



# Higher Education Review of City College Norwich

December 2014

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at City College Norwich. The review took place from 8 to 10 December 2014 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Tessa Counsell
- Mr Eric Macintyre
- Dr Clive Marsland
- Miss India Woof (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by City College Norwich 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 3. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 8.

In reviewing City College Norwich 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/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code).

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

## Amended judgement June 2016

### Introduction

In December 2014, City College Norwich underwent a Higher Education Review, which resulted in 'meets UK expectations' for the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations; the quality of student learning opportunities; and the quality of the information about learning opportunities. The College also received a judgement of 'requires improvement to meet' UK expectations for the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

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

The College published an action plan in August 2015 describing how it intended to address the recommendations, affirmations and good practice identified in the review, and has been working over the last 10 months to demonstrate how it has implemented that plan.

The follow-up process included three progress updates and culminated in a desk-based analysis by a reviewer of the College's progress reports and the supporting documentary evidence.

The desk-based analysis confirmed that the recommendation relating to the enhancement of student learning opportunities had been successfully addressed.

### QAA Board decision and amended judgement

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree awarding bodies and other organisations **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.

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

### Findings from the follow-up process

The team found that the College had made progress against the recommendation as follows.

#### Recommendation – Enhancement

The College has undertaken a full review of the annual monitoring report processes to detail the systematic and regular review of enhancement actions at course, school and college levels. This involved a review of the flow of information between meetings and committees to allow both operational and strategic management of enhancement to be aligned. A termly higher education report to Governors makes specific reference to enhancement of student learning opportunities in order to promote strategic oversight. The regulatory framework of the College's awarding partner (the University of East Anglia) has been updated to reflect development of the annual monitoring process, including a review of the cycle of meetings and agendas of course committees. Briefings to staff and Governors have enabled the changes to be understood across the different levels of the College.

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about City College Norwich

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **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 **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

### Good practice

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

- The employability preparation provided by course elements within the Social Work programmes (Expectation B4).
- The effective operational contribution made by the Achievement Tracking System to the student journey which facilitates the involvement of external examiners (Expectation B6).

### Recommendations

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

By April 2015:

- provide contextualised versions of Higher National programme specifications and make these available to students and staff (Expectations A2.2 and C)
- include definitive module specifications for Higher National programmes in the College Module Catalogue (Expectation A2.2)
- expedite the completion of the student charter with full student involvement (Expectation B5)
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of student engagement mechanisms (Expectation B5)
- make available external examiner reports for Higher National programmes to students and staff (Expectation B7).

By September 2015:

- ensure there are clear and accessible complaints and appeals procedures for both prospective and current students (Expectations B2 and B9)
- ensure that all students experience an effective induction at the beginning of their course and at transition to a higher level (Expectation B4)
- develop an overarching and systematic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

## **Affirmation of action being taken**

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

- The introduction of the revised foundation degree core modules (Expectation B4).
- The progress being made to articulate a strategy for higher education (Expectation B4).
- The actions being taken to develop a sign-off process for information (Expectation C).

## **Theme: Student Employability**

Student employability is an important part of the College's higher education strategy and provision, and there is a clear focus on employability within the curriculum, and through events and opportunities that sit outside the delivery of programmes. Employers have input into building workforce requirements into the curriculum and learning opportunities through their involvement in Course Committees, and are consulted in the design and validation of new and existing programmes.

Students reported positively on the College's employability measures and how well prepared they felt for employment.

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

## About City College Norwich

City College Norwich (the College) has been a major provider of higher education within the further education sector since the 1960s. The College recruits around 10,000 students annually; each year there are around 1,000 students studying on full-time and part-time higher education programmes.

The College provides higher education opportunities for Norwich and the wider eastern region of England, and is part of a federation of education institutions within Norfolk which is aiming to increase educational opportunities and attainments in the region. This position is reflected by the very high proportion of the College's higher education students being drawn from the local catchment area. The College is committed to providing education and training which supports the local and regional needs, and provides progression routes and provision complementary to the other higher education providers in the area. Due to the College's close relationship with local business, commercial and public sectors, the higher education provision of the College has focused on vocational and professional courses. The College regards the provision of employer focused vocational education and training as one of its key features.

The College has worked with a single validating partner since 2006, the University of East Anglia (the University), and through them offers undergraduate diplomas, foundation degrees and honours degrees. The College also offers Pearson accredited Higher National programmes in engineering and construction to meet local employers' requirements for workforce training.

The College has its own higher education framework for quality assurance and regulations, called the Norfolk Regulatory Framework, which is approved by the University. In this way the College has a high level of engagement and responsibility in the quality management of the provision awarded by the University. These specific responsibilities are detailed under the expectations contained in this report. Restructuring in 2012 led to the creation of the Head of the School of Higher Education and further developed a Higher Education Office to lead on the administration and quality assurance of the College's higher education provision.

The College is currently transitioning from its College Strategy 2009-14 to the new Strategic Framework 2014-19, which is underpinned by annual strategic aims and targets, and the development of specific strategies for the workforce, curriculum, teaching and learning, and accommodation.

The College received a positive outcome to its QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review in 2010 with a number of features of good practice, one advisable recommendation and three desirable recommendations. The advisable recommendation concerned improving the use of progression and achievement data in monitoring student performance. The review team found that the College has taken a number of steps in the development of statistical reporting, including: staff training; improvements in the management information system for the reporting of data; the appointment of a new role of Planning and Performance Programme Manager in each curriculum department; and standardisation of reporting through Annual Monitoring Reviews. The review team noted that there is now a reporting system that provides staff with access to live performance data.

In response to the desirable recommendation to further encourage a higher education ethos amongst its students, the College located its higher education provision in Norwich city centre, beginning with St Andrews House in September 2012 and then a year later with the opening of Norfolk House. The two other desirable recommendations concerned information, consistency of information held on the virtual learning environment (VLE) across

programmes, and information for employers involved in work-based elements of foundation degrees. The review noted in relation to the VLE that the College has continued development of guides and handbooks for staff and students, and training of academic staff in the development of VLE content. While the review team noted that there is some variation in the amount of information by programme, students confirmed that the resources are useful and support their learning. Finally, in respect of supporting employers' understanding of the expectations of work-based learning, the team noted the closer engagement of employers through their membership of Course Committees and their input in programme design in addressing this. The employers also confirmed that they had been involved in commenting on and inputting material into the handbooks and other information for students on placement.

## Explanation of the findings about City College Norwich

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 institution but is in partnership with a sole partner, the University of East Anglia (the University); this is fully articulated in the Norfolk Regulatory Framework for the majority of the provision, with some additional Pearson BTEC HNC/D courses in engineering and construction.

1.2 The University holds ultimate responsibility for the setting and verification of the standard of its awards. The Expectations of the Quality Code, *Chapter A1* - allocation of programmes to the appropriate level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) - are scrutinised and confirmed via the University quality assurance processes for partner institutions, and through the requirements of the University Partnerships Handbook, which is reviewed annually. The University Partnerships Handbook and the College's Regulatory Framework are detailed, and together cover all the University awards and those awarded by Pearson with regard to external reference points. The College is in transition regarding its overall strategy for 2014-19, with the strategy for higher education currently incorporated in the overall Strategic Framework.

1.3 The review team tested the Expectation by examining validation documents, and the College's Partnership Agreement and Regulatory Framework. The team also

met relevant staff from the College to discuss the process, and partnership staff from the University.

1.4 The review team found that there is evidence that the specified requirements are adhered to, for instance in the credit rating of programmes and use of Subject Benchmark Statements, and, where relevant, the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), in programme proposals and validation documents, and external examiner reports.

1.5 While the College's Regulatory Framework refers to the Code of Practice, as opposed to the Quality Code, the team found that the mapping of the Chapters of the Quality Code, Part A had been carried out. A number of staff were involved through workshops and working groups, some in conjunction with the University, leading to some understanding across staff, and with plans for further staff development to ensure embedding across the College.

1.6 In reviewing the evidence made available, the review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and that the associated level of risk to academic standards 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**

1.7 The University Partnership Agreement and Partnerships Handbook set out the responsibilities for academic governance arrangements and frameworks, with the detailed College's Regulatory Framework, known as the Norfolk Regulatory Framework and approved by the University, setting out assessment regulations and arrangements for monitoring and review of modules and programmes.

1.8 The lines of responsibility are clear and function well, with the University chairing the Joint Board of Study and with representation on the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Committee. Any changes or updating to the College's Regulatory Framework require University approval.

1.9 The College's academic and assessment regulations are reviewed regularly and align with those of the University, whilst taking account of local requirements, and are approved by the University Learning and Teaching Committee.

1.10 The Norfolk Regulatory Framework gives detail regarding all awards, including Higher Nationals designed by Pearson for which the College is a centre approved by BTEC.

1.11 All of the evidence presented confirms that the clear lines of responsibility set out to cover the relationship between the University and the College are effective in meeting this Expectation. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated 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**

1.12 The Norfolk Regulatory Framework sets out the documentary and other requirements of the partnership within which the College operates with the University as its validating partner. This is fully amplified in the University Partnerships Handbook in which templates are supplied for all aspects of record keeping, such as programme specifications.

1.13 Following all validation and approval events, definitive versions of programme specifications are produced and are held in the College Higher Education Office and on the VLE. Module specifications are housed in the College Module Catalogue, which is also published on the VLE, and these are updated as modifications or new module specifications are approved. Definitive programme documents, including programme specifications, are also held by the University's Partnerships Office. The review team was able to confirm that the record keeping process is robust and fit for purpose for the College programmes which are validated by the University.

1.14 The College also offers provision in the Higher National engineering and construction programme area, which is under the aegis of Pearson as the awarding organisation. The specification which is made available to staff and students is the standard Pearson document and is therefore not contextualised to the College offer as in a programme specification document. As a consequence, the review team **recommends** that by April 2015 the College provides contextualised versions of Higher National programme specifications and makes these available to students and staff. Also, the team found that Higher National module specifications are not housed in the College Module Catalogue. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College includes definitive module specifications for Higher National programmes in the College Module Catalogue, also by April 2015.

1.15 Overall, the external scrutiny and the internal quality assurance processes ensure that the definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study are made available. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met, both in design and operation in full for the University validated awards and for Pearson Higher National awards, with some recommendations leading to an associated risk at a moderate level.

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

**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**

1.16 Course development, design and approval processes are aligned with, and overseen by, the awarding body or awarding organisation.

1.17 The College approval process is regulated by the University validation policies and practices. The requirements are clearly laid out in the Norfolk Regulatory Framework and the University Partnerships Handbook. This process was found by the review team to be rigorous and ensures that all validated awards in the College are set at the correct UK threshold standards.

1.18 BTEC Higher National awards offered by Pearson follow the required standard procedures under this expectation.

1.19 The University processes also ensure that at annual monitoring review events the matter of the academic standards of awards is also covered in detail. Pearson Higher National awards are covered under the College annual monitoring process, which also involves students.

1.20 The review team tested the Expectation by examining programme specifications, validation documents, relevant committee minutes, the College's operating procedures and Partnership Agreements. In addition to this, the team also met relevant staff from the College to discuss the process and partnership staff from the University.

1.21 From the evidence presented, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met in full and that 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**

1.22 The College makes it clear that the design and approval of programmes is based on awarding body models; the Partnership Agreements and the University Partnerships Handbook set out the processes for ensuring that credit and qualifications are awarded appropriately, including the role of the external examiners and the University Academic Link. The assessment of learning outcomes is also detailed in the College's Regulatory Framework. The role of the external examiners in the assessment process is made clear, and external examiner reports are considered in detail at the Joint Board of Study.

1.23 There is detailed guidance for Module Assessment Boards and Award Boards in order to ensure that modules and awards are awarded in line with UK threshold academic standards; external examiner reports confirm that this is the case.

1.24 The student submission reports that students are provided with generally consistent information on assessment criteria, with 83 per cent understanding the criteria. Students are aware that the degree of difficulty increases during the programme of study. The feedback system is seen as giving students clear direction in order to achieve, with 79.37 per cent of students agreeing that their feedback is timely and helpful. Students met by the review team at the visit confirmed that they were clear regarding the criteria for assessment and learning outcomes; they were generally positive regarding the feedback they receive and had the opportunity to book a tutorial if they wanted more detail. Both staff and students emphasised the importance placed in lesson planning on the discussion of learning outcomes, and these were well understood by students and staff.

1.25 The review team considered a range of documentation relating to the achievement of learning outcomes being demonstrated through assessment, including: the requirements set by the University and Pearson; module assessment plans; examples of module changes and programme modifications; examples of innovative assessment; external examiner reports (and responses to them); and programme validation documentation. The annual monitoring template emphasised the role of fair and accurate assessment appropriately, and actual annual monitoring plans placed due emphasis on considering the efficacy of assessment across the College. The review team noted the composite reports the College provides to senior committees, and the periodic reports of the Universities when reviewing their provision at the College. Confirmation for triangulation was obtained through meetings with staff and students.

1.26 Staff were clear about the process and responsibilities for sign-off of assessment plans and how the effectiveness of this process is monitored for both the University and Pearson BTEC programmes. For the University programmes this is done through the annual monitoring process, with the reports going to the Partnerships Office and then to the Joint Board of Study.

1.27 For the process of minor and major modifications to programmes (for example, changes in assessment instruments in relation to feedback from Course Committees) staff were clear on the process, including reference to external examiners. The Achievement Tracking System (ATS) is used in the monitoring of the assessment process, including access by external examiners and verifiers. The review team concludes that the process was managed effectively and ensures that there is no drift from the academic standards approved at validation.

1.28 The review team confirmed that assessment briefs contain learning outcomes, that these are made available to staff and students through the VLE, and that students found the information clear.

1.29 Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low. The internal processes are well established and operate effectively.

**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**

1.30 The University Partnerships Handbook sets out the processes for the monitoring and review of programmes, with Appendix 1 of the College's Norfolk Regulatory Framework detailing the annual review of modules and programmes of study. Strategic oversight of the processes for programme monitoring and review is maintained through the College Academic Management Board. The Programme Monitoring Review process is essentially that of the University, while the College Annual Monitoring Process is closely aligned to that of the University.

1.31 An Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) is produced and sent to the School Management Team, which uses all Programme AMRs, together with the report of the external examiner(s) and actions, and statistical evidence, to write an evaluative annual report for College higher education provision and to produce an Action Plan for the School. AMRs go forward to the Partnerships Office and are considered by the Joint Board of Study, which provides written feedback. The Head of School is responsible for the sign off of the Action Plan. The review team confirmed that the process is well understood by College staff.

1.32 Students are involved in the process through their membership of Course Committees, School Boards and the Joint Board of Study, and through the monitoring of the Action Plans at termly Course Committee meetings. Students also attend AMR meetings. Employers also have input through Course Committees. There is also a document for employers in the form of a template with prompts to address every year with timescales. Validation and revalidation documentation confirmed that threshold academic standards are proactively considered by the use of Subject Benchmark Statements and other benchmarks, for example, those of professional bodies.

1.33 All programmes are revalidated every five years in accordance with the procedures in the University Partnerships Handbook. Monitoring and confirmation of Action Plans from the revalidation of programmes is considered by the Joint Board of Study.

1.34 Overall, the review team considered that the College process for the monitoring and review of programmes is robust and meets the requirements of their validating body. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

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

**Findings**

1.35 The University Partnerships Handbook sets out the use of external and independent expertise in setting and maintaining academic standards. The self-evaluation document speaks of the external element being vital in College validation or revalidation events.

1.36 During the process of validation of new programmes, or revalidation of existing programmes, there is evidence of externality in terms of employer consultation in preparation for revalidation, for instance, in the validation documents for BA (Hons) Childhood Studies and BA (Hons) Hospitality, Tourism and Event Management. Minutes of validation and revalidation meetings confirmed the use of external input at that stage, as did meetings during the visit with employers and academic staff regarding external input at the programme design stage within the College.

1.37 The requirements of the University Partnerships Handbook regarding external examiners' nominations, appointments, briefing and induction are met, with examples of external examiner reports and responses to them. Programme teams review external examiner reports and formulate responses at the point at which the report is received. The reports are also reviewed by the University and are signed off by Academic Director of Taught Programmes. The reports are an important part of Annual Monitoring Reviews, reported to the Joint Board of study. They are also available for student viewing on the VLE (see also Expectation B7).

1.38 The review team found that there is also a clear process for module or programme-level amendments, based on feedback from students, employers and external examiners. The process involves senior staff and the academic link at the University, with a clear mechanism for ensuring all definitive documentation is appropriately updated following approval of the amendments.

1.39 The Head of the School of Higher Education presents a summary of external examiner reports to the Academic Management Board.

1.40 From the evidence presented, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that 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

1.41 In reaching its judgement about academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the applicable Expectations in this area have been met and the risk is judged to be low in six, and moderate in one, of the Expectations. There is evidence that although the College's awarding body and awarding organisation have ultimate responsibility for setting academic standards, the College is aware of its responsibilities for maintain standards.

1.42 The requirements of the College's degree-awarding body, the University of East Anglia, along with Pearson are clearly laid out in the College's Regulatory Framework. There are clear lines of responsibility and the College's internal processes are rigorous and function well in terms of the maintenance of academic standards. Mechanisms are in place to ensure the College meets the requirements of the University and Pearson. The review team made two recommendations reflecting omissions/oversights in relation to the definitive information made available on Higher National programmes, which were judged to provide a moderate risk.

1.43 The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of threshold academic standards of awards offered by the College on behalf of its awarding body and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

### Findings

2.1 The College follows the University's regulations in respect of curriculum design and approval, which are outlined in the Norfolk Regulatory Framework and the University Partnerships Handbook. Higher education programmes are validated by the University for a specified period after which revalidation is required. Typically, the validation period is three to five years. For Higher National programmes the College uses the standard module specifications and programme structures.

2.2 A business case and market analysis is required for new programme proposals, which are considered by the College's Academic Management Board and joint University and College bodies, including the Joint Board of Study. The self-evaluation document speaks of the College being mindful of its local strategic and partnership obligations in discussing new programme proposals with other partners. This process was discussed with staff and employers, and the review team found it to be clear and robust. If a proposal passes these stages, it goes forward to the University/College Joint Board of Study and onwards to final approval by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee.

2.3 Professional body approval is also given for some College programmes, an example being that of the Health and Care Professions Council. Employers confirmed that they are consulted on new proposals and have taken part in development activities and validation events.

2.4 From the evidence presented, the review team concludes that the Expectation is fully met and that the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.5 The College has a clear process for student admissions, which is outlined in the Norfolk Regulatory Framework. The College clearly outlines and understands its responsibilities in relation to admissions and the awarding bodies' requirements. Recruitment, selection and admissions activity is undertaken by nominated individuals within the College. These individuals receive general staff development training rather than training specific to their admissions role. The College ensures equality of opportunity for all applicants in accordance with its policy on embracing Equality and Diversity. The College has an academic complaints and appeals procedure in place, however they are in the process of implementing a new policy which has a separate academic Complaints Procedure.

2.6 The College has a clear policy relating to admissions, which aligns with the Expectation set out in the Quality Code, *Chapter B2*, and the roles of the awarding bodies are clearly defined within the recruitment, selection and admissions process.

2.7 The review team tested the College's approach to recruitment, selection and admissions through meeting with staff responsible for admissions, professional support staff, and students. The team also reviewed various College documents relating to admissions, including: the Norfolk Regulatory Framework; the application process outline; the Equality and Diversity Policy; and examples of interview information.

2.8 The application process used by the College is clear and consistently implemented. Students are recruited to each programme in accordance with the minimum entry requirements set out in the programme specification, as approved at validation. Entry requirements and the selection procedure are clearly outlined for each programme and are mapped to professional capabilities frameworks where relevant. The initial selection process is the responsibility of the Course Leader. Students are admitted to their programmes of study on the basis of a judgement made by a tutor with responsibility for that decision conferred by the School for that purpose. Tutors are not provided with any formal training for their role in relation to admissions.

2.9 The College has a procedure for the recognition of prior learning and a set of fundamental principles underpinning the consideration of claims for the accreditation of prior learning (APL) or the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). All APL and APEL applications are submitted to the Higher Education Office, where they are considered by a College Accreditation Review Panel of two or three academics appointed by the Chair of the Validations Awards and Regulations Committee. Any claims for accreditation which are recommended by the College are sent to the University Partnerships Office for approval by the Academic Director of Partnerships. A summary report on APL claims is received annually by College's Higher Education Learning and Teaching Committee.

2.10 The College Senior Executive and Higher Education Office are responsible for the monitoring and review of higher education policies, including those related to recruitment, application and selection, with these processes then being approved by Academic

Management Board. The College's focus on delivering provision which meets the needs of the local area, and providing appropriate progression routes from further education study, is reflected in its approach to recruitment, selection and admission. This is ensured through the active discussions involving Course Teams and senior management relating to recruitment targets and strategies at course level as part of the annual course planning process. Recruitment is monitored and reviewed by Course Teams, school management and senior management. Recruitment data is disseminated through enrolment meetings. Despite the relationship between the strategic and implementation elements, the review team felt that staff found it challenging to articulate the link between the College's strategy and their course level recruitment approaches, and their understanding of this relationship is likely to be enhanced by the introduction of a clearly articulated higher education strategy. This finding contributes to the affirmation, noted under Expectation B4, concerning the progress being made by the College to articulate a higher education strategy.

2.11 Detailed information is provided to students at each stage of the application process, including during application processing, interviewing, post-offer and prior to commencing their studies. Students are provided with a welcome pack and a handbook, which they find useful and informative.

2.12 The review team found that the grounds and guidance for appealing against recruitment, selection and admission decisions are not currently made clear to students, and there is no published timescale. The College's approach to appeals and complaints is currently under review. To date there has been an Academic Appeals Procedure and a Complaints Procedure, neither of which make explicit reference to admissions. A new document has been drafted by the College to incorporate both the Academic Appeals Procedure and the Complaints Procedure, to form a single Academic Appeals and Complaints Procedure which will work alongside a separate general Complaints Procedure. However, these draft documents make no reference to appeals and complaints in relation to admissions. Considering this lack of guidance for students who may wish to appeal or make a complaint against an admission decision, the review team **recommends** that by September 2015 the College ensures there are clear and accessible complaints and appeals procedures for both prospective and current students. (Expectation B2 and B9)

2.13 The review team found that the College has clear policies for recruitment, selection and admissions of students which are implemented consistently by the relevant members of staff. While staff are not provided with dedicated training in relation to their role they nevertheless conduct their role professionally. The team found a lack of guidance on the procedure for students to raise a complaint about or appeal against recruitment, admission and selection within the current procedure, and also within the new academic complaints and appeals procedure that has been drafted. The review team regards this to pose a low level of risk in relation to the area as a whole and, therefore, concludes that 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**

2.14 The College places learning and teaching at the forefront of its strategic statements in its College Strategy 2009-14 and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy.

2.15 The review team found that the College has a clear institutional approach to its management of learning and teaching, including an effective approach to the observation of teaching and use of the UK Professional Standards Framework. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy is central to the success of meeting this expectation. In particular, the Observation of Teaching, Learning and Assessment provides detail on the use of the UK Professional Standards Framework in observations, and the use of judgements, not grades, in the process. Meetings with academic and senior staff evidenced that this observation process is effective, with peer support identified for staff requiring support, and new staff having an informal point of contact as well as a supportive probationary period which includes developmental and performance aspects. Appraisal of staff includes the review of teaching and assessment activity, as well as performance in continuing professional development. Staff are well qualified in their subjects and a number are being supported to undertake postgraduate qualifications. Students are given the opportunity to feedback on the micro-teach used as part of the interview process for new staff. Outcomes of teaching observations are reported to the Executive Team and Governors via reports to the Curriculum and Standards Committee.

2.16 Learning and teaching activities, support for learning, academic and pastoral progression, and resources available to support the achievement of learning outcomes are identified in the Higher Education Student Handbook and course information files which are available to all students. The 2014 National Student Survey satisfaction score for teaching and learning overall was 89 per cent and has risen consistently over the years. Links in the Student Handbook lead to further information in the student charter and the College Regulatory Framework on the VLE.

2.17 Employers and agencies providing placement or work-based opportunities are engaged in the internal quality processes, as exemplified in the Social Work Practice Assessment Panel.

2.18 During the visit, students reported positively on the teaching and assessment they had experienced at the College, in particular the opportunity to give feedback on lectures, the teaching staff, the 'nurturing environment', the adequacy of learning resources and the ATS. The recent Institutional Review identified the requirement to revise the foundation degree core modules, and students met confirmed that this revision would be welcomed (see also Expectation B4).

2.19 The College has a commitment to ensuring that disabled students and students with specific learning support difficulties receive support through the specific learning support difficulties referral unit. The College received a satisfaction score of 87 per cent in the 2014 National Student Survey for academic support, with students met at the visit confirming the supportive ethos at the College. In addition, induction, the Higher Education Student

Handbook and course information set out the expectations regarding student engagement with learning.

2.20 All staff and students receive equality and diversity training in order to provide fully inclusive learning opportunities, the detail of which is outlined in the College's Equality Statement and was confirmed at the visit.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.22 The College's strategic and operational approaches to enabling student development and achievement are expressed in the College Strategy 2009-14 and in the Strategic Framework 2014-19. The College is currently in a position of transition between the two strategies. The strategy for higher education will be incorporated within the overall Strategic Framework for the College. In the absence of a current strategy, it was unclear to the review team at the time of visit how the College's approach to its higher education policies and approaches are informed by its strategic priorities regarding the provision of learning opportunities which enable students to develop fully their academic, personal and professional potential. Therefore the team **affirms** the progress being made to articulate a strategy for higher education.

2.23 The 2013 Institutional Review report, while commending the College's actions around 'the continued engagement of students in quality assurance processes at the College, the supportive environment and personal learning experience provided by programme tutors and the ATS', does note some actions regarding Norfolk House, the internal careers service and employability, and the foundation degree core modules. The latter issue has resulted in modification to these modules (Higher Learning Skills and Advanced Higher Learning and Research Skills), and these are to be introduced fully from the 2015-16 academic year. In meetings with staff and students at the visit, the review team found that student and staff feedback had been sought over time, but that the full introduction had become protracted. In light of this, the review team **affirms** the planned introduction of the revised foundation degree core modules in the 2015-16 academic year.

2.24 The enhancement of provision to enable student development and achievement is informed by the systems of oversight in place, involving student representation, including Annual Monitoring, the Joint Board of Study, the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Committee, Institutional Review, validation/revalidation of programmes and School Management meetings.

2.25 Course Committee meetings offer opportunities for discussion around course data, delivery models and curriculum, student experience and development plans. The student submission reports that 83 per cent of students felt that their course did prepare them for employment, and students met at the visit confirmed that they feel well prepared for life after college, including personally, professionally and for further study.

2.26 There is a range of information on services, resources and programmes for both prospective and current students on the website, including how to access initial advice and guidance. Information regarding the process for intercalation and changes to modes of study are outlined in the Intercalation Procedure.

2.27 While there is a useful outline of the 2014-15 student induction on the College's mapping document for the Quality Code, *Chapter B4*, the review team found through looking at induction material that the associated practice is variable. Students reported mixed experiences at the start of their programme of study and a lack of any induction at the start of subsequent academic years. As a consequence, the team **recommends** that by September 2015 the College ensures that all students experience an effective induction at the beginning of their course and at transition to a higher level.



2.28 The ATS is designed to enable staff and students to track the student journey and inform all parties of options in all stages of study. External examiners also have full access to the system, ensuring ease of access to all student assessment which has been submitted and marked online. This system also links directly to students' electronic Individual Learning Plans in order that students can track their own progress. The student submission reports very positively on both, and students and staff met by the review team also commented on the benefits following its introduction. The review team found that the effective operational contribution made by the ATS to the student journey is a feature of **good practice**.

2.29 There are specific examples of innovative practice in employability on the Social Work programmes which are designed to prepare students for their professional careers, for example, the Social Work Futures module and the involvement of service users and carers in all taught modules. Members of the services and users group are actively involved in the design and input to these modules. The review team identified the employability preparation provided by course elements within the Social Work programmes as a feature of **good practice**.

2.30 The requirements for progression to further study are made clear in the Norfolk Regulatory Framework, including from both new and legacy Higher Nationals, and were confirmed by students at the visit.

2.31 Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk in this area is moderate. The College has appropriate arrangements and resources in place to enable students to develop and achieve, but the College's arrangements for the induction of students and those transitioning to higher levels was identified as an area of weakness, and it was recommended that the College ensures that all students receive an effective induction. The team also affirmed the actions being taken by the College in relation to the planned introduction of revised foundation degree core modules in 2015-16.

**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**

2.32 The College offers and promotes a range of opportunities for any student to engage in educational enhancement and quality assurance. Students have various channels through which they are able to provide feedback. The College has drafted both a student charter and student engagement Key Performance Indicators, however these are yet to be completed and embedded.

2.33 The College processes align with the Expectation set out in the Quality Code, *Chapter B5*, by providing students with a range of opportunities to engage in its quality assurance processes, and has recently taken steps to further embed student input at all levels of the provider.

2.34 The review team tested the College's approach to meeting the Expectation set out in the Quality Code, *Chapter B5* by meeting with staff involved in student engagement and associated mechanisms, meeting students, and reviewing documentation including minutes of relevant meetings, and the draft student charter and Key Performance Indicators for student engagement.

2.35 Students at the College are able to provide feedback on their experience to the Course Team through course representatives, who are elected for each level of each of the degree programmes. Course Committee meetings are held three times a year. Students are also represented on the Higher Education Student Forum (held three times a year); the Programme Committee; the Higher Education School Board; the Student Parliament; the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Committee; the Academic and Executive Management teams of the College; the Governing Body, where there is an elected higher education student representative; and the Joint Board of Study.

2.36 As outlined above, opportunities currently exist for the effective representation of the collective student voice at all organisational levels. Recent developments in extending the student voice include the addition of the Chair of the Higher Education Student Forum to the membership of the Joint Board of Study and the involvement of students in Annual Monitoring Meetings, which staff and students found exceptionally useful.

2.37 The review team found that formal training and ongoing support is not consistently available to student representatives and staff working in this area to equip them to effectively fulfil their roles in educational enhancement and quality assurance. Although staff continuing professional development has covered developments in the Student Engagement and Partnership Charter, and training is available to some student representatives, students met by the team during the visit were not all aware of, or had attended, training.

2.38 Student opinions are sought over the restructuring of the programme and the design of individual modules, and students are invited to participate in the appointment of new staff. Students are involved in programme revalidation, including through sitting on revalidation panels. All students have an opportunity to provide feedback on the experience by completing evaluations in the middle and at the end of every module.

2.39 The student submission clearly outlines how issues raised at Student Forums are addressed and how students are generally very positive about opportunities to provide feedback on their courses and College experience. Where comments were negative,

students felt that changes on the basis of their feedback beyond their course tutors were not always being acted on quickly and efficiently. The student submission goes on to state that 'Higher education students feel that there is a disconnection between them and the management team with lecturers managing the frontline'. Students met by the review team during the visit also highlighted issues relating to disconnection and lack of access to College services and resources through being based at Norfolk House.

2.40 The College has produced a draft student charter and Key Performance Indicators for student engagement in the School of Higher Education, however these are yet to be implemented, despite a draft being discussed at the Higher Education Student Forum in May 2014. The review team **recommends** that the College expedite the completion of the student charter with full student involvement by April 2015. Due to the lack of Key Performance Indicators or other formal measurement tool, there is currently no clear mechanism within the College to measure how the effectiveness of student engagement is monitored and reviewed using pre-defined Key Performance Indicators, to ensure policies and processes are enhanced where possible. This, taken in conjunction with the finding that training and support of student representatives and staff for their role in Course Committees is variable, leads the review team to **recommend** that by April 2015 the College monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of student engagement mechanisms.

2.41 Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met, as the College takes clear steps to ensure students are partners in their educational experience. While there are opportunities for representation of the student voice at many levels, students and staff are not always fully prepared for this role at course level. The team also found that the College lacks clear mechanisms to measure the effectiveness of its efforts to engage students in quality assurance and enhancement processes, which led to the recommendation that the College monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of its approach. The team considered the risk in this area to be low as the College is making clear progress on developing Key Performance Indicators to monitor student engagement.

**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**

2.42 The College Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, including the Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy, is detailed, stating among other things that students must have access to a fair and transparent assessment process through a range of assessment methods and opportunities, and that it is important that assessment does not act as a barrier to students. The policy also notes that appropriate assessment techniques, consistent with the learning outcomes to be assessed, should be available for those who require them. The review team found that staff were familiar both with these expectations and with the overarching expectation for fairness and transparency in assessment practice, which was firmly linked to a learning outcomes-based approach. The College is continuing to develop its assessment practice in line with important developments such as employability, and has started to implement innovations in assessment such as live and simulated live briefs.

2.43 Modules are validated in accordance with the defined academic levels for qualifications as laid out in the FHEQ, and student performance is assessed in accordance with the principles articulated in the Norwich Regulatory Framework.

2.44 Information for students relating to APEL is provided in the Higher Education Prospectus, in the course information section; in the Student Handbook; and in the Norfolk Regulatory Framework.

2.45 The College has undertaken a detailed mapping of its processes against the Quality Code, *Chapter B6*, demonstrating the College and awarding body processes for all indicators. The Quality Code, *Chapter B6* mapping document states that module assessment plans are completed at the start of each academic year for all programmes, to monitor the volume, timing and spread of assessment in all programmes. This is also considered at validation and revalidation events and in the Annual Monitoring process. The review team reviewed a number of module assessment plans, course validation and revalidation documents, AMRs and minutes of appropriate committees, and explored the process in meetings with academic staff, concluding that the processes for setting and maintaining assessment are reliable. The awarding body assures appropriate oversight by means of the Joint Board of Study and the Learning and Teaching Committee; external examiners are carefully briefed on assessment practice.

2.46 The College's ATS is designed to enable staff and students to track student achievement and inform all parties of options in all stages of study, including receiving, marking, giving feedback, achievement tracking and reporting for all student work. External examiners also have full access to the system, ensuring ease of access to all student assessment which has been submitted and marked online. This system also links directly to students' electronic Individual Learning Plans in order that students can track their own progress. The student submission reports very positively on both, and students and staff met by the review team also commented on the benefits following its introduction. The review team found that the effective operational contribution made by the ATS to the student journey is a feature of **good practice**.

2.47 Internal verification of assignment briefs is completed for all assignments in all modules before hand out to students. A strategy for the adoption of modules of 20 credits or more has been adopted at validations and revalidations to ease the assessment burden for students. While the review team heard there was some assessment bunching within the College, the team also heard that clear steps had been taken to address the issue and ensure an even spread of assessment workload throughout the academic year and cycle.

2.48 External examiners comment positively on assessment practice, and on the ATS system.

2.49 The majority of students feel their assessments are appropriate; most are satisfied with the timeliness and helpfulness of the feedback they receive, and understand the criteria. Nearly all students are aware of the regulations around plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct.

2.50 In reviewing the evidence made available, the review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and that 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**

2.51 The College has undertaken a comprehensive mapping exercise against the indicators in the Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*. Procedures for nominating and appointing external examiners are set out in the Partnership Agreement with the University, and in the University Partnerships Handbook and detailed in the Norfolk Regulatory Framework. The University Partnerships Office issues a common External Examiner Report Template. The Higher Education Office and the Head of the School of Higher Education record and monitor all information regarding external examiners. Staff and students met at the review visit were clear regarding the role of external examiners.

2.52 External examiners, once appointed, are invited to a College specific induction event at which a briefing pack is discussed and the ATS outlined. A register of external examiners is maintained by the College's Higher Education Office.

2.53 External examiners have full access to the College's ATS tracking system and indeed are not able to discharge their duties if they are unable or unwilling to use it.

2.54 External examiners are required to complete a report that explicitly asks for confirmation of all of the Quality Code, *Chapter B7* indicators. This report is completed manually by the external examiners and then electronically forwarded to relevant parties for comment and response. The external examiners' reports are also made available for inspection both at the University and in the College, and via the College VLE. External examiner reports seen by the review team were generally positive.

2.55 External examiner reports are considered by: the Course Team, with the production of an Action Plan, as part of the annual monitoring process; the curriculum programme manager; the Head of School of Higher Education; and the University's Partnerships Office, and are then finally approved (or rejected) by the University's Director of Taught Programmes as Chair of the Joint Board of Study. Page 3 of the report template enables external examiners to comment on academic standards; the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions. A useful summary of comments is provided, and discussed at the Academic Management Board and the Joint Board of Study. Written responses to external examiner reports are sent to the external examiner from the University Partnerships Office.

2.56 External examiner reports are made available to students on the VLE. Reports are also discussed at the Higher Education Student Forum. While the College process and the student submission confirm that all external examiner reports are made available to students on the VLE, the review team found that for those for the Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals this was not the case. Students also reported varied experiences regarding the sight of the full reports, but student representatives were aware of external examiner comments being discussed at Course Committee meetings. The review team therefore **recommends** that by April 2015 the College makes available external examiner reports for Higher National programmes to students and staff.

2.57 The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation. With the omission of making external reports for Higher National programmes available to students and staff, a relatively small area of the College's provision, the team considered the associated level of risk for this expectation to be 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**

2.58 The College has undertaken a mapping exercise of the indicators contained in the Quality Code, *Chapter B8* against the University Partnerships Handbook and the College's Norfolk Regulatory Framework. It suggests there is a comprehensive approach to programme monitoring and review, with the strategic oversight of the processes for programme monitoring and review maintained through the Academic Management Board.

2.59 Students are involved in the programme monitoring processes through the end and mid-module evaluations and input at Course Committee meetings, which contribute to the AMRs. Students are also involved in consultations about revalidations and participate in revalidations as panel members. Annual reports from the University Academic Links, external examiners and other stakeholders, including employers and students, are included in and used to inform the AMRs.

2.60 The mapping document states that staff are supported in the completion of AMRs by their line managers and receive feedback on the process.

2.61 All programmes are revalidated every five years in accordance with the procedures in the University Partnerships Handbook and incorporating the requirements of PSRBs. Revalidation panels include: external representation from subject academics from other higher education institutions; academic panel members from the University and the College (not involved in the delivery of the programme); and students and industry/employer representatives where appropriate, as set out in the University Partnerships Handbook.

2.62 The University carries out regular Institutional Reviews every five years, the most recent taking place in 2013. This resulted in a number of requirements and recommendations, together with four commendations.

2.63 On examining the evidence provided in advance and at the review visit, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.64 The Norfolk Regulatory Framework provides information on the College's regulations and policies relating to academic misconduct, student complaints, student discipline and internet use. The College has its own procedures for the Academic Appeals Procedure, which is published on Blackboard, and makes explicit reference to guidance available within the Quality Code, *Chapter B9*. The College currently has a separate Complaints Procedure. It has been proposed that the Academic Appeals Procedure incorporate the Academic Complaints Procedure, and to this end the College has produced a draft Academic Appeals and Academic Complaints Procedure. This new document outlines the mechanisms through which students would be able to formally raise concerns about their assessment results, and the outcomes of the boards and panels which make decisions on progression, awards and classifications. Students would then continue to use the Complaints Procedure for non-academic complaints. However, both the existing and proposed procedures are designed for University-validated awards and do not make reference to Pearson qualifications.

2.65 The review team concluded that the College's current and draft procedures relating to appeals and complaints do not make the processes explicitly clear to all students, and as a consequence the procedures do not align with the Expectation set out in the Quality Code, *Chapter B9*.

2.66 The review team tested the College's approach to student appeals and complaints through meetings with students, professional support staff, senior staff, academic staff, and representatives from the awarding body. The team also consulted documentation, including records of complaints and appeals during 2013-14, alongside the current policies and draft policies for appeals and complaints.

2.67 Higher National programmes are not referenced in the proposed new academic complaints and appeals procedures, although they are referenced in the Higher National Diploma Engineering Handbook, provided at the review visit, which refers to the College's formal Complaints Procedures.

2.68 During the visit, the review team discussed appeals and complaints with staff and students. It was not made clear to the review team whether the College ensures that appeals and complaints are dealt with in a timely manner. Although a minimum target response time is set out within the Academic Appeals Procedure, there is no evidence of this being adhered to. None of the staff met by the review team during the visit could clearly outline the formal complaints and appeals procedures. There was confusion amongst staff about the different routes available for students to make complaints through, and senior staff were also not aware of the formal procedures for handling appeals and complaints. Furthermore, the majority of students met by the review team were unsure where they would find information about complaints and appeals. One student met by the team was in the process of making a complaint and had not been made aware of the formal complaints process. Staff were also not clear how opportunities are offered for early/informal resolution of potential appeals and complaints, which the College has identified as an area to be addressed. The team had found under Expectation B2 a lack of guidance on the procedure for students to raise a complaint or appeal in the recruitment, admission and selection process which, combined



with the findings under this Expectation, leads the review team to **recommend** that by September 2015 the College ensures there are clear and accessible complaints and appeals procedures for both prospective and current students.

2.69 In summary, the review team concludes that the Expectation relating to appeals and complaints has not been met, as there was confusion amongst staff regarding the policies and processes relating to appeals and complaints, and students were not aware of where to find information about these processes. Furthermore, the documentation relating to appeals and complaints omits any reference to the procedure for Higher National programmes. The team considered the level of risk is moderate, as the omissions which exist in the College's current policies continue to persist within the proposed (draft) new policies.

**Expectation: Not 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**

2.70 The University is responsible for the degree-awarding aspects of the link with the College, and the responsibilities of each partner are clearly laid out in the Norfolk Regulatory Framework and the University Partnerships Handbook. The College has no franchising arrangements with any other partner.

2.71 The self-evaluation document speaks of work placements being an important aspect of provision which falls within this expectation. The College works with employers to ensure the effectiveness of this process and to make sure that placements are correctly managed. In the BA (Hons) in Applied Social Work and the FdA in Early Years programmes placements fulfil both validated programme and PSRB requirements. Employers confirmed that the College is fully discharging all its responsibilities and providing them with briefings and information. The employers also confirmed that they had been involved in commenting on and inputting material into the handbooks and other information for students on placement. This was greatly valued by them and enhances the student learning experience.

2.72 The review team concludes that the Expectation in the Quality Code, *Chapter B10* is met in both design and operation, 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**

2.73 The College offers no postgraduate provision, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

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

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

2.75 The team identified two features of good practice: the ATS, for receiving, marking, giving feedback, achievement tracking and reporting of student work, which benefits students, staff, and external examiners; and course elements within Social Work programmes that prepare students for employment. Other positive features that contributed to the judgement in this area included the supportive ethos of teaching staff to student learning and the College's approach to enabling student development and achievement.

2.76 Nine of the 10 applicable Expectations in this area have been met, with five recommendations arising in total. Where the Expectations are met, in eight of the nine cases the risk is judged to be low, and in one case the risk is considered moderate. Where the risks are low the recommendations relate to the need to address minor omissions and oversights in small parts of the College's provision, and the timely completion of activity which is already underway. Where the risk is moderate there is one recommendation which is related to the need to ensure clarity and consistency in relation to course induction and transition to higher levels. Where the expectation has not been met, the risk is judged to be moderate. There is one recommendation in this area which relates to the need to undertake further work on the design of the complaints and appeals policies to make these clear and accessible to staff and students. The team also made two affirmations in this area where the need for action is already being taken forward by the provider.

2.77 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities **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 website includes information that describes its mission, values and overall strategy. It also includes detailed information on the admissions and applications process; information about higher education courses and study is also provided through the Higher Education Prospectus. Key Information Sets are also available on the College website. The College's Norfolk Regulatory Framework is available to students via the website and VLE.

3.2 The Academic Agreement between the University and the College details the respective roles and responsibilities with respect to marketing and publicity. Discussions with College and University partnership staff confirmed that the process is robust and effective.

3.3 The College has a social media policy and procedure for both staff and students. The comments received on the platforms are regularly monitored and responses made where appropriate by College staff.

3.4 The team tested the appropriateness of the information made available by the College. This included: following trails through its public website; examining programme documentation, including academic support services information; attending a demonstration of the VLE; discussing with staff their input to the process; and discussing with students the trustworthiness of the information.

3.5 Discussions took place on the processes for producing and signing off public information within the College. Students are consulted on the development and review of both outward and inward-facing sources of public information, and their views are considered for informing possible changes. Staff confirmed that most of the processes are informal, but that a formal sign-off process is being developed. The review team affirms the actions being taken by the College to develop a sign-off processes for information.

3.6 In terms of information for students applying to study at the College, students met by the review team confirmed that the information which they had received in advance of applying or being interviewed for a course was helpful to them.

3.7 The College produces programme handbooks for all awards, and students in discussion confirmed that these are accessible and helpful for their studies.

3.8 The College publishes a range of information for current students, including a handbook and course information document, both of which are updated annually and monitored by the University. Students confirmed that these were helpful to them and fit for purpose. The employers consulted felt that the information provided to them about students on placement was good. External examiner reports are published on the College VLE, although the review team found that this does not include reports for Pearson Higher National awards. In addition, the College uses standard Pearson programme specifications for its Higher National programmes rather than contextualising the specification to the programme delivered by the College. The review team therefore recommended under

Expectation A2.2 that the College provides contextualised versions of Higher National programme specifications and makes these available to students and staff.

3.9 Students confirmed that the vast majority of resources held on the VLE are extremely useful and are accessible from anywhere, although there is some variation among staff on the amount of material they place on it. The review team learned that the VLE is regularly developed in response to staff and student suggestions. The team saw how it is used in a variety of ways, both as a repository for documents and for other interactive teaching and learning activities, and for the online submission of assignments.

3.10 In summary, the review team concludes that the information produced about the College's provision is on the whole comprehensive, accurate and well received by students. There are some issues to be addressed in respect of producing contextualised versions of Higher National programme specifications (Expectation A2.2); clarifying appeals and Complaints Procedures (Expectations B2 and B9); and making external examiner (verifier) reports for Higher National programmes available to students (Expectation B7). Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met in both design and operation 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

3.11 In reaching its judgement, the review team considered its findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The team concludes that the Expectation in this area is met and the risk considered low.

3.12 Roles and responsibilities with respect to marketing and publicity of the University awards delivered by the College are set out in the Academic Agreement between the University and the College. These processes were confirmed to be effective and robust. Public information produced by the College outside this agreement was confirmed by students to be fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible, however, the College does not currently have a formal signoff procedure. The College is taking appropriate action to address this, which is affirmed by the review team.

3.13 In reaching its judgement, the review team noted a number of factors that made positive contributions to this area, including the involvement of students in the development and review of information, and the monitoring of and responses to social media.

3.14 In assessing the effectiveness of the College in this area, the review team noted some differences between the information provided to Higher National students and students registered on University awards. The team found external examiner (verifier) reports for Higher National programmes are not made available to students, and programme specifications for these programmes are not contextualised to the College offer. These findings led to recommendations in the sections for Expectations A2.1 and B7. The team considered the risks associated with these recommendations to be low.

3.15 Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of information provided by the College about its provision **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 QAA definition of enhancement privileges deliberate steps taken at provider level to improve the quality of learning opportunities for students. While the College states in the self-evaluation document that it has a 'well established and effective strategic approach to enhancement', in testing this claim the review team did not find sufficient evidence of a strategic approach to embedding enhancement across the College. Rather, the College has a number of examples of good practice, including those it highlights with regard to employability and the regional economy in the self-evaluation document, and those such as the Achievement Tracker System noted as a feature of good practice elsewhere in this report (see Expectation B6), which, while valuable in themselves, do not cohere to form a deliberate or systematic approach to enhancement across the board. While the review team felt there was a higher education ethos across the College which had developed positively in recent years, this view was not universally shared by students, some of whom said that they felt part of a good course, but not part of a higher education culture. This did not support the assertions of this section of the self-evaluation document, and was again an area in which enhancement, systematically applied and driven, would have contributed significantly to the overall higher education culture.

4.2 While the Principal stated that enhancement is 'in everything we do', the key deliberative documentation within the College, including agendas and minutes from meetings and key strategies, do not emphasise deliberate steps or a strategic approach - in fact, enhancement is rarely mentioned within such key documentation. When it is, the associations tend not to be allied even loosely to the QAA definition, nor to a deliberate approach across areas of higher education practice. The agenda for the continuing professional development day for higher education does not mention enhancement or sharing of good practice. The Higher Education Student Forum minutes do not emphasise enhancement; neither does the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, which is normally an obvious vehicle for promoting enhancement activity. Programme documentation offers clear opportunities and evidence of enhancement activity, but this is not brought together in a formalised or systematic way. For example, the Student Engagement Revalidation documentation has examples of enhancement which could have been systematised and used as examples of good practice for wider dissemination. Such missed opportunities to emphasise and drive home the individually good examples of enhancement characterise College documentation and written evidence across its higher education provision.

4.3 Key supporting documentation issued within the College, for example the Staff Handbook, does not mention enhancement. The review team did not find that key activities associated with staff development, for example, were driven by an overarching enhancement approach, but by conventional developmental practice, for example in Teaching Observation. While there were other numerous examples not signposted in the initial self-evaluation document which the review team found to be examples of enhancement, for example the Start-Up Lounge, these did not cohere to form a systematic approach to enhancement driven by the management of the College.

4.4 The review team tested staff understanding of enhancement in more than one meeting during the visit. Staff found it hard to define enhancement in convincing or specific



ways, and no member of staff appeared to be aware of the QAA definition, or the importance of a systematic, deliberate approach. More importantly, the review team did not see or hear evidence of how the College uses its quality assurance processes to drive a strategic enhancement agenda, in spite of the clear examples of enhancement which characterise individual initiatives within the College. The College does not have a formal enhancement strategy or policy.

4.5 For these reasons, the review team **recommends** that by September 2015 the College develops an overarching and systematic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associated risk is moderate, as there are examples of good practice leading to improvements of the quality of students' learning opportunities. However, there is a lack of a deliberate and systematic approach that would drive an enhancement agenda.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

4.7 While the review team found a number of examples of good practice within the College, these were often not noted, recognised or disseminated as such, and there was a lack of a systematic, deliberate and strategic approach to enhancement, as well as a lack of strategic use of quality processes to drive an enhancement agenda. Staff were confused about their understanding of the term 'enhancement', and key deliberative, quality process and support documentation demonstrated a lack of targeted, systematic discussion or specific emphasis on this area of higher education practice and activity. The team considered the Expectation to be not met and the associated risk moderate, as weaknesses in the operation of deliberate steps being taken at provider level may lead to missed opportunities to identify, support and disseminate good practice, which over time may have a significant impact on the quality of students' learning opportunities. The review team has, therefore, recommended that by September 2015 the College develop an overarching and systematic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

4.8 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 Student employability was cited as an area of good practice in the College's Integrated Quality Enhancement Review, and is a key objective of the College Strategy. The review team found that there is a strong sense that employability is an important part of the College's higher education strategy and provision. There is a clear focus on employability within the curriculum, and through events and opportunities that sit outside the actual programme delivery structure.

5.2 Students reported positively on employability measures, including work placements, the Careers Fair, Employability Days and core employability focused modules across programmes. The student submission reported that 83 per cent of students agreed that their course prepared them for employment, and students met by the review team at the visit confirmed their preparedness for life after college. However, on programmes where there is not a statutory requirement for a placement, or where students are already employed, the review team found that students would benefit from more support in the operation of placement activity.

5.3 The College runs its own careers service and events such as the Higher Education Careers Fair, with an Advice Shop, Start Up Lounge and online resources, and there is an Employability Group in the School of Higher Education.

5.4 There are specific examples of innovative practice in employability on the Social Work programmes, for example the Social Work Futures module and the ready availability of quality practice learning opportunities. The employability preparation provided by the course elements was considered by the team to be a feature of good practice (see Expectation B10).

5.5 The Course Committee structure allows students, staff and employers to meet termly, involving employers in building workforce requirements into curricula and planning employer input into programmes by means of placements, internships and mock interviews.

5.6 Employers are consulted in the design of new programmes and those under revalidation, and sit on validation panels. Professional institutes and bodies are key partners in promoting employability among students.

## 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 29-32 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.

## **QAA1118 - R4022 - July 15**

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786