



Higher Education Review of City College Plymouth

April 2015

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at City College Plymouth. The review took place from 14 to 16 April 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Fazal Dad
- Dr Ross Fergusson
- Ms Sarah Ingram (student reviewer)

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by City College Plymouth 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)¹ setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

In reviewing City College Plymouth 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,² 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.³ A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)⁴ 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.

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review

Key findings

QAA's judgements about City College Plymouth

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

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

Good practice

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

- The active and widespread employer involvement in curriculum design and development (Expectations B1, B10).
- The highly supportive approach to managing the quality of teaching, which is underpinned by a wide range of staff development activities and opportunities for sharing good practice (Expectations B3, Enhancement).
- The distinctive requirement for a student representative to be present at Programme Committee meetings in order to be fully constituted to make decisions (Expectation B5).

Recommendations

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

By September 2015:

- ensure that the staff absence and lesson cover policy is capable of addressing the full range of circumstances that may adversely affect student learning opportunities (Expectation B4)
- ensure that the policy for the return of assessment feedback is met for all students and that the effectiveness of the policy is regularly and systematically monitored at College and department level (Expectation B6)
- improve the accuracy of written information in student handbooks and on the student sections of the virtual learning environment (Expectation C).

By January 2016:

- develop a framework that clearly articulates the nature of work-based, work-related and placement learning and the contribution they make to meeting programme outcomes (Expectation B10).

By September 2016:

- establish a clearer relationship between higher education strategic priorities and specific enhancement practices (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to consistently and systematically involve students in course approval and development (Expectation B1).

Theme: Student Employability

The College outlines its commitment to developing the employability and work-readiness of students through its Strategic Plan 2012-15, which focuses on employer engagement activities, particularly at Curriculum level and supporting them in obtaining and gaining high quality employment opportunities. Engaging with employers is central to this mission. The College has an extensive and well developed infrastructure for employer liaison, the strategic development of partnerships with employers and their involvement in curriculum design and development. The students, staff and employers reinforced the strength, depth and range of the College's external partnerships. Students are provided with an extensive range of opportunities to develop employability-related skills and knowledge.

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

About City College Plymouth

The College's Strategic Plan 2012-15 articulates the College's mission to '...be the South West's leading provider of innovative, skills-based vocational education and training by supporting partnerships for growth, raising aspirations and enabling wealth creation'. The College's higher education Strategy 2014-18 outlines the higher education vision and strategic aims and underpins a number of the strategic priorities within the College's wider Strategic Plan.

The College views higher education as of critical strategic importance. It contributes to the delivery and development of vocational higher education across Plymouth and the surrounding area. Widening participation, engaging with employers, promoting progression to higher education locally and in supporting regional economic, social, community and cultural development are all key aspects of the College's strategic direction for higher education.

City College Plymouth is a large general further education college and is the largest provider of further education and skills training in the Plymouth Travel to Work area. The College was first established in 1889 when it was a school of science and art. The College has been an integral part of the local community for over 125 years and celebrated its anniversary in 2014. It became Plymouth College of Further Education in 1969 and rebranded in 2007 to become City College Plymouth. With a staff of approximately 792, the College operates from two main campuses within the city. Higher Education has been offered at the College since the early 1990s. The total number of students is 15,378, which includes 780 higher education students.

Plymouth's local economic strategy identifies priority sectors which are key to employment growth. These include: advanced manufacturing; marine and renewables; medical and healthcare; business services; creative industries; and tourism and leisure. The College has

refocused its mission and provision to align with these priority sectors, and ensure that its provision remains of value to the city.

In 2012-13 City College Plymouth was launched as an enterprise college, involving a range of different stakeholders, both internal and external, in the design, delivery and evaluation of its provision. The College underwent a significant restructure, establishing five curriculum directorates, focused upon the key priority sectors for the local region. This has led to a recent restructure of higher education that aims to support a highly responsive curriculum and growth aligned to these key priority sectors, and to encourage student progression along a clear ladder of opportunity.

At the same time as the restructure of higher education provision, the College also invested further in a dedicated Higher Education Centre that incorporates a new study room. The College also created a Student Engagement Officer role which is positioned within the Higher Education Office to provide a central point of contact for higher education student engagement.

City College Plymouth was successful in securing 80 full-time equivalent additional student numbers through the Higher Education Funding Council for England core and margin exercise. This increase in student number allocation has supported the development of new provision, delivered with Pearson.

The College offers a portfolio of higher education courses that currently includes 19 Foundation Degrees, six Higher National Certificates (HNC), and two Higher National Diplomas (HND). All foundation degrees and five of the six HNCs are validated by the University of Plymouth. In addition, since 2013-14, the College has also been delivering a small number of Higher National courses directly with Pearson.

The College has responded fully and effectively to the recommendations made and features of good practice identified in the Integrated Quality Enhancement Review report of March 2011.

Explanation of the findings about City College Plymouth

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 The College delivers its higher education provision in partnership with University of Plymouth and Pearson. Overall responsibility for the academic standards of the College's higher education provision is retained by its degree-awarding bodies and organisations.

1.2 In the case of the University of Plymouth, the Academic Cooperation Agreement between the University and the College defines the responsibilities for the management, development and quality assurance of higher education within the College. The Pearson HNC/HND Performing Arts and HND Creative Media Production (Games Design) is designed and validated by Pearson. The College maintains academic standards through appropriate programme delivery procedures. Programme specifications provide the guidance for teaching, learning and assessment of students at the appropriate level.

1.3 The approach taken by the College in respect to the maintaining of academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding organisation allows the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.4 The review team scrutinised the College's processes and their effectiveness in maintaining academic standards through consideration of quality assurance procedures,

minutes of meetings, external examiner reports, programme documentation and meetings with staff and students.

1.5 The mapping of qualifications to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) for higher education awards run by the College is the responsibility of the awarding body and awarding organisation. The FHEQ is mapped at programme level using a 'Programme Structure' for each FHEQ level of study and 'Exposition and Mapping of Learning Outcomes, Teaching & Learning and Assessment' within all University of Plymouth-approved programme specifications. The Module Record also clearly displays the FHEQ level of each module and is aligned to the level descriptors.

1.6 Managers and teaching staff have a clear understanding of the FHEQ and its implications for course design, delivery and assessment.

1.7 All assessment briefs are internally verified and checked for coverage of programme specifications prior to delivery. Pearson allocates subject-specific external examiners to a programme to conduct sampling of assessed students' work and to provide judgments and feedback. Course teams work closely with external examiners to ensure that the College's implementation, delivery and assessment are consistent with national standards. External Examiner reports from the University of Plymouth and Pearson confirm that the standards set for the awards are appropriate for qualifications at the relevant level against the FHEQ.

1.8 The *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* is reflected in the programme design of all foundation degrees and is considered when designing and developing a new programme and is explicit in programme specifications.

1.9 Students confirmed that the academic credit of individual modules or units and intended learning outcomes are clearly communicated through a number of channels including during induction, with module lecturers, information on their virtual learning environment (VLE) and within programme documentation.

1.10 The awarding body and awarding organisation have overall responsibility for ensuring programmes take into account relevant subject benchmarks. All higher education programmes offered by the College are aligned, informed by and mapped against Subject Benchmark Statements, where applicable, during approval.

1.11 The review team concludes that the robustness of the processes in place to maintain the academic standards of awards offered by City College Plymouth on behalf of its degree-awarding body and awarding organisation meet Expectation A1 and the associated level of risk in this area 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

1.12 The College operates within the prescribed regulations set out by its awarding body, the University of Plymouth, and awarding organisation, Pearson. The College's own Higher Education Assessment Policy outlines the purposes and principles that guide assessment across all higher education programmes and identifies where responsibilities for assessment reside.

1.13 The processes for internal and external verification are determined by the quality assurance guidelines set by the College and the awarding body. The responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of these lies with the Faculty Directors and Heads of Academy, although is operationally delegated to higher education Programme Leaders. This is also monitored by Subject Assessment Panels and Award Assessment Boards and through the process of Annual Programme Monitoring.

1.14 Annual Subject Assessment Panels and Award Assessment Boards are conducted for all higher education programmes to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications within the relevant academic frameworks and regulations. These formal meetings consider students' achievement and academic progression and all marks are confirmed. For University of Plymouth-approved awards, the Subject Assessment Panels and Award Assessment Boards are run by the University of Plymouth and Academic Partnerships in conjunction with the College's Higher Education Manager. For Pearson-approved awards, the process is managed internally by the Quality Improvement Team in conjunction with the College's Higher Education Manager.

1.15 The Assessment Award Boards set the academic requirements for progression on a programme and criteria for the award of a qualification within the academic framework stipulated by the awarding body. The final decision to confirm the award of a qualification to a student rests with the College's awarding body and organisation.

1.16 The clear and comprehensive academic frameworks, regulations and processes in place, aligning with those of its awarding body and organisation, allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.17 The review team scrutinised the College's processes and their effectiveness through consideration of evidence provided in documented quality assurance procedures, minutes of meetings, external examiner reports, and meetings with staff and students.

1.18 Regulations are systematically and consistently applied to secure academic standards. The College's higher education provision is regularly monitored, evaluated and supported by well established templates and processes and benefits significantly from its excellent relationships with its awarding body.

1.19 The College has very clear guidance on the division of responsibilities for academic governance and management between the College and its awarding body and organisation. Staff demonstrated a shared understanding of academic regulations between staff and students.

1.20 Academic regulations are available via the higher education VLE for staff and students. Key elements of the academic regulations, such as regulations on passing their qualifications, extenuating circumstances, academic offences and referencing requirements, are outlined to students during their induction. They are further reinforced by their personal tutors and programmes teams during the initial weeks of each programme of study.

1.21 The review team concludes that the College has transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks to govern the delivery of academic credit and qualifications on behalf of its awarding body and organisation and thereby meets Expectation A2.1 and that the associated level of risk in this area 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

1.22 A definitive record for each programme is held by the Higher Education Office and is shared with staff and students on the College VLE and in the Programme Quality Handbook. The definitive record includes the content, structure, assessment and learning outcome for every module/unit that leads to the award of credit. The module records are reviewed by programme teams and approved by the programme leader before being submitted to the awarding body.

1.23 Modifications to programmes are addressed using the 'minor changes' process through the Joint Board of Studies meetings following Annual Programme Monitoring. Any permitted changes to programmes are recorded in the permitted changes log for each programme, detailing each change and the applicable dates. The Higher Education Office maintains a centralised database of all permitted changes to monitor the cumulative effect of permitted changes to modules and ensure consistency and continued adherence to intended learning outcomes. The College modifies programmes in accordance with the requirements of the awarding body and organisation.

1.24 The processes that the College has in place allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.25 The review team evaluated the documentation provided by the College relating to the processes for amending and maintaining an accurate copy of the definitive record for each programme. The review team spoke to senior staff to understand the process that the College had put in place to maintain and amend the definitive records. The review team tested this process with programme leaders to ensure that they had an awareness of the process and that it was fit for purpose. The review team also tested whether the students were aware of where they could find the definitive record of the programme and whether that provided sufficient information for them about the programme.

1.26 All staff are clear on the annual College process for considering amendments to the definitive record. Students were aware that they could find the definitive record for their programme on the VLE and in the Programme Handbook.

1.27 The review team concluded that Expectation A2.2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.28 University of Plymouth and Pearson are responsible for the formal approval of programmes leading to awards taught in partnership by the College. The College follows University of Plymouth formal processes, using the templates provided, and sound processes ensure full and detailed oversight by the College and University of Plymouth. The College supplements Pearson approval requirements using similar reference points to those employed on University of Plymouth programmes.

1.29 University of Plymouth and Pearson formal validation processes ensure compliance with subject benchmarks, professional benchmarks and threshold standards required by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. Using a two-stage process, the University of Plymouth Academic Development Committee first scrutinises proposal documentation to assess compliance. Independence of judgement is secured in the second stage of the process by means of an approval panel chaired by academic staff from University of Plymouth who have no connection with the programme being considered, as well as by secretarial support from the University of Plymouth quality team. For Pearson programmes, the single-stage supplementary internal process combines these procedures to add safeguards to those required by the awarding body. For all programmes, the processes that are in place allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.30 The review team tested the implementation and effectiveness of the approval processes undertaken at college level by scrutinising a number of approval templates supplied by the College at programme and module specification levels, along with minutes of the relevant committees/panels. Discussions with the principal, senior staff and teaching staff also contributed to the assessment of this Expectation.

1.31 The review team found extensive evidence of full documentation, including detail at module level that provided reassurance about the ways in which standards are met at high levels of specificity. Although not explicitly tested during approval processes Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmarks are also met. Appropriate levels of externality were observed in approval processes. Records of discussions at relevant meetings indicated appropriate levels of engagement with proposals and of assessment of their attainment of required standards. Although it was difficult to identify points at which awarding body framework requirements differed significantly from threshold standards, this did not detract from the assessment that threshold standards are clear and are being managed effectively.

1.32 Scrutiny of this aspect of programme approval led the review team to conclude that processes clearly meet this Expectation and the associated level of risk is now.

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

1.33 Assessment requirements for each programme are set through the course approval process. As part of this process, assessments are aligned with learning outcomes. Responsibility for valid and reliable assessment rests primarily with the Subject Assessment Panels, which review the standard of assessment in each subject, and with Assessment Award Boards, which make decisions on progression and awards to students.

1.34 The policies, processes and frameworks in place allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.35 The review team tested the relevant processes and documentation by examining examples of internal verification of assessment prior to issue, Module Records set out in Programme Quality Handbooks, and external examiner reports. In addition, discussions with senior staff and teaching staff affirmed that the processes described help secure achievement of this expectation.

1.36 The capacity of Subject Assessment Panels and Award Assessment Boards to ensure that the Expectation is met derives from careful and fully documented learning and assessment design. Learning outcomes are fully specified at both module and qualification levels when programmes are initially approved. As a result, appropriate conditions are established for threshold and local academic standards to be satisfied by means of assessments that are closely articulated to required learning outcomes. Module records provide a definitive record of learning outcomes and assessments that have been internally and externally verified. Assessment outcomes are internally moderated and externally verified, including by use of external advisers during programme development. The review team concludes that the College has in place appropriate frameworks and processes that allow it to ensure the maintenance of sound academic standards by means of its assessment processes and their secure connection to relevant learning outcomes. Expectation A3.2 is therefore met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.37 The College's Higher Education Quality Schedule and Structure establishes the framework within which monitoring and review of programmes is undertaken to ensure appropriate academic standards are achieved. University of Plymouth has established an Annual Programme Monitoring process, which the College follows. On its own initiative, the College conducts a comparable process in respect of Pearson provision, to secure parity in its higher education programmes. For all provision, higher education programme reviews and higher education mid-year reviews supplement and feed into the Annual Programme Monitoring process. In addition, University of Plymouth undertakes periodic institutional reviews of the College's provision. In combination, the framework and the various processes described establish mechanisms by which the college is able to assure itself that appropriate academic standards are maintained and the Expectation is met in theory.

1.38 The review team was presented with a range of evidence which it scrutinised to test the success of the framework and its associated processes. This included documentation evidencing all relevant elements of the Annual Programme Monitoring process across several programmes, including Pearson provision. Examples of the data upon which reviews are able to draw were also provided, along with minutes, reports and action plans. The review team also had sight of a University of Plymouth Institutional Review Report. Discussions with all categories of staff and with employers further contributed evidence that programme monitoring and review address the achievement of academic standards.

1.39 Monitoring and review of programmes at the College is effective. The 'minor change' process ensures that programmes remain responsive and up to date while ensuring overall integrity of the approved programme outcomes. Discussions with employers provided evidence that that College proactively seeks external contributions to the review of programmes.

1.40 The documentary evidence and discussion with College staff led the review team to conclude that the college has in place sound and effective processes of programme monitoring and review that address the achievement of threshold academic standards and those required by the awarding bodies. Expectation A3.3 is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

1.41 For the majority of the College's higher education provision, academic standards are set in partnership between the College, University of Plymouth and an independent and external academic and industry expert as part of the approval process. In addition, to support the maintenance of standards, external examiners are nominated by the College and approved by University of Plymouth. This process is outlined within University of Plymouth's guidance on the criteria for the selection and appointment of external examiners. Both subject external examiners and award external examiners are selected and appointed to ensure that the University's regulations are being implemented consistently, fairly and in line with national standards. Pearson allocates a standards verifier (external examiner) for its awards. The external examiners liaise with the College, as an approved centre, to negotiate arrangements for standards verification visits and sampling of students' work.

1.42 The policies and processes in place allow the expectation to be met in theory.

1.43 The review team scrutinised a range of relevant documentation including policies and procedures relating to external examining and external examiner and verifier reports. Meetings were held with senior staff and teaching staff to understand how external examiner and external adviser input is used to maintain standards.

1.44 External examiners are recognised as an essential element of the verification of assessment, their confirmation of assessment at the Subject Assessment Panel at the end of the academic year (in the form of their written report for Pearson-approved programmes) confirms the assessment standard of the programme, while the Award Board external adviser confirms overall academic standards of all University of Plymouth programmes.

1.45 The College also uses external expertise to maintain the academic currency of its awards and support the vocational relevance of the programmes of study. The College holds regular Employer Advisory Boards and, where relevant, maintains good relationships with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. For example, the recent approval of the FdSc Health and Wellbeing programme was informed by consultation with employers at a College Employer Advisory Board. The review team concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met. The associated level of risk is judged to be low, since the systems in place enable issues to be identified and resolved promptly.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.46 In reaching its positive judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area were met and the associated levels of risk were low. In all aspects of this judgement area the College complies with the requirements of its degree-awarding body and awarding organisation. The review team identified no recommendations or affirmations for this judgement area. No features of good practice were identified. The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-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 and Approval

2.1 University of Plymouth and Pearson retain ultimate responsibility for ensuring that programmes are designed and developed in line with appropriate benchmarks and to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. Oversight of the approval process is maintained by use of standard templates and processes described under Expectation A3.1. The College's activity in designing and developing programmes and seeking the approval of its awarding body and organisation is supported by its higher education department and by the Quality Improvement Team, using a mentorship system. The Director of Quality Improvement, the Faculty Partnership Manager and the Higher Education Manager also participate in approval panels.

2.2 Programme learning outcomes and assessment constitute a key element of programme design and development. Scrutiny and discussion of both is central to the approval process. The initiative to develop new programmes is strongly guided by the priorities set out in the College's Strategic Plan. Opportunity, inclusivity and enterprise are important drivers. Particular attention is paid to the interests of employers, local economic development needs and priorities, and student employability. Consideration of resource requirements forms an integral part of programme approval processes. Employer Advisory Boards support and guide curricular developments. Overall, the frameworks and processes described are conducive to assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities and this Expectation is met in theory.

2.3 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the framework and processes by scrutinising a number of proposals at programme and module level, and at both stages of the University of Plymouth approval process. It also read minutes and reports relating to processes of approval for the programmes of the awarding body and organisation. Aspects of this Expectation were considered in discussions with staff and with employers.

2.4 The review team found the programme design and approval processes to be well understood by all involved. The policies and processes set out by the College and its awarding body and organisation are implemented effectively. The evidence of cross-subject involvement in approvals is an aspect of the process that facilitates the exchange of new ideas and new practices. Programme leaders provided the review team with current examples of the care taken to align programme proposals with the Quality Code and with Subject Benchmark Statements.

2.5 Very good use is made of external advice and guidance in programme approval processes. Discussions with employers corroborated their close and open contact with the College, and its readiness to take account of their needs in programme design. For example the development of the naval architecture programme in consultation with Babcock Engineering provided a particularly effective example of employer engagement in programme design and development. The review team concluded that the active and widespread employer involvement in curriculum design and development is **good practice**. Programme leaders also provided the review team with current examples of the care taken

to align programme proposals with the Quality Code and with Subject Benchmark Statements.

2.6 There is some student involvement in programme design, development and approval. The College provided some evidence of the use of student feedback from surveys and focus groups in the design of new provision, and emphasised its importance in relation to re-approval processes. The introduction of revised processes for course development and approval has now formalised the input of students. It is now a requirement that all programme approvals involve a student focus group. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to consistently and systematically involve students in course approval and development.

2.7 Both the documentary evidence provided by the College, and discussions with staff and employers demonstrated to the review team that Expectation B1 is met. There is one instance of good practice and one affirmation of action being taken. The associated level of risk is therefore 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*

2.8 The College has a Higher Education Admissions Policy available on the website, staff intranet and VLE. This is aligned to the Quality Code and the College's overall admissions policy. The Policy ensures that all applications are dealt with equally and fairly, and it aligns with the widening participation strategy highlighted in the Higher Education Strategy. Responsibility for the admissions process is shared between the Higher Education Office and the Central Admissions Team.

2.9 Entry criteria for each programme are reviewed at programme level and are published in the Higher Education Guide; the College website, in the definitive programme documents; and in the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) website for full-time provision. Admissions criteria are considered and planned during programme approval.

2.10 Student numbers are agreed annually with the curriculum directors through the curriculum planning process. Admission applications are recorded on the College's management information system, and weekly updates are produced by the higher education office and circulated to curriculum directors and the Senior Leadership team to support ongoing planning.

2.11 The College has a variety of annual recruitment events that prospective students can attend including open days and talks aimed at further education students. Information is also available to prospective students via the higher education guide and the City College Plymouth website. The consistency and clarity of the information is jointly managed by the higher education department and the Marketing Team.

2.12 The Corporate Relations Team provide support to external employers wishing to sponsor their employees to undertake study at the College. The Work-Based Learning team supports students undertaking higher apprenticeships. The International Team supports international students with the additional requirements during the application process and works closely with international agents.

2.13 Full-time applications are made through the UCAS system, part-time applicants apply directly to the College through an application form. All applications are processed within two working weeks. Applications are initially received by the admissions team and logged on the management information system. Where entry criteria is based on UCAS points, applicants can be accepted by the admissions team, otherwise they are passed onto the programme leaders for further consideration. All non-standard applicants are interviewed and successful applications are approved by the Higher Education Manager.

2.14 The Learning Support Team is advertised through the website, Higher Education Guide and joining instructions to prospective students. The Learning Support Team will contact any students declaring a disability or learning difficulty on their applications when they have accepted a place onto the programme to ensure students have the correct information regarding the Disabled Students Allowance.

2.15 Students are informed of their application outcome either through UCAS or by the Admissions Team. Unsuccessful applicants are signposted to appropriate College advice

and guidance about other opportunities available to them. Applicants can appeal the admission decision, or complain about any aspect of the admissions process, through the College's Talkback policy and procedure. Alternatively applicants for University of Plymouth-awarded provision can contact the University to complain or appeal.

2.16 Applicants who have accepted a place onto a programme are sent joining instructions by the Higher Education Office, which informs them about enrolment, induction and support services. All College students are provided with an induction when they begin their programme. An introduction checklist is given to staff and students to enable consistency and transparency in induction. All programme inductions include introducing students to the VLE, the library and other resources within the College.

2.17 Recruitment activities and admissions processes are evaluated through attendee questionnaires. The Higher Education Office and the Marketing Team conduct an annual evaluation of the admission process. The first higher education student focus group of each academic year includes an evaluation of recruitment and induction.

2.18 The Higher Education Admissions Policy sets out a clear and fair procedure which enables the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.19 The review team considered the processes provided by the College in relation to the recruitment, admission and induction of students. The review team asked staff at each level of the College whether they were familiar with the process and whether they were consistently used. The review team spoke with students to understand their experience of recruitment, admission and induction to the College and how they had been able to give feedback about this part of the College.

2.20 The Policy is supported by a number of processes and staff responsibilities are clearly outlined and followed. The process is annually evaluated by staff and students to enable improvements to be made.

2.21 The process works effectively in practice. Staff are aware of, and consistently use, the admissions and induction processes and these enable recruitment, admissions and induction to be monitored and improved. Students are happy with the processes and felt that they had been given all of the necessary information to begin their programme.

2.22 The review team have concluded that Expectation B2 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*

2.23 All teaching and learning activity at City College Plymouth is informed by the College's Strategic Plan. The College's strategic oversight of teaching and learning in higher education is further informed by the strategic aims directly relating to higher education within the Strategic Plan. These aims place a focus on providing a high quality student experience with teaching and learning supported through e-learning, electronic individual learning plans, staff development opportunities and the assessment and evaluation of teaching and learning.

2.24 The College has a Teaching and Learning Strategy and a Higher Education Assessment Policy which links to College's strategic plan and is guided by University of Plymouth's Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Strategy. Strategic aims are incorporated into the Higher Education Action Plan and this is monitored by the Higher Education Manager, Faculty Directors, Director of Quality Improvement and Senior Leadership Team. Good practice is incorporated into a published document entitled Journey to Outstanding 2014/15 – Improving Success at City College Plymouth.

2.25 Students have an induction into each level of their higher education study. This includes information about the VLE and its use, student representation and study support activities, which are also promoted through the VLE and by the Higher Education Department. The College website contains a section on Teaching, Learning and Assessment and the Higher Education Student Learning Agreement further outlines expectations and is circulated to all higher education students through the VLE. University of Plymouth students have access to the University VLE, learning resources and library, which are introduced during induction.

2.26 Higher education programme teaching and learning strategies are set out within Programme Specifications and in other programme-specific information issued to students. Each module or unit has a Teaching, Learning & Assessment Module Guide which describes the learning activities, the learning outcome and the assessment. This guide is used alongside the student handbook and the VLE.

2.27 The strategies, policies and procedures enable the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.28 The review team took account of the College, Higher Education and Teaching and Learning strategies when testing this Expectation. They also scrutinised the minutes of relevant committees and met students, senior staff, teaching staff and support services staff.

2.29 Personal Tutors produce a group profile for each cohort, which is distributed to the teaching teams to ensure the needs of all learners are acknowledged and supported and reasonable adjustments to teaching practice are made where applicable.

2.30 The VLE provides programme information, module or unit guides, learning resources and content for students. Some programmes also use discussion areas. VLE good practice is shared via the Higher Education Forum and many sites have received affirmation through the College's internal award system. The VLE is sometimes used to

share assessment information with external examiners and 'Teachers' Space' supports higher education staff and provides material to support teaching and learning.

2.31 Investment in learning resources includes the ABB Energy Centre, Engineering and Construction Centres and a Gym and Sports Therapy Laboratory and Strength Conditioning Suite. The programme approval process ensures suitable resources support the programme. The higher education centre has had a new silent study area developed and an updated resource room.

2.32 The review team noted that employers play a significant role in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning and are fully engaged in the design and development of the College's foundation degrees and HNCs.

2.33 Some foundation degrees have links to professional bodies, for example, providing FdA Accounting and Finance students exemptions from professional accounting qualifications. The FdSc Sports Therapy and Injury Rehabilitation is accredited by the Sports Therapy Organisation and has links with Plymouth Raiders (basketball team). External examiners have positively commented on the work-based learning or assessment scenarios provided through employer engagement.

2.34 The quality of teaching and learning is monitored through teaching, learning and assessment observations. These consist of classroom walkthroughs, teaching and learning coaches and a peer observation procedure that shares good practice between different programme teams. Teaching and learning is also monitored through module reviews; higher education programme reviews; annual programme monitoring; higher education student focus groups; an annual dedicated teaching and learning staff development day; teaching, learning and assessment forums; a higher education forum; ongoing staff development; and, teaching and learning initiatives. This is further supported by a range of staff development activities that enhance the student learning experience. In addition, students confirmed tutors are extremely knowledgeable in their subject areas, which reflect industry academic standards. The review team also noted that use of employer forums was a critical tool for enhancing the student experience by ensuring that higher education qualifications demonstrate employment currency. The review team identifies as **good practice** the highly supportive approach to managing the quality of teaching, which is underpinned by a wide range of staff development activities and opportunities for sharing good practice.

2.35 From 2014-15, teaching and learning is an explicit agenda item on the annual programme monitoring committees. This includes analysis of the National Student Survey and Student Perception Questionnaires, module leaders' feedback on issues and/or notable good practice, information from the external examiners' and external verifiers' reports to review teaching and learning activity and any proposed programme changes.

2.36 Programme learning outcomes map onto a variety of summative assessment types and staff are trained in inclusive assessment. The schedules facilitate feedback in a variety of mechanisms to enable reflection and dialogue in a timely way to enable use in future assessments. This is monitored within external examiner reports.

2.37 Annual higher education Programme Review meetings enable quality improvement and student feedback. Teaching and learning activities are reviewed and actions are developed to ensure continuous improvement. Each meeting includes attendance from the higher education programme leader(s), Higher Education Manager, Faculty Director, Head of Academy, Director of Quality Improvement and Administrator and requires a higher education programme review pro forma to be completed. These inform the development of higher education faculty self-evaluation documents which help to identify any common themes or good practice in learning and teaching. Any actions arising from the higher education programme reviews and the autumn term programme committees are reviewed at

the higher education mid-year review in January and subsequently at the spring programme committee.

2.38 The review team concludes that the arrangements in place to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning are appropriate and robustly executed with one example of good practice identified. Expectation B3 is therefore met and the associated level of risk in this area 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

2.39 The College's Higher Education Strategy reflects the Strategic Plan, and prioritises students having graduate skills to support them in their further studies and employment.

2.40 Academic Board monitors student development and higher education mid-year reviews. Higher Education Directors' meetings ensure strategic oversight of the actions. The 2013-14 Higher Education Action plan focused on employability. This led to students developing an Internship Journal, and planning the communication of opportunities and induction activities for 2014-15. The Higher Education Action Plan is updated to ensure that existing actions are being complete while new actions are identified and added as necessary. Annual progress is also presented to the University of Plymouth at the Joint Board of Studies.

2.41 Students receive a minimum of three one-to-one tutorials each academic year. From September 2014 students are required to have an e-Individual Learning Plan (e-ILP). Students can refer themselves for a range of support services promoted through the student intranet, the Student Handbook, VLE, and their tutors.

2.42 A higher education librarian supports academic development and liaises with academic staff regarding learning resources required for their programme. Higher Education students have a specific area on the library VLE site providing information and guidance for their particular needs. The higher education librarian frequently attends higher education student focus groups and gathers feedback. This supports the promotion of facilities and services available, and identifies additional resource needs. The higher education librarian attends the higher education forums and programme committee meetings.

2.43 The strategies and approaches the College employs to monitor and evaluate the arrangements and resources in place allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.44 The review team considered a wide range of documentary evidence and met staff and students to investigate the approach the College takes, ensuring that students develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.45 The Employability and Enterprise Team consists of three areas of work and resources referred to as the workspace, the jobspace and the infospace. Together these services support students to develop their employability skills. They provide general advice, formal careers advice, employability workshops, self-employment start-up support, enterprise competitions, progression workshops, signposting, sector-specific surgeries, and work experience workshops. University progression activities are promoted by the Careers Service. The Employability and Enterprise Team also attend Higher Education Forum meetings to ensure that Programme Leaders are aware of opportunities.

2.46 The review team investigated concerns that students on the foundation degrees in Construction and Civil Engineering had recently experienced significant staff absence, which was having a detrimental impact on their programme of study. The review team was also informed of significant staff absence occurring in a previous year and of the disruptive impact this had on the student experience. Members of senior management informed the team that The College staff absence and lesson cover policy had been implemented and presented evidence of both the policy and its implementation. The review team was told that the situation was unusual and was more challenging because it involved staff with specialist

subject knowledge. Nonetheless, it remains the case that students had experienced a significant period of disruption to their usual study arrangements such that assessments could not be completed as planned. The situation had also been noted by employers who were reported to have expressed their own and their secondees' dissatisfaction with late class cancellations. The review team concluded that the current Staff Absence and Lesson Cover Policy did not fully address situations where teaching of a specialist subject has to be covered. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure that the staff absence and lesson cover policy is capable of addressing the full range of circumstances that may adversely affect student learning opportunities.

2.47 Students who have declared a learning difficulty or disability during the application or enrolment process are referred to the Learning Support Team. The Learning Support Team signpost students to the Disability ASSIST Team at University of Plymouth and provide a point of contact for students. The Learning Support Team, Higher Education Department and higher education tutors facilitate identification of additional support needs. Students complete an online screening during their induction so that the College can identify where students require assistance. These students are referred to the tutors, who discuss the results with the student before making a referral to the Learning Support Team. Disabled Student Allowance reports are received by the Learning Support Manager who considers the suggestions within the report. The student's tutor meets the student to discuss the support needs and arrange exam concessions.

2.48 Compulsory study skills sessions are held during induction week and a Higher Education Skills Away Day focuses on personal development skills for new students including team-building, communication and entrepreneurialism. University of Plymouth students receive a 'Study with Plymouth' resource pack specifically tailored to partner colleges, which is available through the University's website.

2.49 The College runs an annual Step-up to Higher Education day event, which introduces students to the requirements of higher education.

2.50 All students have a hardcopy of Cite them Right as a response to previous external examiner feedback regarding the use of academic referencing. The College's Students at Risk Policy aims to ensure that every student will be provided with opportunities to achieve their full potential. This process is coordinated by the Higher Education Student Engagement Officer in the Higher Education Office. Case meetings are held with the student, tutor and representatives from the Higher Education Department, and the Student Journey and Learning Support Teams when appropriate. Agreed actions are subsequently recorded on the student's e-ILP.

2.51 International students are supported in academic and personal development through access to support mechanisms including the International Team which provides general pastoral support and organise activities to support the transition to life and study in the UK. The College runs an annual international student 'buddy scheme'. An English for Academic Purposes module ensures students have the opportunity to develop the academic English skills they need for their level 5 foundation degree studies at the College. The College also provides English support sessions for international students who do not take the English for Academic Purposes module, delivered as either one-to-one or small group sessions.

2.52 Staff and students have access to a variety of e-tools, for support in self-evaluation, goal setting and identifying possibilities for development available to students. The students enrolled on a University of Plymouth programme have access to the Plymouth Award which supports personal development.

2.53 Monitoring is provided by the annual Self-Assessment Report (SAR). These SARs are submitted to, and reviewed by the Quality Improvement Team, and form part of the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) for the College.

2.54 The review team concludes that the arrangements in place to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources, which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, ensures that Expectation B4 is met. The one recommendation relates to a situation where a policy does not reliably assure the quality of the learning experience of all students and therefore the associated level of risk in this area is moderate.

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

2.55 The College outlines its plans for student engagement in the student involvement strategy. This document links to the strategic plan and the Higher Education strategy and is available in the Student Handbook, on the VLE and on noticeboards. An annual student involvement action plan is developed and is monitored by the Higher Education Department, Head of Student Journey and the Deputy Principal.

2.56 The College has a College-wide Student Charter available via the intranet and the VLE. The College worked in partnership with students to develop a higher education specific charter, the Higher Education Learning Partnership Agreement. The agreement commits the College to providing student feedback opportunities and expects students to engage with the College where possible.

2.57 Annually, each student cohort elects a student representative who attends: student representative meetings, away days, student focus groups, programme committee meetings, student representative away days, mid-term and mid-year reviews, and the College-wide student conferences and council.

2.58 Annually, a higher education student representative is elected in addition to the course representatives, to represent the student body at meetings on behalf of absent course representatives. Meetings attended by this representative include the Joint Board of Studies, and the partner institution student forums. This role has been developed to ensure representation of all students, irrespective of course of study or awarding body.

2.59 Student representatives are given annual training by the Higher Education Office and the affiliated Students' Union. It is designed to support and enhance the professional development of the student representatives. The training is evaluated and provides an opportunity for representatives to give feedback.

2.60 There is an annual cycle of student representative meetings. Minutes and actions from the meetings are circulated to all student representatives. Three of the annual meetings include a themed focus group around the student lifecycle. The feedback from the focus group is discussed at the Higher Education Forum. Curriculum issues are dealt with at programme level and outcomes are communicated to staff, students and reported to the Higher Education Department who include the outcomes on the student voice action plan available to all students via the VLE. Focus group feedback is included in the mid-term and mid-year reviews and students are invited to these meetings. The Student Journey Team annually review the structure and content of the focus groups. The Higher Education Manager and Higher Education Student Engagement Officer review the outcomes of student engagement activities on a fortnightly basis, ensuring action is being taken to encourage participation and respond to student concerns.

2.61 The Higher Education Office is a focal point for students regarding queries or feedback. The Student Engagement Officer provides a central point of contact for all course representatives and organises engagement activities, ensuring students are aware of the student voice opportunities available to them and monitors any concerns.

2.62 Higher Education students are surveyed each year, either through the Student Perception Questionnaire or the National Student Survey. These survey results are discussed at programme review and programme committee meetings. Programme action

plans are developed taking into account the students' views obtained through these surveys. The action plans are then communicated to students through the VLE. Results are also reported to Academic Board, along with an action plan and to the Joint Board of Studies. Actions are agreed at mid-term and mid-year reviews and at the Higher Education Director's meeting.

2.63 All students complete module review forms at the end of each module. There is currently a pilot to require students to complete these at two points during the year. The outcome of the student module reviews feed into the module leaders' reports at the annual Subject Assessment Panel meetings, and any programme planning days, with both quantitative and qualitative data being considered.

2.64 All programme committees require a student representative to attend. Programme Committee Meeting discussions are evidence-based and include student feedback data, retention data, module pass rates and external examiner feedback. All information is shared with representatives and student feedback is an agenda item. External examiner reports and programme committee meeting minutes are made available to students via their programme sites on the VLE.

2.65 The College reports outcomes to student representatives for communication back to their cohorts. The College also produces 'You said, we did' posters to further promote actions that have been taken to the entire student body.

2.66 The strategies and processes that the College has in place enable the Expectation to be met in theory. The students are able to engage in assuring and enhancing their educational experience and the College reviews the opportunities that students have to engage.

2.67 The review team considered the processes in place to support student engagement and then tested the usefulness of student engagement with academic and professional services staff within the University. The effectiveness of the process from a student perspective was assessed through a meeting with students.

2.68 All programmes have representation and the majority of student representatives attend training. The distinctive requirement for a student representative to be present at programme committee meetings in order to be fully constituted to make decisions is **good practice**, particularly given the critical role that programme committees have in the quality processes. Students have access to information about improvements that are being made through the VLE and their representatives.

2.69 Changes are made to the College every year as a result of student feedback. Examples of a direct impact from the 2013-14 higher education student focus groups include the provision of more detailed information regarding travel in the 2014-15 joining instructions and the introduction of a more practical tour of facilities during induction. However, students are not consistently aware of all of the mechanisms the College uses to inform students of change that is made as a result of their feedback, for example, the 'You said, we did' posters or the Higher Education suggestion box.

2.70 Overall the review team concluded that Expectation B5 was met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

2.71 The College's higher education assessment policy establishes the principles that guide assessment in relation to the programmes of both the degree-awarding body and the awarding organisation. Due regard is paid to the regulatory requirements of both. Recent changes to the University of Plymouth assessment policy are reflected in the College's current approach to assessment.

2.72 The review team considered a wide range of documentary evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of assessment policies and processes. The team discussed several aspects of assessment with several groups of staff and with students. The team scrutinised a wide range of external examiner reports.

2.73 Assessment planning is a central part of programme design at the proposal and approval stages of programme development. As reported in relation to Expectation A3.2, there is close detailed articulation between assessments and required learning outcomes. Module records provide a definitive account of both. Published guidance and appropriate templates are used to standardise internal verification and moderation processes. There is an appropriate allocation of responsibility for the implementation and effectiveness of these processes. Module level Programme Quality Handbooks provide further appropriately detailed specifications of required learning outcomes and of the relationship of assessment to them. Subject assessment panels review assessment standards and comparability at the level of the module. Appropriate recording of the allocation of marks and results by Award Boards is in place and made accessible via the VLE. Systematic processes for the accreditation of prior learning are managed by the Higher Education Department and the Quality Improvement Team. These policies and processes establish appropriate conditions for this Expectation to be met in theory.

2.74 Discussions with senior staff demonstrated a strong shared understanding of University of Plymouth's new assessment policies, particularly regarding student feedback, anonymous assessment, employability and work-based learning. They provided assurances regarding the mechanisms by which comparability of assessment standards was maintained, through internal verification processes and the provision of guidance to staff through professional development sessions. There was clear evidence that staff discuss these issues and the appropriateness of assessment policies and practices across the College's higher education provision. Other staff demonstrated a strong awareness of key principles for effective assessment. They offered information about the ways in which assessment design takes account of Subject Benchmark Statements and the requirements of the Quality Code, as well as employer requirements.

2.75 The College offered sound evidence of efforts to ensure inclusivity of assessment. Appropriate arrangements are in place for dealing with extenuating circumstances. Disabled Students' Allowance reports make recommendations for individual adjustments to assessed work supported by guidance from the Learning Support Manager. All students are offered detailed guidance about inappropriate academic practice and in how to avoid academic offences. A pilot scheme offers some students access to commercial plagiarism-detection software, which will be reviewed and extended in the near future. There are clear procedures for dealing with academic misconduct and student malpractice.

2.76 Students unanimously and enthusiastically affirmed the clarity of guidance they receive about assessment through module guides, including with regard to learning outcomes, grading criteria and assignment weightings. Several students gave positive accounts of the support they had received in response to disappointing assessment results. These placed strong emphasis on informal mechanisms. The formal appeals system is very little used at the College, but students showed awareness of its availability. There were numerous accounts of constructive and positive feedback on assessment and of the various media and forums in which such feedback is offered.

2.77 The Student Submission identified as an area for improvement a number of aspects of students' feedback about assessed work. The College's Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ) results for 2013-14 showed a decrease in the number of students affirming that tutors' feedback on their work had been prompt. National Student Survey results reflected a smaller decrease over the same period. The review team noted that timeliness of feedback on assessed work was evident in the recommendations of the 2009 Institutional Review conducted by the University of Plymouth. A programme-specific summary of all feedback over the last two to three years indicated a number of programmes on which student satisfaction about the timeliness, detail and helpfulness of feedback on their assessed work had fallen far short of the College's satisfaction targets. Other documentation recorded recurrent concerns about the timeliness of feedback, in some cases relating to several modules. Some evidence from the meeting with students also corresponded with Student Perception Questionnaire and National Student Survey findings. Staff acknowledged some difficulties, which they identified as ongoing challenges. Staff queried students' knowledge of the 20-working day turnaround requirement and students' understanding of what constituted appropriate feedback. Students' perceptions and the appropriateness of their expectations were also queried. Nevertheless, support staff confirmed that this issue had been raised in some Programme Committees and that it recurs in meetings with student representatives. The students whom the review team met had a clear knowledge of the turnaround requirement, and described significant delays across three programmes in detail. Some appeared to be related to instances of staff sickness, which could not be covered by other staff (see Expectation B4 and associated recommendation). Other students emphasised the importance of recognising the variety of forms taken by appropriate feedback. Further enquiries of staff found that turnaround time was monitored at department level, but it was not collated or overseen at College level. These observations lead the review team to **recommend** that the College should ensure the policy for the return of assessment feedback is met for all students and that the effectiveness of the policy is regularly monitored at College and department level.

2.78 The review team concluded that the College has sound and comprehensive assessment policies that are predominantly implemented to good effect to enable all students to demonstrate that they have achieved the required learning outcomes. Expectation B6 is therefore met. The recommendation requires the College to fully implement an existing appropriate policy that should be straightforwardly achievable and therefore the level of associated risk as low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

2.79 The nomination and appointment of external examiners falls within the remit of the regulations and processes of the awarding body and awarding organisation.

2.80 For the University of Plymouth provision the College is responsible for submitting a nomination for a new external examiner for approval prior to the cessation of the previous external examiner's contract. The nomination is submitted to the University in line with their policies and regulations for approval.

2.81 The external examiners for the Pearson provision are allocated by Pearson rather than nominated by the College. The responsibility of City College Plymouth regarding this provision is with respect to communicating and arranging a visit with the external verifier post allocation.

2.82 The external examiners appointed by the awarding body and organisation and the College's recognition of the role of the external examiners and the processes in place to ensure that external examiner reports are considered and responded to allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.83 The review team examined documentation, policies and procedures and met staff and students to establish the use made of external examiners on the part of the College.

2.84 For both the University of Plymouth and Pearson provision, the programme leader is responsible for liaising with the external examiner once they have been approved or allocated. This includes providing the external examiner with relevant information regarding the programme, the assignment briefs and confirming the dates of visits. Where possible, an interim visit is arranged to include a meeting with students. The outcomes of this communication, provision of documentation and interim visits are recorded in the external examiner's report.

2.85 The receipt of the annual external examiner's report takes place prior to the Subject Assessment Panel for the Pearson provision and after the Subject Assessment Panel for the University of Plymouth provision. University of Plymouth external examiners are required to sign a declaration at the Subject Assessment Panel meeting to confirm that the academic standards of each module are appropriately met. This report is received by the Higher Education Department from the awarding body and is subsequently forwarded to the programme leader. A central record of reports is maintained by the Higher Education Department, and is accessible by faculty management, programme leaders and the quality improvement team. An annual overview of areas of good practice and concern is undertaken by the Higher Education Department to identify any themes across all provision which should be highlighted in the Higher Education Action Plan.

2.86 All Programme Leaders for University of Plymouth provision are responsible for considering the comments and feedback in the report and formulating a written response highlighting the actions they plan to take. For all higher education provision, irrespective of awarding body, the external examiners' reports form an essential aspect of the Programme Review Meetings and Annual Programme Monitoring Process to confirm academic standards are being met.

2.87 The review team explored students' familiarity with the role of external examiners and their reports. Students confirmed that external examiners' reports were available on their Programme VLE Sites in the Quality Folder. In addition, external examiners are

discussed at programme committee meetings to discuss further quality enhancement actions.

2.88 The review team concludes that the measures in place to ensure the scrupulous use of external examiners' reports to maintain academic standards for each qualification are effective and that Expectation B7 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

2.89 University of Plymouth requirements specify twice-yearly programme committee meetings, using a set agenda and templates. This same procedure is applied to Pearson provision. These meetings discuss feedback about the student experience and a range of aspects of programme and module management and administration. They include student representatives as mandatory. All College programme leaders have annual contact with their subject-specialist counterpart at the University of Plymouth, which leads to commentaries and reports on provision. The outcomes of programme committee meetings are reported to the University of Plymouth Joint Board of Studies, which meets annually. In addition to meeting awarding body requirements, the College's Quality Improvement Team holds mid-term reviews and end of year reviews for each faculty. These additional meetings focus on student retention, progression, attendance and complaints or concerns. Student representation is encouraged but not required.

2.90 In support of an additional stratum of internal review processes, Faculty Directors write an annual self-evaluation document, and these are submitted to the Director of Quality Improvement and the Higher Education Manager to monitor faculties and follow through on agreed actions. The outcome is an annual Higher Education Action Plan which is informed by all aspects of standards verification and quality assurance processes, and provides a basis for further action and for enhancement. This Action Plan is also reported to the University of Plymouth Joint Boards of Studies. The College's processes for monitoring and reviewing programmes are judged to be comprehensive, complementary and to establish positive conditions for effective review and therefore allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.91 To evaluate these arrangements, the review team read detailed documentation arising from the monitoring and review activities, and discussed them in meetings with several groups of staff, and with students and employers.

2.92 Having met staff and students, the review team formed the view that the policies and procedures for monitoring and review are being effectively implemented. The review team was given many examples of the positive impact of monitoring and review. One example of a direct outcome of monitoring and review was the recent restructuring of higher education provision at the college. The restructuring had created a larger staff team with improved staffing and physical resources. Further examples of beneficial results and enhancements arising from the review processes are recounted under the Enhancement section of this report.

2.93 Students valued their capacity to contribute to programme committees and mid-term reviews. Some employers whom the review team met welcomed their ability to participate regularly in reviews, although frequency and levels of involvement appear to vary.

2.94 The review team concludes that the routine structures and processes described and the practices and improvements to which they give rise provide a strong basis for programme monitoring and review that maintains academic standards and assures the quality of learning opportunities. Expectation B8 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

2.95 Students are informed that they can contact their tutor or programme leader regarding concerns. Additionally, there are a number of opportunities for students to raise concerns outside of the formal complaints process, including programme committee meetings and student focus groups. However, the College has a formal Talkback Policy and students on University of Plymouth programmes can raise a complaint directly to the University's Appeals and Complaints office if they wish.

2.96 The Talkback Policy is the College's formal complaints procedure, although it can also be used for positive feedback. The Policy is managed within the Quality Improvement Team by the Talkback Coordinator. Complaints are dealt with in a timely way, all feedback is recorded and good practice is shared.

2.97 The Talkback policy is communicated to staff through the intranet, staff induction, and liaison with the Talkback Coordinator and the Director of Quality Improvement. Any significant changes made to the procedure are communicated to all staff through the College Weekly Staff Bulletin, and as a Quality Improvement VLE News item. Once a student has submitted a complaint students are given written acknowledgement of their feedback within five working days and an anticipated deadline for resolution. At this stage students are also sent a 'quick guide', which provides them with a brief overview of the process.

2.98 The Talkback Coordinator will send a complaint to the relevant Director or Head of Service, as well as the Higher Education Manager, with the deadline date for providing a response to the Talkback Coordinator. The Talkback Coordinator will provide the resolution in writing to the complainant. There is an opportunity to appeal any decision within 20 working days to the Director of Quality Improvement who will investigate and provide a response. If the student disagrees with the appeal response, they can appeal again to the Principal within 20 working days. The Principal will then carry out his own investigation and will respond within a reasonable time. If the complainant remains dissatisfied they may appeal their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator or, if they are studying in partnership with the University of Plymouth, the latter's Complaints Office may begin their own committee of investigation.

2.99 This process is advertised through the Higher Education Student Handbook, the VLE and the student intranet. The overall Talkback Policy is also available on the College website. Information about the complainant is recorded for equality and diversity monitoring purposes. Each complaint is categorised into direct and indirect themes to allow for accurate reporting and for recurring themes to be highlighted quickly. Termly reports are produced and the methods of communication are also monitored. Any feedback which covers learning support, equality and diversity or safeguarding issues are automatically flagged to the relevant officers within the College and these numbers are also monitored within the termly Equality and Diversity Committee report.

2.100 University of Plymouth has an academic appeal process and the College provides information with the academic transcript about students' right to appeal. The College submits a written response to any academic appeals received by the University. The Higher Education Office centrally coordinates the response and ensures students are aware of their appeal outcome. The academic appeal process for Pearson is managed by the Quality Assurance Coordinator who produces a handbook containing the policy, procedure and

guidance in line with Pearson. After the internal appeals process is completed, as outlined in the handbook, students are able to appeal to Pearson.

2.101 The design enables the Expectation to be met in theory and ensures that students have the opportunity of raising issues formally with the College and requiring a response. Information regarding the complaints and appeals procedures are provided to students. Information is provided to staff about the procedures and any subsequent changes to them that are made.

2.102 The review team considered the procedures that the College provided and the information about the procedures given to staff and students. The review team then confirmed with staff that they were aware of the procedures and used any outcomes effectively. The review team explored with students their awareness of the procedures and whether they had confidence in the procedures.

2.103 In practice, the majority of concerns that students have are dealt with informally and students approach tutors in the first instance, as a result very few formal complaints are raised. Students were consistently aware of the procedures available to them, though there was some belief that issues raised within formal settings such as programme committees were formal complaints. As the College respond consistently to complaints, however they are raised, this is not a key issue.

2.104 The College responds quickly to complaints although the review team noted that in relation to staff absences complaints about missed lectures or late feedback are sometimes addressed as individual incidents rather than a wider issue relating to staff resource. However, ultimately if students are dissatisfied with a College response they are aware that they can continue to raise it.

2.105 The review team considered that Expectation B9 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

2.106 The College takes responsibility for managing its relationships with employers in respect of student work placements provided on foundation degrees. The College articulates its commitment to developing the employability and work readiness of its students through its higher education Strategic Plan and associated devolved planning processes.

2.107 In developing programmes designed to reflect local need, the College adopts a strategic approach to delivering learning opportunities with employers of students and of graduates.

2.108 University of Plymouth assumes overall responsibility for the quality of learning opportunities relating to this articulation agreement. As the awarding body of the Foundation Degree, it is the University's academic regulations which apply throughout, including the overall oversight of Exam Board arrangements.

2.109 The review team scrutinised the evidence in the self-evaluation document, and handbooks. In addition, the review team held a series of meetings with senior staff, teaching and support staff, employers and students to discuss the organisation and management of work-based learning.

2.110 Work-based, work-placement and work-related learning is monitored by programme teams and forms part of the assessment of foundation degrees. The assessment of work-based learning modules and the maintenance of academic standards are undertaken by the staff on the programme. In meetings, staff were able to differentiate between work-based learning and work-related learning, but the review team noted that the College does not have an overarching framework that sets out and explains the different contributions work-based, work-related and work-placement learning make to meeting programme outcomes. Given the range of stakeholders involved in providing or supporting learning in these various contexts, a more secure understanding needs to be agreed and set out. Therefore, in considering the manner in which the College manages and discharges its responsibility for work-based, work-related and work-placement learning the review team **recommends** the College develop a framework that clearly articulates the nature of work-based, work-related and work-placement learning and the contribution they make to meeting programme outcomes.

2.111 Students studying towards foundation degrees confirmed that they undertake work placements or work-based activities and that they value their work experience very highly. Staff, students and employers whom the review team met were able to provide good examples of student progression into work, leading on from programmes of study.

2.112 Employers spoke highly of the effective communication and the breadth and diversity of engagement activities they undertake with the College. They considered the College to be innovative in its commitment to student employability and responsive to local needs. As already noted under Expectation B1 and the identified good practice in that section, employers are particularly well engaged in curriculum design and development.

2.113 The evidence from students and employers confirmed that arrangements for the oversight and management of work-based learning opportunities, work-related and work-

based learning makes a positive contribution to the students' learning experience. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B10 is met. The action needed to address the one recommendation under this Expectation requires only minor amendments to existing policy to clarify the different contributions expected in different modes of learning with other organisations. The associated level of risk is therefore 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*

2.114 The College does not deliver research degrees.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.115 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. All applicable Expectations have been met and risk is judged low in all but one Expectation. Four recommendations are made in relation to four Expectations. The three features of good practice identified during the review all relate to Expectations in this area.

2.116 One recommendation in B10 is associated with a low level of risk and requires minor amendments or additions to policies and procedures. Another in B6 requires the College to fully implement an existing policy. The recommendation under B4 is associated with a moderate risk given that the issues have had and could continue to have a significant impact on learning opportunities. All actions required are capable of being implemented promptly.

2.117 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

3.1 The College publishes a range of printed and online information about its provision including policy documents, programme information and general information about the College. Information is made available on the College external website, the VLE, and the staff and student intranets. The website is reviewed and updated on a continual basis by the Digital Marketing Officer. Printed documentation is reviewed and updated on an annual basis and is coordinated by the Digital Marketing Officer and signed off by the Higher Education Manager for accuracy. These reviews are done primarily by the Marketing and Higher Education Teams utilising the feedback of programme staff and students.

3.2 The College provides information to the public and applicants on the purposes and value of higher education through the University-level Course Guide. The guide signposts students to information on costs and funding, support, and facilities available to them. The higher education admissions policy is available to students on the website. The application process is outlined in the College's University-level Course Guide and can be found on the College website or requested from the Higher Education Team. Programme entry requirements are given on the website and in the Course Guide.

3.3 The Key Information Sets data is collated and submitted through collaboration between the Higher Education Office and the Management Information System Team. The College Principal has a sign-off for the data before submission.

3.4 The College holds open days and information events, allowing prospective students to attend individual presentations regarding each higher education programme as well as generic higher education-focused talks, advice and guidance regarding careers and student funding, and a tour of the facilities. All students receive a set of joining instructions from the Higher Education Department, which includes information relating to enrolment, induction week, relevant contacts and a reading list. The joining instructions and induction processes are reviewed each year by the student focus group. Induction includes an overview of the course content, assessment methods and supporting information including VLE sites.

3.5 The VLE is used to provide information to current students. Each VLE site has at least one member of staff allocated whose responsibility it is to update the information provided. The College has a VLE and Media Team available to provide support and guidance regarding its use. The College has a VLE medal scheme to support key information being provided to students and to promote use of VLE features.

3.6 The VLE is used to provide students with all of the programme-specific information, the Student Handbook and information about the College support and services. Students can also access external examiner reports, programme committee meeting minutes and action plans. Most modules have their own VLE page which contains the Teaching and Learning Module Guide. Completed VLE checklists now form part of the annual higher education staff training cycle.

3.7 The College-wide and higher education specific Student Charters are published on the website, both of these clarify the College and student's responsibilities.

3.8 Students are provided with a Student Handbook and a Programme Quality Handbook. The Student Handbook provides a general overview of services, support,

opportunities and procedures. The Handbook is made available to students studying with the University of Plymouth and with Pearson-awarded provision. The Programme Quality Handbook contains the definitive programme information and specific detail about the modules and assessments. Module records are collated by the Programme Leader and submitted to the Higher Education Administrative Coordinator for inclusion in Programme Quality Handbooks. Reading lists are updated on an annual basis as part of the above process with support from the reading list assistant role within the Learning Resources Team.

3.9 At the end of an academic year students are issued with an academic transcript to confirm their results and the decision of the Award Board. Transcripts are posted to students along with a letter that explains the content of the transcript, and gives details regarding the appeal process. Any work that students have been referred in is both posted with their transcript and emailed to them. Student transcripts and Higher Education Achievement Report documents are subsequently issued to students via the exams team.

3.10 The new Higher Education Quality Manual VLE site provides a central point of information regarding internal processes, policies and procedures in line with the Quality Code. A shared area containing all programme quality documentation has been developed for programme leaders, Faculty Management teams, the Higher Education Department and the Quality Improvement Team.

3.11 The design of the College's processes for publishing and updating the information allows the Expectation to be met in theory. Each process outlines specific staff responsibilities in ensuring that information is accurate and fit for purpose. The College provides an appropriate level of detail for a number of different audiences to be able to access suitable material.

3.12 The review team considered the documentation provided by the College and reviewed the College's website and the VLE provided for students. The review team discussed with staff the processes for updating information and the responsibilities held by staff in relation to this. The review team also asked students about their experiences of the information and whether they believed it was accurate and fit for purpose.

3.13 The information that the College provides is detailed and students were satisfied with the level of documentation available. There are processes in place for the regular updating of material and there are checks and balances in place to ensure that information that is printed or published is accurate. However, a number of minor inaccuracies found by the review team and noted in some external examiner reports, indicate that the processes are not fully implemented. For example, inaccurate dates in some Quality Handbooks and copy of the Student Charter on the VLE were dated 2009-10. Therefore the review team **recommends** that the College improve the accuracy of written information in student handbooks and on the student sections of the VLE.

3.14 Students are able to give feedback regarding the information they receive and a student focus group in 2013 assured accessibility and accuracy of the website. Following this, the website has been updated with case studies and programme information.

3.15 With a small number of minor exceptions noted in paragraph 3.13, information that the College provides is fit for purpose and provides suitable detail for the public, employers, students, staff and alumni to be aware of the Colleges policies and procedures, as well as specific programme information.

3.16 The review team conclude that Expectation (C) is met. The one recommendation refers to minor inaccuracies only and therefore the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.17 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk is low. The one recommendation refers to matters of minor inaccuracies resulting from omissions in process. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities **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.

4.1 The College has in place a robust and comprehensive quality-related infrastructure (see also Expectation B8). It is depicted in the Higher Education Quality Cycle, which demonstrates the complementary relationship between the multiple responsible bodies and processes. The College's Strategic Plan 2012-15 and its Higher Education Strategy 2014-18 adduce a strong in-principle commitment to a strategic approach to enhancement. The first strategic aim is the enhancement of the higher education student experience. This priority is followed by a commitment to the development of teaching and learning in pursuit of excellence. The Strategic Plan emphasises the annual assessment and evaluation of teaching and learning to ensure that targets for improvement are met and aspires to student and employee satisfaction rates well above the national average. The College regards student feedback as a key source of potential opportunities for enhancement. There is strong evidence that student feedback in various forms is an important part of the systematic and routine generation of information about the quality of students' learning opportunities. A large number of other sources of statistical and qualitative data and information that contribute to an understanding of the effectiveness of learning opportunities are drawn upon in the quality processes described in these documents. In all, these arrangements represent a design that establishes conditions conducive to promoting the systematic enhancement of learning opportunities.

4.2 The review team tested the evidence provided by reviewing the college's Higher Education Action Plans for 2012-13 and 2013-14, by considering a wide range of documentation related to several aspects of the routine quality processes, and by scrutinising a number of sources of student feedback and other data about the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. Aspects of this information were further tested in discussions with all categories of staff, with employers and with students.

4.3 The College exhibits considerable commitment to the improvement of the quality of students' learning opportunities, and there are significant signs of an ethos that expects and encourages this approach. The pursuit of improvement is integral to several aspects of the processes of programme approval, monitoring and review, many of which exhibit a reflective approach. One example is the initiative to adopt a more rigorous process than is required by Pearson for the approval of HNC/HND qualifications. This approach is also evident in the organised levels of student representation and the training which supports it, and in the systematic collection and analysis of regular student feedback. Particular efforts are made in relation to the engagement of students, the presence of student voice in dialogue and the forums in which students are represented. The annual self-evaluation documents prepared by each faculty are indicative of an enhancement-oriented approach to monitoring and review. The Journey to Outstanding brochure further reflects the College's commitment. Major capital initiatives have led to significant improvements to a range of the College's facilities and to the learning environment. A number of initiatives in support of improvements to teaching and learning identified earlier as good practice further exhibit the commitment to enhancing the quality of learning opportunities.

4.4 There is evidence of systematic communication of the findings of student engagement and feedback through the College's committee structures and other feedback channels. Opportunities provided in dialogue with the University of Plymouth are also indicative of the pursuit of enhancement. The 'minor permitted changes' arrangements for

refining elements of programmes exemplify this. The action plans with which each faculty self-evaluation document conclude offer further evidence.

4.5 The aims of the College's Strategic Plan and the Higher Education Strategy are well reflected in the Higher Education Action Plans for 2012-13 and 2013-14. These plans include the recruitment of a Student Engagement Officer into the higher education team, the introduction of e-ILPs in 2012-13, an increased staff development programme for those teaching in higher education, improved formative and summative feedback to students, and the introduction of a minimum student satisfaction target of 85 per cent, leading to monitoring of programmes falling below this level. In addition, evidence was provided of a wide range of other improvements, including improvements to library study areas, classroom resources, library opening hours, the distribution of library texts between College sites, the creation of dedicated new purpose-built teaching space, the dividing of a programme into semesters, adjustments to early assignments, and the easing of transitions between levels on some programmes, including by means of increased studies skills support.

4.6 This evidence is indicative of a responsive approach to the findings of reviews, to feedback, and to the analysis of student performance and progression data. There is also strong evidence of the highly supportive approach to teaching, including the induction of new staff, staff development, peer observation, the walk through system and sharing good practice between staff, commended earlier in this report in Expectation B3. In addition, the support and training offered to student representatives is recognised by the review team.

4.7 Some action plans indicate significant developments that are strategic in their scale and intent. These include the restructuring of the organisation of higher education provision, and an extensive review of higher education provision. The review team noted, for example, that the reorganisation had resulted in higher levels of progression, indicating the achievement of an important strategic objective. However, some action plans embedded within annual self-evaluation documents exhibit some recurrent student concerns about aspects of provision. This raises the question of whether some of the sources of these difficulties may lie at institutional level, and whether they are consistent with an expectation that the provider takes deliberate steps to secure enhancements at strategic level. The nature and level of activity reported in the course representative meeting action plan, for example, is indicative of a commitment to addressing problems in immediate ways. However, while it demonstrates a valuable way of tackling and tracking outcomes in the short term, in itself it constitutes a reactive approach to difficulties. Similar examples were evident. When employers recently indicated concerns about class cancellations they were discussed promptly in Key Account Manager meetings, although dissatisfaction about late timetable changes and class cancellations has recurred in student feedback over a longer period as reported earlier (see paragraph 2.46 and the associated recommendation). Although commendable in itself as a very recently adopted method for responding to concerns, it too is reactive rather than strategic. Recurrent concerns about delays in the return of feedback on assessed work also exemplify persistent problems (see paragraph 2.77 and the associated recommendation). Despite the many examples of responsive efforts to address problems that were presented, there is no clear evidence of a lasting impact on these areas of concern. Nor is there evidence of outcomes that show that underlying causes have yet been adequately addressed at source, as part of a strategic approach to enhancement.

4.8 As a result, the evidence made available to the review team does not provide sufficient reassurance that the College demonstrates a consistently strategic approach to enhancement that is led from its senior management, while also remaining responsive to issues that occur 'on the ground'. This leads the review team to **recommend** the College establish a clearer relationship between higher education strategic priorities and specific enhancement practices.

4.9 On balance, it is the review team's judgement that the College is strongly committed to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities, and demonstrates some considerable success in terms of student satisfaction. The review team therefore concludes that this commitment and successful achievements that have resulted to date indicate that this Expectation is met in theory. The recommendation does not relate to any major strategic or procedural change but, rather, a strengthening of the existing approach. The associated level of risk is therefore considered to be low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.10 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The College has a strategic approach to enhancing student learning opportunities and there is an ethos of continuous improvement. The one recommendation requires closer articulation between priorities and practices rather than major changes to policy or procedures. The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

5.1 The College outlines its commitment to developing the employability and work-readiness of students through its Strategic Plan 2012-15, which focuses on employer engagement activities, particularly at curriculum level and supporting them in obtaining and gaining high quality employment opportunities.

5.2 The College is part of the Gazelle Colleges Group, which focuses on all levels of education to ensure students are suitable for the world of work. The College is focusing on developing the personal skills of students through innovative new learning models involving real work environments. These activities are available to all students, benefitting higher education, including experience within real work environments developing enterprising skills.

5.3 Engaging with employers is central to this mission. The College has an extensive and well developed infrastructure for employer liaison, the strategic development of partnerships with employers and their involvement in curriculum design and development.

5.4 The Employer Endorsement Scheme was created in 2009 and engages with employers on a local level. Business interaction can range from having input into course development, to providing work placement opportunities or delivering guest lectures to students. Early adopters of the scheme were the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, the Duke of Cornwall Hotel, national construction firm ROK, The Herald newspaper, and later Foot Anstey LLP, the largest regional law firm in the South West. The scheme celebrated its fifth anniversary in 2014.

5.5 The College proactively signposts job vacancies to all higher education students, providing students with the opportunity to develop valuable skills in CV writing, interview techniques and personal presentation. Students are required to submit a CV and covering letter, with selected candidates undertaking an informal interview at the College, followed by a formal interview with the employer conducted within the workplace setting, which is used to select the successful candidate.

5.6 The Workspace is an employability centre which involves stakeholders and provides a strategic approach to employability opportunities for all students. It runs annual workshops on careers advice, CV writing, job seeking and skills. The centre is advertised through induction, tutors, the student intranet and noticeboards, however, a focus group in 2013-14 with higher education students identified that there was still a knowledge gap.

5.7 The review team met a group of employers, who spoke highly of the effective communication and the breadth and diversity of engagement activities they undertake with the College. They considered the College to be innovative in its commitment to student employability and responsive to local needs.

5.8 They praised the freedom within the College for course leaders to develop long-term relationships with employers, the regular and easy opportunities for feedback, and the willingness of academic staff to explore and understand employers' needs and to ensure that their views were influential in programme design.

5.9 Within specific programmes, learning and assessment activities are focused on real-life workplace expectations and the development of a professional approach. When possible, projects and activities reflect those undertaken in the workplace and relevant employers are encouraged to set and give feedback on a student's approach and performance. Many module leaders have themselves worked in the areas they teach and maintain good links and connections with those industries to ensure the new practices and expectations are incorporated within programmes. Visiting speakers and visits are used to

expose students to the expectations of employers and the workplace in general and assessments then evaluate how well students have understood and applied these concepts. These activities range from undertaking voluntary placements, internships to organising charity fundraising events and developing research projects which support businesses and the community.

5.10 Employer Advisory Board meetings support employability activities. Faculty management attend these meetings where higher education provision is represented and specific agenda items relate to higher education provision, for example, when seeking employer input into new programmes. These meetings enable employer engagement to be maintained and are integral to the College's strategic aims in relation to employability and enterprise.

5.11 The students, staff and employers reinforced the strength, depth and range of the College's external partnerships which supports the feature of good practice identified under Expectation B1 relating to the active and widespread employer involvement in curriculum design and development.

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

QAA1272 - R4086 - Jul 15

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786