

# Higher Education Review of Chichester College

May 2014

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Chichester College. The review took place from 19 to 22 May 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Kevin Kendall
- Miss Claire Morgan
- Mr Ken Harris (student reviewer).

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

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

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement, and Student Employability,<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/qualitycode](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode).

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106).

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

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review).

## Amended judgements July 2015

### Introduction

In May 2014, Chichester College underwent a Higher Education Review, which resulted in 'meets UK expectations judgements for the threshold maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisations, and the quality of the information produced about its provision. It also received judgements of 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' for the quality of student learning opportunities and the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

Negative judgements are subject to a formal follow-up by QAA, which involves the monitoring of an action plan produced by the College in response to the report findings.

The College published an action plan in November 2014 describing how it intended to address the recommendations, affirmations and good practice identified in the review, and has been working since that time to demonstrate how it has implemented that plan.

The follow-up process included three progress updates and culminated in the review team's scrutiny of the College's progress reports and the supporting documentary evidence, along with a one-day visit on 11 June 2015 with two reviewers. During this visit the team met staff and students to discuss progress and triangulate the evidence base received over the preceding months.

The visit confirmed that the recommendation and affirmations relating to the quality of learning opportunities and enhancement judgements had been successfully addressed and the good practice appropriately disseminated.

### QAA Board decision and amended judgements

The team concluded that the College had made sufficient progress to recommend that the judgements be amended. The QAA Board accepted the team's recommendation and the judgements are now formally amended. The College's judgements are now as follows.

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

The review can be considered to be signed off as complete.

### Findings from the follow-up process

The team found that the College had made progress against the recommendations, affirmations and features of good practice as follows.

#### Recommendation - Expectation B5

At the time of the follow-up visit the College had put in place student representation, in the form of the Vice-President and Student Executives, on the main structures for higher education: the Higher Education Board, Higher Education Committee and Higher Education Curriculum Planning Committee. There continues to be student representation as detailed in the previous review on Staff-Student Liaison Committees, Course Representative Meetings and at the Higher Education Student Conference. There is no representation on Higher Education Management Meetings, Finance, Attendance, Retention, Achievement and

Quality (FARAQ) meetings, the Equality, Diversity and Wellbeing Committee or the Widening Participation Committee.

Recommendation - Expectation B9

The College has developed a new Assessment Policy, Academic Appeals Procedure and Higher Education Complaints Procedure, all of which are set out in the Student Handbook. The Academic Appeals Procedure outlines the three criteria for academic appeal: circumstances affecting the performance of the candidate which the assessor or internal verifier were unaware of; procedural irregularities in the conduct of the assessment (including administrative error); and positive evidence of prejudice, bias or inadequate assessment.

Recommendation - Expectations Information and B2

The College has produced a Higher Education Handbook which details the general information of which all higher education students need to be aware. The College has also put in place the production of programme handbooks which follow a generic format and contain specific programme information. These were signed off by the Higher Education Board following feedback from students. Individual programme handbooks are approved at specific validation meetings before being published for students.

Recommendation - Expectations A4 and B8

The College introduced a revised self-evaluation template aligned to relevant higher education criteria for 2013-14 which was used at programme level. The Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document 2013-14 evaluates the provision against the Expectations of the Quality Code. The College produced an Annual Report of the self-evaluation and quality improvement process in December 2014 and for 2014-15 the Higher Education Course Review and Evaluation and Higher Education Self-Assessment Report templates have been revised so that the College's strategic objectives form part of the evaluation.

Recommendation - Expectation B2

Since the Higher Education Review, the College has undertaken an admissions mapping exercise, put new reporting structures in place and revised the Higher Education Recruitment, Selection and Admissions policy. The new policy is thorough and details the processes, responsibilities and accountability at each stage. It was discussed and agreed through the Higher Education Board and informed by students at Student Voice meetings. Information gathered from a questionnaire at the Higher Education Student Voice Conference was less useful as there was not a specific question on the admissions process.

Recommendation - Expectation B10

Since the review, the College has developed a new Work Readiness Policy for Higher Education Learners, which covers all the classifications of work experience, and a checklist for structures such as for briefing, health and safety or employer feedback. Most of these duties fall on course leaders and the Positive about Future careers service. There is a work-experience placement form, pre-departure checklist, and follow up. There is a work experience log book for students and student handbooks contain details of classification of different types of work experience. Work experience is now reviewed at a number of levels: at programme level by programme tutors in annual review; feedback from the Higher Education Survey and Student Voice discussion; and an employer-led Forum.

Recommendation - Expectation B6

The College has put in place a system of moderating assessment schedules. Feedback is taken from students at Staff Student Liaison Committees and a summary report produced. The Higher Education Board receives information on the timeliness of end-of-module feedback through the Staff Student Liaison Committee.

Recommendation - Expectations B2, B4, Information and Enhancement

The College has revised and agreed the higher education strategic aims at the Higher Education Board. The higher education deliberative structures have also been revised, terms of reference put in place and committees have started to meet regularly. A new system of quality cycle management has also been introduced. The Higher Education Strategy has been linked to agenda items in the committee structure where appropriate. The Higher Education Committee and Higher Education Board annually review the key performance indicators to inform the quality improvement plan.

Recommendation - Enhancement

Since the review, the higher education deliberative structures have been clearly articulated with terms of reference. The Higher Education Board has responsibility for contributing to the development and implementation of the College's Higher Education Strategy. There is a new Higher Education Strategy though this will be superseded by four clear strategic objectives. Priorities include widening participation, vocational progression, employer engagement and employability. There is also a new draft Learning and Teaching Strategy.

Recommendation - Expectation B3

During the spring term 2015, the College conducted a series of drop-in observations for all staff involved in higher education teaching with observations being conducted by senior staff, professional coaching staff and trained student reviewers. Emerging themes provided the structure for discussions and developments at Higher Education Committee and facilitated the provision of continuing professional development. The new template for this activity has been modelled on the UK Professional Standards Framework and the scheme is due for review at end of 2014-15. The College is developing a higher education-specific Licence to Teach for its staff. The draft Higher Education Teaching and Learning Strategy makes an explicit commitment to higher education staff development and teaching excellence.

Affirmation - Expectation B6

The College expects all programmes to use plagiarism-detection software for at least one assessment but currently, despite staff training events, there continues to be variation in its use. This ranges from programmes where students submit all their assessments through the software to those with limited use. However, the College is aware of this and is making progress towards ensuring that programme teams implement the policy. A survey on the use of plagiarism-detection software was completed in early April but as yet the results are unknown.

Good practice - Expectation B4

The College has continued to build on the good practice in this area and delivered another Get Aware event in 2014-15. Many assignments continue to be developed in partnership with employers or closely linked to employment and the students have also given feedback on areas for improvement following the Higher Education Employer Experience event on 7 October 2014. Staff also continue to have employer involvement through development days and visits.

Good practice - Expectation B5

The student representation system has been further developed to ensure that students now have the opportunity to be represented on key governance committees in the College, including the Higher Education Board and Higher Education Committee. The Student President is now also a higher education student at the College and has attended deliberative structure meetings as the student executive member. The role of the Student President remains an integral part of the student voice and representation activity.

Good practice - Expectation B8

The College has revised its higher education quality cycle monitoring and its Higher Education Strategy. This includes the 2014-15 Higher Education Course Review and Evaluation and Higher Education Self-Evaluation templates which now align with the Higher Education Strategic Aims and inform improvements to quality and enhancement as stated in the Quality Code. In addition, the key higher education objectives are clearly aligned and discussed via the higher education deliberative structures.

The changes the College has made to the quality assurance processes and templates further facilitate the ability to ensure actions arising from quality assurance processes are addressed effectively and in a timely manner. The tracking of actions through the review annual cycle of monitoring has been enhanced with its alignment to a revised higher education quality cycle. The effectiveness of changes to the Higher Education Strategy is being monitored by the Higher Education Board.

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Chichester College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

### Good practice

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

- The practice that offers every student the opportunity to develop their professional potential through work-related learning (Expectation B4).
- The student representation system and the role of the Students' Union President in proactively obtaining learner feedback (Expectation B5).
- The quality improvement systems in place to assure actions arising from quality assurance processes are addressed effectively in a timely manner (Expectation B8).

### Recommendations

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

By October 2014:

- provide opportunity for student representation on all higher education deliberative structures (Expectation B5)
- ensure the appeals policies and procedures are applied appropriately, consistently and in accordance with the requirements of the degree-awarding body or awarding organisation (Expectation B9)
- put in place a system of oversight that ensures handbooks are fit-for-purpose and programme information is accurate (Expectations C and B2).

By December 2014:

- ensure criteria used for course and annual review are appropriate for higher education and aligned to the Higher Education Strategy (Expectations A4 and B8)
- further develop the Higher Education Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy to establish management responsibility and oversight of admissions at College level and to consistently apply the policy (Expectation B2)
- formalise a strategic and operational framework that monitors and reviews all work experience regardless of length or location (Expectation B10)
- ensure students receive timely feedback on their performance across all provision (Expectation B6)

- raise awareness of and embed the Higher Education Strategy (Enhancement and Expectations B2, B4 and C)
- ensure the higher education deliberative structures are effective in the setting, implementing and monitoring of strategic objectives designed to improve the quality of higher level learning opportunities (Enhancement).

By June 2015:

- provide formal opportunities for employers to participate in quality assurance processes (Expectation A5)
- ensure mechanisms to develop tutors are appropriate to support higher education learning opportunities and teaching practices (Expectation B3).

### **Affirmation of action being taken**

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

- The implementation of electronic submission and anti-plagiarism software (Expectation B6).

### **Theme: Student Employability**

Overall, employability is embedded across Chichester College's (the College) academic curriculum and through additional activities. Employability and raising student aspirations is an ethos at the College. The College provides an opportunity for each student to undertake work-related or work-based learning and has strong links with local employers. Employability is built in to all courses and is specifically addressed in the electronic course review and evaluation. The College actively seeks feedback from local employers to ensure the employability skills taught are current and relevant. There is evidence of successful progression to vocationally relevant employment.

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

### **About Chichester College**

Chichester College is a large general further education college with over 17,000 learners and currently teaches 321 higher education students. Higher education provision offered by the College is regarded as vital to encourage the progression of students from further education into higher level study and to provide skilled workers required by local and regional employers. The College's Strategic Plan 2013-16 commits it to develop vocational higher education where appropriate. The Higher Education Strategy identifies key drivers and aims. The vision is that all curriculum areas where there is potential to deliver higher education should develop programmes where there is an identified demand from employers and students.

The Principal, Deputy Principal and Assistant Principal Quality have all come into post since the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) Summative Review in 2010. The governance of higher education within the College has been expanded and developed. Higher education is now overseen by the Deputy Principal and led by the Assistant Principal Enterprise and Adults. The Quality Manager operates the quality systems for BTEC Higher Nationals and qualifications delivered in partnership with degree-awarding bodies.

The Academic Studies Manager oversees the operational management of the higher education provision. A revised committee structure is in place to manage higher education. The College offers BTEC Higher Nationals through Pearson and for other programmes has partnership agreements with four degree-awarding bodies: University of Bath, University of Chichester, University of Portsmouth and University of Sussex. Partnerships with the University of Bath and Brighton Film School (awarding Pearson Higher Nationals) have been agreed enabling new courses to be developed which would otherwise be beyond the College's resources.

The College established two new foundation degrees in 2011 validated by the University of Bath as part of their collaborative partnerships programme (FdA Creative Digital Media and FdSc Engineering Systems). However, as a result of changes to policy these courses are in run out and have been replaced by HND programmes in Graphic Design and General Engineering which recruited the first cohorts in September 2013. In September 2012 the College launched a new HNC/D in Creative Media (film making) in partnership with the Brighton Film School. Three cohorts of this programme have been recruited to date. An HND in Performing Arts (Jazz) was launched in January 2013. A new part-time HNC in Health and Social Care was launched in September 2013.

As the College entered the new academic year, the key challenge facing higher education provision was an effective mechanism to capture student voice. A number of actions were undertaken, initiatives introduced and mechanisms put in place to address this challenge. Another challenge the College identified was progression from level 3 to higher education. An emphasis on scholarly and professional activity has been undertaken over the past two academic years to better distinguish the learning needs of level 4 and level 5 learners. A third challenge identified by the College is the limitations of growing given the constraints of student number control. Information, advice and guidance is given to level 3 students by tutors and course leaders to ensure that their higher education decisions are well informed. This enables students who are keen to stay in the Chichester area to progress to higher education at the College.

The IQER Summative Review identified six areas of good practice, three advisable actions and five desirable actions. The College has produced a summary report of external examiner reports and does now share the external examiner reports with students. There are systems in place to address issues arising from external examiner reports. A number of policies and procedures were reviewed in 2013. Not all policies are fully appropriate and internally consistent. Timeliness of feedback on assessment continues to be an area the College is addressing. There is further work to be done on systematically monitoring, collating and then taking account of staff development during individual staff appraisal.

## Explanation of the findings about Chichester College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

# 1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

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

**Quality Code, Chapter A1: The national level**

## Findings

1.1 The degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation are responsible for the setting and maintenance of threshold standards, while the College is responsible for the maintenance, delivery and assessment, where relevant, of those threshold standards in line with the FHEQ. For Pearson programmes, the College provides guidance on the production and review of programme specifications, which include reference to levels in the FHEQ. It is the role of external examiners to confirm assessment standards against external reference points.

1.2 Benchmarking and reference to levels in the FHEQ are included in the College's programme design and approval mechanisms. The Review of Programme Specifications Policy states that programme specifications should be reviewed and amended on an annual basis and these changes approved through the Higher Education Committee.

1.3 The team reviewed validation documentation evidence to determine how levels in the FHEQ are built into new programme design. The review team examined examples of College programme specifications to check that appropriate referencing is made to the FHEQ. External examiner feedback was scrutinised including sections on Management of Academic Standards and Effectiveness of Assessment Instruments. Meetings were held with academic staff at all levels to ensure understanding of processes.

1.4 The review team found that programme specifications, though varied in structure according to degree-awarding body or awarding organisation, do include reference to levels in the FHEQ. Standards are appropriate for Higher National level as is the volume of study. Academic staff are aware to varying levels of the application of the correct level in programme design and assessment, and are less familiar with the external framework of the FHEQ.

1.5 Policies, procedures and documentation adequately reference levels in the FHEQ in theory and in practice and external examiners confirm the appropriate level of standards of assessment and achievements. Therefore, the review team concludes that the College successfully meets Expectation A1 in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level**

**Findings**

1.6 Programmes are designed by degree-awarding bodies and for Pearson programmes the College produces guidance on the production of programme specifications. All Pearson programmes are based on National Occupational Standards which are referenced in programme specifications. There are no professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements for the programmes offered by the College. External examiners' report templates include appropriateness of subject benchmark statements. The College sets out minimum requirements for programme specifications which include the alignment of programme content and learning outcomes set against external subject benchmark statements. In theory, the College's processes and guidance take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

1.7 The review team considered programme specifications, course handbooks, module information and external examiner reports to test whether College programmes take relevant account of subject and qualification benchmark statements. Examples of new course proposals were reviewed to validate the application of the College's processes on the use of subject benchmark statements in programme design. The review team also met with academic staff at all levels.

1.8 The review team found reference to subject and qualification benchmark statements in programme specifications and course proposal templates. In meetings, academic staff awareness of subject benchmark statements was variable. A review of external examiners' reports support the appropriateness of subject benchmarks statements.

1.9 Overall, the review team concludes that the higher education programmes offered at the College take relevant account of subject and qualification benchmark statements and the College successfully meets Expectation A2 in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: The programme level**

**Findings**

1.10 Aims, intended learning outcomes and learner achievement are detailed in programme specifications which are issued to students. Programme specifications are monitored, reviewed and updated on a regular basis, as set out in the College guidance on programme specification. This guidance details annual review, inclusion of students in the review and oversight by Higher Education Committee.

1.11 In template form, the programme specifications if current, reviewed, updated regularly and available to students would meet this expectation.

1.12 The review team examined programme specifications and course handbooks to determine where and how information on aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievement is made available. Higher Education Board, Higher Education Committee and Higher Education Curriculum Planning Sub Group minutes were also reviewed. The review team confirmed their findings in meetings with academic staff and students.

1.13 The team found programme specifications are available to students and applicants via the website and the virtual learning environment. Programme specifications reviewed by the team include aims and learning outcomes and skills acquired but have varying degrees of detail, depending on awarding body or organisation. Not all course handbooks include programme specifications though it is noted that frameworks for course handbooks are often determined by the degree-awarding bodies. The recently introduced Higher Education Curriculum Planning Sub Group approves new programme specifications while the Higher Education Committee manages existing programme specifications, although processes are not yet fully operationalised.

1.14 Overall, the College makes available to students the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements of its programmes through programme specifications via a number of mechanisms. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A3 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter A4: Approval and review**

**Findings**

1.15 For programmes validated by higher education institutes, the College follows degree-awarding body approval and periodic review processes as set out in their policies and procedures. Pearson programmes are subject to their own national review processes.

1.16 The College's Higher Education Board has the responsibility to approve new courses and review existing ones. The Higher Education Quality Manual defines a procedure for the approval of new higher education courses and these are firstly approved by the Higher Education Curriculum Planning Sub Group.

1.17 There is a clear process to internally validate and re-validate Higher Education programmes which was revised in 2013 involving the approval of new programmes through the Higher Education Curriculum Planning Sub Group. It is College policy for programme specifications for new courses to be approved by the Higher Education Curriculum Planning Sub Group, after having been examined by the Quality Manager.

1.18 The College operates its own quality cycle and annual curriculum planning process which links review of the previous year to curriculum planning for future cohorts. This has been recently revised to ensure a more robust analysis of the data available in order to demonstrate a demand for the planned learning outcomes from both potential students and employers. The annual quality cycle includes four finance, attendance, retention, achievement and quality (FARAQ) meetings per year for each course team, which inform the curriculum area. FARAQ meetings are chaired by the Deputy Principal. The FARAQs then inform the electronic Course Review and Evaluations.

1.19 The review team examined the College Strategic Plan, the Higher Education Strategy, FARAQ meeting minutes, degree-awarding body agreements, the Higher Education Quality Manual, the new course approval process, Higher Education Board terms of reference and minutes, and the Higher Education Curriculum Planning Sub Group minutes, FARAQ meeting minutes and electronic Course Review and Evaluations. The team also talked to students about their experiences of course review and evaluation and heard from staff about their involvement in implementing programme review policies and procedures.

1.20 The review team found the College Strategic Plan is limited in reference to higher education but the detailed Higher Education Strategy describes the future direction of higher education programmes, the College's strategic drivers and aims and the evidence of need used in programme development. The review and self-assessment process is based on the Common Inspection Framework which is not fully appropriate for higher education programme approval and review and does not align to the stated key drivers and aims in the College's Higher Education Strategy. In meetings with the review team, staff demonstrated knowledge of approval and review processes but could not articulate relevant information from the Higher Education Strategy. There are no formal mechanisms for sharing with students the wider outcomes from approval, annual and periodic review other than the opportunity for students to receive feedback on issues selected by the College which are perceived as of direct interest to them. Therefore the review team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College ensure criteria used for course and annual review are appropriate for higher education and aligned to the Higher Education Strategy.

1.21 Overall, approval and review mechanisms are in place and understood by staff. However, the criteria used for course and annual review are not fully appropriate to higher education and are not fully aligned to the College's Higher Education Strategy. The review team concludes that Expectation A4 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

**Quality Code, Chapter A5: Externality**

**Findings**

1.22 Each degree-awarding body appoints external examiners for their programmes to ensure independent and external review of threshold academic standards. The College has a procedure for working with external examiners which provides guidance for course teams on the role of external examiners, on the response to external examiner reports and on how the feedback from external examiners is communicated to students. A summary of feedback from external examiners is produced annually, discussed in the Higher Education Committee, and used to inform the annual self-assessment report and action plan.

1.23 The College also has externality through the governing body and the four degree-awarding bodies that validate programmes for them. The degree-awarding bodies provide additional externality in periodic reviews. External consultants from peer colleges are used in the self-assessment report validation process and in curriculum area fitness reviews but not in course reviews.

1.24 The review team considered external examiner reports and summary reports, awarding partner agreements, periodic review documentation, Higher Education Committee minutes and the Working with External Examiners Policy. The team also heard from senior staff and academic staff of their involvement with independent and external input in to their quality assurance processes and held telephone meetings with four individual employers.

1.25 The review team found that the College has effective processes in place with regard to external examiners, although attendance is low at the Higher Education Committee where external examiners are discussed. There is no evidence of PSRB accreditation of any of the College higher education programmes.

1.26 The team found that although employer engagement, vocational progression and partnerships to assist graduates in finding employment are stated key drivers in the Higher Education Strategy, no formal mechanisms exist for external input from employers into the curriculum. Other than employer forums in engineering, there is no formal employer engagement in subject areas. There is no evidence of employer input into the development of programmes other than analysis of demand. The team therefore **recommends** that by June 2015 the College provide formal opportunities for employers to participate in quality assurance processes.

1.27 Overall, there is independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards but employer externality is an area that needs development. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation A5 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.28 The College follows the degree-awarding bodies' assessment policies for foundation degree programmes. The College has a recently written assessment policy for Pearson programmes which covers the assessment strategy, submission, assessment and feedback on assessments, extenuating circumstances, academic appeals and academic malpractice, which is used as a guidance document for staff.

1.29 The assessment policies together with successful implementation by the College's higher education staff would ensure that the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of intended learning outcomes.

1.30 The review team examined the assessment policies of the College and the degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation and reviewed external examiner reports. In meetings, the team discussed with students their experiences of assessment and heard from staff how they implement the College and awarding partner assessment policies and procedures.

1.31 The review team found that course teams at the College agree the assessment schedules and negotiate hand-in dates with students. There is a clear written policy on assessment and internal verification. Course leaders at the College provide assessment information to the degree-awarding bodies for consideration at examination boards, and it is their responsibility to manage these and make decisions on progression and awards. The College runs its own examination boards for programmes validated by Pearson.

1.32 The review team also found that the College assessment and internal and external verification policies are understood and followed. Coursework is the preferred method of assessment, particularly with Pearson programmes, and a higher education study day was run to help lecturers consider alternative approaches to assessment to meet the needs of a wider range of learners.

1.33 Overall, the College has systems in place to ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation A6 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

1.35 Of the six expectations in this area, six are met and the associated risk with each is low. There are no features of good practice and no affirmations. There are two recommendations in the maintenance of the threshold academic standards. The first recommendation, under Expectation A4, relates to the processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes. The team recommends the College ensure the criteria used for course and annual review are appropriate for higher education and are aligned to the College's Higher Education Strategy. There also is relevance for Expectation B8. This recommendation relates to a need for amendments to processes that will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change. The second recommendation, under Expectation A5, is that the College provide formal opportunities for employers to participate in the quality assurance processes. This recommendation relates to minor omissions and also will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change. There is evidence the College is aware of its responsibility for maintaining threshold academic standards.

1.36 The review team concludes therefore, that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme design and approval**

### Findings

2.1 The College has a policy on the approval of new courses and an annual curriculum planning process that is used to scrutinise and approve planned courses using student and employer demand data to support each case. The outcomes from the process of self-assessment, combined with trends in recruitment, are also used in this process. Proposals for new programmes are then discussed at the Higher Education Curriculum Planning Sub Group and if are thought viable are sent for approval at the full Higher Education Board. The degree-awarding bodies run the processes to approve the design for all new non-BTEC qualifications but the design of Higher Nationals is limited to specified core and optional units which are available through Pearson. Validation and periodic review follow degree-awarding body processes. Pearson programmes are off the shelf and approved through the Higher Education Curriculum Planning Sub Group.

2.2 The system of design and approval of new programmes is appropriate and the College has established two new foundation degrees in 2011 validated by the University of Bath as part of their collaborative partnerships programme (FdA Creative Digital Media and FdSc Engineering Systems). However as a result of changes to policy, these courses are in run out and have been replaced by HND programmes in Graphic Design and General Engineering which recruited the first cohorts in September 2013. In September 2012, the College launched a new HNC/D in Creative Media (film making) in partnership with the Brighton Film School. Three cohorts of this programme have been recruited to date. An HND in Performing Arts (Jazz) was launched in January 2013. A new part-time HNC in Health and Social Care was launched in September 2013.

2.3 The review team examined the agreements with the degree-awarding bodies, the College policy on the approval of new programmes, and the terms of reference for the Higher Education Board and the Higher Education Curriculum Planning Sub Group. They also discussed the processes for programme approval with both senior and academic staff.

2.4 The team found that staff involved in programme design and approval are aware of the requirements of the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and latest industry standards when writing or selecting modules, although staff not involved in programme design and approval demonstrated variable awareness. Staff also consider regional skills needs and employment data. New proposals are submitted through the Higher Education Curriculum Planning Sub Group and the review team saw evidence of two foundation degrees and five Higher Nationals having been approved in the last three years. Foundation degree programme proposals then go through the degree-awarding body processes for validation or Pearson for approval to run the programme.

2.5 Overall, the College has effective processes in place for the design and approval of programmes and has validated a number of successful programmes in recent years. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation B1 is met and the associated risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B2: Admissions**

**Findings**

2.6 The College manages its degree-awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's delegated responsibilities for student admissions. Different degree-awarding bodies and the awarding organisation require slightly different procedures. In 2013, the College updated the existing admissions policy and developed a revised higher education specific Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy 2013 which is aligned to *Chapter B2: Admissions* of the Quality Code and guidance provided by Supporting Professionalism in Admissions. The policy includes recruitment and selection of non-traditional students and those with disabilities. The policy sets out guidance for course leaders to ensure the course is described accurately and sets out selection processes that are fair and intended to provide applicants with a realistic assessment of their ability for their desired course. Training is provided to staff who undertake admissions interviews. Analysis of retention and achievement data and of widening participation data is used to evidence effectiveness of admissions. There is a higher education specific admissions adviser in place.

2.7 The system, policies and procedures in place should result in fair admissions. The College provides comprehensive information about the institution, its programmes and its admissions policies in a variety of formats in order to facilitate applicants' decision-making and to ensure that students understand the programme of study that they plan to enter.

2.8 The review team examined documents which set out the College's policies and processes for the admission of students including strategy papers, committee minutes, staff and student guidance. The review team looked at examples of promotional and recruitment material and at the College website. Review team members talked to students about their experience of the admissions process and also heard from staff involved in recruitment and admissions about the way the College implements its policies and procedures.

2.9 The review team found admissions procedures are run effectively through enrolment and students receive adequate information prior to joining the College. A number of events are run to inform students of opportunities at the College and to provide support as they transition to higher education. In the student meeting, some students reported the information they received prior to enrolment did not accurately represent their programme and that the quality of information could be improved. The review team found course handbooks are of variable quality and in the student meeting, students reported handbooks could be improved and made more useful. This contributes to the recommendation for the College to put in place a system of oversight that ensures handbooks are fit-for-purpose and programme information is accurate (see Expectation C).

2.10 The Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy was revised in August 2013 and as such is not yet embedded. The policy states that all students will be invited to attend a selection event and this was confirmed in meetings with staff who indicated this is most often an interview. It was stated that internal applicants can be interviewed in tutorial. However, not all students recognised they had undergone a selection event, either formally or in tutorial. In addition, the policy does not state where overall responsibility for admissions lies. In meetings with the review team, the College confirmed that overall responsibility for admissions lies with the admissions team headed by the Registrar. The Admissions Officer responsible for higher education is a member of the Higher Education Committee where operational issues are discussed, admissions data is monitored and in April the admissions policy was reviewed. However, little strategic oversight for admissions at Higher Education

Board was evident which includes limited oversight of admissions at College level and limited awareness of what is happening at course and programme level. Therefore, the team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College further develop the Higher Education Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy to establish management responsibility and oversight of admissions at College level and to consistently apply the policy.

2.11 The Higher Education Strategy includes a key strategic driver that targets widening participation and key strategic aims to develop new courses to recruit under-represented learners and to develop support mechanisms for students who are transitioning to higher education. However, in staff meetings, staff demonstrated limited knowledge of these drivers and aims. This contributes to the recommendation that the College raise awareness of and embed the Higher Education Strategy (see also Enhancement and Expectations B4 and C).

2.12 Overall, the College, with the support of its degree-awarding bodies, has effective admission processes and procedures in place. Accuracy and quality could be improved in some information provided to students. There is limited provider-level oversight for admissions. The policy is new and not yet embedded, for example in the way selection events are implemented. Staff demonstrate limited knowledge of related key strategic drivers. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B2 is met in design, but requires more consistent implementation. As there is limited oversight at strategic level, the team concludes the associated level of risk moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.13 The College is committed to quality learning and teaching and this is embedded in its core values. Higher education specific professional learning coaches are used to support the development of higher education learning and teaching. Staff, peers and students are involved in the teaching observation process, which includes both formal and informal observations. Drop-in observations are an ongoing part of the College quality cycle. They are ungraded and purely developmental to complement formal lesson observations. The Licence to Observe scheme provides training for anyone who undertakes an observation in an effort to allow consistency across the process. Good practice is shared through half hour specific training sessions called 'spotlight' and one hour road shows that are higher education specific.

2.14 The College takes deliberate steps to ensure that its staff are involved in continual professional development and scholarly activity, such as visits and development opportunities at degree-awarding bodies or further study at higher level.

2.15 The College utilises its virtual learning environment in order to help students develop as independent learners. Students are given both formal and informal opportunities to feedback on the quality of the learning and teaching. Students are given both formal and informal opportunities to reflect on feedback and engage in dialogue with staff.

2.16 The drive to improve learning and teaching, the approach to developing scholarly activity and the support for student academic achievement in theory allow students to develop as independent learners, study their chosen subject(s) in depth, and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

2.17 The review team examined the Higher Education Strategy, the Higher Education Quality Manual, the Higher Education Assessment Policy, the higher education self-assessment report, the Observation Handbook, the observing scholarly activity and higher education lesson observation forms and guidance, and considered information provided by the College about how it manages the observation process, including a presentation on the Licence to Observe. The team reviewed the teaching observation analysis, observation progress report, higher education drop in observations and higher education peer observation records.

2.18 The team looked at staff development materials including a presentation on scholarly activity, and also considered higher education staff development records and staff feedback on staff development. Teaching observations were reviewed to determine how they feed in to professional development opportunities. Documents relating to observation processes and continuous professional development logs were reviewed to determine to what extent there is focus on higher education appropriate learning and teaching. Higher Education Board and Higher Education Committee minutes were reviewed to determine how learning and teaching is addressed at strategic and operational level. Learning and teaching was addressed in meetings with staff and students and in the virtual learning environment demonstration.

2.19 The team found that students are well supported to develop as independent learners and study their chosen subjects in depth. Interactive technologies are used well as specialist equipment to support additional learning needs. Students commented positively on their learning environment. Academic tutorials are used effectively and students have multiple opportunities to reflect on their learning and discuss this with their tutors.

2.20 The review team found that the College provides a variety of professional development opportunities. Internally, staff attend College development days, learning and teaching conferences and participate in spotlights and road shows. Staff visit degree-awarding bodies to attend professional development events and to shadow and share good practice. Lecturers have attended different research groups and have opportunities to spend time in industry. Staff are supported by the College to undertake higher level study. There are opportunities for staff to bid for money to engage in external professional development activities.

2.21 The team found both formal and informal teaching observations are used to support staff development. The Licence to Observe programme offers five modules to develop observers in their role. A module was added for observing scholarly activity in higher education lessons. Drop-in observations are used to develop teaching skills from a non-threatening perspective. The Observation Handbook provided to the team does not make any specific reference to higher education lesson observations and references teaching grades from 1 (outstanding) to 4 (inadequate). The higher education teaching observation template provided by the College references the same teaching grades. The additional observing scholarly activity form is relevant for higher education observations. However, the teaching observations provided to the team were not on these forms. The observation progress report did not reflect scholarly activity nor higher education specific areas for development. Therefore the review team **recommends** that by June 2015 the College ensure mechanisms to develop tutors are appropriate to support higher education learning opportunities and teaching practices.

2.22 Overall systems and processes are in place to support the development of staff in their learning and teaching. Learners are supported to develop as independent learners at a level appropriate for higher education. The review team concludes that Expectation B3 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement**

**Findings**

2.23 The College is committed to having in place arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Professional development opportunities are provided to ensure staff are competent and up to date in their own skills and knowledge. Wide-ranging support is available to the students. Support services include admissions, study skills, physical and online library resources, additional learning support, financial, counselling, nursing and careers. Students are supported as they transition into and out of higher education at the College. Information about services is available in print and online. There is an Equal Opportunities Policy and an Equality and Diversity Policy. Every student is offered the opportunity to undertake work-related or work-based learning. Employability is embedded in the curriculum. A number of initiatives such as the 'Get Aware' event, the 'Enterprise Passport' and 'Positive about Futures' facilitate the development of students' professional achievement. Mechanisms are in place to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources through the Higher Education Quality Cycle. Student feedback is gathered through a variety of means such as end of module surveys, drop-in sessions, from the Student Union Executive and the National Student Survey.

2.24 The holistic approach to student support, the policies and procedures relating to student achievement and the mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources should enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.25 The review team tested the College's approach by analysing policies and procedures such as the Higher Education Strategy, the Higher Education Quality Cycle, the Equal Opportunities Policy and the Equality and Diversity Policy. Student feedback, self-assessment reports, electronic Course Review and Evaluations, external examiner reports, DLHE data, degree-awarding body reports, and minutes from the Higher Education Board and Higher Education Committee and the Higher Education Curriculum Planning Sub Group notes were also considered. In meetings with academic staff, support staff and students arrangements and resources were discussed. Meetings were held with four employers.

2.26 The review team found a well supported comprehensive approach to student resources and achievement. The Students' Union actively promotes itself and the College's services. The information provided to students, both in print and online, assists them in their transition into the College, in developing their potential and in their transition from the College to employment or higher education. Staff have introduced drop-in sessions where students can receive support such as one to one study skills and information on plagiarism. Additional resources are available via the intranet.

2.27 Programmes are designed to develop vocational skills and prepare students for employment and employability is a component in all courses. The review team found all students are offered the opportunity to undertake work-related or work-based learning in order to experience a real-life working environment. Use of live briefs and other forms of work-related learning promote the development of professional potential. A higher education specific event Get Aware and the Enterprise Passport supports the development of seven core competencies as recommended by the Confederation of British Industry. These include:

Time Management, Customer Awareness, Problem Solving, Team Building, English, Maths and ICT. The event also launched a tool called the Enterprise Passport which, along with reflective logs, is used by students to track and monitor their professional skills development and is a resource tool used online that is completed by students as a way to track and monitor their employability skills and development. Employers assisted in the delivery of employability-related activities at the enterprise event. The Positive about Futures team are actively involved in supporting and monitoring student employability and play a key role in providing placements; they are based within the Careers department and are used throughout the College for careers advice, work placements and work and employer-related tasks. They also assist the students in utilising Careers Coach. The team found evidence of successful employment progression. Therefore, the review team found the practice that offers every student the opportunity to develop their professional potential through work-related learning is a feature of **good practice**.

2.28 Evidence of monitoring and evaluation of arrangements and resources was found at course level in electronic course review and evaluations, programme level in self-assessment reports and at provider level through the College higher education self-assessment report and in the Higher Education Committee and Higher Education Board meetings, although the team found discussions are limited at provider level. Through these processes, the College evaluates student feedback in its many forms. Quality improvement plans track any actions arising.

2.29 The Higher Education Strategy contains key drivers and aims around widening participation, vocational progression and partnership working to assist graduates in finding employment. In practice, the team found this is happening although staff demonstrated limited knowledge of the key drivers and aims found in the strategy. Limited mechanisms are in place to effectively monitor and evaluate progress against the key drivers and aims. This contributes to the recommendation that the College raise awareness of and embed the Higher Education Strategy (see also Enhancement and Expectations B2 and C).

2.30 Overall, the College offers comprehensive and responsive student services. Good work-related learning and work experience opportunities further bolster the development of students' professional potential. Systems are in place to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources although there is limited reference to the key drivers and aims in the Higher Education Strategy. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B4 is met in both operation and design and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student engagement**

**Findings**

2.31 The College provides a range of mechanisms for students to feedback on the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The College Students' Union is led by a full-time sabbatical Students' Union President. Higher education issues are considered by the Students' Union Executive which meets weekly. There are two higher education students on the Executive. Each curriculum area has a student representative. Student representatives meet with the Academic Studies Manager half termly at Higher Education Student Voice meetings, and attend programme and course level meetings which include lunch meetings and tutorials and course representative meetings. Students attend the Student-Staff Liaison Committee and these meetings are both chaired and minuted by students. Student-Staff Liaison Committees meet four times per year with two meetings in the first term. There is also a Student Committee which meets three times a year. There is one higher education student on the Board of Governors, and the policy allows for a maximum of three.

2.32 Multiple formal and informal opportunities exist at the College to gather student feedback. Students complete end of module feedback forms, and are invited at the end of the year to complete a cross-College survey and the National Student Survey. Students can feedback to their student representative who meets with course leaders. The Students' Union President runs focus groups and undertakes drop-in sessions in classes throughout the academic year. Discussions take place informally in tutorials and ad hoc surveys are also used when appropriate.

2.33 In design, the College policies and procedures enable the gathering of student feedback, both individually and collectively across a range of situations. However, there are limited opportunities for students to actively contribute as partners to quality assurance and enhancement processes beyond providing feedback.

2.34 The review team considered the terms of reference and meeting minutes of groups and committees that could provide opportunities to engage with students. The team reviewed documents for quality assurance processes to determine the extent to which students engage in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experiences. The team reviewed documents associated with the student representative system and mechanisms for collecting student feedback and for student involvement in quality assurance processes.

2.35 The team found examples of how students had affected change in their courses, such as assessment schedule changes, and in enrichment and improved and increased social activities, based on feedback they had provided. It is evident the College values learner feedback.

2.36 The review team found student representatives are well supported and understand their role. Student representatives undergo initial training and can participate in additional training, attend workshops and student conferences. There are also opportunities for student representatives to develop skills to support them in their role such as through the Student Executive Training Day and Licence to Observe. The Students' Union President takes an active role in providing training, support and guidance and is also engaged in evaluating their experiences. In addition, the team found the Students' Union President actively seeks

and responds to learner feedback. There are good opportunities for dialogue and responding to student issues. Three student representative meetings were scheduled for the academic year 2013-14. Therefore the team finds the student representation system and the role of the Students' Union President in proactively obtaining learner feedback to be a feature of **good practice**.

2.37 Students participate in the Licence to Observe scheme and lesson observations. However, the review team found limited evidence of opportunities for students to otherwise actively contribute as partners to the quality assurance and enhancement of their learning experiences. A higher education student representative is not listed in the terms of reference as a member of either the Higher Education Board nor the Higher Education Committee. The Students' Union President has attended Higher Education Committee meetings but is not listed as a member in the terms of reference. The team found limited evidence of consultations or participation in quality assurance processes and decisions such as self-assessment report validations or the development of policies on admissions or assessment. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that by October 2014 the College provide opportunity for student representation on all higher education deliberative structures.

2.38 Overall, the College actively and effectively seeks feedback from its students and the student representative system is strong. However, there is no student representation opportunity on College deliberative structures such as the Higher Education Board and Higher Education Committee and there are weaknesses in the operational aspect of student engagement as partners in quality assurance and enhancement. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B5 is met and the associated level of risk moderate.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.39 Learning outcomes and assessment details are published in programme specifications which are available on the College website and abridged versions are reproduced in course handbooks. Teaching staff are guided in their assessment practice through the Higher Education Assessment Policy. Foundation degree programme assessments are subject to the assessment regulations of the degree-awarding bodies and the overall assessment strategy for Pearson programmes is discussed at the Higher Education Committee and reviewed by the Higher Education Board.

2.40 The College runs Pearson exam boards and the degree-awarding bodies run foundation degree exam boards. College run exam boards are subject to the College Higher Education Policy on Boards of Examination and appropriate minutes are kept.

2.41 The policies that guide assessment together with their application by management and teaching staff should ensure that the methods used to assess students allow students to have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification.

2.42 The review team examined the Higher Education Assessment Policy, minutes of examination boards and a document provided by the College outlining the composition and roles of boards of examiners. In meetings with staff and students the review team addressed assessment.

2.43 The review team found that the College encourages assessments to promote effective learning in vocational areas. Course teams agree the assessment strategy and produce assessment schedules for each programme. The design and volume of assessment is appropriate to test learning outcomes. Design of assessment gives clarity on how it is set to assess the appropriate learning outcomes and consideration of prior learning and experience, where appropriate.

2.44 All assessments are internally verified before provisional marks are given to students and external examiners examine a sample of assessment briefs. Students report clear assessment criteria and that the quality of feedback on assessed work ranges from excellent to limited. Students indicate they know what to do to achieve higher grades, but external examiner reports, although very supportive, make reference to needing more clarification on how to achieve higher level awards. Students and external examiners indicated in some instances assessments are bunched and feedback is not always timely in accordance with College policy. Therefore the review team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College ensure students receive timely feedback on their performance across all provision.

2.45 Although there is no evidence of formal discussions at the Higher Education Board or Committee, the College recognises that academic malpractice is a potential issue and addresses it in the Higher Education Assessment Policy. It has been recommended by an external examiner that the College consider extending the use of anti-plagiarism software. The policy states that students will be required to submit some or all assessments through plagiarism detection software and staff confirmed this in meetings, although there is some

variation in practice between programmes. Therefore, the review team **affirms** the implementation of electronic submission and anti-plagiarism software.

2.46 Overall, policies and procedures for assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning are in place and effective. Students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation B6 is met and the level of associated 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**

2.47 External examiners for each programme are appointed by the degree-awarding bodies who have their own policies for working with external examiners. External examiners submit an annual report and the College conducts an analysis of their feedback which is fed into the annual self-assessment report and subsequent action plan. The report is also discussed at the Higher Education Committee and Higher Education Board. The College has recently adopted new guidance on working with external examiners that includes a requirement for the curriculum team to respond to external examiner feedback with an action plan. External examiner reports are made available to students on the College intranet and for some programmes, external examiners meet with students.

2.48 The mechanisms in place for working with external examiners, disseminating information provided by external examiners to staff and students and responding to issues arising from external examiner reports do, in design, allow for the scrupulous use of external examiners.

2.49 The review team examined the guidance on working with external examiners, the remits and minutes of the Higher Education Board and Higher Education Committee, and a range of external examiners' reports. In meetings with academic staff, support staff and students the use of external examiners and external examiner reports was explored.

2.50 The team found that the College is responsive to external examiner reports. Course teams produce an action plan in response to external examiner reports. External examiner reports are discussed at Higher Education Committee and Higher Education Board. A summary of external examiner feedback is produced. External examiner reports are available to students on the College intranet and the review team found in some instances students are also briefed on their content by course leaders.

2.51 Overall, there are processes in place to make scrupulous use of external examiners. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B7 is met due to the processes that are in place and that the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review**

**Findings**

2.52 The College's quality cycle and annual curriculum planning processes link review of the previous year to curriculum planning for future cohorts. There is a recently revised process for the review of programmes which includes an analysis to demonstrate demand from both potential students and employers, which includes student feedback and labour market information. Changes were made to ensure a more robust analysis of the data available in order to demonstrate a demand for the planned learning outcomes from both potential students and employers and the changes are reflected in the new programme review policy.

2.53 Programmes are reviewed according to the College's Higher Education Quality Cycle. Course teams undertake four mini finance, attendance, retention, achievement and quality (FARAQ) meetings per year which inform the annual curriculum FARAQ meetings chaired by the Deputy Principal. An annual electronic course review and evaluation is produced by each course team. The electronic Course Reviews and Evaluations for each programme are validated by senior management and result in an action plan which forms part of the report. The Course Reviews for each programme inform the higher education self-assessment report. The remit of both the Higher Education Board and Higher Education Committee is to monitor the quality cycle of higher education provision; teaching, learning and assessment; and the student experience at the College, including oversight of the annual monitoring and evaluation process, and reports from external examiners.

2.54 Procedures are in place, based on the Higher Education Quality Cycle, which in design enable the monitoring and the periodic review of programmes. Each programme has a course leader and there are processes in place through the Higher Education Board, the Higher Education Committee and the Senior Management Team to ensure these processes are followed.

2.55 The review team considered the policies and procedures relating to the monitoring and review of programmes such as the Higher Education Quality Cycle, the procedure for monitoring and revalidation of higher education programmes 2013, the Programme Specifications 2013 Policy and relevant sections of the Higher Education Quality Manual. Documents such as self-assessment reports, electronic Course Review and Evaluations, FARAQs and electronic Self Assessment Reports (eSARs) were reviewed. The review team examined minutes from Higher Education Board and Higher Education Committee meetings and also from Senior Management meetings. Programme monitoring and review was discussed in meetings with senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students.

2.56 The review team found that academic staff are aware and understand the monitoring and review processes. The review team confirmed that four mini FARAQ meetings take place each year and that these feed in to curriculum FARAQ meetings with the Deputy Principal. Electronic Course Review and Evaluations are produced by the course teams in July each year and feed in to the higher education self-assessment report. Outcomes from monitoring and review processes are discussed at the Higher Education Board and Higher Education Committee but there is poor attendance at the Higher Education Committee meetings and the minutes lack detail. Cross-curriculum peers and peers from other colleges are used in the curriculum self-assessment report validation process but not at course level.

2.57 The team found that the electronic Course Review and Evaluations and self-assessment reports map to criteria from Ofsted's Common Inspection Framework and found limited evidence of reference or mapping to relevant higher education external reference points such as the Quality Code. Key criteria used to evaluate programmes are attendance, retention and achievement data. In meetings with the review team, academic staff could not clearly articulate the drivers and aims from the Higher Education Strategy. There are no mechanisms in place to use these drivers and aims as part of the monitoring and review processes. Therefore, as detailed in Expectation A4, the review team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College ensure criteria used for course and annual review are appropriate for higher education and aligned to the Higher Education Strategy.

2.58 The review team found the College complies with the awarding bodies' Periodic Review process and also regularly reviews the BTEC Higher National courses through the annual course review process. Specific items that are relevant from course reviews are shared with students but there is no evidence that they see the whole document.

2.59 The team confirmed quality improvement plans are produced as part of each electronic Course Review and Evaluation and also by curriculum areas, although these are not specifically for higher education. Actions arising from quality improvement plans are monitored by the Quality Improvement Coordinator and also through the annual FARAQ process. The Quality Improvement Coordinator has an effective system to ensure Heads of Learning complete any actions. The team found the quality improvement systems in place to assure actions arising from quality assurance processes are addressed effectively in a timely manner to be a feature of **good practice**.

2.60 Overall, there are processes in place for the routine monitoring and review of programmes, though there is a lack of reference to relevant higher education external reference points. Good systems are in place to monitor actions arising from these processes. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals**

**Findings**

2.61 The College has a procedure for complaints and feedback which applies to all levels of provision in the College and also to visitors, prospective students, employers and the public. Complaints are reported to the College Senior Management Team and governing body.

2.62 The College has an appeals process for admissions decisions as part of the Higher Education Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy drafted in 2013. Applicants are entitled to verbal or written feedback and if an applicant wishes to appeal a decision they are told to contact the Higher Education Admissions Advisory.

2.63 The College is required to follow the degree-awarding bodies' processes for academic appeals. The process for degree-awarding body appeals are based on irregularity in the conduct of assessment or non-declared extenuating circumstances. Appeals on academic judgement are not permitted under the degree-awarding bodies' regulations. The College has an Assessment Policy which outlines the appeals process for Pearson programmes; there are no specific requirements from Pearson on the appeals process. College policy for Pearson courses is a three-stage procedure for appeals: one, feedback from assessment; two, student appeal form with possible remark; three, formal appeal panel.

2.64 The policy for complaints and feedback mentions Ofsted but does not mention higher education specific mechanisms for managing complaints. This policy is accessible on the web though there is no information on complaints in course handbooks.

2.65 In design, the College policies and procedures, and where appropriate adherence to degree-awarding body procedures for handling complaints and appeals, represent fair, effective and timely procedures.

2.66 The review team undertook an extensive review of the College's policies and procedures on complaints, admissions appeals and academic appeals which is part of the College assessment policy. The team were also provided with supplementary evidence of logs of complaints and emails from degree-awarding bodies on appeals. The policies were validated by meetings with senior staff, academic staff, professional staff and the application of processes verified via student meetings.

2.67 Evidence from the meetings with students and staff confirm that the College relies on informal mechanisms for dealing with student issues or complaints for example via Student Voice meetings, meetings with the Higher Education Academic Studies Manager, the Drop-box and course meetings. The Students' Union supports students in handling informal complaints.

2.68 Students report that issues are addressed appropriately and are satisfied with these informal processes. There are limited records of informal issues and resolutions and there is no holistic oversight of issues raised and resolved. The College confirms no higher education complaints have been received over the last three years, though two informal higher education complaints have been recorded by the College Quality Improvement Coordinator.

2.69 The team found feedback on admissions usually takes the form of referral to appropriate alternative courses. There have been no formal appeals against admission

decisions lodged with the Higher Education Admissions Advisor and no informal or formal appeals for admissions. There are no records of feedback to unsuccessful applicants; there is a lack of oversight of the management of informal feedback queries.

2.70 The team found there have been no formal academic appeals. The College does not recognise queries about a mark as an academic appeal and deals with all such queries in an informal manner, consistent with the treatment of complaints. Meetings with staff and students confirm requests for and implementation of remarking, either by internal verification or course team, do occur for both Pearson and non-Pearson courses. As per the appeals process for Pearson courses outlined in the Assessment Policy, a possible remark represents stage two of the appeals process and requires a student appeal form. The team found no evidence of student appeal forms in course leaders' files nor that stage two appeals have been recorded at local course level or at central level. There is no evidence of provider oversight of student appeal forms and remarks. Furthermore, there is no evidence of a cohort re-mark or any recording of such an amendment, or discussion with external examiners or degree-awarding bodies or awarding organisation. There is no College process for reviewing the process of appeals. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that by October 2014 the College ensure the appeals policies and procedures are applied appropriately, consistently and in accordance with the requirements of the degree-awarding body or awarding organisation.

2.71 Although there are policies governing the management of complaints and appeals for admissions and for academic appeals, the College deals with all queries on an informal or local level. The College reports that it has no complaints and appeals, though examples were found of informal complaints and appeals with resolutions. There is no formal recording of these issues at institutional level. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B9 is not met in operation. There is no College-wide oversight of complaints and appeals. There is ineffective operation and there are breaches by the College of its own appeals process found in the Assessment Policy. Therefore, the team concludes the associated level of risk is serious.

**Expectation: Not met**  
**Level of risk: Serious**

**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

2.72 The College Higher Education Strategy makes a commitment to develop employment-focused higher skills training, to develop its work experience programme for higher education students and that programmes are designed on the basis of ensuring employment. All courses are required to have an element of work-based or work-related learning in which students get an experience of professional work.

2.73 The College has a Work Experience Procedure which covers areas such as health and safety, employer liability and risk assessment. A flow-chart outlines the process for placement and specifies the role of the course tutor, work-placement coordinator and Heads of Learning in this process. The College produces a handbook for health and safety and a guide for students.

2.74 The College uses the terms work placement, work-based learning and work-related learning inconsistently and in places interchangeably. There is limited inclusion of quality assurance in the work placement documentation. There is a register of work placement activity for those placements organised through Positive about Futures. There is a risk classification system and the College states that the majority of placements are office-based and are low-risk.

2.75 The review team considered the documentation that exists on all forms of work experience such as the Work Experience Procedure, the Work Experience Flow Chart and the Employers Handbook and Guidance and the Student Guide to Work Experience. The review team had telephone discussions with four employers and discussed work experience and work-based learning at meetings with senior staff, academic staff, professional support staff and with students. The team scrutinised Higher Education Committee minutes to find evidence of discussion of work experience at a strategic or College-wide level.

2.76 A review of work placement agreement forms provides evidence that these are completed though the focus is on health and safety. There is a work placement register but this only covers those placements that are organised through Positive about Futures. The team found they do not capture all forms of work experience. This database does not include detail of scale or scope or any form of evaluation or employer feedback. There are good informal working relationships between the College and employers that are managed at local level.

2.77 Employers confirm they are not involved in the direct formal assessment of a student though they can provide evaluations or support students with their log books which may count towards a mark. Work experience modules exist in some programmes which outline specific work-related learning outcomes and there is clarity on what skills students get from undertaking this activity.

2.78 The review team found there is limited guidance on work experience for students, employers or staff. The handbook for health and safety and the guide for students lacks detail. There are no set guidelines on minimum expectations for staff, students or employers

other than those aforementioned. The nature and level of information that is sent to employers is determined by each course team or course manager.

2.79 In terms of quality assurance of work experience, there is evidence of the use of templates but not across all courses with no systematic collection or analysis of data from students or employers. There is limited evidence that work experience is reviewed by the provider or built into annual quality reviews. Student evaluation is limited and no information is provided on how this feedback is reviewed or acted upon.

2.80 A review of Higher Education Board and Higher Education Committee minutes show that there is no discussion against this strategic objective at either level and the College lacks an overarching framework for the management of this work experience irrespective of length and location. There is no College policy on how work experience activities should be managed, monitored or reviewed. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College formalise a strategic and operational framework that monitors and reviews all work experience regardless of length or location.

2.81 Overall, the College has a strategy to engage all its students with some form of work experience. Student views on these experiences are positive, which tend towards low-risk placement activity and relationships between the College and employers are positive though informal. A policy for work experience exists though the focus is on health and safety and managing risk. Records of work experience activity exist though in partial form and there is limited systematic evaluation of College work experience and the student experience. Therefore the review team concludes overall that Expectation B10 is met both in design and operation. However, given the lack of institutional oversight of how these experiences are being managed, reviewed and improved, the team considers the associated risk level is moderate.

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

**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**

2.82 The College does not offer research degrees.

## Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.84 Of the ten applicable expectations, nine are met. Expectation B9 is not met and the associated level of risk is serious as the College breaches its own appeals policy. Of the nine met expectations, the associated level of risk is low for six and moderate for three. The three expectations where the associated level of risk is medium are B2, B5 and B10.

2.85 There are three features of good practice in this area. Every student at the College is offered work-related learning (Expectation B4). The student representation system and the role of the Students' Union President allow for proactive collection of learner feedback (Expectation B5). There are systems in place to assure actions arising from quality assurance processes are addressed effectively in a timely manner (Expectation B8).

2.86 There is one affirmation in this area. The College had identified a need to further develop its academic malpractice policy and introduced electronic submission and anti-plagiarism software (Expectation B6, Assessment).

2.87 There are nine recommendations. One recommendation relates to more than one expectation in the quality of student learning opportunities, Expectation B2 has three associated recommendations and three expectations have recommendations that relate to other judgement areas.

2.88 The level of risk associated with Expectation B2 and Expectation B10 is moderate and without action, this could lead to serious problems over time with the management of each expectation area and with the management of quality of student learning opportunities collectively.

2.89 There are weaknesses in the operation of part of the provider's governance structure as it relates to quality assurance. For the Higher Education Board, there is limited evidence in the meeting minutes of strategic provider level discussion. In the minutes provided for the three meetings in the academic year 2013-14, attendance at the Higher Education Committee has been 24 per cent, 40 per cent and 34 per cent. Furthermore, the minutes provided for those who have given apologies are lacking in detail. The team recommends the College raise awareness and embed the Higher Education Strategy and ensure the criteria used for course and annual review are aligned to this strategy and appropriate for higher education. There is no formally identified management responsibility at provider level for the oversight of admissions policy and processes. There is no student representation on either the Higher Education Board or the Higher Education Committee.

2.90 There are also quality assurance procedures which, while broadly adequate, have some shortcomings in the rigour with which they are applied. There are two recommendations that relate to inconsistent application of policy. In Expectation B2 the team recommends that the College consistently apply the Higher Education Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy. In Expectation B9 the team recommends the College ensure the appeals policies and procedures are applied appropriately, consistently and in accordance with the requirements of the degree-awarding body or awarding organisation.

2.91 Evidence reviewed by the team and the outcomes of meetings held during the review indicate that the College may not be fully aware of the significance of certain issues.

However, previous responses to external activity suggest that the College may take the required actions and provide evidence of action, as requested.

2.92 While Expectation B9 is not met and there is a serious level of risk associated - and thus potentially supportive of a 'does not meet' outcome - there are no significant gaps in policy, structure or procedures across the area of quality of student learning opportunities. Therefore, for this reason and the reasons stated above, the team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

### **3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision**

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

**Quality Code, Part C: Information about higher education provision**

#### **Findings**

3.1 The College produces information about its missions, values and strategy in the Strategic Plan and Mission for 2013-16 and in the Higher Education Strategy. The College's website offers a full range of appropriate information for potential students and parents and additional information such as the equality and diversity policy and governance documents. The prospectus is available in print and online and details relevant information for prospective students covering College information, course details, support services information and a range of factual information drawn from satisfaction surveys and student experiences.

3.2 The degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation stipulate the minimum requirements the College must meet when producing information about its higher education provision. Programme specifications are the primary source of information from which other materials are developed. Course leaders produce handbooks according to a template or modify the handbook with College specific information, depending on the degree-awarding body and awarding organisation. Systems are in place to regularly check the accuracy and completeness of information. Heads of Learning are responsible for checking prospectus content and the higher education admissions officer and the marketing manager undertake final checks. Ultimate responsibility at the College lies with the deputy principal. Degree-awarding bodies then give their approval. Feedback is gathered from students on the effectiveness of course materials. On the website, lecturers are responsible for their own units which are overseen by course leaders. For the virtual learning environment there is the 'Going for Gold' initiative which rewards staff for their skills. Higher education specific information is checked by the Higher Education Coordinator. In theory, systems are in place to approve, monitor and evaluate information produced by the College about its higher education provision.

3.3 The team reviewed the website, materials produced for prospective students, the virtual learning environment and course materials and handbooks for existing students. The team analysed the processes by reviewing the responsibilities checklists, Higher Education Committee and Higher Education Board minutes and related policies. In meetings senior staff, academic staff and students were asked about how these processes work in practice and about the quality of information produced about higher education provision.

3.4 The Higher Education Strategy is a key document that supports the quality of learning opportunities at the College. In meetings with staff, there was limited awareness of the key drivers and aims. While the team found evidence that the strategy is being implemented to some degree, such as the College's work on widening participation and the Higher Education Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy and the embedding of employability throughout the curriculum, they found limited evidence of systems and information in place to support, monitor or evaluate the strategy. This supports the recommendation that the College raise awareness of and embed the Higher Education Strategy (see also Enhancement and Expectations B2 and B4).

3.5 In reviewing the prospectus and other information made available to prospective students, the review team found some good course specific information, information on career opportunities and case studies available on the website, although this is not consistent across all courses. When reviewing a sample of course handbooks, the team found variations in format, quality and information provided. For example, the complaints and appeals, academic misconduct and late submission processes, reading lists and dates or links for this information are not consistently included and programme specification detail varies.. In the meeting, students expressed mixed reviews about the use and accuracy of handbooks and generally did not consider them a primary source of information. There was no evidence of student engagement in developing course handbooks. The review team therefore **recommends** that by October 2014 the College put in place a system of oversight that ensures handbooks are fit-for-purpose and programme information is accurate (see also Expectation B2).

3.6 The team reviewed the virtual learning environment and found that students can access the virtual learning environment for course information, dates and reading lists prior to the summer admission date.. Students are happy with the accuracy and availability of information. The virtual learning environment contains information about admissions, the course, referencing, student support, careers advice and learning resources, student voice info, student charter, events calendar, external examiner reports, and end of module surveys..

3.7 The review team found there are mechanisms in place to check the accuracy of information on both the website and the virtual learning environment. The administrator surveys students, monitors statistics and evaluates the 'Going for Gold' programme. While the Higher Education Admissions Advisor has responsibility for the input and checking accuracy of information there are additional checks done by various staff at different levels. However, there was minimal discussion in Higher Education Committee meetings.

3.8 Overall, information produce by the College about its higher education provision is accessible and trustworthy. Processes are in place to approve and monitor production of information in line with degree-awarding body and awarding organisation requirements, although there is variable quality in course handbooks. The team found limited reference to the Higher Education Strategy. However, the review team concludes that Expectation C is met in design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

3.9 In reaching its judgement about the quality of information produced about its provision, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.10 The expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no examples of good practice and no affirmations in this area. There is one main recommendation and contribution to a second recommendation. There are no serious risks to the management of this area. Actions needed to address the recommendations will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change. There is limited student engagement in the production of information about the College's provision. There is evidence that the College is aware of its responsibilities in this area. Therefore, the team concludes, the quality of information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College Higher Education Strategy describes the future direction of higher education at the College and outlines key priorities and drivers. The Higher Education Board is responsible for strategic decision making.. The Higher Education Committee is responsible for operational decision making. The key focus of the College in terms of enhancement is student achievement with attention being paid to continuous improvement of retention and progression through the College's quality assurance cycle. Systems are in place to monitor actions arising from the quality assurance processes..

4.2 In theory, the Higher Education Strategy could provide guidance for which steps are to be taken to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. There are deliberative structures in place that could allow enhancement discussions and decisions at provider level. The quality assurance cycle could allow for monitoring of the priorities set out in the Higher Education Strategy and any actions arising.

4.3 The team reviewed the College Strategic Plan, the Higher Education Strategy and minutes from deliberative structures ranging from the Senior Management Team to programme teams. Systems and documents for the quality assurance cycle were considered such as FARAQs and electronic Course Review and Evaluations. The systems in place to monitor actions arising from the quality assurance processes were also reviewed. In meetings, the principal, senior staff, support staff, programme managers and tutors were asked about enhancement and the College's higher education priorities. Senior staff, support staff, programme managers and tutors were asked about their role in the quality assurance procedures and systems..

4.4 The review team found that while the Higher Education Strategy does include key drivers and aims, it does not address continuous improvement of these nor mechanisms for the monitoring of them. The Strategy's targets focus on curriculum offer, success rates, progression and income generation and do not consider how the College will monitor the drivers and aims set out. A generic target included is 'to meet or exceed national quality standards as outline in the current RCHE and planned HER (Higher Education Review)'. A review of the Higher Education Board minutes do not reflect strategic discussions on key aims and drivers from the Higher Education Strategy rather focus on recruitment, retention and progression. Attendance at the Higher Education Committee where operational matters are discussed has not been above 40per cent in 2013-14.

4.5 The review team found that a strategic decision had been taken to improve learning, teaching and assessment. In addition, the College actively promotes staff development and scholarly activities and steps are being taken College-wide to improve the virtual learning environment. A review of Higher Education Board and Higher Education Committee minutes does not provide evidence of where decisions for such initiatives are made nor how they are evaluated. These examples do not appear as key priorities in the Higher Education Strategy showing disconnect between College Higher Education Strategy and actual practice. There is no evidence of analysis or mapping against the objectives found in the Higher Education Strategy. Senior Management Team meeting minutes show limited mention of the Higher Education Board and there is a lack of strategic discussion of higher education at senior level in the College. Therefore, the review team **recommends**

that by December 2014 the College ensure the higher education deliberative structures are effective in the setting, implementing and monitoring of strategic objectives designed to improve the quality of higher level learning opportunities.

4.6 The team found the culture of wishing to improve can be evidenced through multiple examples of individual success stories. In staff meetings with the review team, staff at all levels demonstrated limited understanding of the Higher Education Strategy key strategic drivers or aims and struggled to identify College enhancement priorities. The main focus for staff is on general improvements to the student experience rather than the key strategic objectives of the College that are provider led. Therefore, the team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College raise awareness of and embed the Higher Education Strategy (see also Expectations B2, B4 and C).

4.7 In Expectation B8, the review team found the quality improvement systems in place to assure actions arising from quality assurance processes are addressed effectively in a timely manner to be a feature of good practice. Actions from the quality improvement plans are monitored through FARAQs and are followed up by the Quality Improvement Coordinator to ensure that actions have been completed. While the actions arising tend to focus on retention, achievement and progression, this does demonstrate mechanisms exist to address quality assurance issues arising.

4.8 Although there are some examples of enhancement initiatives, overall there is limited College-level oversight or evidenced leadership for improving the quality of learning opportunities. Quality assurance and enhancement processes are broadly adequate, but have some shortcomings. Therefore, the review team concludes that the College does not meet the expectation for enhancement and the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Not met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

## Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.10 There is one expectation in this area and it was not met. The associated level of risk is moderate, and without action could lead to serious problems over time with the management of this area.

4.11 There are two recommendations in this area. The recommendations identify a weakness in the College's governance structures, the Higher Education Board and the Higher Education Committee, relating to the enhancement of learning opportunities including a lack of clarity about responsibilities. Insufficient emphasis is given to assuring that the drivers and aims in the Higher Education Strategy are made aware of, disseminated, monitored and evaluated. Quality assurance procedures, which while broadly adequate, have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied. The College is not fully aware of the significance of these issues. However, previous responses to external activities suggest that the College may take the required actions and provide evidence of action, as requested.

4.12 It is for the reasons stated above that the team concludes the enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The College provides an opportunity for each student to undertake work-related or work-based learning and has strong links with local employers. Employability is built in to all courses and is specifically addressed in the electronic course review and evaluation. The College actively seeks feedback from local employers to ensure the employability skills taught are current and relevant.

5.2 There are a number of innovations that promote student employability. The Positive about Futures team are actively involved in supporting and monitoring student employability and are involved in providing placements. They play a key role in finding students placements and allowing them to recognise their employability and potential. Careers Coach is an online tool that is used by students with staff in order to plot their student journey and identifies and tracks key competencies and skills that lead to students recognising their employability. It helps students build on their employability skills by providing current local data on wages, employment, job postings, and associated education and training. This is done by way of online tutorials, videos and resources that include a CV writing tool. Careers Coach is promoted by the Positive about Futures team.

5.3 A scheme called Enterprise Passport allows students to track skills while recording skills gained through placements. The Enterprise Passport supports the development of seven core competencies as recommended by the Confederation of British Industry. These include: Time Management, Customer Awareness, Problem Solving, Team Building, English, Maths and ICT.

5.4 Live briefs are used throughout the College as a way to get students and employers actively involved in ensuring that employability is embedded into the curriculum. With the work of the Positive about Futures team and other lecturers and staff, the College creates opportunities for employers and students to get involved in live briefs. This is achieved by creating specialist events within the College that connect students with employers and provides an opportunity for students to put their skills to use. For example, students have been involved in providing consultancy, while another student has produced a research report for an employer. There are numerous examples of employers visiting the College to provide careers-related talks to students.

5.5 Employers' contribution to curriculum development is not formalised and varies across the provision. Academic staff talk to employers about which employability or vocational-specific skills are currently relevant and need to be developed and added to the curriculum. Employers who offer work experience have the opportunity to informally contribute to programme development. Employers visit the College to give talks and students undertake workplace visits. For some students, employer feedback on their performance in the workplace contributes to assessment. The Positive About Futures team meets with employers and invites them in to career related events.

5.6 Overall employability is embedded across the College's academic curriculum and through additional activities. Employability and raising student aspirations is an ethos at the College. There is evidence of successful progression to vocationally relevant employment.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27-29 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject benchmark statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

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

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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