explored students' understanding of assessment policies and regulations.

1.12 The students met were aware of key assessment matters, including policies for mitigating circumstances and plagiarism, and confirmed that this information was made available through the VLE, programme and module handbooks and at induction events. The review team verified that programme handbooks provided clear links to academic regulations, with the exception of one Pearson programme. In this instance, the action plan in response to the external examiner's report ensured that several matters relating to assessment regulations are now more explicit.

1.13 The higher education quality assurance manual indicates that HESMQ will consider matters relating to assessment as part of its oversight of academic standards and, specifically, that the group will review higher education policies and procedures at its March meetings. This is not evident from the minutes, nor is it clear from the wider set of minutes that the group has been exercising regular and systematic oversight of matters relating to

assessment, except in response to particular issues raised by students. This supports the recommendation made in Expectation B8 that the role of this senior deliberative quality committee is strengthened to ensure that higher education policies and procedures are effectively monitored and systematically reviewed.

1.14 On the basis of the evidence assessed, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met. The risk is judged to be low, notwithstanding the evolving role of HESMQ, on the basis that the circulation of information to students and staff is effective, enabling all to develop a clear understanding of assessment regulations.

**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**

1.15 The definitive record of programmes provided by the College is maintained by the University of Cumbria, University of Salford and University of Bolton for programmes validated by those institutions. For programmes validated by Pearson, the College maintains the definitive record. The responsibility for maintaining the definitive record is outlined in each of the provider checklists. The definitive list of programmes currently validated and those validated over the last five years has been provided. Programme specifications for franchised programmes adopt existing university-provided programme specifications. For programmes awarded through Pearson, the College is responsible for the production of programme specifications. This process features the nominated Programme Leader who, in conjunction with the Director of Higher Education, is responsible for producing the programme specifications. Programme specifications are made available online to students through the VLE.

1.16 The College follows the requirements of the degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation, and has established internal processes that would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.17 The review team reviewed the College's supporting documents as well as additional documentation. Information provided online through the College website was accessed and meetings were held with both students and staff.

1.18 The evidence shows that the College meets the requirements for maintaining a definitive record as set out in Expectation A2.2. The College's internal definitive record, including the definitive record for Pearson programmes, is maintained by the Director of Higher Education. Programme specifications meet the expectations of the Quality Code and are made available to both students and applicants. The awarding bodies retain ultimate responsibility for maintaining definitive records, but the College's own internal processes are satisfactory. For Pearson programmes, the College is responsible for maintaining the definitive records, with the internal processes, overseen by the Director of Higher Education, being satisfactory.

1.19 The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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**

1.20 The responsibility for academic standards rests with the awarding bodies and awarding organisation as the College's validating partners. The College manages the standards of its academic provision and monitors the effective and appropriate implementation of university requirements, through implementing agreed policies and procedures set out in signed agreements. Approval to run Pearson Higher National provision is provided in the form of approval letters stating the approval period. There is explicit reference to qualification level and benchmarks in the responsibilities checklist document describing the Pearson collaboration.

1.21 The external processes for programme approval are described in Expectation B1, together with the internal approval process that coordinates with those of the university partners and Pearson. The processes at the College would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.22 The review team tested this Expectation by considering a wide range of documentation describing the College and its three awarding bodies, including programme specifications, programme handbooks and agreement documents. The team also held meetings with staff and students of the College and a representative from the University of Bolton.

1.23 Programmes that are approved by the awarding bodies are delivered through either a franchise or validation agreement. Processes for the development of a new course are clearly set out by the College and its awarding bodies and involve the completion of an academic development approval process that confirms the business case and academic rationale. Academic teams developing programmes under a validation arrangement take responsibility for developing the programme specifications, while franchised programmes adopt existing programme specifications. The three awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring that the provision meets the national qualification standards as set out in the FHEQ. In all cases, programmes are referenced to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, levels within the FHEQ and subject-specific reference documents relating to the sector. The awarding bodies provide support and guidance at the development stage to ensure that the College delivery teams are aware of the FHEQ requirements for each of the levels appropriate to the programme and the Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.24 The College is responsible for ensuring that the academic standards of Pearson Higher National programmes meet the requirements of the FHEQ and the provider checklist outlines the responsibilities of the College and the awarding organisation. Approval to run Pearson Higher National provision is provided in the form of approval letters stating the approval period. Programmes awarded through Pearson require the production of a programme specification that identifies the structure of the programme, its aims and objectives and the teaching, learning and assessment strategies that meet the Pearson qualification specifications approved by Ofqual. The College can select optional units to deliver from a prescribed list, which gives the College some flexibility to customise programmes to meet the needs of students and employers. The College has clear

assessment regulations in place for Pearson and uses the Pearson Centre Guidance to Assessment at Level 4 to 7.

1.25 The HESMQ approves the development of new higher education programmes and monitors academic standards through scrutiny of external examiner reports. The Higher Education Programme Leaders Committee meets to discuss, review and contribute to the development and embedding of the Quality Code and to evaluate processes and practices relating to academic standards. Students confirm that they recognise the levels of difficulty during assessment and the requirement for increasing levels of independent learning as their academic studies progress from Level 4 to 6.

1.26 The review team concludes that the College, in association with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation, has effective processes for approving programmes and securing standards. Therefore 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**

1.27 For Pearson programmes, setting assessments is a shared responsibility between the awarding organisation and the College. Programmes validated by Pearson are awarded in line with the quality assurance procedures set by Pearson. The external examiner has a key role in confirming that the design and nature of the assessments permit the aims and learning objectives of a programme to be met and that they are of a standard appropriate to the qualification level. Pearson Quality Review and Development Reports and the College's assessment regulations detail the awarding organisation's expectations for the conduct and administration of assessments, including verification of assessment outcomes.

1.28 In contrast, assessments on the programmes delivered in collaboration with the awarding bodies are coordinated across all partnerships delivering the same programme. External examiners are required to confirm that the assessment is fit for purpose and that standards are comparable to other higher education providers. The processes at the College would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.29 The review team tested this Expectation by considering a wide range of documentation including programme specifications, external examiner reports and assignment briefs. The team also held meetings with staff and students of the College and a representative from the University of Bolton.

1.30 Assessment materials for programmes validated by awarding bodies are designed in line with approved module specifications, including intended learning outcomes. All programme specifications map the learning outcomes against the modules and it is clear where each outcome is developed and assessed. The College's Higher Education Teaching and Learning Policy notes that higher education teachers are responsible for setting clear learning outcomes and creating clear links to summative assessment criteria.

1.31 Assessment materials for Pearson qualifications are designed in line with the unit specification, internally verified by College staff and moderated by the external examiner.

1.32 Assessment arrangements for programmes awarded through the University of Bolton are those that are approved at validation or revalidation. The Programme Committee is permitted to make variations to the assessment arrangements, with the caveat that the changed assessment arrangements remain consistent with the approved assessment scheme and are progressed through the University's minor modification process. As detailed in the Agreement, College staff are responsible for setting, marking and internally moderating assessments and are supported by the Link Tutor. The terms of reference for the Assessment Boards are prescribed by the University of Bolton and Boards are held either at the University or at the College.

1.33 Programmes validated through the University of Cumbria are subject to the University's academic and quality assurance processes. The University allocates a Programme Leader who works with the College Programme Leader and they have joint operational responsibility for the programme. Assessments are produced by the University's module leader and approved by the University-appointed external examiner. College staff are responsible for distributing the assessments within the same timescale as the counterpart programme delivered at the University and for marking and internal moderation of assessments. Further moderation of assessments is undertaken by the module leader and external examiner. The University confirms grades through Assessment Boards, which College staff are requested to attend.

1.34 Programmes validated by the University of Salford are subject to the academic governance as outlined in regulations for taught awards. Programmes are approved and reviewed in line with the University's policy. The University appoints a Link Tutor, at school level, to act as the main point of contact and to attend key programme meetings. Assessment materials for programmes are produced by a nominated member of staff from the University and approved by the external examiner. The College academic team marks the assessment with a sample marked by the module leader at the University.

1.35 Each of the awarding bodies and the awarding organisation are responsible for appointing external examiners. Reports are received from the external examiner through the relevant university and are sent directly to the Principal and the Head of Standards, then distributed internally through the College to the Director of Higher Education and the Programme Leaders. All external examiner reports confirm that assessment is rigorous and in line with learning outcomes, and where issues are raised in the final report, there is evidence that the College makes timely and appropriate responses. The Pearson Annual Quality Review and Development Report confirms that the College is meeting the expectations of the awarding organisation.

1.36 Consultation with the student body showed that 90 per cent of students feel that their assessments are relevant to the module learning outcomes.

1.37 The College, in working with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation, has clear and appropriate processes in place for the assessment of learning outcomes, the monitoring of standards and the associated award of credit and qualifications. 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 (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**

1.38 The awarding bodies and awarding organisation bear ultimate responsibility for the quality and standards of higher education provision at the College, including programme review. The College assures itself that academic standards are being met through its internal self-assessment processes, including the annual self-assessment of individual courses. In addition, the College produces an annual position statement for each Curriculum Directorate and a College Higher Education Position Statement. The College also participates in awarding body annual monitoring and review processes.

1.39 There are clear processes in place and division of roles and responsibilities, with the awarding body, the awarding organisation and the College's processes, which would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.40 The review team tested this Expectation by considering documentation from internal reviews and from awarding body and awarding organisation annual review documents. The team also discussed the processes for monitoring programmes in meetings with staff and students from the College and a representative from the University of Bolton.

1.41 The HESMQ oversees the strategic direction of higher education and ensures that the College meets the requirements as detailed in the signed agreements with the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The remit of the Group implicitly includes ensuring that UK threshold academic standards are achieved and that academic standards required by each individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.

1.42 As part of the academic oversight of standards, a dedicated higher education self-assessment review and evaluation document was produced in 2012-13, and this was superseded by an annual Higher Education Position Statement and Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP). The College's annual review draws upon individual programme evaluations and action plans. The process is illustrated in a diagram that shows the self-assessment cycle and associated deadlines. The 2013-14 Higher Education Position Statement, which was presented to the self-assessment report panel, provides a summary of individual curriculum evaluations and highlights the need to undertake a more detailed analysis of programme performance over time. The Higher Education Position Statement was updated in 2014-15 and identifies five key areas for continued improvement of student learning opportunities.

1.43 The Higher Education Programme Leaders Group (HEPLG) meets regularly and oversees operational issues relating to quality assurance and progress made in self-assessment action plans and external examiner reports. The performance of higher education programmes is reviewed monthly at curriculum review meetings by the Curriculum Directors. Overall performance is included in the end-of-year Directorate Self-Assessment Report Position Statement, which is validated by the senior leadership team.

1.44 It is the University of Bolton's policy to appoint a Link Tutor who will oversee the operation of programmes in accordance with the University's quality assurance procedures.

The Link Tutor works closely with the Programme Leader at the College and advises them on the implementation of policies and regulations. Each programme awarded through the University of Bolton has a Programme Committee with overall responsibility for the management of the programme. The membership of this committee includes student representation, the University Link Tutor, the College Programme Leader and the College's academic team.

1.45 The College Programme Leader is required to contribute to the University of Bolton's annual programme monitoring procedures through annual programme quality enhancement plans (PQEPs). The University of Bolton conducts an annual partnership review, which includes the current operational position as well as future challenges and solutions to develop the partnership; however, this has not yet taken place at the College.

1.46 At subject level the University of Bolton undertakes a periodic process of subject review. A panel comprising two external and two internal peers, two student representatives and an officer from the Standards and Enhancement Office scrutinises the operation and continued viability of programmes delivered at the University and with college partners. The College has participated in four such events over the past three years. One recommendation identified was that the College would benefit from external examiner comments that are more specific to the College.

1.47 The review team concludes that the College, in line with the requirements of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation, has effective processes in place to monitor and review programmes and to ensure that academic standards are being maintained. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.48 Employers are involved in the design stage of foundation degrees and employers and practitioners are consulted in the design of other programmes. Validation events include input from employers and validation panels include an external academic. External examiners are asked to confirm that threshold standards are achieved.

1.49 Reports of validation events show the consistent use of external academic specialists by university partners; usually one, two or, for large-scale periodic review, three specialists are involved. Employer involvement in validation events is evident, though variable. At times only a single employer attends and on other occasions groups of four or five participate. Validation reports indicate some involvement of employers and practitioners in the design of programmes. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.50 The review team read through the range of external examiner reports provided and explored, with senior and academic staff, their degree of confidence in their ability to meet and maintain academic standards. The nature of the College's relationship with its university partners and with Pearson and its engagement with external examiners were discussed.

1.51 Completed external examiners' reports confirm the maintenance of threshold standards, the comparability of standards and the matching of assessments to learning outcomes. The College acts on the feedback in these reports and this aspect is considered in Expectation B7. Senior staff spoke of the usefulness of working with a range of university partners and, in particular, how new partnerships help the College to re-evaluate the quality of its existing relationships. Academic staff spoke of their close links with university Link Tutors and how these enabled them to set, deliver and maintain appropriate academic standards. The University of Bolton provides further support through the Academic Partnership Manager, whom the review team also met.

1.52 In Pearson programmes, externality is provided through the external examiner process. The College's experience, during 2014-15, of having one Higher National programme blocked and subsequently cleared confirms the effective use of external and independent expertise in the oversight of academic standards in this area of provision. The review team concludes that this Expectation is met. The risk is judged to be low, as the systems in place enable issues to be identified and action to be taken to resolve these.

**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

1.53 In determining its judgement on the maintenance of academic standards of awards at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is considered low in all cases.

1.54 The approach to maintaining academic standards at the College is defined by the awarding bodies and by the requirements of the awarding organisation. The College uses the established university academic frameworks, regulations and procedures and has drawn on these to model the College approach to maintaining academic standards for Higher National provision with Pearson. Staff are familiar with the responsibilities that are assigned to the College with regards to academic standards and there is external engagement and oversight of standards through the awarding bodies and through the use of external examiners.

1.55 Overall, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The College currently delivers higher education programmes approved by three university partners and Pearson. It is required to follow the associated awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's mechanisms for consideration and approval of new or modified courses and programmes. The external approval mechanisms are complemented by an internal approval mechanism that considers aspects such as any resource or staffing implications of the new provision. The HESMQ oversees the strategic development of new collaborative higher education partnerships and curriculum developments that meet the needs of local and sub-regional priorities and contribute to the development of Bury as a university town. The processes at the College would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.2 The review team tested this Expectation by considering documentation such as programme specifications, programme handbooks and example programme approval documents. The team also explored the programme approval processes through meetings with staff and students of the College and a representative from the University of Bolton.

2.3 The College produces a comprehensive needs analysis each year as part of the development planning cycle, which is discussed by the senior leadership team and used to investigate opportunities for development, investment and change. The process of developing new programmes involves the Director of Higher Education identifying potential areas for development, in conjunction with the relevant Curriculum Director and academic teams. This analysis is based on clear criteria, such as resource requirements including existing staffing expertise, Level 3 student destinations, potential links with universities or awarding organisations and labour market needs. There is evidence of discussion regarding the development of new higher education courses at the monthly curriculum review meetings, which demonstrates how the College responds to opportunities to provide internal progression routes.

2.4 The new course approval process for both awarding body and awarding organisation courses has been improved in 2015-16 and now incorporates an initial development stage whereby programmes are proposed and discussed and suggestions or recommendations are made. The revised process ensures that resource costs are considered before a development is taken forward to full approval; for example, the HND Media programme was given detailed consideration.

2.5 The HESMQ considers all development plan proposals and identifies responsibilities along with timeframes for achieving approval with the awarding bodies or awarding organisation. The Director of Higher Education's role is to drive forward this initial proposal through to validation. The higher education development plan provides a clear and ambitious planning document which identifies scheduled developments for the next three years, showing which programmes are running and those that have been phased out. New developments include FdA Health Care, HNC Engineering and HNC Computing and Systems Development and are examples of programmes developed in response to needs

analysis information and predicted demand across Greater Manchester and beyond. In addition, the Group reviews enrolments on existing programmes, and 'teach out' will be initiated where a programme has reached the end of its useful life. This has resulted in a number of small cohorts within the College.

2.6 The development and approval process for the University of Bolton for both franchised and validated programmes includes the preparation of an initial business proposal and a description of the academic arrangements. Clear arrangements also exist for the approval to run franchised programmes through the University of Cumbria and the University of Salford. There is evidence that some unit and module selection within the approval process has included input from current or potential students and employers, for example the HND Hairdressing Management and the BSc Events Management.

2.7 Due consideration is given at the development stage to ensuring that College delivery teams are aware of the FHEQ requirements for each of the levels appropriate to the programme as well as the Subject Benchmark Statements. Where a programme is proposed under a validation agreement, development time is given to enable curriculum staff to complete the necessary documentation, including programme specifications, exemplar assignments and course handbooks. Throughout the development and validation process, delivery teams are supported by the Higher Education Coordinator and the Director of Higher Education, who has final internal approval of the document prior to submission to the awarding university or Pearson.

2.8 Pearson Higher National qualifications form the knowledge component of two higher apprenticeship frameworks in Computing and Engineering, which the College delivers as part of a suite of higher apprenticeships in Greater Manchester and which were developed with funding received from the Local Enterprise Partnership. This provision is supported by local employers and provides students with a relevant vocational learning experience.

2.9 Programmes awarded through Pearson require the submission of documentation including a programme specification. To ensure uniformity across all programmes the College has standardised programme specifications for Pearson programmes, all of which include information on admissions criteria; the aims of the programme; the acquisition of higher level skills; distinctive features of the programme; FHEQ descriptors; and the programme structure. As part of the development process the College has consulted existing further education Level 3 students and employers through Employer Forums on the units and skills they wish to see on Higher National programmes in Beauty Management and Hairdressing Management.

2.10 Responsibilities for assessment, including modifications to programmes, are set out in the responsibility checklists and the delivery plan for the University of Cumbria. Assessment arrangements for programmes awarded through the University of Bolton are those that are approved at validation or revalidation. The Programme Committee is permitted to make variations to the assessment arrangements, with the caveat that the changed assessment arrangements remain consistent with the approved assessment scheme. The College has contributed to these discussions by providing feedback on the curriculum and assessment processes.

2.11 The review team concludes that the College has well developed processes for programme design and approval. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.12 The College has a Higher Education Admissions Policy which applies to programmes accredited by the University of Bolton, University of Cumbria and Pearson. Applications for programmes awarded by the University of Salford are administered through the University of Salford's own admissions policy. Both policies are made available online to applicants, staff and current students. The Director of Higher Education is responsible for the College's Higher Education Admissions Policy and the HESMQ is responsible for the implementation of the Admissions Policy. The College has a specific higher education website, which provides information on entry requirements, the UCAS tariff system and the application process. This information is also conveyed in physical form through a printed higher education prospectus. Entry requirements are set in partnership with the awarding bodies at the validation stage and are subject to review prior to the start of each recruitment cycle. For Pearson provision, entry requirements are set by the Director of Higher Education and the corresponding programme leader. For programmes accredited by the University of Bolton, the College has established a direct relationship with UCAS, receiving applications directly rather than through the University's admissions team. The College interviews all part-time applicants, and full-time applicants when further information is required. The College has established internal policies and procedures that would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.13 The review team reviewed supporting documents as well as additional documentation. Information provided online through the College website was accessed and meetings were held with both students and staff.

2.14 The College's decision to introduce a direct relationship with UCAS is proving helpful to admissions staff, allowing them to respond to most applications within two weeks, and giving them more control over and oversight of the process. It has also facilitated a stronger relationship with the applicant throughout the application cycle, as detailed in the communications schedule.

2.15 The College assists applicants in making informed decisions about higher education by providing access to detailed impartial pre-entry advice, guidance and information about programmes, including fees and funding. All applicants requiring an interview are given two weeks' notice and there is flexibility regarding the interview date. If an applicant lives outside the North West or has a disability that would make it difficult for them to get to the College, staff will conduct interviews over the internet. The level of flexibility around the interview process is positive. Students are extremely affirmative about the admissions process, particularly the supportive and approachable nature of the staff, as well as the interview process itself. The review team therefore considers that the flexibility of the admissions procedure and the personalised level of support and information given to applicants throughout the process is **good practice**.

2.16 Overall, the review team concludes that the College's 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 the College in the selection of higher education students who are able to complete their programme.

2.17 The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.18 The College sets out its learning and teaching principles in the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Policy. Oversight of this rests with the HESMQ, whose remit also includes the establishment of staff forums for sharing good practice in learning and teaching. HESMQ oversees the work of the Higher Education Programme Leaders Committee (HEPLC), whose responsibilities include to share, discuss and contribute to quality enhancement processes.

2.19 Staff teaching on higher education programmes submit their curriculum vitae to each validation panel where it must be approved by the awarding body. They should hold a qualification one level higher than the level at which they teach. They have opportunities to attend continuing professional development (CPD) events organised by university partners, take part in College development days and receive an allocation of five additional CPD days each year, which are called IPAD days. Staff new to teaching Pearson programmes have been supported through CPD activities. A small amount of subject-specific scholarly activity is undertaken.

2.20 The action plan from the 2012-13 higher education self-assessment review (SAR) aimed for 'increased scholarly activity at team and individual level with the outputs disseminated to the wider college community', but the College acknowledges that further work is needed 'to ensure that any form of scholarly activity is formally disseminated' and this remains an action point in the 2014-15 higher education SAR. HESMQ minutes show that the College was formulating a Scholarly Activity Policy from October 2013 but this remains a consultation document.

2.21 A CPD register and CPD logs for staff teaching on higher education programmes were provided, showing involvement across a range of activities. Of the 46 staff teaching on higher education programmes, seven have master's qualifications and six are working towards master's or PhD qualifications.

2.22 Observation of higher education teaching began in 2012-13 and as a result the College acknowledges that up until 2014-15 the evidence to show that learning and teaching was taking place at the appropriate level was limited. Processes were revised for 2015-16, an extensive template was created, and three different formats for observations were included in the evidence base. Lesson observations now place greater emphasis on assessing performance against the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning.

2.23 A new University Centre opened early in 2014-15 accommodating all non-specialist higher education teaching. It includes information technology (IT) suites and a Social Learning Zone designed in partnership with students; additional IT resources have been added subsequently. The Director of Higher Education, the Higher Education Coordinator and the Head of Standards coordinate matters relating to resources, on behalf of HESMQ and in conjunction with relevant teams.

2.24 The College completed the review of its Higher Education Learning and Teaching Policy in autumn 2015, so the outline of HESMQ's responsibilities within this is therefore recent. Evidence of the group systematically monitoring the development of teaching and learning strategies is not apparent in the minutes provided, and actions to discharge its responsibility for establishing staff forums for sharing of good practice are still at the planning stage. The Policy also makes reference to Learning Improvement Leaders (LILs). It was not clear from the minutes of the HEPLC how this committee addresses their remit to support a culture of continuous improvement.

2.25 HESMQ minutes confirm discussion of retention and achievement data but there was less evidence of the group's oversight of learning resources. Overall, National Student Survey (NSS) results compare with sector benchmarks and an improving trend in most areas is evident. Internal student feedback shows satisfaction with the quality of teaching.

2.26 Information to prospective and new students (prospectus, website, welcome booklet) is fit for purpose, and student representatives have been involved in revisions. Programme handbooks provide links to partner regulations and policies, information on course structure, assessment, academic and pastoral support, and support for learners with disabilities. They also outline expectations in relation to attendance, and actions to improve learner engagement further flow from student representative meetings. Handbooks for students, mentors and employers involved in work-based learning outline individual responsibilities. NSS and internal survey results indicate high levels of satisfaction with regard to advice and support, and the students confirm that they have positive and effective relationships with staff.

2.27 The range of processes outlined above would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.28 The review team explored several issues in detail in meetings, including how important strategies such as the Learning and Teaching Policy were formulated and embedded; the operation of key deliberative committees; support for good practice, scholarly activity, CPD and inclusivity; the impact of the revised lesson observations; and the role and impact of LILs.

2.29 The College provided an audit trail to illustrate the processes underpinning the revision of the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Policy. This showed consideration by HESMQ at key stages, though the College acknowledged that the minutes of meetings did not reflect the full substance of discussion.

2.30 Senior staff explained that while HESMQ maintains a focus on strategic issues, oversight and activity relating to quality matters are spread across different levels, including upwards to the senior leadership team and downwards to Curriculum Directors. The team asked for examples to illustrate the ways in which HESMQ is fulfilling those terms of reference relevant to *Chapter B3* of the Quality Code, including dissemination of good practice and support for teaching teams in CPD and scholarly activity. The review team learned about the planned Higher Education Forum and master's modules supporting the transition from further to higher education teaching. The limited references to teaching and learning matters in HESMQ minutes did not allow the team to see how this group is systematically supporting and overseeing these initiatives, and staff explained that the role of HESMQ is only to check that actions have been completed. In addition, the team noted only one standing management report relating to teaching and learning in the year's cycle for HESMQ. This was the January overview of lesson observations, but the team could not see any consideration of these in the minutes provided. These findings support the recommendation made in Expectation B8 that the role of this senior deliberative quality committee should be strengthened to ensure that higher education policies and procedures are effectively monitored and systematically reviewed.

2.31 Staff provided examples of CPD and scholarly activity and confirmed that while higher education lecturers do not receive remission, current arrangements are satisfactory. The new process for lesson observation is settling down and some staff were able to speak about this from first-hand experience. All staff are enthusiastic about the role of the new LILs in observations and their input to shaping the planned Higher Education Forum and the additional peer support it is envisaged this will provide. The review team therefore **affirms** the steps being taken to improve and enhance the lesson observation process and the role of Learning Improvement Leaders in the ongoing support and development of staff.

2.32 A new VLE was introduced at the start of the 2015-16 academic year. The team found the demonstration of this interesting and helpful, and recognised the speed at which the College has implemented the transition from the previous VLE. Staff and students spoke warmly about its accessibility and the way in which it combines information and interactivity within a central hub. They are also enthusiastic about its potential to support independent learning further and the emergence of a collaborative platform extending beyond the classroom. The personalised and collaborative platform provided by the VLE, which gives students greater ownership of their learning experience, is **good practice**.

2.33 The team concludes that the Expectation is met, and has identified one feature of good practice arising from the College's work in developing the VLE as an effective learning and teaching resource. The risk is judged to be low, although the team has made one affirmation as well as one recommendation that links to this area in Expectation B8.

**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**

2.34 The HEPLC is responsible for supporting a culture of continuous improvement and for overseeing the quality of the student experience. Induction activities for students include introductions to College and (where relevant) university resources, academic skills sessions and the self-efficacy survey. Student transitions are supported through the tutor system and through planned transitional activities. Support materials are available through a dedicated website and include study guides, advice on academic referencing, subject reading lists and information on financial and educational support. Study skills sessions have been compulsory for all new entrants since 2014-15 and refresher classes were introduced from 2015-16. Personal development planning is built into programmes in various ways and careers advice is available from Student Services and from the University of Bolton Careers Service team. Interventions to support at-risk students during transition include extra maths and English classes, and sessions in research skills, time management and accessing financial support. Help is available to students who apply for the Disabled Students' Allowance.

2.35 Foundation degrees include work experience modules. Students source their own work placements and they and their mentors are provided with guidance prior to these taking place. Programme handbooks include short sections on personal development and employability. Validation reports show careful scrutiny of aspects relating to work placements.

2.36 The higher education welcome pack confirms the induction arrangements outlined above. These were revised to take into account feedback from the 2013-14 student representative action plan, which indicated that students were not aware of where to take queries relating to financial, emotional and additional support.

2.37 Internal student surveys show good levels of satisfaction with regard to course guidance/advice and library resources, and NSS scores for access to specialist resources have increased to 79 per cent. Students confirm positive developments in response to their feedback, including the provision of more computers, more rooms for drop-in study and improvements in relation to library borrowing.

2.38 The processes outlined would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.39 The review team discussed with members of HEPLC the ways in which this committee discharges its responsibilities. The team also explored a range of matters including arrangements for academic, pastoral and general support; inclusivity of provision; and with students, further discussion of resources.

2.40 Senior staff and Programme Leaders have differing views of the ways in which HEPLC supports a culture of continuous improvement. The former offered the roll-out of new assessment software, the impact of lesson observations and the creation of the Higher Education Forum as examples, while the latter outlined the general sharing of ideas (for example, support for academic writing during the transition from further to higher education), involvement of students and their views and the upward push of issues to HESMQ. Notwithstanding these differences, and the infrequent references in HESMQ minutes to

matters arising from HEPLC and its predecessor, the review team was satisfied that the HEPLC was working effectively within its terms of reference.

2.41 Students appreciate the creation of the University Centre and the ways in which this has developed a higher education ethos within the College, a view also endorsed by staff. In addition, students spoke positively about the quality of the support they receive from their tutors, identifying this almost unanimously as the best aspect of their learning experience at the College. The team therefore commends, as **good practice**, the high level of individualised pastoral and academic support, which enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.42 The self-efficacy survey generated a student-led action plan and identified areas for improvement, including further support to facilitate the transition from further to higher education and greater access to central careers advice to supplement that provided by tutors. The Additional Learner Support Team advises students with learning needs and provides support to those experiencing financial hardship.

2.43 The review team concludes that this Expectation is met, noting that student development is placed clearly at the heart of teaching and learning support at the College. The level of risk is judged as low, given the good practice observed and maintained since the last review.

**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**

2.44 The College sets out how it will interact with students at both programme level and as a collective higher education student body in its Higher Education Student Engagement Policy. The Head of Standards is responsible for the monitoring and implementation of the policy, with the Director of Higher Education overseeing the monitoring and continuous improvement of the student engagement process. At programme level, it is a requirement for every programme to have a student representative, who will attend both programme student-staff liaison committees (SSLCs) and College-wide higher education student representative meetings. Student representatives are elected by their peers for a term of one academic year and are provided with both training and a training booklet. Higher education student representative meetings provide a focus for institutional quality assurance and are chaired by the Director of Higher Education. In addition to programme-level student representatives, Lead and Deputy Lead Student Representative positions exist to facilitate communication with the College senior leadership team and for the postholders to attend the HESMQ. Internal surveys, including a self-efficacy survey and module evaluation forms, are also used as a way of gauging student opinion.

2.45 The College has established internal policies and procedures that would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.46 The team reviewed supporting documents as well as additional documentation. Information provided online through the College website was accessed and meetings were held with both staff and students, including student representatives, the Lead Student Representative, the Deputy Lead Student Representative and those who do not have a formal student representative position.

2.47 Student representatives are elected at the start of the academic year and receive training, which is indicated to be both interesting and useful. Additional training, to facilitate communication and negotiation skills, is provided through a half-day workshop midway through the year. Student representatives are also provided with a training booklet, which acts as a helpful tool for the representatives to conduct their responsibilities. The main method by which representatives feed back to the College is through the SSLC meetings, which are attended by the Higher Education Coordinator to ensure College-level oversight. Key information sets, such as the NSS and suggestion box comments, are shared with the student representatives, demonstrating a good level of College support to empower representatives to fulfil their role adequately. Representatives indicated positivity with the SSLC meetings and were able to cite a number of examples of issues that have been raised at the meetings and consequently responded to by the College. In addition, actions from student representative meetings are discussed at HESMQ, where a student representative is invited to discuss the actions, and these are then formed into a College-wide action plan. This action plan is disseminated to student representatives through email to close the feedback loop and indicate what steps are being taken in response to issues raised. The action plan is also fed back to the wider student body through the Student Learning Zone and electronically on the VLE. The College is further developing mechanisms to inform students of actions being taken in response to student feedback through the introduction of 'Could, Would, Should, Did', which is advertised on posters in the University Centre and through the VLE. The focus on ensuring the closure of the feedback loop is shown by students' ability to point to College-wide enhancements such as providing wireless access, a

pop-up café, noticeboards and recycling bins. Students also cited examples of responses to student feedback at programme level.

2.48 The introduction of an elected Lead Student Representative and Deputy Lead Student Representative is further evidence of the College's commitment to developing its student representative system and ensuring that students are empowered to lead on student engagement. The Lead Student Representative attends relevant parts of HESMQ, ensuring that there is student representation at the highest level and providing a direct link between the student body and the senior leadership team. Student representatives indicated that the introduction of the two lead roles is proving a helpful addition, which aids their own roles.

2.49 As well as providing feedback and suggesting enhancements, students are involved to a limited extent in the creation of new programmes. As part of programme validation, students look at the specification and provide a statement with regards to how many would be interested in the new courses. There are examples of programmes and units that have been produced in response to student need and feedback.

2.50 There is a strong commitment to measuring both student engagement and student satisfaction across the College, with an internal student survey tracking whether students feel able to put forward their views, whether their feedback is listened to and how comments are acted upon. Module evaluations are carried out by the College, with results fed back to Link Tutors at the relevant body. In addition, the introduction of the self-efficacy survey further demonstrates the commitment to student engagement. The responses to the survey were fully shared with student representatives, and a student-led plan, developed with the Director of Higher Education, has been produced as a result of the survey.

2.51 The comprehensive and systematic representation structures and support, which empower students to contribute to the enhancement of their educational experience, is **good practice**.

2.52 Overall, the review team concludes that the College takes deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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**

2.53 Assessments on higher education programmes at the College are ultimately the responsibility of the awarding body or awarding organisation, with the College having delegated responsibility for setting assignments that match the learning outcomes for Pearson courses. There are defined procedures with each of the partners for setting, marking and moderating assessments, for dealing with mitigating circumstances and for accreditation of prior learning. The processes at the College would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.54 The review team tested this Expectation by considering a wide range of documentation, including programme and module handbooks, external examiner reports and policy documents. The team also reviewed students' assessed work and examples of internal verification, viewed the VLE, and held meetings with staff and students of the College and a representative from the University of Bolton.

2.55 The College, in partnership with the awarding bodies, has robust practices to ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show that they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit. The College ensures that the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and aligned to the Quality Code. The College Higher Education Teaching and Learning Policy, yet to be formally approved, sets out the key principles of higher education assessment, noting that students will be able to monitor their progress and improve development through regular opportunities to reflect on feedback through dialogue with staff.

2.56 Academic policies and regulations of the three awarding bodies are outlined in the separate web-based academic policies and regulations for each partner. The regulations for the submission of assessed work are laid out in the College's assessment regulations for Pearson HNC and HND Awards. In addition, the College has a Malpractice Policy and a Mitigating Circumstances Policy that are on the VLE and understood by students. Students note that the College's view on plagiarism is made clear from the beginning of the academic year, when seminars are held to provide such information, along with rules, regulations and other useful information.

2.57 Learning outcomes for awarding body programmes are provided in the programme specifications and module handbooks. Pearson learning outcomes are also contained within the programme specification and appear on assignment briefs. The process of setting assessments for higher education programmes at the College is clearly documented and understood for the awarding bodies and the awarding organisation. Assessments for collaborative provision with the awarding bodies are coordinated across all partnerships delivering the same programme.

2.58 For Pearson programmes, the tutor responsible for the unit prepares the assessment, which is then subjected to the College's internal verification process.

Assessments and processes are then verified by Pearson through the external examiner and through the Pearson Annual Quality Review and Development Report.

2.59 The College has responded positively to the implementation of an action plan in response to a Pearson external examiner report that placed a block on the HND Beauty Management; this has now been removed. The College has used this as a positive learning experience and has ensured that staff delivering new Higher National programmes receive appropriate training from Pearson to ensure that assignment briefs are fit for purpose.

2.60 The QAA IQER report in November 2011 noted that the high quality of written and verbal feedback on assessed work enables students to prepare effectively for future assessments and this continues to be the case. External examiner reports are generally favourable in relation to assessment feedback, noting that feedback is helpful in directing students to good quality source materials, feed forward is used effectively, clear formative assessment opportunities are provided, and marking is consistent with judgements that are fully explained.

2.61 The 2014-15 NSS results show an upward trend in scores relating to assessment. The analysis indicated that 73 per cent of students were satisfied with assessment and feedback compared to 69 per cent the previous year. The 2015-16 internal student satisfaction results indicate that 90 per cent received detailed and positive feedback and 93 per cent agreed that feedback made reference to ways of improving academic standards such as referencing and language issues. Students in particular benefit from the detailed and constructive written feedback received within two to three weeks of submission, which is often supplemented by one-to-one verbal feedback.

2.62 The review team therefore commends as **good practice** the consistent, high quality and timely feedback on assessment, which facilitates the achievement of learning outcomes.

2.63 The College operates sound processes for the internal verification of assignment briefs for Higher National qualifications, for the second marking of student work and for moderation processes. Issues arising from the marking and moderation of work are discussed at team meetings and on some programmes tutors attend standardisation meetings at the relevant University. In addition, tutors have the opportunity through the Link Tutor and University of Bolton Programme Committees to contribute to minor modifications.

2.64 Student grades for Pearson programmes are ratified at assessment boards held by the College and at each university for university programmes. Boards for programmes validated by the University of Bolton are held at the College twice each year and chaired by a senior member of the Off Campus Division, with representatives attending from each of the programmes. Similarly, boards for programmes validated by the University of Cumbria and the University of Salford are held twice each year at the respective university, with College representatives attending from each of the relevant programmes.

2.65 For Pearson programmes the College operates an assessment board at the end of each semester, which makes recommendations for the grades achieved, confirms unit grades, identifies referral and deferral opportunities, makes recommendations for progression and notes any instances of misconduct or mitigating circumstances. The assessment board is chaired by the Director of Higher Education, with the Head of Standards, a nominee from the Exams department, the Higher Education Coordinator and the Programme Leaders in attendance. The external examiner is also invited. Minutes of the assessment boards are formally recorded.

2.66 The College has an ethos of continuous improvement and strives to respond to both student feedback and comments made by external examiners. The CIP notes improving academic skills as an area for development and that progress has been made. The College

also notes, through an analysis of external examiner comments, that there are a number of areas for improvement in relation to the design of assessments and improving academic skills. Assessment scheduling and loads are generally well managed and ensure that opportunities for the achievement of learning outcomes are maximised, and that students have the opportunity to balance workloads and meet assignment deadlines. The College responds to the needs of student groups, for example with regard to agreed assessment deadlines by avoiding busy work periods and allowing some flexibility in the format of the assessment.

2.67 Requests for accreditation of prior learning rarely occur. During the 2013-14 academic year there were no applications for the accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APEL) and there was one successful application for accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL). Any applications would be dealt with under the relevant university procedure or the College's Pearson Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and Process, according to the programme of study involved.

2.68 The College has robust arrangements to ensure that students are registered with the awarding body as soon as they formally start a programme, and these ensure that records of assessment against prior learning are maintained, certification claims are made according to standard procedures, and all relevant evidence is assessed before assessment decisions are confirmed.

2.69 The review team concludes that the College's processes for assessment are equitable, valid and reliable and recognise good practice in the consistent, high quality and timely feedback on assessment that facilitates the achievement of learning outcomes.

2.70 Therefore, 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**

2.71 Awarding partners appoint external examiners and lead on liaison. External examiner reports are sent to the Principal and Head of Standards and are distributed to the Director of Higher Education, relevant Programme Leaders and Curriculum Directors. External examiners' details are included in programme handbooks; their reports are posted on the VLE and students comment on these through the student representation process.

2.72 University partners are responsible for responding to reports and do so after consulting with the College's relevant Programme Leaders. Each programme compiles an external examiner action plan, which includes planned milestones. These are monitored throughout the year by the Higher Education Coordinator, who creates a CIP, noting actions from each report. HEPLC oversees progress made on actions; HESMQ also receives an analysis of the actions required and updates those achieved throughout the academic year in addition to signing off completed action plans at the June meeting.

2.73 External examiners' reports confirm the maintenance of threshold standards, comparability of standards and rigour in assessment. The majority indicate provision of sufficient evidence and timely notification of assessment boards.

2.74 The team noted a necessary action from the 2012-13 higher education self-assessment report for more robust tracking of external examiners' comments and timely completion of actions. Minutes of HEPLC confirm oversight of actions arising from reports. These processes were evident in HESMQ minutes at the start of each academic year but not at the end.

2.75 The processes outlined above would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.76 The team scrutinised the minutes of HESMQ and HEPLC, the individual programme-level action plans and the overarching summaries. The team also sampled a number of programme pages on the VLE. During meetings the team explored students' familiarity with reports. The team asked students how they were notified of late external examiner appointments and sought clarification of processes for the circulation of examiners' reports and action plans, and of HESMQ's role in the oversight of these.

2.77 Overarching summaries of issues identified in external examiners' reports were provided. The revised template, evident from 2014-15, replaces a commentary and allows for the identification of strengths and weaknesses. This will potentially encourage a more robust approach, although there is still scope for greater criticality. The team noted the comment 'no significant issues' against a programme that had been blocked that year by Pearson and the Lead Student Representative spoke eloquently at the final meeting of what had been learned from this experience. This supports the recommendation made in Expectation B8 for the College to ensure that self-assessment and quality improvement plans are rigorous at all levels and fully cognisant of key quality reference points.

2.78 The outline provided by staff with regard to the circulation of reports and creation of action plans confirmed the processes described by the College before the review. Oversight and realisation of action plans were described as resting with specific individuals, such as Programme Leaders and the Director of Higher Education, and no reference was made to the role of HESMQ within this cycle, though this Group's sign-off of action plans is indicated as a standing item for June meetings. Following further exploration of this, the College

provided additional evidence to illustrate HESMQ's oversight of external examiner action plans and this confirmed information that the review team had already collated, but did not show the end-of-year sign-off of external examiner action plans. The team therefore refers the College to the recommendation made in Expectation B8, that the role of this senior deliberative quality committee should be strengthened to ensure that higher education policies and procedures are effectively monitored and systematically reviewed.

2.79 Staff confirmed that details of late external examiner appointments would be fed through promptly to the VLE. While only a minority of the students met had read an external examiner report, the team confirmed the availability of these on the VLE and students explained that tutors make reference to these in classes.

2.80 The review team concludes that this Expectation is met and judge the risk as low, notwithstanding the recommendations referred to above, as oversight by key individuals is evident and there are examples of good levels of criticality in some individual programme action plans.

**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**

2.81 The College shares responsibility for programme monitoring and review with its awarding bodies and the awarding organisation. Programme Leaders produce programme self-assessment reviews (SARs) and a separate action plan in response to external examiner reports and matters arising from surveys and student feedback. From these a higher education SAR, now superseded by an annual higher education SAR Position Statement, provides an overview of key strengths and areas for development. The higher education SAR includes a CIP monitored throughout the year by the HESMQ. A summary of the higher education SAR is presented to a panel that includes the Principal, Deputy Principal, Head of Standards and governing body representative; from this event the CIP is agreed. Alongside the higher education Position Statement are Directorate SAR Position Statements, which evaluate both further and higher education and in some cases identify actions for the further development of higher education. The higher education self-assessment process is supported by external evaluation of performance and quality through awarding body partner reviews.

2.82 The College takes the programme review mechanisms of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation into account in the design of its own review processes. The processes at the College would therefore allow the Expectation to be met.

2.83 The review team tested this Expectation by considering internal review processes at all levels and external review reports, and through meetings with staff and students of the College and a representative from the University of Bolton.

2.84 The College has in place a structure of self-evaluation with a clear cycle and timescales for the completion of documentation. All programmes produce a programme-level SAR with actions for improvement. The quality of programme-level SARs is variable, with some having a minimal level of criticality and few actions for improvement. Programme-level SARs are validated by the Curriculum Director and form part of the analysis that feeds into the Directorate SAR Position Statement. In addition, course-level SARs for university programmes are forwarded to the relevant awarding body.

2.85 The 2012-13 higher education SAR was detailed and informative, but the change to a higher education Directorate Position Statement has resulted in a level of analysis that is less robust. The higher education SAR Position Statement is not linked to the Quality Code and the impact of this is that the CIP for 2014-15 has a limited range of actions, which do not embrace the full scope of Expectations in the Quality Code. There was no action plan for 2015-16 presented, although there were a number of additional actions noted at the end of the 2014-15 SAR Position Statement. A summary of the higher education SAR is presented to a panel that includes the Principal, Deputy Principal, Head of Standards and governing body representative. Although not formally part of its remit, the HESMQ undertakes some monitoring of the higher education CIP.

2.86 The five Curriculum Directors produce an annual Curriculum SAR Position Statement, which addresses both further and higher education business development and quality assurance issues. The inclusion of actions relating to higher education is variable, with two instances of specific higher education actions recorded in 2014-15. The ongoing

performance of the curriculum is monitored through monthly curriculum review meetings with the Principal and Deputy Principal. Both business-related and quality management issues are raised at these meetings, for example matters concerning student performance, teaching, learning and resources. This is the forum where failing programmes are discussed and there were no higher education courses in this position in 2015-16.

2.87 These findings support the recommendation in this section that the College should ensure that self-assessment and quality improvement plans are rigorous at all levels and fully cognisant of key quality reference points.

2.88 The Professional Support functions also produce self-assessment reports and action plans, which are informed by student feedback. These have directly improved the learning experience of higher education students, for example the provision of careers guidance sessions in the University Centre, the accommodation of higher education students' request for more quiet higher education study space, and consultation with students to plan the welcome day and freshers' fair.

2.89 The College has in place a structure of meetings that provide strategic oversight of higher education where the HESMQ plays a key role. This group performs three key functions: to oversee the strategic development of new collaborative higher education partnerships and curriculum developments; to receive reports and recommend appropriate action concerning the maintenance of academic standards, and to receive and discuss items raised through the student representative process. The College acknowledges that the minutes do not always capture the full extent of the discussion that takes place and there is a lack of evidence that key documents, such as the Learning and Teaching Policy, are formally approved or that external examiner action plans are formally signed off. The College recognises that the structure for higher education reporting may not be sustainable with further growth, noting in particular that while the focus on strategy is good, the focus on quality is picked up elsewhere. There are no specific higher education Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), but the College is in the process of establishing a governor subcommittee to focus on the performance of higher education.

2.90 The review team therefore **recommends** that the College should strengthen the role of the senior deliberative quality committee to ensure that higher education policies and procedures are effectively monitored and systematically reviewed.

2.91 The higher education Programme Leader meetings concentrate on operational issues including programme performance, actions emerging from external examiner reports and student feedback at both module and programme level. Academic staff report that these meetings provide a useful forum to respond to student feedback, review data and share good practice. The College has recently identified a need to create a Higher Education Forum as a more formal mechanism to share best practice, specifically in relation to teaching, learning and scholarly activity. Module tutors and self-assessment at programme level are also informed by module feedback, which is largely positive with regard to teaching and assessment.

2.92 Each programme awarded through the University of Bolton has a Programme Committee with overall responsibility for the management of the programme. The membership of this committee includes student representation, the University Link Tutor, the Programme Leader and the College's academic team. This forum provides an opportunity for staff to share good practice across the University partnership.

2.93 The review team concludes that the College's processes for programme monitoring and review enable the Expectation to be met. The team concludes that the College should strengthen the role of the senior deliberative committee and ensure that self-assessment and quality improvement plans are rigorous at all levels and fully cognisant of key quality

reference points. The associated level of risk is assessed as moderate, as quality assurance procedures are broadly adequate but have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

2.94 The College operates an internal Complaints Procedure, which incorporates an Appeals Policy. This procedure applies to Pearson provision. For programmes awarded by the University of Bolton, University of Cumbria and University of Salford, the respective university appeals policies apply. The appeals policies for all programmes are made available to students through the VLE and through the higher education website. The College's internal complaints procedure must be exhausted before a student studying on a Bolton, Cumbria or Salford University programme can escalate their complaint to the awarding body. Once the university complaints procedure is exhausted, the relevant university will issue the student with a Completion of Procedures letter, which enables the student to progress the complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) if desired. For students studying on Pearson programmes, once the complaints process has been exhausted, the Head of Standards is responsible for issuing the student with a Completion of Procedures letter directly. Complaints can be made either in writing or through a feedback form, initially to the Head of Standards, but then to the Deputy Principal and progressing to the Principal if deemed necessary by the complainant. The College has established internal policies and procedures that would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.95 The review team reviewed the relevant sections of supporting documents as well as additional documentation. Information provided online through the College website was accessed and meetings were held with both students and staff.

2.96 The College has had no incidences of students making academic appeals so it has been difficult to test the veracity of the appeals processes. It is clear, however, that students are made aware of the procedures through a number of channels. Complaints and appeals are highlighted during student induction for all programmes at a University Centre seminar and can also be found in student handbooks with a clear location on the 'Course Info' page on the VLE. In addition, tutors are used as a helpful reference point for students when seeking information and guidance about both the appeals and complaints procedures.

2.97 Regarding complaints, the College's internal complaints pro forma for tracking complaints through the stages of the internal process is good and illustrative of a well designed process. Staff encourage informal complaints to be made first, which minimises the number of complaints that are taken to the formal stage of the procedure.

2.98 The HESMQ is responsible for approving the Complaints Policy. It is not clear how the College monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of these procedures, particularly in terms of reflecting on the outcomes for enhancement purposes. It is unclear whether HESMQ is responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the Complaints Policy, and if so, how exactly, and how often, this happens.

2.99 Overall, the review team concludes that the College has procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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**

2.100 Agreements with university partners indicate that the College is responsible for managing relationships with partner organisations, including work placement providers. However, while work placement is integral to programme design, aims and objectives, there is no delegation of management of academic standards or assessment responsibilities to third parties by the College. Students are responsible for organising their own placements, with one exception: the BSc International Tourism Management, where placements abroad are sourced through the Leonardo Mobility project. The College has arrangements in place that would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.101 The team explored matters relating to work placements in meetings with students, staff and employers.

2.102 Students did not report any difficulties with the work placement element of their studies and appreciate that their responsibility for sourcing their own placements was made clear before they started their studies. They explained that tutors are at hand to deal with problems, if these should arise. The team met with two employers, one of whom had recently become involved in higher education work placements, and so was not able to gain a full picture of the operation of these from the employers' perspective. However, the experience of this employer is very positive, and an interesting example of the student's positive contribution to the business was provided. Staff are enthusiastic about the ease of communication that the new VLE now facilitates, particularly with students who are less frequently present in College due to their work and work placement commitments.

2.103 The team was informed that the College has links with more than 700 employers, although only two were able to meet the team and therefore the range of views was limited. The team was advised by senior staff of the difficulty of getting employers to attend meetings at the College. The College had made provision for more employers to be available through telephone conversations, which were not conducted due to time constraints. The College does, however, provide clear and extensive information to all parties involved in work-based learning through student, mentor and employer handbooks, which outline individual responsibilities and include a template of the stakeholder agreement.

2.104 The team concludes that this Expectation is met, and the risk is low given the current small number of higher education students.

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

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

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

### **Findings**

2.105 The College has no research degree provision, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

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

2.106 In determining its judgement on the quality of student learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is considered low in all Expectations, apart from Expectation B8 where the review team considers there to be a moderate risk to the quality of learning opportunities. Although quality assurance procedures are broadly adequate within Expectation B8, there are some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied. The review team identifies five areas of good practice in Expectations B2, B3, B4, B5 and B6; two recommendations for action pertaining to Expectation B8, which are linked with Expectation B3; and two affirmations in Expectation B3 and Enhancement.

2.107 The College offers considerable support for students. In particular, the flexibility and personalised level of support afforded through the admissions process is recognised as good practice for the positive impact this has on the student experience at the initial stages of engagement with the College. Support for students continues throughout their learning journey. The review team notes as good practice the high level of individualised pastoral and academic support, which enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential and the consistent, high quality and timely feedback on assessment, which facilitates the achievement of learning outcomes. The review team also recognises as good practice the personalised and collaborative platform provided by the VLE, which gives students greater ownership of their learning experience. The College demonstrates its commitment to developing its student representative system and ensuring that students are empowered to lead on student engagement. The review team therefore notes as good practice the comprehensive and systematic representation structures that empower students to contribute to the enhancement of their educational experience.

2.108 The College has in place a structure of self-evaluation with a clear cycle and timescales for the completion of documentation. All programmes produce a programme-level self-assessment report with actions for improvement; however, the quality of these is variable, with some having a minimal level of criticality and few actions for improvement. The reports form part of the analysis that feeds into the Directorate SAR Position Statement. The Curriculum Directors produce an annual Curriculum SAR Position Statement which addresses both further and higher education business development and quality assurance issues. The inclusion of actions relating to higher education is variable. The review team notes that while the 2012-13 higher education SAR was detailed and informative, the change to a higher education Directorate Position Statement has resulted in a level of analysis that is less robust and the document is not linked to the Quality Code. The impact of this is that the CIP for 2014-15 has a limited range of actions which do not embrace the full scope of Expectations in the Quality Code. There was no action plan for 2015-16 presented, although there were a number of additional actions noted at the end of the 2014-15 SAR Position Statement. The team therefore recommends that the College should ensure that self-assessment and quality improvement plans are rigorous at all levels and fully cognisant of key quality reference points (Expectations B8 and B3).

2.109 The College has in place a structure of meetings that provide strategic oversight of higher education where the HESMQ plays a key role. The team noted only one standing management report relating to teaching and learning in the year's cycle for this Group. The College acknowledges that the minutes of these meetings do not always capture the full extent of the discussion that takes place and there is a lack of evidence that key documents, such as the Learning and Teaching Policy, are formally approved or that external examiner action plans are formally signed off. In addition, the College recognises that the structure for

higher education reporting may not be sustainable with further growth, noting in particular that while the focus on strategy is good, the focus on quality is picked up elsewhere. It is therefore recommended that the College strengthens the role of the senior deliberative quality committee to ensure that higher education policies and procedures are effectively monitored and systematically reviewed.

2.110 The review team notes that the new process for lesson observations is settling down and some staff were able to speak about this from first-hand experience. All staff were enthusiastic about the role of the new Learning Improvement Leaders in observations and their input to shaping the planned Higher Education Forum, as well as the additional peer support it is envisaged that this will provide. The review team therefore affirms the steps being taken to improve and enhance the lesson observation process and the role of Learning Improvement Leaders in the ongoing support and development of staff.

2.111 Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

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

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

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

##### **Findings**

3.1 The College's primary source of information is through its VLE and dedicated higher education website, with the VLE being used by staff and students, and the higher education website primarily by prospective students. In addition, there is a physical College higher education prospectus, which is also made available online. Prior to its publication, approval is sought from the awarding bodies to ensure that published information is correct. The website is maintained by the marketing department, with the Director of Higher Education working with Programme Leaders to ensure that programme-level information is current and correct. Programme information and marketing materials must also be approved by the awarding bodies. Information on fees, financial and other student support is available on the higher education website to support and advise prospective students. Programme specifications are also made available to prospective students on some programme pages. Current students receive an induction, which includes an introductory presentation from the Director of Higher Education, the distribution of programme handbooks and a welcome pack which provides students with important information on accommodation, College facilities, term dates, key contacts and student representation information.

3.2 The College has established internal policies and procedures that would enable the Expectation to be met.

3.3 The review team reviewed the relevant sections of supporting documents as well as additional documentation. Information provided online through the College website and VLE was accessed and meetings were held with both students and staff. There was also a demonstration of the VLE.

3.4 Students indicated that the higher education website is easy to use, provides students with a great deal of information and is up to date and accurate. The information on the website is clear and developed, with information on tuition fees and student finance aiding prospective students in their decisions regarding higher education. The decision to introduce a freshers' week and a welcome pack is a good one and has been positively received by students.

3.5 The VLE is a good example of digital communication. It is constantly and consistently updated by staff, so students are able to access important information from home or from a personal device. This has further aided the student experience by providing a user-friendly interface, the introduction of a mobile app and the ability for students to interact with one another and request workshops. The Student Portal, in particular, which allows students to view personalised information such as attendance records and grades, is an innovative way to improve the student learning experience and is well used by students. Overall, the VLE provides an excellent collaborative platform which allows students to continue their academic discourse outside of the classroom. This is recognised as good practice in Expectation B3, as the VLE gives students greater ownership of their learning experience.

3.6 Testing of the availability of programme specifications on the higher education website displayed a degree of inconsistency, with not all of the individual programme pages featuring a link to the programme specification. However, the College is in the process of correcting this and has a plan to update all of the individual pages to ensure that all of the programme specifications are available online to prospective students. In addition, programme handbooks show a considerable degree of inconsistency, with some containing more relevant information than others. The College recognises this and is adopting a standard template for all programmes in 2015-16. The standard template will be the programme handbook used for the BA Professional Development Early Years (Top-Up), which will provide a good basis for all future programme handbooks. Individual module guides, on the whole, are consistent and contain the required information.

3.7 The College's processes for ensuring the accuracy and consistency of information are developed and well articulated. Overall, the review team concludes that the College produces information for its intended audiences about higher education that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

3.8 In determining its judgement on the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team considers that the Expectation in this area is met and that the risk to student learning opportunities is low. There are no recommendations, affirmations or areas of good practice in this area, although there are links to good practice in Expectation B3 in relation to the VLE.

3.9 The College produces information through a range of mechanisms and media that is generally sound and trustworthy. Good use is made of the website by students and prospective students and information on the website is comprehensive, with information on tuition fees and student finance aiding prospective students in their decisions regarding higher education. The VLE provides a user-friendly interface which is regularly updated by staff and which enables students to access important information from home or a personal device. Students can view personalised information such as attendance records and grades, which improves engagement and the student learning experience.

3.10 The team notes that the availability of programme specifications on the higher education website displays a degree of inconsistency, with not all of the individual programme pages featuring a link to the programme specification. Programme handbooks also show some inconsistencies, with some containing more relevant information than others. The College recognises these issues and has a plan to update all individual pages on the website to ensure that all programme specifications are available online, and is adopting a standard programme handbook template for all programmes in 2015-16.

3.11 Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College does not have a clearly articulated enhancement strategy, but there is a range of activity contributing to continuous improvement and investment in enhancing the higher education student experience. The senior leadership team at the College recognises that quality improvement is a continuous, ongoing process that takes account of the views of students, employers, peers and other stakeholders. The processes at the College would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.2 The review team tested this Expectation by examining a wide range of documentation including strategy and policy documents, committee minutes, external examiner reports and student representative minutes and action plans. The team also held meetings with staff, students and employers.

4.3 There is limited reference to enhancement within the higher education strategy and self-assessment documentation and the College is not able to show that the evaluation of the enhancement of student learning opportunities is taking place at a strategic level. There is an acknowledgement that through empowerment of students, strategic initiatives are driven from the bottom up. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College ensures that initiatives and activities are evaluated at a strategic level to inform the enhancement of higher education.

4.4 Nevertheless, there is strong evidence of enhancement initiatives being implemented and significant investment that has enhanced the student learning experience. The College has invested £4.5 million in a University Centre which was designed in consultation with students and which includes a Social Learning Zone, IT facilities and specialist resources and food service. This has enabled the College to start the process of establishing, in partnership with the student body, a higher education ethos that supports student achievement. The student representatives are clear that this investment has had a positive experience on their learning and enjoyment of their higher education experience. Students are able to outline College-wide enhancements, such as wireless access within the building, a pop-up café, noticeboards and recycling bins, which have been instigated in response to student feedback.

4.5 The College Principal and senior staff are committed to giving students a positive experience and pride themselves on being approachable and able to respond quickly. The College has demonstrated a senior-level commitment to enhancing mechanisms to promote the higher education student voice. Planned improvements to student representation are documented in the Student Engagement Policy and aim to create a sense of community that helps to develop students' skills and promote wellbeing.

4.6 The student representative role description and role of the Lead Student Representative are formalised in the representative training booklet. To facilitate discussions, student representatives are also provided with performance data, including non-continuation and achievement rates and NSS and internal student satisfaction results. Additional training for student representatives, including communications and negotiation skills, took place in 2015. This was well received, with some students noting that it provided transferable skills for their programme and for life in general.

4.7 The student representatives have embraced their role, holding regular meetings and being proactive in developing action plans to improve the student experience. One example of the College being proactive is the self-efficacy survey, which was developed through the European Community Leonardo project and which has empowered the student representatives to drive forward improvements. The four areas identified by the student representatives are improved access to the College careers advice service; further support in making the transition from Level 3 to 4, and similarly to Level 5 and 6; support to reflect upon assessment feedback; and establishing a learning resource facility in the University Centre.

4.8 Students note that College staff listen to their views on enhancement through student representative meetings, a University Centre suggestion box and the HESMQ, where most meetings are attended by the Lead Student Representative. There is a strong sense that senior managers listen to the student voice and will support bottom-up initiatives. Examples include changing the times of maths sessions for engineering students; offering GCSE Maths, English and Science to higher education students; improving access to University of Bolton resources; and changing the number of books that can be borrowed from the College library. Actions taken are branded 'Could, Would, Should, Did' and are widely promoted through the VLE and on posters around the University Centre.

4.9 In 2015 the College launched a new virtual learning platform for higher education. This has improved the visual presentation, ease of use, functionality and consistency of information made available to students. There is evidence, even at this early stage of introduction, that it has enabled students to take greater ownership of their learning experience. Student representatives were consulted at the development stage and one aspect of functionality that was influenced, and which is appreciated by students, is that it can be accessed through personal handheld devices.

4.10 The new VLE, like the previous one, allows students to access their course information and learning materials. There are also clear links to key documentation including policies and procedures, for example the Mitigating Circumstances Policy, assessment regulations, external examiner reports and a direct link to the library catalogue, allowing students to access e-books and other electronic sources. In addition, the VLE allows students to see their cumulative attendance and, for some programmes, their grade profile and can more effectively support group discussions and two-way communication. The student representatives noted one example where students were able to alert the tutor to their need for an additional workshop, and similarly tutors can send students reminders, for example in relation to work placement visits.

4.11 The College has recently identified the need to create a Higher Education Forum as a more formal mechanism to share best practice, specifically in relation to teaching, learning and scholarly activity. There is already evidence that the Programme Leaders' Forum provides a useful mechanism to share good practice, for example in sharing tools to promote accurate referencing, and this new initiative moves this forward. The College notes that the Higher Education Forum will in particular support the ongoing development of new tutors and will also be helpful in disseminating information following university conferences. Some higher education tutors are already actively participating in, and sharing knowledge from, projects supported by the Expansive Education Network, for example in relation to academic support. The review team regards the creation of a Higher Education Forum as a positive initiative and **affirms** the work being undertaken to establish the Higher Education Forum to formalise the dissemination of good practice.

4.12 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. Although there is a lack of a clearly articulated enhancement strategy or evidence that enhancement is evaluated at a strategic level, the College has demonstrated that enhancements have taken place and as a

result student learning opportunities have improved. The associated level of risk is assessed as moderate due to some weaknesses identified in the operation of the College's governance structure.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

4.13 In determining its judgement on the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team considers that the Expectation in this area is met but that the risk to student learning opportunities is moderate.

4.14 The College does not have a clearly articulated enhancement strategy, nor does it show that enhancement is evaluated at a strategic level. It is therefore recommended that the College ensures that initiatives and activities are evaluated at a strategic level to inform the enhancement of higher education.

4.15 However, there is a strong commitment to continuous improvement and investment to enhance the higher education student experience. This is evidenced by the new University Centre, the new VLE, improving systems to access and act upon the student voice, and the development of the Higher Education Forum to assist in the dissemination of information and good practice while supporting the development of new tutors. The review team therefore affirms the work being undertaken to establish the Higher Education Forum to formalise the dissemination of good practice.

4.16 Overall, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 A strategic aim of the College is to create a higher education portfolio that is relevant to the needs of the community and employers, and part of the HESMQ's role is to ensure that higher education programmes meet local and sub-regional priorities. The needs analysis, a planning document that is updated annually, explores a range of national, regional and sub-regional issues that impact on partnerships, employers, employment and funding. This recognises the importance of providing students with 'work-ready' skills to enhance their employability, and identifies skills that are lacking or need improvement among job applicants.

5.2 Student employability is promoted at a strategic level through the Bury Employment and Skills Task Group, a subgroup of the Bury Economic Partnership. This group brings together a range of agencies involved in the planning and delivery of learning and employment opportunities and is tasked with encouraging the development of skills that will meet the economic needs of the Bury and Greater Manchester region. Examples of qualifications developed recently to provide vocational learning experiences include higher apprenticeships in Computing and Engineering, both of which were developed in conjunction with the Greater Manchester Local Enterprise Partnership.

5.3 Initially, the College provides information to students on personal development and employability through programme handbooks. The quality of information in these is variable, the most effective emphasising transferable skills and the importance of self-reflection in securing and maintaining employment. In practice, it is the close links that exist between tutors and employers, the tutors' communication of their knowledge and professional practice to students, and the students' experience of work placements and real-world learning that allow employability to be an integral part of curriculum design, teaching and assessment.

5.4 Programme teams maintain close links with employers through employer forums, and some use these to seek input to programme design. Several programmes invite employers as guest speakers. Foundation degree programmes include work experience modules and students have further opportunities to perform or coach in community settings, visit arts organisations and take part in external events to develop their experience of real-world learning. The tutorial system and small cohort sizes enable a bespoke approach to the support and development of individuals, and, in a number of programmes, assessment is tailored around work scenarios including, where practicable, the student's own workplace.

5.5 Students confirm the College's good connections with employers and the strong focus on employability within the curriculum. They also provided examples of how their programmes were preparing them for future employment. There is a desire among the student body, arising from the self-efficacy survey, for a further layer of careers advice to supplement that provided by tutors, which the College has acknowledged. Notwithstanding this, the 2013-14 Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey indicated that 92 per cent of graduates had progressed into employment or onto other higher education programmes.

## Glossary

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

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