



# Higher Education Review of Cirencester College

April 2015

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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 Cirencester College. The review took place from 16 to 17 April 2015 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Tessa Counsell
- Mr Matthew Kitching (student reviewer)
- Mr Howard White
- Mr Ian Woodland (student reviewer)

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

In reviewing Cirencester 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 2014-15 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/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code).

<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/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Cirencester College

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

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

### Good Practice

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

- The effective use of the Career Ready Boards as a means of simultaneously engaging with employers and students in programme development (Expectation B1).
- The creation of a dedicated Subject Learning Coach for Higher Education, which has enhanced staff development opportunities for HE staff (Expectation B3).
- The enhancement of learning and career opportunities for students through the utilisation of the professional networks of staff (Expectation B3).
- The extensive support for students to use placements and work experience to inform career choices (Expectation B10).

### Recommendations

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

By December 2016:

- ensure that the proposed action to eliminate confusion of version control, location and nomenclature of key documents relating to learning opportunities is completed (Expectation B1).
- establish a process to enable discussion of annual monitoring reports by SSLC to contribute to changes to current year Quality Improvement Plans (Expectation B8).
- review and amend the Higher Education Academic Appeals Procedure to take account of guidance on best practice published by the OIA (Expectation B9).

By June 2017:

- develop a formal process for the monitoring and tracking of students' progress and personal development (Expectation B4).
- revise the College's annual monitoring template to include reflection on learning resources and, where appropriate, placement and work experience opportunities (Expectations B8 and B10).

## Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to resolve challenges in securing student engagement through the development of the SSLC (Expectations B5 and B7).

## Theme: Student Employability

Cirencester College (the College) strategically articulates its aim to ensure that its graduates are employable and skilled, and it has identified 10 specific skills it expects to students to develop. Many of the College's higher education programmes include work-based learning or placements, which the College uses as a vehicle for enhancing students' employability. In addition, students benefit from career guidance and individual learning plans to enable them to identify and master the skills they need for their chosen career paths. The College audits programmes to evaluate how well embedded employability skills are within the curricula, arranges guest lecturers from industry, and offers additional complementary professional qualifications in some subject areas. The College consults with employers to ensure local demand for skills and programmes, and to determine how programmes can support local skills needs.

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

## About Cirencester College

Cirencester College, established in 1991, has been a designated sixth-form college since 2011. The College's mission is to be an outstanding sixth-form college, serving its community and enabling learners to realise their potential. Its vision is to be a dynamic and outcome-orientated sixth-form college. The aims of the College's Higher Education Strategy include: to deliver foundation degrees and Higher National programmes, working effectively with a limited number of partners; to widen participation in higher education, both in terms of internal progression and wider recruitment in the region; to prepare learners for further study or employment, with academic and vocational skills; to ensure a higher education standard student experience through staff development and investment in facilities; and to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities based on student voice and quality assurance procedures.

The College has around 3,100 students, of which 2,200 are full-time. At the College, 87 per cent of its delivery is aimed at 16 to 18 years provision, with the remaining 13 per cent comprising apprenticeships and higher education, the latter accounting for around 80 students. The College is nearing the end of a five-year accommodation improvement plan. The College's Senior Management Team comprises the Principal and three Vice-Principals, providing strategic leadership for the College which is structured into four faculties.

Since its Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review by QAA in 2011, the College has experienced a number of changes with its awarding partners: it has ceased partnerships with the University of Bolton, the Open University and the University of Bath. The partnership with the University of the West of England, Bristol is being phased out. A partnership with Pearson has enabled the College to become directly funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England for its Higher National programmes, which has also driven the College to develop its own higher education-specific policies and procedures. It has also reorganised management responsibilities for higher education.

A significant proportion of the College's higher education provision has changed since the last review. Its teacher training programmes are now awarded by Pearson and are no longer within the scope of this review. The College works with the Royal Agricultural University (RAU) to deliver three foundation degrees, in Environmental Conservation and Heritage Management; British Wildlife Conservation; and Archaeology and Historic Landscape Conservation. A new Foundation Degree in Business and Enterprise has recently been validated by the RAU and is scheduled to commence in September 2016. The College also offers a Criminology and Criminal Justice Foundation Degree with the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE), which is currently in teach-out. Since 2011-12 the College has been delivering Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), which include Animal Management, Sport (Coaching and Development), and Computing (currently in teach-out).

Since its last QAA review, the College has faced challenges in relation to changes of awarding partners, and developing the necessary internal quality assurance procedures to run the HNDs. Student recruitment is challenging in the competitive environment, and staff recruitment to specialist posts is also considered challenging. The effects of the Local Area Review, and potential academisation opportunities for sixth-form colleges, is another area of challenge for the College.

In response to the 2011 QAA Summative Review the College has changed its arrangements for the annual monitoring of programmes, so that all programmes are considered by a Scrutiny Committee. It has responded to a recommendation to ensure that actions taken by course teams are recorded, by including action plans in programme annual monitoring reports. In a response to a recommendation to develop the role of the Personal Tutor, the College has introduced an HE Tutor to provide pastoral support to students. The College has revised its higher education handbook, and information for students on its virtual learning environment (VLE), to provide a wider range of resources. It has furthered areas of good practice in relation to its internal audit of higher education, its staff development strategy for higher education, and the information available through the VLE on good academic practice.

The College's 2011 review included a broad recommendation to implement the actions arising from its review in 2009. In response to this, the College now provides detail on assessment arrangements on course webpages, and complements information from awarding partners with its own VLE content. It has revised its Assessment Policy, and disseminated changes through staff development to promote compliance and a comparable student experience across programmes. It has incorporated higher education guidance into its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy. In discussion with its awarding partners, the College resolved not to introduce an additional cover sheet for formative feedback to students, as students and staff did not appreciate the duplication. The College enhanced higher education staff development through the appointment of a subject learning coach, a higher education staff development day, and some higher education-specific teaching observations.

## Explanation of the findings about Cirencester College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Findings

1.1 The College is not a degree-awarding body but delivers foundation degrees and Higher National awards in partnership with the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE), the Royal Agricultural University (RAU) and Pearson. Memoranda of Agreement are in place with each university, clearly indicating that the responsibility for the oversight and maintenance of academic standards lies with them as awarding bodies. The College Academic Standards template delineates the respective responsibilities of the College and its awarding partners regarding the definitive documentation and student assessment.

1.2 The College scrutinises academic standards through the Higher Education Scrutiny Committee, overall College Academic Board and Senior Management Team. The College's awarding bodies scrutinise and confirm academic standards via quality assurance processes articulated, for example, in the UWE Annual Operating Agreement and the RAU Partnership Agreement. The College's awarding partners are ultimately responsible for setting and verifying the standards of the College's awards in terms of allocating programmes to the appropriate level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), ensuring learning outcomes align to qualification descriptors, and for using Subject and qualification Benchmark Statements.

1.3 The College's approach to maintaining the standards of its programmes is to use external examiner reports; the annual monitoring process; and Scrutiny Committee, Higher Education Assessment Board and Higher Education Academic Subcommittee meetings, together with discussion at course team level. Staff development includes an induction for new staff, which refers to the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*, and links to the Quality Code. Line managers reiterate information regarding academic standards to their staff and direct them to relevant information available on the College's VLE.

1.4 The College's programmes awarded by the RAU were developed in partnership with the University, with the University maintaining responsibility for the definitive documentation, including the programme and module learning outcomes. The College is responsible for assessment briefs, based on RAU templates, and examination papers, which are scrutinised by a University examination panel and external examiners prior to students sitting exams.

1.5 The College is responsible for the assessment of the unit and programme learning outcomes for Pearson Higher National programmes at the College. There are currently no College-derived units. Taken together, these arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.6 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising a range of documentation (including records of validation meetings and programme specifications). The review team also held a number of meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding bodies) and students.

1.7 The review team found that College staff understand their responsibilities in relation to the frameworks underpinning academic standards in their delivery of higher education on behalf of their awarding partners.

1.8 External examiner reports are detailed, and highlight issues affecting the provision, together with good practice. The reports play an effective role in the maintenance of standards by confirming alignment with qualification and Subject Benchmark Statements, and the achievement of learning outcomes detailed in the programme definitive documentation.

1.9 Senior and teaching staff met at the visit were clear regarding academic frameworks and the requirements of the awarding bodies and the awarding organisation, and where the respective responsibilities lay between these bodies and the College. Staff were also clear regarding the requirements of the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* and how these were adhered to in the programmes on which they taught.

1.10 The review team found evidence that the College takes account of national credit frameworks and Subject Benchmark Statements in designing programme validation and re-validation proposals.

1.11 The review team concludes that the College has arrangements for ensuring that the programmes it delivers on behalf of its awarding partners are maintained at an appropriate level, and align with programme and module learning outcomes and qualification and Subject Benchmark Statements. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

1.12 The higher education programmes at the College are governed by the College's awarding partners, with standards set at validation and confirmed at re-validation. These governance arrangements are clearly outlined in Partnership Agreements and the College's internal documents. Within the College, the overall responsibility for higher education and the governance of academic standards rests with the Vice-Principal Curriculum, Pastoral and Quality, with operational responsibility assumed by the Head of the Business Faculty, who has cross-College responsibility for higher education and leads a team that includes the Higher Education Officer and Higher Education Tutor. Higher education-specific committees, including the Higher Education Scrutiny Committee and Higher Education Academic Sub-Committee, report to the overall College Academic Sub-Committee, which in turn reports to the Senior Management Team and Corporation Board.

1.13 The College has its own Higher Education Assessment Regulations relating to the Higher National Diploma awards, which include its own processes for complaints and appeals, made available to staff and students on the VLE. Programmes delivered in partnership with awarding bodies adhere to the academic and assessment regulations set out by the relevant university, and the College provides easy access to their regulations through links on the VLE. Key aspects of the university regulations are included in course handbooks, with students advised to access the full regulations on the university websites. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.14 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising a range of documentation (including course proposals, validation and re-validation minutes, programme specifications, programme handbooks and committee minutes). The review team also viewed information available on the VLE for staff and students, and tested the application of the College's Higher Education Assessment Regulations. The review team also held a number of meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding bodies) and students.

1.15 Staff and students demonstrated a clear understanding of assessment regulations relating to the individual programmes, and staff demonstrated awareness of the operation of quality assurance procedures. The review team found that, where an issue had arisen relating to student progression from the first to the second year of a Higher National Diploma programme, the College had taken action to update the College assessment regulations for the following academic year in line with the Pearson Centre Guide to Assessment. This requirement was noted at the Higher Education Academic Sub-Committee and approved by the Senior Management Team.

1.16 The review team concludes that the academic governance arrangements delineated in the College's Partnership Agreements with its awarding partners, together with the College's committee structure for the management of higher education, provide effective governance arrangements for the management of academic standards, and the award of credit and qualifications. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.17 Definitive programme documents for the College's higher education courses are developed and maintained by its awarding partners. As such, programme specifications are provided by the awarding bodies. Programme specifications for the Higher National programmes are those determined by Pearson, rather than College-devised. Pearson specifications are available to staff and students on the VLE. The College follows the processes of its awarding partners for making changes to programmes and modules, and is responsible for ensuring that updates to programme specifications are circulated to staff and students in handbooks and via the VLE. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.18 The review team tested the Expectation through scrutiny of a range of documentation including programme specifications (and the process for their maintenance and modification relating to programme or module amendments), and the Pearson guidance documentation regarding programme specifications. The review team also held a number of meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding bodies) and students.

1.19 The College produces contextualised College-devised programmes specifications for Higher National programmes, as required by Pearson, in order to ensure that programme-specific learning outcomes are in place to accompany unit-specific learning outcomes devised by Pearson.

1.20 Programme specifications and intended programme-level learning outcomes are not available in full in the Foundation Degree handbooks, but are available and accessible to the College's staff and students, in full, on the awarding bodies' websites and on the staff and student pages of the College VLE. Students confirmed they were aware of the content of the specifications and that they are on the College VLE.

1.21 The review team explored the arrangements by which the College is involved in amendments to programmes and modules, and found this process effective and well understood by academic and senior staff.

1.22 The review team concludes that there are appropriate arrangements for provision of definitive programme documents by the universities, and clear processes for amendments to such documents. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.23 The College is not a degree-awarding body and therefore works with a range of awarding partners in order to approve programmes for delivery. All of the College's awarding partners retain responsibility for the approval of programmes in line with their own regulations, and the extent of College involvement in the approval process consequently varies between partners.

1.24 Pearson retains responsibility for the development and approval of units for the College's Higher National programmes, and the College constructs programmes by selecting discrete units, ensuring it opts only for units where it possesses appropriate staff expertise. The College is responsible for designing assessment in line with unit learning outcomes provided by Pearson. It provides staff development to support programme teams in meeting this responsibility.

1.25 Where the College designs programmes, it requires all proposals to be considered through its Higher Education Gateway procedure prior to seeking approval from its awarding partners. This procedure considers the rationale, market research, financial model and marketing arrangements for the programme.

1.26 The high level of involvement of the College's awarding partners, which arrange external scrutiny: the College's formalised Higher Education Gateway procedure; its staff development opportunities for those involved in designing assessment; and the College's familiarity with relevant external benchmarks, including the Foundation Degree Subject Benchmark Statement, would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.27 The review team tested this Expectation through scrutiny of a range of documentation (including policies pertaining to programme approval, evidence demonstrating the College's involvement in the development of assessment, and paperwork produced by the College in preparation for validation events). The review team also held a number of meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding bodies) and students.

1.28 The review team found that a productive and collaborative relationship exists between the College and its awarding partners in relation to the approval of programmes. The College works with the RAU to design the curriculum and assessments. Likewise, the College liaises with Pearson when constructing Higher National programmes and uses Pearson Higher Education Assessment Regulations when developing assessment.

1.29 Arrangements differ with UWE, where the College operates franchise programmes and has no input into curriculum design. Nevertheless, the review team found that approval processes at all of the College's awarding partners use external expertise. The College supplements this by consulting with employers over unit selection for their Higher National provision. Student feedback is also taken into account when reviewing units and this may also influence changes.

1.30 The review team found the Higher Education Gateway procedure is applied consistently and complements the robust approval arrangements of the College's awarding partners. The procedure considers appropriate criteria when determining whether programmes are viable and suitable for delivery at the College.

1.31 The review team concludes that the College's awarding partners maintain ownership of approval processes; the processes allow for appropriate externality and the College implements its own approval procedure prior to submitting proposals for validation. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.32 The awarding partners retain responsibility for programme approval and ensuring that credit and qualifications are awarded only where programme and module learning outcomes have been met, and academic standards, both their own and threshold standards, have been satisfied. Programme aims are contained within student handbooks and programme specifications made available to students via the VLE. Module aims are communicated through module handbooks.

1.33 For some programmes, the College designs assessments aligned to learning outcomes and specifications provided by Pearson and the RAU, and external reference points such as the FHEQ. It provides staff development to support programme teams in meeting this responsibility. Other programmes are franchised, and assessments are designed by awarding partners.

1.34 The College's awarding partners have overarching responsibility for ensuring that this Expectation is met. The College assumes an active role in this process, through its Higher Education Assessment Board, which ensures that the assessment of learning outcomes, at programme, module or unit level, is carried out according to stated procedures. The College moderates results, although precise arrangements vary between awarding partners. External examiners are also asked to provide assurances that learning outcomes are being met and that standards are aligned with UK threshold standards and those of the awarding partners.

1.35 Staff development ensures that staff are equipped to construct assessments and mark at the appropriate level, and that they are familiar with the awarding partners' processes, especially in relation to moderation. Induction and mentor support for new staff further prepares them in this area. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.36 The review team tested this Expectation by scrutinising a range of documentation (including programme and module handbooks, external examiner reports and External Standards Verifier reports). The review team also held a number of meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding bodies) and students.

1.37 Staff acknowledged challenges in constructing assessment for Pearson programmes where module learning outcomes are broad. To combat this, staff new to developing assessment work closely with more experienced colleagues and use previous assessment as a benchmark.

1.38 The external examiner arrangements generally work effectively. Some instances where external examiners have identified issues have been satisfactorily dealt with. This demonstrates that external expertise helps to identify weaknesses in the College's provision

and enables it to address them. For example, in the first year of delivery the external examiner raised some issues about the extent to which students on the HND in Animal Management were achieving outcomes appropriate to the level. These issues have been satisfactorily resolved through providing a more robust induction for students and closer academic support during the year. Issues raised by the external examiner for the Foundation Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice, relating to the completeness of information they received about assessment processes, have been resolved following changes made to the mechanisms for the operation of the partnership with UWE.

1.39 The review team concludes that the College's awarding partners maintain overall responsibility for the award of credit and qualifications, and that the College complies with the requirements of its awarding partners in relation to the design and approval of assessment. It is responsive to external examiner reports and has also worked with awarding partners to ensure that external examining arrangements are robust. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.40 Programme teams are required to complete an annual monitoring report. These are subject to oversight at the College's Higher Education Scrutiny Committee, which meets at least twice per academic year. The College also monitors programmes at its Higher Education Sub-Committee, and through its cross-College self-assessment process. The College's processes feed directly into the processes of its respective awarding partners.

1.41 External examiners play a significant role in the oversight of academic standards by commenting in their annual reports on whether academic standards have been met. Although it does not form an explicit part of the annual monitoring template, staff use external examiner reports to inform the College's annual monitoring process.

1.42 The review team found that the College's procedures for the production of annual monitoring reports, subsequently overseen by a formal deliberative committee and which interface with awarding body processes, combined with regular teaching and learning inspections, would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.43 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising a range of documentation (including the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee and Higher Education Assessment Board, as well as external examiner reports and annual monitoring reports for each programme). The review team also held a number of meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding bodies) and students.

1.44 The Head of Business and the Higher Education Officer receive external examiner reports and oversee the formation of responses from programme teams. The review team found that annual monitoring reports are detailed, and provide a constructive and well considered critique of programmes. They draw on a range of information, including feedback from the external examiner and student achievement data, but little direct student feedback informs the reports. The review team found clear evidence that annual monitoring reports are received by the College's Scrutiny Committee. At present, because of the timing of meetings, the input of the Staff: Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) into discussion of annual monitoring is limited and the team makes the recommendation in Expectation B8 that the College should establish a process to enable discussion of annual monitoring reports by SSLC to contribute to current year Quality Improvement Plans.

1.45 Evidence confirms that the appropriate committees at the awarding partners, such as the Field Board at the UWE and the Joint Board of Studies at the RAU, receive external examiner reports and annual monitoring reports. This results in discussion between the College and its partners about the extent to which academic standards are being maintained.

1.46 The College's awarding bodies maintain responsibility for the periodic review and revalidation of programmes, and the review team found that the College participates appropriately in these arrangements. The College is not required by its awarding organisation to implement a periodic review process for Higher National provision, but the

College intends to implement one to strengthen its own monitoring and review arrangements.

1.47 The review team concludes that the College has met the requirements placed upon it by its awarding partners. The College routinely completes annual monitoring reports, and responds to external examiner reports. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

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

**Findings**

1.48 The College's awarding partners are responsible for setting academic standards, and as such they retain responsibility for involving external individuals in the design, development and approval of programmes. The awarding partners' processes include external involvement at the validation stage. The College's one awarding organisation, Pearson, secures external involvement during unit development, and the onus is then on the College to ensure externality when selecting units to form programmes. The College seeks to achieve this through the Higher Education Gateway procedure.

1.49 External involvement in the maintenance of academic standards is achieved through external examiners for each programme; these appointments are again the responsibility of the awarding partners. The College is responsible for engaging with externals appointed by its awarding partners. It does this in liaison with external examiners and those involved in programme validation. The College has Career Ready Boards, which it uses to gather feedback from employers on the College's provision. Neither the College's Higher Education Assessment Board nor its Higher Education Scrutiny Committee contains external members. The awarding partners' processes for ensuring externality at design and approval stage, their requirements for external examining, the College's use of its Career Ready Boards and its Higher Education Gateway procedure are sufficient to enable the Expectation to be met.

1.50 The review team tested this Expectation by scrutinising a range of documentation (including external examiner reports and the minutes of committees charged with overseeing the management of academic standards). The team also held a number of meetings with staff (including representatives of the College's awarding partners) and students.

1.51 The review team found that the College's awarding partners consistently apply processes that secure external expertise in programme design and approval: validation events incorporate external and independent expertise on the panel. The College's Higher Education Gateway procedure allows for external input at the design stage. The engagement of students and employers in the programme development process is gained simultaneously through the Career Ready Boards, which the team identifies as a feature of good practice in Expectation B1.

1.52 External examiner reports are detailed and comment on whether UK threshold standards and those of the awarding body are met. As noted in Expectation A3.2, where issues have been raised by external examiners appropriate action has been taken to respond. The College has worked with the UWE to improve external examining arrangements for the Foundation Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice, and these arrangements are now operating successfully.

1.53 The review team concludes that the processes of the College's awarding partners ensure that externality informs programme design, approval and the maintenance of academic standards. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

1.54 In reaching its judgement on the maintenance of the academic standards of awards the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.55 The College's awarding partners set the academic standards of programmes. The College is involved in maintaining academic standards as set out in partnership arrangements, which differ for validated and franchised programmes, and for programmes delivered on behalf of Pearson. In addition to its awarding partners, the College takes account of national academic standards' frameworks and has secure academic governance arrangements. It participates effectively in its awarding partners' processes for approving programmes, awarding credit and qualifications, reviewing programmes, and involving external examiners in setting and maintaining academic standards. Its internal processes for maintaining academic standards complement those of its awarding partners.

1.56 All seven of the Expectations under Part A of the Quality Code are met with an associated low level of risk. There are no recommendations and no affirmations in this judgement area. There are no areas of good practice identified, although there is a related good practice in Expectation B1 concerning the use of the Career Ready Boards as a means of simultaneously engaging with employers and students in programme development.

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

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 Responsibility for the approval of programmes rests with the College's awarding bodies and organisation. The College is required by its agreements with awarding bodies to implement the procedures and regulations of the respective partners for programme design, development and approval. These require that proposed provision is aligned to the FHEQ and to qualification and Subject Benchmark Statements, that account is taken of external expertise, and that programme details are formally recorded in module and programme specifications. The College has an internal approval process under which the Higher Education Lead first checks proposed programmes for strategic fit. The academic and business case, presented in separate documents, are then considered at a Higher Education Gateway subcommittee of the Academic Board chaired by the Vice-Principal (Curriculum, Pastoral and Quality) and attended by the higher education leadership team and the heads of professional services. If approved, foundation degree proposals are taken on for development with the awarding body; Higher National (HN) proposals are considered by a subgroup of the Gateway which selects modules and creates a programme specification before submission to Pearson for validation. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.2 To test the Expectation, the review team scrutinised a range of documentation (including the College's formal procedures, documents generated in the course of programme development and approval, and the minutes of relevant committees). The team also held meetings with academic and professional support staff (including a member of the governing body and a representative of an awarding body), and students.

2.3 To shape and develop its provision the College has a Strategic Plan which is drawn up by the Senior Leadership Team and approved by its governing body, the Corporation. Higher education provision at the College is relatively small-scale but is regarded as strategically important in providing progression opportunities for the College's Business and Technology Education Council students and meeting the needs of local employers. While sixth-form education is the primary focus of the Strategic Plan 2013-16, the incremental expansion of higher education is identified as an ambition. This is elaborated on in the College's Higher Education Strategy 2015-16, which refers to the development and delivery of suites of foundation degree and HN programmes which meet the needs and aspirations of the local community. Local priorities are identified with the assistance of employer groups including the Local Enterprise Partnership.

2.4 Programme proposals are developed by curriculum teams in an iterative process involving the awarding body and discussion at the Higher Education Academic Sub-Committee (HEASC) of the Academic Board. College staff have played an active role in the design of the foundation degrees validated by RAU but do not, at the moment, design modules for UWE or Pearson programmes. The College acknowledges that it needs to formalise a procedure for design and selection of HN modules and this is an action in its Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan for 2015-16. The College does not currently

involve students formally in the approval process. It does, however, seek the opinions of students and alumni on programme proposals, and the team was given several examples of their influence.

2.5 The team saw records of the development of the existing foundation degrees and their approval by the awarding bodies. It noted that these partners had either revalidated or extended approval of the College's provision within the last two years. The team also traced the development over the past year of a new Foundation Degree in Business and Enterprise to be validated by RAU, and a new HND in Sport (Health, Exercise and Fitness) to be validated by Pearson. In both cases effective use had been made of the College's Career Ready boards (Career Academies) as a means of simultaneously engaging with employers and students in programme development. This is **good practice**.

2.6 In reviewing the written evidence, the team found that many policy documents were undated and contained no record of when and by whom they had been approved. The team also found inconsistencies in terminology. The team was informed that a decision had recently been taken at a meeting of the Senior Leadership Team to conduct an audit of all such documents to establish a definitive electronic record. The College is **recommended** to ensure that the proposed action to eliminate confusion of version control, location and nomenclature of key documents relating to learning opportunities is completed.

2.7 The team concludes that the internal processes for programme design, development and approval operate effectively and that the College adheres to the requirements of its awarding partners. The Expectation is met. As the recommendation relates to a need to amend or update details in documentation (where the amendment will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change), the associated risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.8 The College is responsible for admissions to the HN programmes, which are handled directly. The College's values, as articulated in the Strategic Plan, include commitments to equality and diversity, and the HE Strategy includes a commitment to widening participation. The HE Admissions Policy is supported by a process chart which establishes principles of fair admission and sets out responsibilities and procedures, including procedures for feedback and appeals. There is an HE Assessment of Prior Learning Policy, although it has not yet been used. There is also an HE Course Change and Closure Procedure which includes guidance on the implications of closure for admissions. Overall responsibility for admissions rests with the Vice-Principal (Student Journey & Support) who manages admissions and marketing staff.

2.9 Printed and online admissions materials are the responsibility of Marketing and Communications. Policies are set and reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team and the HEASC which gathers feedback from staff. A start-of-year survey is used to gather feedback from students on their experience of admission and induction.

2.10 Applications are screened by the HE Tutor, who plays an important role in ensuring consistency. All applicants are interviewed by the programme team leader and the HE Tutor. There is an interview assessment form which has selection criteria and also prompts interviewers to solicit information on learning support needs. Staff involved in the separate entry routes are trained for that specific route. Professional support staff attend training and updating events provided by Supporting Professionals in Admissions (SPA), and take account of SPA guidance on good practice in admissions. The HE Tutor and programme team leaders also receive generic and HND-specific training.

2.11 Information for applicants is provided in a printed prospectus, and on the College website. In addition to a webpage with general information about higher education, each HN programme has a page on the website and each foundation degree programme has a link to the relevant RAU page. The HN programme pages include information on course structure and fees, a link to Key Information Set (KIS) data, a link to the programme specification and links to the Admissions, Assessment of Prior Learning and Academic Support policies, as well as to an application form. These programme pages include information on course structure, fees, and programme specification. There is also unambiguous information on admissions, APEL/APCL, and links to various sources of support. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.12 To test the Expectation, the review team scrutinised a range of documentation (including the Admissions Policy and other related policies). The team also met senior staff, teaching staff, and students to test the operational effectiveness of the College's admission processes.

2.13 Students whom the team met confirmed that the admission process was efficient and prompt. They found their induction to be very helpful. They received good pre-enrolment information and documentation, including handbooks. The majority of the students confirmed

that they had interviews with subject specialists and the HE Tutor. Some had attended open days or taster days. Others had informal discussions with the HE Tutor before deciding to submit a formal application. Academic and professional support staff confirmed that they received training and guidance on the admissions process. In the past, there had been some discretion exercised in relation to borderline cases, but in the light of experience it had been decided to adhere to the admissions requirements in all cases. The involvement of the HE Tutor in the process allows students to receive informal advice prior to a formal application, assists in the identification of additional support needs, and ensures consistency in admissions decisions.

2.14 The College acknowledges its responsibility to ensure that information provided to current and prospective students is accurate, accessible and fit-for-purpose. The College's Admissions Policy is monitored and reviewed annually to take into account the latest College requirements and responses to national initiatives. Students can access information through a variety of media such as the website, course leaflets, higher education prospectus, VLE and course handbooks. The College also gathers students' views from surveys at induction and at key points in the academic year.

2.15 The review team concludes that the College has consistent, fair and clear admissions procedures and policies which are understood by students and staff. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.16 The College's Strategic Plan 2013-16 sets out the broad objective of excellence in teaching to be achieved by the recruitment of high calibre staff, effective performance management, and the engagement of students and employers. This is elaborated in a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and a Quality Improvement Strategy for Teaching, Learning and Assessment. The College has a specific Higher Education Strategy and sets annual targets in a Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan; progress in implementing the plan is monitored throughout the year.

2.17 To implement its Higher Education Strategy, the College has created a series of higher education subcommittees of the Academic Board. These have responsibility for programme approval (the Gateway), monitoring (the Scrutiny Committee) and the practice and development of teaching and learning (the HEASC). A Higher National Diploma Group (HNDG), also reports to the HEASC. The Gateway and Scrutiny committees are chaired by the Vice-Principal (Curriculum, Pastoral and Quality); the HEASC and HNDG are chaired by the Higher Education Lead and the College-wide Vocational Coordinator respectively.

2.18 Higher education teachers at the College are qualified in their field to at least the next level above that at which they are teaching, and are required to hold a teaching qualification. They receive a formal induction and undergo individual performance review, including lesson observations three times a year, with at least one observation of higher education teaching. The College has a newly updated Staff Development Strategy which identifies eight areas of activity including pedagogy, management and scholarship. Staff are assigned 15 development days a year of which 10 are self-directed. Higher education staff are expected to engage in an agreed mix of scholarly activities which are recorded in personal development plans generated through annual performance review. As is appropriate to its essentially vocational mission in higher education, the College embeds work-related learning and employability into its programmes. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.19 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising a range of documents, including policy documents and committee minutes, performance statistics, a full set of external examiners' reports, staff CVs and records of staff development, and examples of teaching materials. The team also held a number of meetings with staff and students.

2.20 Strategic direction for higher education is provided by the Senior Leadership Team and the Academic Board, but overall responsibility rests with the Corporation, which approves the strategy documents and monitors their implementation closely; it receives an annual report on teaching and learning and two governors are assigned particular responsibilities for student experience. Capacity to manage a relatively disparate set of higher education programmes is assured through one of the Faculty Heads taking the role of Higher Education Lead, with the support of a Higher Education Officer. The creation of the HNDG in 2014 has also enabled practice to be shared and standardised across Pearson provision. Each programme has a designated leader; for the foundation degrees these are staff of the awarding bodies, but College staff sit on the programme management boards.



For the UWE programme there is a college programme lead and for the RAU programmes there is a designated college lead. There are staff handbooks for each of the HN programmes and a handbook for Heads of Department. The College is aware that its higher education programmes depend upon a relatively small number of academic staff, and actions to improve resilience were included in the Higher Education Enhancement (Quality Improvement) Plan for 2014-15. These have included targeted recruitment and the engagement and training of staff who work in other areas of provision.

2.21 In looking at the records the team found performance management at the College to be robust. In addition to individual performance review, the College observation team (consisting of senior managers and a lead governor) conduct regular Learning Walks using a higher education recording template. There are also cross-College inspections conducted by the Vice-Principal or Faculty Head with cross-College responsibility for quality. The Quality Officer coordinates these and conducts interviews with students; these feed into Faculty Review meetings at which senior managers including the Principal and a governor challenge the performance reports of departments.

2.22 The College's approach to higher education, as articulated by senior staff, is to focus on teaching and learning. The College does not claim to offer a traditional university campus experience and believes that this would deter the sort of student it aims to recruit. It seeks to guide students to become independent and critical learners through small group teaching, close individual support and the gradual removal of scaffolding. Students and academic staff met by the team had a clear grasp of this strategy and of the specific nature of teaching and learning in higher education, which is articulated in the Higher Education Student Handbook, programme handbooks, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, and induction materials for staff and students. The team was able to trace the implementation of the strategy through module handbooks and schemes of work. The College acknowledges that research and critical thinking need to be further embedded in its HN programmes and has begun to address this through lesson observation and development of electronic resources.

2.23 Staff development focuses on the nature of teaching in higher education and on sharing good practice. There is an annual Higher Education Staff Development Day and a dedicated learning and teaching afternoon is held each week in term-time. The College recently employed an external consultant to help to differentiate lesson observation, and has also drawn on the expertise of staff at the RAU. A system of cross-departmental peer observation of higher education teaching has recently been introduced. The team learned of a range of development activities undertaken by individuals, including support for a member of staff to complete a PhD. Despite the small scale of its provision, the College has appointed an experienced Subject Learning Coach who mentors and supports staff in higher education teaching and scholarly activity. Staff told the team that this initiative has appreciably heightened the sense of community among higher education teachers. The team noted that the Subject Learning Coach had developed the peer observation scheme and reported regularly to the HEASC on good practice. Academic staff told the team that this arrangement ensured effective individual support in induction and in the enhancement of their practice and of the curriculum. The creation of a dedicated Subject Learning Coach for higher education, which has enhanced staff development opportunities for higher education staff, is **good practice**.

2.24 Work-related learning and employability are embedded into the programmes. An employability audit was conducted in 2014 to verify and record this in detail, including activities and the names of visiting speakers. The Corporation receives an annual cross-College report on employability and recently agreed on a number of themes against which programmes have been mapped, and which could form the basis of a future system of personal development planning. All the foundation degrees have work-based

learning modules. Good practice in this area at the RAU was shared at the most recent Higher Education Staff Development Day. Of the HN programmes only Sport (Coaching and Development) has a formal work placement but Computing students are usually already in employment and Animal Management students have opportunities for practice in the College's own animal centre.

2.25 The College actively seeks engagement with local employers and has a set of Higher Education Employer Relations and Placements Protocols. It makes particular use of its Career Ready Boards to foster relationships and gain employer input to teaching and learning. The team were shown a list of work experience opportunities, trips and visiting speakers in each programme in 2014-15 and work-realistic assignment briefs from a number of programmes. It learned that many of these had originated from the personal contacts of members of staff. A specific example was provided of a new part-time member of staff, who also works as a heritage consultant, who has drawn on her experience and contacts to strengthen discussion of funding in the curriculum, revise two practical assessments, and arrange a new site visit and three new work experience opportunities. The team heard of similar examples from other programmes including the HND in Sport (Coaching and Development) and the Foundation degree in Criminology. The enhancement of learning and career opportunities for students through the utilisation of the professional networks of staff is **good practice**.

2.26 Students met by the team confirmed the high level of satisfaction with teaching recorded in the student submission and available survey data. External examiners are equally positive about learning and teaching. Noting examples of good practice and evidence of enhancement in teaching, the team concludes that the College's management of learning opportunities and teaching practices is effective. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.27 In its mission statement the College commits itself to enabling learners of all abilities to realise their full potential. The Strategic Plan 2013-16 sets out to meet this goal by developing a learning environment characterised by inclusivity, participation and mutual trust and by treating all stakeholders in a fair and equal manner. The Higher Education Strategy 2015-16 commits the College to developing a high quality but affordable infrastructure, which will permit growth, and to invest in staff and facilities accordingly. In its Higher Education Charter, students are promised appropriate and flexible learning resources, student and course handbooks with information about services, two individual progression meetings each year, and pastoral support as required. There is information about pastoral, financial and disability support for prospective students on the higher education section of the College website. The College has a Disability Policy that provides additional learning support for students who are able to claim the Disability Support Allowance and offers guidance on how to do this. Support services are professionally staffed and evaluate their provision twice a year. Students on RAU programmes can also access support services at the University and often prefer to do so.

2.28 Tutorial support and guidance on study skills is generally provided at the curriculum level. The College holds a general induction event for all its students; those on foundation degrees also attend induction at their awarding body. Students are briefed on what is expected of them, how the College will support them, and on assessment regulations and academic practice. A few weeks later a second induction event is held, which is devoted to study skills; attendance for foundation degree students is optional as they receive similar sessions from their awarding body. At the end of the year a transition/employability evening is held at which students hear presentations on university progression and are given mock job interviews; alumni are also invited back to talk about their experiences.

2.29 Over the past five years the College has provided a study room for higher education students, upgraded classrooms with appropriate IT resources, constructed new sports facilities, developed a higher education section in its VLE and an online record system which staff and students can access. It has also appointed a Higher Education Careers and Adult Guidance Tutor (HE Tutor) who is backed up by College-wide pastoral managers for Careers and UCAS, and the College's academic support manager. The College VLE has curriculum areas, although curriculum pages for students on RAU programmes are hosted at the University. There is a document specifying minimum documentation requirements for these pages and they are checked annually by the HE Tutor. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.30 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising a range of documentation, including policy documents, induction materials, schemes of work, tutorial records, and the VLE. The team also held meetings with academic and professional support staff and students. The team was also given a demonstration of the online student record system.

2.31 The Gateway, Scrutiny Committee and Academic Sub-Committee of the Academic Board ensure that higher education issues are considered at institutional level and feed into resource planning. The Vice-Principal (Curriculum, Pastoral and Quality) and Higher Education Lead chair these committees and provide strategic leadership and oversight of resourcing. The Vice-Principal (Student Journey and Support) oversees the operation of the

support services and attends or is represented on the higher education committees while the Vice-Principal (Corporate Services) oversees physical resources.

2.32 The team noted close attention paid at all levels to issues of equality and diversity, including support of male students through peer mentoring on the Foundation Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice (on which the students are predominantly female). Equality and diversity issues are regularly discussed by the Corporation. The College has very few students in receipt of Disability Support Allowance and is usually able to support learners at the curriculum level. All students now undergo a Sherwood Ability Screen test of numeracy and literacy skills on induction which enables staff to identify support needs. The team found the Higher Education Student Handbook to be clear and informative about study resources, pastoral and financial support. The role of the HE Tutor is explained clearly and there are signposts to sources of further advice.

2.33 The College offers small group teaching with a practical and vocational focus, which allows a high degree of individual support. This is built into programme schemes of work in the form of one-to-one tutorials and catch-up sessions at which staff are available for consultation. The HE Tutor is responsible for providing additional pastoral support, progression and careers advice to all higher education students, although students on RAU programmes also receive tutorial support at the university and are therefore less likely to engage with the support at the College. These students also have access to personal development planning at the RAU. The College's Student Tracking and Referral System (STaRS), recently created in-house, has the potential to be developed in this direction and a set of employability skills has already been embedded to help students design their CVs. The HE Tutor offers individual tutorials twice a year which are logged electronically on this system. It also enables staff to upload marks and module report cards, although the team found that this was not currently common practice and that a number of separate systems for recording marks were in operation. Not all students take up the offer of tutorials, although the HE Tutor makes every effort to encourage them, attending curriculum events as a means of contact. Students met by the team were clear about the role of the HE Tutor and confident they know where to turn for support if they need it. After discussing this issue in detail with staff and students the review team was satisfied that students are receiving adequate personal support and opportunities to reflect on their progress. Nonetheless, the team felt that the College relies too heavily on curriculum-level and informal processes and is vulnerable to the risk of lack of continuity or failure in staffing. The College is **recommended** to develop a formal process for the monitoring and tracking of students' progress and personal development.

2.34 The College acknowledges that its library is primarily oriented to sixth-form study and seeks to compensate for this, for example in providing digital resources in the VLE for HN students who do not have access to university partner libraries. The librarian reviews holdings annually and recently conducted a benchmarking exercise in response to feedback from an external examiner. HN students are also given the opportunity to visit a university library to practise information research skills. The College has significant in-house IT capacity which has enabled it to develop the VLE and STaRS.

2.35 Students met by the team expressed high levels of satisfaction with support and no concerns about resources beyond some frustration with library holdings (confirming evidence provided in the student submission and survey data). Individuals spoke of exceptional support offered by the HE Tutor and their curriculum leader at times of personal difficulty. The external examiner for the HND in Sport (Coaching and Development) commended in successive years the tracking of and support for learners, and the collaboration between teaching and support staff. There have been no concerns raised by external examiners about resources.

2.36 The team concludes that the College offers effective support for students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. There is, however, over-reliance on local and informal systems of tracking of student progress. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate as the recommendation relates to an area where insufficient emphasis or priority is given to assuring quality.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.37 Student engagement is overseen primarily by the HEASC, which monitors its effectiveness. The College as a whole, including the Corporation, has taken engagement seriously; with governors being given specific lead/focus responsibility for the student voice and liaison. The Strategic Plan includes the aspiration to unite all stakeholders into a single College community and to provide an effective learner involvement strategy. The Higher Education Enhancement Plan 2014-15 includes actions to develop higher education student feedback and engagement, which are continued in the HE Quality Improvement Log 2015-16.

2.38 Upon enrolment, students at the College sign an HE Student Charter in which they are asked to share ideas and comments with the College, and to make themselves aware of opportunities to contribute to all aspects of policy and development affecting the student experience. A College-wide Student Voice statement identifies in more detail channels through which students can provide feedback (directly and through representatives) and opportunities to act as representatives; it also explains how the College responds to the student voice, giving a number of examples of improvements made. Similar information is also made available to students through the Higher Education Handbook.

2.39 The College's awarding bodies establish the requirements for student feedback and representation for provision for which they are formally responsible. The voice of students on RAU programmes is shared with the College through the joint Programme Management Committee and participation in the Staff: Student Liaison Committee (SSLC); the College's HE Tutor also visits students at the RAU campus.

2.40 Having acquired its own student numbers in 2014/15 the College now participates in the National Student Survey (NSS). It conducts entry and annual surveys and has recently introduced end-of-module surveys; the results are reviewed at the HE Scrutiny Committee. Students are invited to attend a twice-yearly HE Student Forum chaired by the HE Tutor. Additional feedback is sought by the College's Quality Officer during the process of internal quality inspection.

2.41 Each programme is invited to elect a course representative who attends the SSLC and Student Forum, headed by the HE Lead. SSLC aims to provide discussion on academic and programme-related issues and to enable students to provide feedback on their experience. Courses with no elected representatives are supported by the HE Tutor, for example, through engagement with students in their classes. The College also actively encourages a shared approach to student engagement through the use of a Student Rep Agreement, which provides information on the expectations of student representatives and on the guidance and support that is available to them.

2.42 New students are directed to the HE Student Charter, which explains what students can expect from their experience, and the College's expectations of students; it also introduces students to some of the key aspects of academic life. The Student Voice statement demonstrates how students can provide feedback and take up opportunities to act as representatives. This information is also available in the Higher Education Handbook. Taken together, these arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.43 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's approach by talking to senior staff, programme leaders, teaching staff, and students. The team also considered the student submission and evaluated student representative structures and the minutes of SSLC.

2.44 The College actively seeks the views of students in a variety of ways, including gathering students' views from surveys at induction and at key points during the academic year. All students studying on higher education programmes are able to express their views through their student representation at Student Forum and SSLC meetings. The Student Forum meets twice a year, and its focus is on gathering student views, identifying concerns and sharing good practice. During the team's meeting with students, they advised that minutes of the SSLC meetings are distributed via email and made available on the VLE. Students reported that their feedback had an impact and had, for instance, led to changes in higher education facilities in the College. Student representatives from the College's university courses are invited to attend the latter's Student Representatives Committee. The College provides training for student representatives, and students are also provided with training material from UWE.

2.45 Although there has been a lead student representative on the HEASC, student attendance at the HEASC has been challenging because of students' attendance patterns, work commitments and the distance some students travelled to College. The SSLC was established, following consultation with students, to address these challenges. SSLC meets twice a year and has a focus on academic and programme related issues. The agenda at these meetings is a combination of topics and issues compiled by course leaders, College managers and higher education students. The SSLC provides reports to the HEASC and senior staff and governors have access to minutes. This, along with other methods of collecting students' views, has enabled senior managers to listen to the student voice and take actions accordingly. Additionally, end of module evaluation forms provide ongoing feedback that is subsequently addressed in tutorials and staff-student representative meetings. The introduction of the SSLC has enabled a new learner voice schedule to be designed and implemented, although it is yet to be formally evaluated. The module evaluations also provide academic staff with feedback on how they can improve the student experience. In its meeting with students the team was provided with some specific examples of student feedback being acted on promptly and particularly effectively.

2.46 The College strives to hear the student voice but acknowledges this has proved challenging because of the nature of its higher education provision and students. The College responded to these challenges by the introduction of the SSLC. The team **affirms** the steps being taken to resolve challenges in securing student engagement through the development of the SSLC.

2.47 The team concludes that the College engages students and provides appropriate platforms for them to communicate with each other and the College. Students understand how the representation system and other engagement mechanisms operate and the College monitors and responds effectively to the student voice. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.48 The College's awarding partners have policies, regulations and processes to set and maintain standards for each award of credit or a qualification, and to assure the reliability of assessment. These are reflected in the College's policies, regulations and processes. The College is required to apply the assessment regulations and procedures of its awarding bodies and organisation as set out in partnership agreements and manuals of collaborative provision. These include rules governing the accreditation of prior learning, reasonable adjustment, mitigating circumstances and unfair practice. External examiners are appointed by the awarding partner. College staff have some input into the design and marking of assessments on the foundation degrees, but primary responsibility for assessment rests with the university partners which convene the boards of examiners. For HN provision the College develops local regulations and is responsible for the design and marking of assessments and confirmation of results, subject to external verification by Pearson.

2.49 The College has a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy which defines the purpose and varieties of assessment and includes specific guidance on assessment for higher education. The College's local regulations for HN programmes include an HE Assessment Policy which establishes principles of fair and robust assessment. The HE Assessment Regulations set out detailed rules about deadlines, mitigating circumstances, unfair practice, appeals and retrieval, and also contain advice on good academic practice. There is an HE Assessment Appeals Procedure and an HE Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy. An HE Assessment Board is held at the end of the year to ratify marks for the HN programmes and to receive outcomes for all other programmes. It approves marks, considers mitigating circumstances and applies regulations on progression and appeals for HN provision. Applications for mitigating circumstances are heard by the HE Assessment Board which may grant deferrals but not exemptions from assessment.

2.50 Academic staff are required to hold a teaching qualification, and the College provides a number of staff development activities relating to assessment. New staff teaching on the foundation degrees are briefed on assessment by the link tutor or programme manager at the partner. Employers contribute feedback which informs assessment of students on work placements, but they do not conduct assessment.

2.51 The College encourages assessment literacy among its HN students through discussion of assessment regulations and academic practice at induction and in class. Regulations and policy documents are available to students in the VLE, and students also receive information about assessment in the HE Student Handbook, course handbooks and module handbooks.

2.52 Opportunities are provided for formative assessment (students are permitted to submit a draft) and reflection on assessment through feedback in class, one-to-one sessions with module leaders and the HE Tutor. The College stipulates a normal turnaround of 10 days for assessments in HN provision.



2.53 There are College moderation and internal verification processes for marking and moderation that are clearly documented. The College has an Examinations Policy that covers higher education examination arrangements, coursework and appeals. Marking is carried out against published marking criteria on both foundation degree and HN awards. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.54 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising a range of documentation, including assessment regulations, course handbooks, internal verification reports and external examiner reports. The team also met senior staff, course leaders, teaching staff and students.

2.55 Assessment regulations and procedures are clear and fit for purpose. The terms of reference and minutes of the HE Assessment Board demonstrate that there are satisfactory procedures for oversight of assessment. There is evidence of discussion of assessment and feedback in deliberative committees and in staff development. The examples of module handbooks provided clearly specify learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Examples regarding moderation of assignment briefs and assessment and feedback show that these processes are fit for purpose.

2.56 The student submission records general satisfaction with assessment and feedback, including promptness of return of work. External examiners' reports for all programmes in 2015 are complimentary about assessment design, marking, moderation and feedback. Two external examiners commended the College for its advice on plagiarism and its procedures for ensuring that students understand assessment criteria. The clarity of advice on assessment matters is echoed by the student voice.

2.57 The Higher Education Handbook has clear guidelines on assessment criteria for foundation degree programmes and cross-refers to grading criteria for HNDs. The team was told in meetings with staff that grading criteria are included in the individual module handbooks, and some examples of this were provided. Students the team met said that they were clear about the criteria used to mark their work, that they were fully briefed on the requirements of the assessment, well supported during assessment, and that they received excellent and normally very prompt feedback. Assessment was generally returned within two weeks of work being submitted, although slightly longer for the UWE programme because of the University's moderation process. The team also found clear evidence of briefing about plagiarism in the Higher Education Handbook and all students said that staff were very clear about the requirements for originality of work and clear referencing. In addition, the College supports students through a study skills programme which is intended to build students' capability in learning and assessment at the higher education level.

2.58 The review team concludes that through its adherence to the assessment processes of its awarding bodies, and the operation of robust approaches to assessment for the HN programmes, the College ensures that there are equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment. There is good support for students and the underpinning procedures are understood by staff and students. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.59 External examiners are appointed and managed by the College's awarding bodies which require them to make annual reports on standards, learning opportunities and good practice, as well as endorsing assessment outcomes. Their reports (which use the standard templates of the awarding partner) are distributed to programme teams who are required to respond as part of the annual monitoring process; recommendations are incorporated into Quality Improvement Plans at each level. Reports are considered at the HESC alongside other performance data. They are also noted at the HEASC which pays particular attention to sharing good practice. Reports are published to students in the VLE and shared with student representatives at the SSLC. These processes for consideration of, and responding to, reports also applies to the HN programmes. Pearson appoints external verifiers who undertake annual visits which include considering and reviewing the quality of assessment planning, the validity of the assessment decisions and the consistency of the assessment process. A report following a standard Pearson template is produced. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.60 The team tested the Expectation by reviewing a range of documentation, including external examiners' reports and minutes evidencing their scrutiny and discussion, responses to external examiners, and the section of the VLE where external examiner reports are shared with students. The team also held a number of meetings with staff and students.

2.61 The College uses the information in the reports to inform course review, its Quality Improvement Plan, and to share good practice. The College operates its external examiner systems under the regulations defined by its university awarding partners. Clear definitions are in place in academic handbooks. External examiners visit the College at least annually to meet programme teams. The roles and responsibilities of the external examiner or verifier are defined by the awarding partners and they carry out their duties according to the regulations of the respective awarding partner. For its university-validated programmes the College can nominate potential examiners, but responsibility for appointment and training resides with the respective university.

2.62 Academic staff have a clear understanding of the importance of the role of external examiners and their own responsibilities in responding to comments from them. They also fully understand the need to discuss reports with students, although hitherto the College has not purposefully engaged students with external examiners and their reports. This is partly because of the acknowledged past difficulties in securing student engagement. As noted in Expectation B5, the College has responded to the challenges in securing student engagement by establishing the SSLC, leading to an affirmation in Expectation B5, and the terms of reference of the SSLC includes discussion of external examiner reports.

2.63 There is clear evidence that the College responds effectively, promptly and robustly to examiner and verifier comments in the appropriate annual report. Reports are considered at all levels within the College in a well-regulated process starting with programme leaders and going through the various committees. External examiner and verifier reports effectively inform action plans at both programme and institutional level.

2.64 The review team concludes that external examiner and verifier reports are used to inform and, where necessary, initiate quality improvement activity. Students are aware of external examiner reports and are able to access them. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.65 The College is required to participate in the annual monitoring processes of its awarding bodies. In view of the relatively small scale of its higher education provision, the College meets this requirement by making minor adjustments to the self-assessment process it operates across the whole of its provision: it creates separate reports and action plans for higher education programmes (in the format required by the awarding bodies where appropriate) and they are reviewed at the Higher Education Scrutiny Committee (HESC) alongside student voice data and external examiner reports. These documents feed into awarding body processes in an iterative manner and the outcomes are reviewed through special higher education programme monitoring sessions of the Academic Board, which are held twice a year. Pearson conducts an annual review of quality management at the College.

2.66 The awarding bodies and organisation also have processes for periodic review, linked to revalidation in the case of the awarding bodies, in which it is required to participate. The College undertakes to conduct internal periodic review of its Pearson provision every four years. The Higher Education Gateway is responsible for approving changes to modules and programmes, subject to approval by the awarding bodies and organisation, and decides whether a programme should be suspended or closed. A Higher Education Course Changes and Closures Procedure details the process and timeline and requires that students are consulted and protected. Taken together, these arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.67 To test the Expectation the team scrutinised a range of documentation, including the College's formal procedures, documents generated in the course of annual monitoring and periodic review, and the meetings of relevant committees. The team also held meetings with academic staff, an awarding body representative, professional support staff and students.

2.68 Annual monitoring begins at the end of the academic year. Curriculum team leaders compile course reports which take account of external examiner reports along with performance and student voice data, including feedback on individual modules. To accompany the report a Quality Improvement (QI) Plan for the year ahead is created along with a QI Log, which also records actions carried forward from previous years or added during the current year. These are reviewed individually by the HESC which also has sight of the original data sets and may require changes. The HESC is also charged with disseminating good practice. Once approved, the plans and logs are aggregated into a Higher Education QI Plan and Log. In 2015-16 the HESC began to conduct mid-year scrutiny of first semester module feedback and progress against the QI Plans and Logs. Twice a year the Academic Board holds a special meeting for monitoring higher education programmes; it receives the minutes of the HESC and signs off the Higher Education QI Plan and Log for approval by the Corporation. Annual monitoring reports are also discussed at the SSLC.

2.69 In parallel, the programme reports feed into Departmental and then Faculty QI Plans and Logs which form the basis of Faculty and College self-assessment reports. In addition there is a college-wide system of inspection on a four-year cycle, using Ofsted methodology, and individual lecturers undergo performance review across their teaching.

These exercises are primarily to inform the Senior Leadership Team but it is planned to share higher education-related results with the HESC. This enables the College to maintain separate oversight of higher education provision while ensuring it also feeds into College-wide processes of monitoring and enhancement.

2.70 The review team looked at annual monitoring reports from all higher education programmes and examples of Higher Education and cross-college QI Plans and Logs at each level, as well as SSLC, HEASC, HESC and Academic Board minutes, enabling it to be confident that annual monitoring operates as described.

2.71 The team noted that the first SSLC meeting of the year is in December, which means its input into annual monitoring is limited. The College is **recommended** to establish a process to enable discussion of annual monitoring reports by SSLC to contribute to changes to current year QI Plans.

2.72 Professional support staff told the team that although they did not formally contribute to programme annual monitoring, they had ample informal opportunities to raise issues on resources for their area and to feed into annual monitoring in relation to the support and resources they provide for students. Although the team accepted that this was the case, the team felt that the College's annual monitoring form, which is currently somewhat brief, could usefully be revised to require curriculum teams to reflect on resources (and, as noted in Expectation B10, work experience). The College is **recommended** to revise the College's annual monitoring template to include reflection on learning resources and, where appropriate, placement and work experience opportunities.

2.73 The team saw evidence of the effective periodic review and revalidation of one of the College's programmes by RAU. It noted that the College had not yet had occasion to conduct formal periodic review of its HN provision but had decided to review two HN programmes at a Higher Education Gateway meeting because of poor performance against indicators, resulting in the closure of one (primarily because of poor recruitment). The team saw evidence of appropriate closure strategies, including measures to protect the interests of students, following the decisions to close the HND in Computing and the Foundation Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice; and students affected told the team that they were satisfied with the arrangements.

2.74 The team concludes that the arrangements for monitoring generally operate well and that there are effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review of programmes. The team notes that some minor improvements to processes would further improve the mechanisms. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low as the recommendations relate to a need to amend or update documentation, and to make minor changes to processes.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.75 The College's responsibilities for handling academic appeals and complaints vary according to the awarding body or partner involved. Complaints and appeals from students on the HN programmes are entirely the responsibility of the College. For the foundation degrees, the procedures for handling student complaints and appeals are a shared responsibility between the College and the University, depending on the programme. All appeals and complaints made to the College are logged. Both processes are managed by the Vice-Principal (Student Journey and Support) who monitors and evaluates them and reports annually on complaints to the Corporation.

2.76 The HE Academic Appeals Against Assessment Policy sets out grounds and a simple one-stage process for students on HN programmes under which an appeal panel will be constituted to investigate a written submission; it notes that in some cases there may be the right of further appeal to Pearson.

2.77 The Cirencester College Customer Feedback Procedure sets out a simple process whereby a complaint will be investigated by a senior manager and the outcome can be appealed to the Chair of the Corporation. The document is worded so as to encourage informal resolution and makes clear that the College has a 'no blame' policy.

2.78 Information is provided to students about appeals and complaints in the HE Handbook and the higher education student site in the Virtual Learning Environment. The complaints procedure is also accessible on the College's website. The HE Tutor provides support for students considering a complaint or appeal.

2.79 The partner universities have sole responsibility for academic appeals from foundation degree students; appeals in respect of HN provision are handled at the College. Complaints for the RAU programmes are submitted directly to RAU. For the UWE programme, complaints are submitted to the College initially but students may escalate a complaint to the University if they remain dissatisfied.

2.80 Information regarding both complaints and appeals are logged and managed by the Vice-Principal who audits them, investigates and reports via an annual review to the Corporation.

2.81 Complaints are overseen by the College via the Customer Feedback Procedure, again a simple process that requires investigation by a senior manager and there is a right of appeal to the Chair of the Corporation if the student is dissatisfied with the outcome. The procedure aims to resolve complaints informally, and clearly defines the College's 'no blame' policy. Together, these arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.82 To test the Expectation, the team scrutinised a range of documentation, including partnership agreements and relevant procedures. The team also held a number of meetings with staff and students.

2.83 Students, while not all aware of the specific procedures, were all confident that they would know who to talk to if they needed to raise an issue of concern. The complaints procedure and its application were clearly articulated during the meeting with support staff

where it was confirmed that all complaints are reported to and reviewed by the Senior Management Team. The review team was told during the visit that the appeals process includes the option for students to request that their work be re-marked and the original mark be modified. This is not made explicit within the appeals documentation, and the team considers that the procedure lacks clarity and is open to unfairness in its operation. The team **recommends** that the College review and amend the Higher Education Academic Appeals Procedure to take account of guidance on best practice published by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.84 The College receives very few complaints and has not received any academic appeals in the last three years. It provided an audit trail of how the two complaints received in 2014-15 were handled (both were ruled unjustified), which demonstrated that appropriate procedures had been followed and students who went through the appeal process reported in the student submission to have found it fair.

2.85 The team concludes that the College has appropriate complaints procedures. The appeals procedures for HN programmes lack clarity on the grounds for an appeal and the remedies available if an appeal is upheld. Overall, the team concludes that the design, application and review of the complaints procedure is satisfactory, but that there could be greater clarity in respect of the appeals procedure which may not be consistently fair either in its design or operation. The Expectation is met. The associated level of risk is moderate because the recommendation relates to weaknesses in the operation of part of the governance structure as it relates to appeals.

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

**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**

2.86 Students on the College's foundation degrees and on its HND in Sport (Coaching and Development) are required to complete work-based learning. These are the only instances where the College delegates responsibility for learning opportunities to other organisations. For the suite of foundation degrees in Conservation, placements are managed directly by RAU; the College shares responsibility with UWE for work placements for the Foundation Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice.

2.87 The Higher Education Employer Relations and Placements Protocols set out the responsibilities of the work placement module leader at the College and a workplace mentor designated by the employer. It is specified that there must be a formal agreement including a defined framework of activities, that students must be supervised by both parties, and that the workplace mentor must facilitate assessment by providing feedback. These protocols are supplemented by a procedural document which indicates how risks are to be assessed and managed. It includes a risk matrix which is used to determine appropriate action. Employers must complete a Health and Safety questionnaire which also contains this matrix so that the module leader can evaluate the risk. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.88 The team tested the Expectation by scrutinising a range of documentation, including complete sets of documents governing placements on both programmes, examples completed by students and employers. The review team also held meetings with students and staff, including academic staff with responsibility for placement modules.

2.89 Students on the HND in Sport are usually already in employment and negotiate to use their own work setting to meet placement module learning outcomes, although they may in some cases need to make separate arrangements. Students on the Foundation Degrees in Criminology and Criminal Justice must find their own placement under guidance from the College. The College conducted an Employability Audit in 2014 which it used to establish a central record of placements, although these are managed at programme level. The work placement module tutor has primary responsibility for conducting a risk assessment, approving the placement, and briefing students and employers. There is a work placement module handbook for each programme/year, which sets out requirements and responsibilities in detail. A copy is sent to the employer when a placement is approved. The team was impressed by the guidance given to HND Sport students in their work placement module handbook, which constructs the experience as a sequence of tasks and provides extensive guidance on each.

2.90 The College ensures that students are aware of the requirement to undertake a work placement by making reference to this in its offer letters. Information grids are maintained to ensure that questions can be answered. Another grid ensures that students on placement are tracked. Students complete a log in which they record and reflect on their experience. Employers are asked to provide feedback on forms which include notes for their guidance.



2.91 Students who had been on placement told the team that they had received sufficient advice and support. Finding a placement had been challenging for some but help had been provided where necessary. HND Sport students who are not in employment can ask for help during the application process and the team met one who had been offered a post at the College. The team heard that College staff use the Career Ready Boards (Career Academies) to identify placement opportunities but also use their own personal professional networks. Staff told the team that students are encouraged to link placement choice to career aspirations, choosing a placement which will help them meet the selection criteria for their job of choice (the identification of which is set as a formal task) and reflecting on their progress against these criteria while on placement. For RAU students this is built into the system of personal development planning. Students confirmed that staff tried to find out what jobs they might be interested in and provided advice, both on placements and other forms of work experience. The team heard of examples from several programmes of students who had progressed to relevant careers in this way. The extensive support for students to use placements and work experience to inform career choices is **good practice**.

2.92 The College exercises appropriate oversight of its relatively small-scale provision but the team identified that the annual monitoring form used for HN programmes could usefully be revised to require curriculum teams to reflect on work placements. A recommendation to this effect has been made under Expectation B8. Considering this to be a relatively minor amendment to the documentation, the team concludes that the College's procedures are fit for purpose and ensure that students have access to appropriate opportunities to learn in the workplace and develop employability skills. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

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

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

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

2.95 All of the 10 applicable Expectations in this judgement area are met. Eight are judged to be of low risk and two of moderate risk (B4 and B9).

2.96 There are five recommendations in this judgement area: that the College should ensure that the proposed action to eliminate confusion of version control, location and nomenclature of key documents is completed; that a formal process should be developed for the monitoring and tracking of students' progress and personal development; that the annual monitoring template should be revised to include reflection on learning outcomes and, where appropriate, placement and work experience opportunities; that a process should be established to enable discussion of annual reports by SSLC to contribute to changes to current year Quality Improvement Plans; and that the Higher Education Academic Appeals Procedure should be reviewed and amended to take account of guidance on best practice published by the OIA.

2.97 The team affirms the steps being taken to resolve challenges in securing student engagement through the development of the SSLC.

2.98 The review team identifies a number of areas of good practice in the approach taken by the College to managing the quality of student learning opportunities. In particular, the team identifies as good practice: the effective use of the Career Ready boards as a means of simultaneously engaging with employers and students in programme development; the enhancement of students' learning and career opportunities through the use of the professional networks of staff; the creation of a dedicated Subject Learning Coach for Higher Education; and the extensive support for students to use placements and work experience to inform career choices.

2.99 The recommendations in this area relate to areas where there is a need to amend or update details in documentation; where there is insufficient emphasis or priority given to assuring quality; or where there are weaknesses in a part of the governance arrangements. The moderate risks in a small number of Expectations do not, individually or collectively, present any serious risks to the management of this area.

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

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

3.1 The College does not have an overarching policy regarding the information it publishes about its higher education provision, relying instead on the role of the Head of Marketing and the Higher Education Officer to provide information about its higher education programmes externally, and the Student Journey Team and Higher Education Tutor to provide information internally.

3.2 Information for the public and prospective students about the College's mission, vision and strategy and its higher education provision is provided on the College's website. College policies relevant to external stakeholders are also available on the website, for instance, the Higher Education Prospectus, a complaints procedure and information on applications. Generic outline information is available regarding foundation degrees and Higher National programmes; for the RAU foundation degrees, the College uses a link to the RAU's website to provide full detail about programmes, including programme specifications containing programme and module learning outcomes. The College provides basic detail on its website about the UWE programme, again using a link to the University's website to provide full detail. For the Pearson Higher National programmes, the College's website details information on the programmes (including programme specifications) together with guidance on application and the tuition fees. Key Information Sets are available for all programmes. The Higher Education Officer conducts a regular audit of all higher education information on the website.

3.3 Students on the Pearson Higher National programmes receive information prior to the start of their programme from the Student Journey Admissions Officer on enrolment and induction arrangements. Once students are enrolled, they are inducted on to the programme and given a hard copy of the Higher Education Student Handbook, access to the relevant programme handbook and the College VLE, which is used by students on the Higher National programmes and the Foundation Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice, with the RAU students using the VLE of the respective university. The VLE provides information to students about the College and their programme of study, including policies and regulations, accessing support and guidance, the complaints procedure and student feedback. The VLE is audited regularly by the Higher Education Tutor. The review team noted that although some issues had been raised through annual monitoring in 2014 about pre-course information in respect of one programme, there had been a restructure of the College website which now contains full detail regarding the programmes and how prospective students can access further guidance.

3.4 On completion of their studies, students receive a detailed transcript and a certificate of attainment, supplied by the relevant awarding partner. The College plans to introduce a student achievement report, which will give more detail, using its student management software, STARS.

3.5 Information for those with responsibility for maintaining standards and assuring quality is the responsibility of the Higher Education Officer, and the College's processes

and procedures are articulated in its academic regulations and those of its awarding partners. The College produces management information supporting the implementation of its processes: the annual monitoring reports discuss programme-level data and outcomes, and the Higher Education Scrutiny Committee discusses and evaluates student data for each higher education programme and reports to Academic Sub-Committee.

3.6 The clearly allocated responsibilities for managing information, and the review processes in place at the College to manage the information it provides about its higher education provision, enables this Expectation to be met. The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising a range of documentation, including overarching higher education data and a range of module handbooks. The team also met senior, teaching and support staff, and students from all programmes, and viewed information available on the VLE for staff and students.

3.7 The review team found that the process for providing information is well understood by staff, with course teams providing all required information, including handbooks, to the marketing team to an appropriate level of detail and to agreed annual deadlines. The Head of Marketing is responsible for the accuracy of all published information, and attends higher education meetings to inform and remind staff of the marketing cycle and deadlines.

3.8 Students met at the review visit were extremely positive regarding the information provided by the College and its awarding bodies. Students found pre-enrolment information on the College and partners' websites to be complete and helpful, and understood that staff were available for further information where required. Post application, students receive clear information regarding interviews; following interviews, they receive written notification regarding the outcome and an invitation to an applicant day. Once enrolled, students receive an induction into the appropriate VLE. Students reported positively on the information available to them on the respective VLEs, including in the programme handbooks, available in hard copy if required.

3.9 Information for students and staff on the College VLE is comprehensive and accurate, including its information on programmes, modules, assessment, finance, careers, College policies and academic regulations, external examiners' reports and the previous academic year's programme review. Staff pages are equally comprehensive, including information on the Quality Code, enhancement, higher education policies, staff development, and the terms of reference and minutes from higher education committees.

3.10 While there is some lack of consistency in the level of detail provided in the programme handbooks in terms of programme dates, reading lists, and timetables, students found them a useful source of information on the course structure, unit/module descriptors, assessment, referencing, and progression on completion. Staff understand what is required as a basis and are able to innovate and add material to the handbooks for which they are responsible, as relevant to each programme. Heads of department have overall responsibility for the production and content of handbooks. Work-Based Learning Handbooks are valued by students as sources of information complementing those available from the course tutors.

3.11 The STaRS system for higher education provision at the College provides a useful additional source of information for those with responsibility for maintaining standards and assuring quality regarding the progress and achievement of students. The review team discussed the use of programme and student outcome data with senior staff. While programme-level data is considered in the overall annual monitoring cycle, overarching data at College level is not currently considered. It is anticipated that the developments in the College Management Information System and STaRS for higher education will enable this data to be fully considered in future. The review team noted

some issues with dating of documents, records of timing and approval and some inconsistencies in terminology. A **recommendation** is made under Expectation B1 that the proposed action to eliminate version control, location and nomenclature of key documents relating to learning opportunities is completed.

3.12 The review team concludes that the information produced about the College's provision is comprehensive, accurate and well received by students. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

3.13 In reaching its judgement on the quality of information about learning opportunities the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.14 The review team found that while the College does not have an overarching policy on how it manages information about its higher education provision, it does have appropriate and effective arrangements. Responsibilities for certain types of information are well understood, and there are processes for the annual production, revision, and auditing of information for staff, students, and other stakeholders. Students confirmed that they are given information about their programmes, College policies and regulations, and how they can access further learning support. There are no recommendations in this judgement area although there is a related recommendation in B1 that the proposed action to eliminate confusion of version control, location and nomenclature of key documents relating to learning opportunities is completed.

3.15 In making a judgement on this area, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low. The College is fully aware of its responsibilities for the quality of information about its higher education provision. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College has an Enhancement Statement that reflects the definition used by QAA. The Higher Education Scrutiny Committee has responsibility for determining enhancement priorities, using quality assurance processes to identify areas that need attention. This informs an annual Higher Education Enhancement Plan, which is designed to be reviewed regularly in light of student feedback.

4.2 The College implements a dual approach to enhancement that is both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up'. Through the top-down approach, senior staff drive strategy development and enforce compliance with policies and procedures. Through the 'bottom-up' approach, the College uses student feedback and quality assurance processes to inform developments and improvements to the programmes and the College more broadly. Ultimate responsibility for enhancement rests with the Higher Education Academic Sub-Committee and Board of Governors.

4.3 The review team found that the College's defined approach to enhancement, coordinated action plan, use of quality assurance procedures, and the student voice, would enable the Expectation to be met. The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising a range of documentation, including the College's Enhancement Statement, the Higher Education Enhancement Plan 2014-15, training materials on enhancement and the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee. The review team also held meetings with students, staff and employers.

4.4 The review team found clear evidence that the College takes deliberate steps at provider level to enhance the quality of learning opportunities. A number of key initiatives, such as investment in the Higher Education Tutor, library refurbishment and creation of a higher education study space, together with an increase in staff teaching on higher education programmes, are examples of these deliberate steps.

4.5 The College has delivered staff briefings on enhancement and the review team found a number of examples of enhancement initiatives, including those identified as good practice in B3 (the enhancement of learning and career opportunities for students through the utilisation of the professional networks of staff) and B10 (the extensive support for students to use placements and work experience to inform career choices).

4.6 Although student input into enhancement discussions has been limited in the past, the creation of the SSLC has now provided a forum for students to contribute to the College's enhancement discussions.

4.7 The College has defined its strategic approach to enhancement and has delivered on a number of provider-led enhancements, and ensured their successful implementation. The team also found that an ethos clearly exists among staff to enhance student learning opportunities. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

4.9 The review team found that the College's approach to enhancement is strategically articulated and that responsibilities are suitably allocated. In practice, it reflects on each programme through its Scrutiny Committee to inform enhancement at provider level. This enhancement approach has been effective in improving the quality of learning opportunities. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this area.

4.10 There are no areas of good practice identified in this judgement area, although there are areas of good practice in relation to enhancement of learning opportunities in B3 (the enhancement of learning and career opportunities for students through the utilisation of the professional networks of staff) and B10 (the extensive support for students to use placements and work experience to inform career choices).

4.11 In making a judgement on this area, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low. The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The College's Higher Education Strategy states the College's intention to focus on employer engagement and provide students with the vocational skills for specific employment sectors. Work-based learning is an important aspect in all programmes, with the College responsible for providing work-based learning opportunities for its Higher National and UWE programmes, but not its RAU programmes, where the University manages such opportunities directly. The College attracts a number of students from the Swindon area, and intends to develop ways of working with the Wiltshire and Swindon Local Enterprise Partnership, in order to identify local employment needs and effectively strategise higher education at the College to ensure the relevance of programmes on offer to the area. The College has recently identified the top 10 employability skills it aims to develop through the curriculum, and intends to include higher education students in this initiative, recording their progress and outcomes on the Student Journal platform.

5.2 Many of the College's programmes include relevant work placements and work-based learning opportunities. In addition, the College ensures higher education students have access to guidance on potential careers, individual learning plans, developing curricula vitae, and an annual review of progress against personal and career goals. Students appreciated the opportunities to spend time on work-based learning placements as an integral part of their programme. Employers also noted students' participation in opportunities beyond formal work placements, for example, volunteering with the local town council, and coaching programmes with primary schools.

5.3 The College undertook an audit of employability activities for each programme, which provided a range of examples of professional development and initiatives to enhance students' employability, including guest lecturer input, links with a range of employers and potential additional qualifications on the Foundation Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice. The RAU programmes similarly exhibit an impressive range of employment-related activities, including guest lectures, sector body-accredited embedded courses and the requirement for the completion of a professional development portfolio. Students at the College on the UWE's Foundation Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice have access to a Graduate Development Programme, which aims to enhance and develop students' learning skills, personal development, employability, and academic achievement. The programme is embedded in the two compulsory criminology modules.

5.4 The College invites some employers to deliver guest lectures, and aims to expand this to one guest lecture per term and course. Students the review team met at the visit were complimentary about employer input into their programmes via guest lectures and feedback on presentations.

5.5 Employers are consulted during the initial design stages of programmes, and their opinions are also fed into programme review by the programme managers. The College's Careers Ready Boards provide a platform for this engagement. The Higher Education Gateway procedure is designed to assess, among other aspects, the employer demand for planned programmes.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 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/assuring-standards-and-quality](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality).

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

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

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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