Higher Education Review of Furness College

February 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Furness College. The review took place from 2 to 4 February 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Fiona Thompson
- Mr Mark Cooper
- Ms Tatjana Lipai (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Furness College and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)[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 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 5.

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

The themes for the academic year 2015-16 are Digital Literacy 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.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/the-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 Furness College

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

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

Good practice

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

- The drawing together of data from a range of sources to inform comprehensive action plans, which are aligned to internal and external benchmarks (Expectation A3.3).
- The effective relationship between the College and stakeholders that enables the College to make timely adjustments to the curriculum to maintain relevance and currency (Expectation A3.4).
- The strategic approach that enables all stakeholders to work together to identify and seamlessly develop enhancement opportunities of mutual benefit (Enhancement).
- The culture of enhancement that pervades all aspects of College provision (Enhancement).

Recommendations

The QAA team makes the following **recommendations** to Furness College.

By September 2016:

- implement formal structured training for student representatives (Expectation B5).

Theme: Student Employability

Furness College embeds student employability into all of its systems and processes. This is demonstrated in its proactive relationships with a range of employers, which are embedded in both the development and delivery of its higher education provision. This approach is appreciated by both employers and students, and this relationship has a positive impact on students' employment prospects.

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

About Furness College

Furness College (the College) is an incorporated general further education college situated in the industrial town of Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria. The College occupies a single, purpose-built campus close to the town centre.

The Furness College vision is 'Inspiring people and changing lives through education and training'. Specifically, the College aims to:

- inspire individuals through a rewarding, safe and inclusive environment
- raise individual aspirations, create opportunities and promote personal development and progression by delivering high-quality, inclusive education and training
- contribute to the economic development and success of Furness through close working partnerships with employers and other key stakeholders
- be financially successful through efficiency, cost-effectiveness and the delivery of sustained income.

These Strategic Aims have been reviewed and developed using the key sources identified by Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) priorities, the Furness Economic Development Plan, key employers and the Governing Body.

Higher education at the College represents 14 per cent of its annual income. Proportionally, the College is one of the largest deliverers of higher education among further education colleges. The College has well-established relationships with Lancaster University, the University of Central Lancashire and the University of Cumbria. All engineering higher education programmes are accredited by the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) and/or the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE). In the case of each of the Universities there is a written agreement in place that stipulates that they have responsibility for academic standards for all qualifications awarded in their name. The College has its own Quality Manual, which references the requirements of the awarding bodies. In the case of Pearson/EDEXCEL, the responsibilities for academic standards sit with them as the validating body and the College follows the requirements that are laid out in its quality assurance process.

The College provides vocational training up to level 6. A large amount of College provision falls within STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths). STEM accounts for 76 per cent of the provision in higher education and this has grown from 66 per cent over the last four years. Similarly, STEM in workplace learning has grown from 49 per cent to 65 per cent over the same period while classroom learning has grown from 60 per cent to 79 per cent. The College has been recognised for the significant amount of work it does within the STEM-based subjects, thus gaining STEM Assured Accreditation in 2012.

The College has led on the implementation of the recommendations from the report of the regional study 'A national cradle for advanced manufacturing' through the creation of an economic development forum. The College worked in partnership with local councils, BAE Systems and local enterprise agencies to produce an Economic Delivery Plan, in which the College leads on the Skills and Education element.

In 2014 the College was successful in applying to the LEP and the Catalyst Fund to build an Advanced Manufacturing and Technology Centre in response to the high-level skills shortages identified within the LEP's Cumbria Strategic Economic Plan 2014 to 2024. The centre will become operational in September 2016 and will accommodate 1,153 advanced manufacturing apprentices and 450 higher education places, including additional growth in HNC, BEng and additional specialisms in Project Management, Quality Engineering, Testing and Commissioning, System Integration and Structural Engineering.

Alongside this development the College will further develop capacity in advanced manufacturing research and development, with College research lecturers and higher education graduates to support local businesses with product and/or process developments.

After the last QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2011, the £43 million capital rebuild of the College campus was completed in 2016. This created a dedicated higher education area with a Higher Education Resource Hub, dedicated higher education classrooms and tutorial rooms. The higher education students appreciate and acknowledge these new facilities and the support that they receive from the Learning Resources Team. The University of Cumbria (UoC) supported part of the redevelopment with a £3.5 million contribution via the North West Development Agency (NWDA). These dedicated higher education resources are shared with UoC for its own delivery of BSc Nursing and BA Social Work degrees. UoC has a dedicated staff office on this floor.

The College has invested in resources to create bespoke e-learning packages for staff and students. This follows on from the success of a funded project with seven other colleges across the country in 2013-14, Design ELearn, intended to create a level 3 and 4 qualification and apprenticeship framework with Ascentis for supporting the next generation of digital learning designers. The College now employs two apprenticeships under this new framework and continues to work with a growing network of colleges in developing e-learning. The College has also developed its virtual learning environment (VLE) to create internal e-learning materials and a range of continuing professional development (CPD) activities via a blended learning approach.

The 2011 White Paper, Students at the Heart of the System, provided a range of challenges and opportunities to the College. These have required a number of changes to the College's provision, including student support and guidance to students as well as student engagement. The challenges and opportunities identified by the College include:

- student engagement with a predominately part-time and full-time working population
- widening participation/increasing student numbers
- employability/employer engagement
- progression/progression pathways
- recruitment of key staff, especially in Engineering.

The College's drive to enhance and further develop the student experience with more active engagement with the student body is regarded as a key activity.

Widening participation, increasing student numbers and strengthening progression routes from level 3 are also regarded as key activities. These are also linked to the growing local and regional employability opportunities with larger employers and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The College's focus will be to develop further higher education opportunities through the development of higher and degree apprenticeships.

The University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) Initial Teacher Education provision is referenced to Education and Training Foundation Professional Standards (2014).

The HNC and BEng Programmes are referenced to the UK Standard for Professional Engineering Competence (UK-SPEC). This sets out the competence and commitment required for registration as an Engineering Technician (EngTech), Incorporated Engineer (IEng) or Chartered Engineer (CEng).

Explanation of the findings about Furness College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1   The College does not have degree awarding powers and is therefore expected to support the maintenance of the academic standards of its three awarding partners. It has a range of programmes with each provider focused primarily on *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) levels 4, 5 and 6; however, the PGCE franchised provision with the University of Central Lancashire includes modules at level 7.

1.2   The Pearson programme in Art and Design is managed in line with awarding organisations' guidelines and the College's own internal quality, standards and enhancement policies and procedures.

1.3   Each awarding body and organisation ensures that qualifications are set at the appropriate level, approved and monitored through their own validation and revalidation events. To support this, periodic course review, external subject specialist review, annual review and external examiner reports all combine to ensure that academic standards are met.

1.4   These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.5   The team examined all programme specifications and handbooks for University programmes and also scrutinised the Pearson Centre Guides and Specifications to see how they mapped to College-produced documentation for the Pearson Art and Design programme. In addition, this was tested in conversation with College management and academic staff and also those from partner organisations.

1.6   Periodic course, programme and partnership reviews were also considered as part of the analysis of documentation provided by the College to test this Expectation. Students confirmed that they understand and have experienced the academic step from one level to another as they progress through their higher education. They commented that this progression through levels is explained, differentiated and managed well by the College.

1.7   University-validated programmes have detailed programme specifications and handbooks that follow their own predefined format. They are comprehensive documents covering all aspects of the programme, including regulations, intended learning outcomes and all key policies and procedures in relation to study. They clearly exhibit alignment with the FHEQ.

1.8   Similarly, Pearson Centre Guides and Specifications set out the framework within which its awards are to be managed and the College contextualises these at programme level for students in their programme handbook, where details on the intended learning outcomes of the programme are shown and supported by a separate formal programme specification.

1.9   The team concludes that the range and detail of evidence provided demonstrates the College's understanding and fulfilment of its responsibilities to secure academic standards. The use of external reference points such as the FHEQ confirms that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.10   The College operates effectively within the academic framework and regulations of its partner Universities, as defined in the Memorandum of Cooperation or Agreement documentation. It defers to College policies and procedures in respect of the Pearson qualification in Art and Design and references the Pearson Handbook as the guiding article for reference points for academic standards and its links to the FHEQ. It contextualises these in the student Programme Handbook and Higher Education Staff Handbook.

1.11   The partner University-associated Memorandum of Cooperation and/or Agreement documentation clearly outlines the expectations of the College in meeting academic regulations. Oversight is the responsibility of the Director of Higher Education, who ensures compliance within the College for all partner programmes as appropriate. This is supported and monitored by the Quality Improvement Group, chaired by the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality, and Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Group. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.12   Review of the Memorandum of Cooperation and/or Agreement documentation with each University explicitly defines the academic regulations by which the College must abide. Minutes from the Quality Improvement Group and Higher Education Quality Enhancement Group confirm oversight at committee level and this was mirrored in discussion with partner organisations during the review. As mentioned previously, students whom the team met also confirmed that they understood, and could relate to, the academic progression between levels as outlined by the FHEQ.

1.13   With overall responsibility for the curriculum framework for higher education, the role of the Director of Higher Education is pivotal in the effective running of all higher education courses at the College, as well as compliance with partner Universities and Pearson's academic regulations. Staff understand the requirements of each awarding body and organisation and apply the correct practices in relation to their relationship with partners.

1.14   The team concludes that the design and application of the College's approach to its delegated responsibilities around this Expectation enable it to be met with a low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.15   The College is responsible for delivering programmes in accordance with its awarding bodies' regulations and the definitive programme documents approved through validation. The definitive documents are stored and shared with higher education staff via the College's network drive. All minor changes, validation documents, periodic course reviews and annual reports are placed on this network drive. All programme specifications are included in the student Programme Handbook or referenced as an appendix. These documents are also placed on the relevant course page of the College's VLE for student use. These programme handbooks are approved at validation and reviewed in line with the requirements of the relevant awarding body. Changes and updates to Programme Handbooks are undertaken annually after partner Universities update the College with revised templates and changes to academic regulations.

1.16   The approaches as detailed would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.17   The team tested the Expectation through scrutiny of evidence, exploration of the College website and VLE, and relevant meetings with staff and students.

1.18   The College maintains clear documentation relating to the process for and approval of awards in line with the requirements of the awarding bodies. This includes internal planning and approval documents, records of meetings and final approval documentation. Additionally, annual and periodic review processes, in line with awarding body requirements, provide opportunities to reflect on the appropriateness of provision and to identify minor changes, which are followed through appropriately.

1.19   The team notes that programme specifications are produced for all provision and are available through the VLE and the College website, as well as in student programme handbooks; the latter are approved by the relevant awarding body.

1.20   Following its analysis of evidence and from meeting with staff and students, the team verifies that within its partnership agreements the College effectively fulfils its responsibilities for maintaining definitive records, and concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.21   The approval of taught programmes is the responsibility of the awarding bodies and the approval, annual and periodic review processes are clearly laid out in relevant documentation. For Pearson provision, the College offers programmes within the organisation's specified programme framework with unit selection informed by a combination of employer, student and staff feedback to meet local needs. These arrangements would allow this Expectation to be met.

1.22   The team tested this Expectation through meetings with relevant staff and through access to documentation including awarding bodies' guidelines and handbooks, internal planning and approval documents, records of meetings and final approval documentation.

1.23   The team found that there is consistent reference across documentation to the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements plus, where relevant, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' (PSRBs') expectations, such as those of the Institution of Engineering and Technology.

1.24   Programme specifications include clear programme aims, learning outcomes, and learning, teaching and assessment strategies, and they also identify how students will be assessed against UK threshold standards. The meeting of these standards is commented on through external examiner reports.

1.25   The evidence demonstrates effective processes, with an appropriate level of external input and clear engagement with external academic and professional frameworks and benchmarks.

1.26   Following evaluation of the evidence, and discussions with staff and students, the team concludes that there is consistent use of the University's approval processes, frameworks and regulations and adherence to the Pearson Guide to Managing Quality. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.27   Responsibility for ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes rests with the College's awarding bodies. Through the validation and approval process, consideration is given to the assessment strategy for enabling students to demonstrate they have achieved the learning outcomes. The College also uses the awarding bodies' modification processes to amend assessment in modules as required. The College uses the approved assessment strategies and the relevant awarding body grading criteria to ensure that the awarding body's requirements are met.

1.28   The programme specifications give an overview of the assessment strategy and student Programme Handbooks and Module Guides document the intended learning outcomes as well as the assessment strategies.

1.29   Where authority for the approval of marks and programme outcomes is delegated to the College, the process is managed via Module and Course Boards, chaired by the Director of Higher Education, with attendance by representatives of the relevant awarding body and external examiners. External examiners are required to comment through their reports on the comparability of standards and the assessment process.

1.30   The processes as outlined would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.31   The team tested this through meetings with staff, students and representatives of awarding bodies and through scrutiny of relevant documentation.

1.32   Awarding body documentation sets out expectations and regulations, and the validation documents and Programme Specifications clearly articulate these in the assessment strategies for each programme. External examiners' reports demonstrate that standards are met and that processes followed are robust and appropriate. This includes the effective and appropriate management of assessment boards.

1.33   Programme Handbooks and Module Guides provide thorough and detailed information on assessment. Students consider that assessment is progressively more challenging, that it is appropriate and that grading criteria are clear.

1.34   Regular monitoring provides additional assurance, with Subject-Level Self-Assessment forms (SARs) providing an opportunity for the module leader to identify any issues with assessment, and with the annual monitoring and periodic review processes being used to identify trends and any actions required.

1.35   Staff new to higher education delivery and assessment are provided with a Learning Coach and have individual meetings with the Director of Higher Education, which aids them

in engaging effectively with assessment at higher education level. The Higher Education Staff Handbook provides detailed guidance on assessment for all staff.

1.36   The team found that the policies are operated consistently to ensure that assessment is reliable and appropriate. Learning outcomes are clearly communicated and credit is awarded on achievement of these. The College adheres to the assessment and award regulations of the validating organisations. The team therefore considers the systems and processes to be robust. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.37   The monitoring and review of programmes is the responsibility of the awarding bodies; therefore, the College is subject to a range of annual and periodic reviews. Review documentation is prepared by the programme teams and the Director of Higher Education and these are implemented effectively. Reviews include the College in completing its own evaluation and providing a range of documentation.

1.38   In addition, the College has internal annual processes to review programmes that are evaluative and action focused. This includes scrutiny of Module Evaluation Questionnaires and of external questionnaire and survey outcomes, for example National Student Survey (NSS) results and actions resulting from Student Liaison Meetings. Self-assessment uses feedback and actions required by external examiners to create a rolling action plan referenced to the Quality Code.

1.39   For Pearson programmes, the College makes use of external verifier reports and programme data within the College to assure itself of the quality of these programmes. Curriculum Managers include relevant higher education programmes within their Self-Assessment Reports. This information is overseen by the Director of Higher Education and included within the full College Self-Assessment Report.

1.40   This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.41   The team tested this approach through the scrutiny of a range of documents and through meetings with staff, students and representatives of the awarding bodies.

1.42   There are robust annual review processes in place, which operate in line with the awarding bodies' requirements. These draw on a range of data including student feedback, captured via Module Evaluation Questionnaires, and NSS outcomes. The process is further supported through the regular Subject-Level Self-Assessment process. External examiner reports are given due consideration as part of this process. A Higher Education Summary and Review Report is produced annually by the Director of Higher Education and considered by the Quality Improvement Group and the Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Group. Actions from the annual reviews are collated into comprehensive Curriculum Area Enhancement Plans and mapped against relevant chapters of the Quality Code. Overarching themes are collated into a Higher Education Enhancement Plan, which is mapped both to the relevant chapter of the Quality Code and to the College's strategic aims. These action plans are monitored throughout the year via the Quality Improvement Group, the Principalship Strategic Team, and the newly formed Higher Education Quality Enhancement Group. The drawing together of data from a range of sources to inform comprehensive action plans, which are aligned to internal and external benchmarks, is **good practice**.

1.43   The processes and timescales for periodic review are clearly articulated by the awarding bodies and followed by the College. These include appropriate external input and consideration, where appropriate, of reports from PSRBs.

1.44   The team concludes that the College adheres to the requirements of monitoring and review and fulfils its delegated responsibilities. It is proactive in gathering information that informs action plans which, in turn, take account of external benchmarks. There is strategic oversight at College level of processes. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.45   Awarding bodies have responsibility for ensuring independent expertise in setting and maintaining academic standards and are responsible for appointing external examiners. The College is guided by the awarding bodies when making changes or amendments to programmes and modules of study, and for the Pearson Art and Design programme it used the external advice of a partner University to support the selection of units of study for the programme.

1.46   At validation and revalidation events the College and its University partners call on the expertise of the external examiner and subject specialists' reports to further develop and ensure that standards are met.

1.47   External examiner reports contain suitable detail on areas for development and identifying good practice; however, some are generic in nature where wider whole partnership reporting is necessary for the validating organisation. The College's reliance on curriculum teams and External Subject Specialists is therefore of great importance in the monitoring and review of alignment with UK threshold academic standards for the programmes that it runs.

1.48   The team met students, senior staff, academic staff and employers and examined a range of documents, such as external examiner reports and committee and employer review contract meeting minutes.

1.49   The College uses a variety of internal as well as external processes to identify areas for improvement, and centre-specific monitoring of external examiner action plans where insufficient detail is provided in whole partnership-wide reports. It conducts quality audits and unpicks specific centre-related actions during programme partnership meetings to ensure the management, assessment and delivery of programmes are strong and externally advised.

1.50   The design of the process when put into practice allows the College to monitor external feedback from a range of sources, including students, employers and external examiner reports, to better understand, develop and maintain academic standards for its programmes.

1.51   The College engages with employers to develop programmes in a bespoke way to meet the needs of the business in which they work; for example, the FdSc Business programme removed an employability module and replaced it with a project management one, because staff and students felt that the project management module would increase opportunities for employability on completion of the course and was more relevant, considering students' prior knowledge and experience. In consequence, the Programme Leader for Computing was supported by the College in gaining a professional qualification to assist in the effective delivery of the module.

1.52   Employer contract meetings, which are the forums for proposals of curriculum developments and amendments to make programmes more relevant, substantiate how feedback from employers, students and staff can lead to swift, informed module changes to make the programme more relevant. The effective relationship between the College and stakeholders, which enables the College to make timely adjustments to the curriculum to maintain relevance and currency, is considered by the team to be **good practice**.

1.53   The College actively seeks out external as well as internal perspectives on setting and maintaining academic standards and proposes module and/or programme changes to its awarding partners based on a range of information and evidence. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.54   In reaching its judgements, the team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.55   The College is effective in managing its responsibilities, in conjunction with the degree-awarding bodies and organisations, and is effective in maintaining academic standards. The team identified two features of good practice: the first with regard to the drawing together of data from a range of sources to inform comprehensive action plans, which are aligned to internal and external benchmarks; and the second with regard to the effective way that the College and stakeholders work together that enables the College to make timely adjustments to the curriculum to maintain relevance and currency.

1.56   From its scrutiny of a wide range of evidence, and through the meetings that the team was able to have with staff and students, the team concludes that effective use is made of relevant subject and qualification benchmarks and external expertise in the development of programmes and their subsequent approval and monitoring, with qualifications being set at an appropriate academic level. Furthermore, the team confirms that effective use is made of input from external examiners and link tutors from the degree-awarding partners.

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

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College works closely with each awarding body, and with relevant employers, in the development and design of programmes. The College has different responsibilities depending on the nature of the award and the partnership with the awarding body. These requirements are clearly articulated by the University awarding bodies. In addition, the College draws on a number of sources in deciding whether to introduce new programmes and the process is carefully managed by the Curriculum Managers, working with the Director of Higher Education.

2.2 This approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.3 The team explored the extent to which this approach met the Expectation through consideration of a range of documentation and through meetings with relevant stakeholders, including staff, students, representatives from the awarding bodies and employers.

2.4 The process for developing and approving new provision and revalidating existing provision is articulated through College and awarding body documentation. Engagement with the process is effective and draws on internal and external stakeholders as well as scrutiny of data, which is rigorously recorded. The process of approval, overseen by relevant Curriculum Managers and the Director of Higher Education, includes appropriate reference to external benchmarks, including PSRBs, and with relevant external scrutiny to ensure currency and comparability with the higher education sector.

2.5 Discussions with staff and representatives from the University partners showed that the respective roles and procedures for validation and programme modification are well understood and effective. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.6   Admission to the College's higher education provision is by direct application to the College, with some progressing level 3 students using the UCAS application process. The College employs a designated Higher Education Coordinator who administers all the applications, admissions and enrolment processes. The Higher Education Coordinator records applications on the student information management system, and ensures that suitable candidates, as identified by Programme Leaders, are interviewed. Entry criteria are clearly identified and used from the Programme Specifications available on the College website. The application process is accessed via a link on the website, but paper copies of the application form can be used if required.

2.7   The College understands the importance of prospective students receiving the best possible guidance to enable them to choose the right course. Student Services are available to answer general questions and refer students to course-level staff for course-specific information. All guidance is carried out by members of the lecturing team. Guidance can be accessed at Open Days and Taster Days and can be booked at any other time through the Higher Education Coordinator. The Higher Education Coordinator is also able to offer in-depth advice and support for accessing student loans and available bursaries.

2.8   All applicants are interviewed to ensure that the course is suitable for them. A higher education application interview record is completed. Part of this process is to ascertain whether the applicant has any additional needs. All interviews are carried out by experienced members of the lecturing team. Where the decision is made not to offer a place, the applicant is informed by the lecturer of the appeals procedure and where to access it. Further guidance is offered to all unsuccessful applicants to explore suitable options. This may be from vocational teams or the Student Services' Team.

2.9   In line with the Equality Policy, the College works closely with students who have any protected characteristics or additional needs from application stage, to provide any necessary support. The College has excellent support for students with additional needs. The Inclusion Manager is responsible for coordinating the interviews and detailing the support that is offered to eligible students. Learning support coaches are highly qualified and experienced and interview any students who disclose additional needs.

2.10   This approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.11   The team explored the approach taken to meeting this Expectation through meetings with staff and students, and through scrutiny of documentation.

2.12   The College, as a long-term partner of the awarding bodies, is responsible for devolved applications, admissions and enrolment processes. These are articulated in the Institutional Agreements or Memoranda of Cooperation. A Furness College Admissions Policy and Higher Education Interview Record are maintained by the College. Student qualifications and identities are checked at enrolment. These checks are audited by the partner Universities.

2.13   The process works effectively and has a strong emphasis on inclusivity and on enabling students to achieve their potential through effective and personally focused information, advice and guidance. The team heard of specific examples in which applicants were advised of alternative provision that was better suited to their current needs, and this was highlighted by students as a positive and enabling experience. Applicants have a right of appeal and, via the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) and Admissions Policy, they are directed to use the Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy.

2.14   The College's Equality Policy effectively underpins and informs the admissions process, and the team heard a number of examples from students and staff of successful interventions that enable students to achieve their potential. Specialist support, both formal and informal, is provided for students as required, with the Learning Support Coach working with students on a one-to-one basis to identify their support requirements.

2.15   Following examination of the evidence, and meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that the College operates a clear and transparent policy for student admissions and that it has effective oversight of the process. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.16   The College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy sets out its seven key priorities for the delivery of high-quality learning. It reflects the College's values, strategic aims and mission and considers higher education, although it is not a higher education-specific strategy. While the strategy includes a learning and observation policy, the College recognises the need to develop further a prescribed Higher Education Learning Observations policy and process for 2015-16. Underpinning this strategy is a range of policies and procedures to maintain, improve and enhance the quality of teaching and learning. This includes the College-enhanced observation system, which offers a holistic approach to a teacher's development linked to formal self-assessment, observation of teaching and learning processes, performance management and continuous professional development. This information is linked to, and stored in, areas on the College information dashboard.

2.17   The College Higher Education Strategy synchronises with the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and specifically measures its success against the second key measure titled 'Success', where it analyses observation data and staff continuing professional development and scholarly activity opportunities to support the effectiveness of teaching and learning practice. The College's overarching CPD Policy and plan is appropriately coordinated by the Human Resources department. The College is actively upgrading its buildings, facilities and resources to provide all students with greater, more industry-relevant environments. Linked employers and stakeholders take an active part in upgrade proposals, many of which are discussed between the College and employers to make sure that new facilities are appropriately requisitioned.

2.18   The strategy and College systems support the development of teaching, learning and assessment at higher education level, but are not higher education-specific. Likewise, the teaching observation form and pre-observation meeting form is used by the College for all programmes across all levels of study. The form is comprehensive and asks observers to comment on key aspects of higher education learning styles, for example independent learning, and is adequate for assessing the effectiveness of the quality of teaching at higher education level. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.19   The team reviewed teaching and learning observation outcomes, student satisfaction survey results, CPD requests and outcomes from reviews captured by the in-year course reviews and in-year Self-Assessment Reports. These feed into the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Plan, which plans for and drives improvement.

2.20   Feedback from meetings with staff and students was also used to triangulate evidence. The Learner Voice and Student Liaison Meetings and the NSS also clearly show how staff, student and employer contribution has led to the development of facilities and learning resources, including a dedicated Higher Education Resource Hub. Students were involved during the planning and creation of these facilities, with student focus groups.

2.21   Staff are well qualified and some have achieved Master's and PhD-level qualifications. Many staff have access to partner awarding body professional development opportunities. Staff involved in higher-level professional development commented on how supportive the College is in supporting development requests. Expressions of interest for continuing professional development and scholarly activity are identified on a request form and discussed with the Curriculum Manager during the appraisal and performance management review. The member of staff then completes a CPD application form, which identifies the objectives and needs of the individual, curriculum, curriculum area and College in respect to the contribution towards teaching and learning strategy and higher education strategy objectives. The tracking of staff development activities is centrally administered by Human Resources. An example of this is noted in how promptly the College responded to CPD requests regarding module changes in the FdA Business programme, focusing on project management, and supported the Programme Leader in attaining the Association of Project Management professional qualification to support delivery.

2.22   The College rebuild has led to improved facilities: classrooms, practical workshops, the learning resource hub and computer laboratories with connected IT facilities, which are modern and accessible. Currently under construction is an Advanced Manufacturing and Technology Centre which will see further facilities developed to enable greater use of specialist equipment in advanced product manufacture, product inspection, simulation and material testing. An associated employer-led project to renovate a local building to become a music and arts academy has been written into an assignment for the Construction Management programmes, providing students with a live project directly linked to employability skills development.

2.23   The overall College Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, supported by the higher education strategic measures of success criteria, work seamlessly together in ensuring learning and teaching is at the forefront of professional skills development and teacher development for staff teaching on higher education programmes. Students whom the team met feel overwhelmingly that the teaching they receive is highly relevant, and that the experience of the tutors is used effectively to broaden and make relevant the subject areas.

2.24   Overall, the approach to teaching and learning is strategic, coherent, well thought through and appropriately managed by the College in the way results from observations feed into the overall College quality systems. Students are very complimentary about their experience and how the teaching they receive is current and of good quality, and prepares them well for work and further study. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.25   The College refers to the policies, procedures and guidelines of the awarding bodies to monitor and ensure the student experience is enhanced and that students are provided with the best opportunity to achieve. This is complemented by its own quality assurance policy and procedures and particularly the following key documents: the College Strategic Plan, Higher Education Strategy, Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, Higher Education Quality Enhancement Plan and the Information and Learning Technology Strategy. It uses data, including the student voice, to review performance at key College committees. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.26   The team discussed with senior staff, students, teaching staff, support staff, employers and alumni a wide range of topics relating to enabling student development, particularly in relation to academic study and associated study skills, employability and career development. This was supported by access to induction plans, programme handbooks, reviews and strategy documents, as identified above.

2.27   Students receive a comprehensive induction onto their programmes and when progressing between years, and the process is detailed in the Higher Education Quality Systems - Staff Guide document, which outlines how students are invited to attend an induction session that will be organised via the Higher Education Director, Higher Education Coordinator and Programme Leader. The process is designed to enable students to feel that they have received all the information required to feel comfortable with starting a new course and understand the expectations of their time, study hours and assessment hours.

2.28   One-to-one and group tutorials are available to students and enable development with a focus on personal development and planning, academic writing, referencing and researching skills. Pastoral support is provided by a course team lecturer who also supports students with broader academic and progression guidance. Students are surveyed on the quality of their tutorial programme and they confirmed during the review visit that they find the tutorial system helpful in focusing on areas for academic and pastoral development and in considering their future destinations and career ambitions.

2.29   Students are able to access learning support as required and are also offered support by the Learning Resources Team, who advise and guide them through the virtual learning environment, book and ebook collections, catalogue and referencing, and study skills and access to the partner Universities' facilities.

2.30   Students are able to access one-to-one support in the Learning Centre to develop CVs, job applications, preparation for interview or to explore self-employment opportunities. This service has now been extended to 12 months after students have completed their Furness College programme. The Learning Centre VLE page has comprehensive resources to support application for employment, including a bespoke CV builder for higher education students using an e-learning package.

2.31   Students confirm that the tutorial process and support mechanisms provided by the College are effective in supporting their academic studies, personal development, pastoral and employment/employability needs. They were also able to articulate confidently how the support systems provided by the College aided them in their current employment and future

employment opportunities, and insightfully expressed how the transferable skills they develop while at the College make them more employable, whatever industry they should enter.

2.32   The team concludes that the College provides a broad range of support and development opportunities for its students, who appreciate and use them to maximum effect. Therefore, the team considers that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.33   The College has adopted a proactive approach for 2015-16 of deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively. In the past this has been difficult as the majority of students are full-time employed and come to College in very limited time sequences. Mechanisms such as Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQs) and student liaison meetings were felt to be appropriate at course level and at a strategic level a Higher Education Student Governor has been elected. The gap between course level and the student governor was felt to be too great and student representatives have been recruited successfully to become part of the Higher Education Student Forum, as detailed in the Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy. Students are seen as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience and the College is committed to ensuring that their views are captured and used to inform the quality systems, with the purpose of improving the student engagement experience for both current and future cohorts.

2.34   The student voice model actively engages both staff and students in evidence-based discussions of mutual sharing of information. The College uses a number of mechanisms to close the feedback loop and to provide feedback to students in relation to changes made, where their feedback has been acted upon or on occasions where change is beyond the control of the College.

2.35   The College has effective and robust mechanisms for supporting sponsored employer students via termly contract review meetings. Key staff from the College and the employer are in regular contact and share student views and issues via the employer-led mechanisms, such as Apprenticeship and Traineeship focus groups. A key employer also employs one member of staff to be based in the College to be available for student support and aid in communication between the College and the employer. This approach should allow the Expectation to be met, although it is noted that new developments have been introduced that need to be tested over time.

2.36   The team tested this Expectation through consideration of a range of documentation, including that present on the College's VLE, and through meetings with students, staff and employers.

2.37   The team noted that recent changes to student engagement had been introduced as an enhancement to provide greater opportunities for higher education students to engage in and influence their own experience and to bridge identified gaps. The election of a Higher Education Student Governor, who sits on the Governors' Learner Experience Committee, provides a focus on higher education provision and learner engagement. A new Student Higher Education Forum has been created to develop more engagement from student representatives and to discuss formally and propose solutions for cross-College higher education enhancements. This student forum will report to the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Group.

2.38   The first meeting of the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Group acknowledged the establishment of the new Higher Education Student Forum and agreed the new Student Engagement Strategy for Higher Education. This strategy clearly articulates both the principles for student engagement and the mechanisms for that engagement.

2.39   The College's previous internal mechanisms for the student voice had provided feedback, which in turn has led to positive change on the delivery, design and development of its learning programmes and College services. MEQ data and NSS outcomes are carefully analysed and actions identified through the annual monitoring processes (see also Expectation B8). In addition, there are regular Student Liaison Meetings at course level where student representatives can bring issues to the attention of staff and provide input to enhancement activities.

2.40   The students whom the team met identified a range of ways in which they considered their views were heard, both through formal structures and the opportunities for informal feedback. The students consider that there is a strong listening culture within the College, with quick responses to issues raised. The formal feedback loop is via the VLE, where the minutes of student liaison meetings are posted.

2.41   The higher education section of the VLE contains a range of student representative training materials. The team heard that formal training had been offered to the students but that they had declined it. As a consequence, the team considers that this does not provide an assured and consistent approach to the effective implementation of the newly implemented Higher Education Student Forum and Student Engagement Strategy, and **recommends** that the College implements formal structured training for student representatives by September 2016.

2.42   Although the current processes are new, the team saw and heard sufficient evidence to recognise that these are an enhancement, building on a strong foundation of actively seeking student views, and responding accordingly. However, the team identified that the measures taken by the College in this area would be more effective if the College implemented formal structured training for student representatives. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.43   The College has robust practices to ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show that they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit. The College ensures that the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and aligned to the Quality Code.

2.44   The College's assessment strategies are subject to approval by the awarding bodies, which maintain responsibility for ensuring that assessment processes are equitable, valid and reliable.

2.45   Information is provided via programme specifications and student programme handbooks and module guides. Module tutors discuss the assessment with students and provide face-to-face opportunities for students who wish to have additional support and feedback. There are also appropriate processes in place for the management of additional learning needs. Summative feedback is provided within published timeframes.

2.46   Module and Course Boards held at the College are chaired by the Director of Higher Education in accordance with the requirements of the relevant awarding body.

2.47   The College uses processes for the accreditation of prior learning (APL) set by its awarding bodies. Respective forms are completed and sent to the appropriate awarding body for approval.

2.48   External examiners are required to comment on the appropriateness of assessment, as well as comparability of standards, via their annual reports.

2.49   New staff are allocated a Learning Coach and Subject Mentor, and have a one-to-one induction session with the Director of Higher Education. In this session the relevant awarding bodies' requirements and processes are outlined using the Higher Education Staff Guide. Regular CPD days also focus on sharing good practice, including aspects on assessment and feedback.

2.50   The College has processes in place for managing assessment and making assessment practices transparent to students, including arrangements for academic misconduct. The processes for malpractice and plagiarism are clearly stated in the relevant programme handbook. The College policy aligns with the awarding bodies' regulations.

2.51   The processes, as detailed, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.52   The team tested the Expectation through scrutiny of relevant documentation and meetings with students, staff and employers.

2.53   As discussed in Expectation A3.2, assessment strategies are clearly articulated through course approval documentation including Programme Specifications. Programme handbooks and module guides provide clear guidance as to what is required

for assessment, how it relates to the learning outcomes and the criteria for assessment. Students are positive about the approach taken to assessment and the feedback provided.

2.54   Assessments are either set or approved by the awarding body in line with their requirements and are submitted to external examiners for comment. While employers are not involved in the assessment of students, they do feed into the assessment process through, for example, the provision of live briefs, which enhance the student experience by providing appropriately quality-assured opportunities for putting theory into practice.

2.55   External examiners report on standards, marking and moderation processes as well as the appropriateness of assessment. Positive comments have also been made on the quality of the guidance provided to students. External examiners also comment, in their reports, on the conduct of the Board for the approval of marks and, where the Boards are held at the College, there is appropriate representation by the awarding body.

2.56   MEQs are also used as a mechanism to reflect on and enhance assessment practices, and module leaders analyse this data, plus other assessment data, to identify issues and action through the module report forms that form the SARs.

2.57   Staff are positive about the help provided by the Learning Coach to support assessment at higher education level. The Higher Education Staff Guide provides information to support staff in their understanding of the assessment process and this is also emphasised in the annual briefing/training on assessment, feedback and marking.

2.58   The College has an Extenuating Circumstances Guide, which aligns to awarding bodies' guidelines and is understood and used appropriately by both staff and students. In addition, there are clear processes for declaring, managing and supporting additional learning needs.

2.59   Processes relating to academic malpractice are clearly detailed in programme handbooks and module guides, and students are aware of plagiarism, how to avoid it and the College's approach to incidences of malpractice.

2.60   The College uses processes for APL set by its awarding bodies. Respective forms are completed and sent to the appropriate awarding body for approval.

2.61   The team verifies that the College offers equitable, valid and reliable processes for assessment. This enables all students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved their intended learning outcomes. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.62   For all University courses the awarding bodies carry out all management of external examiners, including their training. Recommendations for external examiners are also suggested by the College but again, full approval rests with the partner University. Pearson directly appoints external examiners for its programmes.

2.63   External examiner reports are received by the College and considered by teaching teams, Programme Leaders and Curriculum Managers, with any concerns added to programme Annual Report and action plans. These action plans are monitored by the Programme Leader and Curriculum Manager and reviewed during the in-year and self-assessment reviews.

2.64   The College receives and considers external examiner reports at a range of committees, including those attended by students. Generic partnership reports are broken down by External Subject Specialists as appropriate, to support the specific identification of actions and good practice. Students become aware of actions being completed in discussion with their Student Representative or by viewing them on the College virtual learning environment. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.65   The team examined a full suite of external examiner reports over a period of three years to consider trends and responses to actions, which the team concludes are very positive and confirm that academic standards on all programmes are being met. In meetings with students the team heard how they have access to external examiner reports, which are also presented on the course pages on the College VLE.

2.66   An external examiner for the Pearson Art and Design programme has been appointed, and has visited the College and met students, but at the time of the review no formal report had been submitted.

2.67   External examiner reports contain suitable detail on areas for development and the identification of good practice; however, as already stated, some are generic in nature, particularly where wider whole partnership reporting is necessary for the validating University. This can make the identification of College-specific issues more difficult. The College therefore relies heavily on curriculum teams and External Subject Specialists in being able to decipher aspects of the reports that relate to them.

2.68   The team confirms that the College makes scrupulous use of external examiners, and concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.69   The monitoring and review of programmes are the responsibility of the awarding bodies; therefore; the College is subject to a range of annual and periodic reviews. Review documentation is prepared by the programme teams and the Director of Higher Education and these are implemented effectively. Reviews include the College in completing its own evaluation and providing a range of documentation.

2.70   Higher education programmes are monitored by the Quality Improvement Group, who meet on alternative weeks, by the Principalship Strategic Team, who meet on alternative weeks, and in the Curriculum Area in-year and course reviews, who meet termly. The newly created Higher Education Quality Enhancement Group has terms of reference specific to enhancing the review and monitoring process with regards to the higher education programmes. Course leaders and relevant Curriculum Area managers will attend these meetings to oversee strategic review and action planning in regard to higher education programmes. The Learner Experience Committee also receives regular updates specifically on higher education provision.

2.71   Curriculum Managers, with their teams, produce Self-Assessment Reports, which include relevant higher education programmes. These feed into Annual Evaluation Reports, which are discussed with the Director of Higher Education.

2.72   The processes for monitoring and reviewing provision are in line with the awarding bodies' requirements and are as detailed in Expectation A3.3. The processes as outlined would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.73   The team tested the Expectation through scrutiny of relevant documentation and meetings with students, staff and employers.

2.74   The production of SARs (which draw on data such as MEQs, student liaison meetings and student achievement) feeds into the annual review process, which then feeds into the Curriculum Area Enhancement Plans, the Higher Education Enhancement Plan and the Higher Education Summary and Review report. These are considered by the Quality Improvement Group, the Principalship Strategic Team and the Higher Education Quality & Enhancement Group, and are working documents used throughout the year to chart progress against actions identified to enhance the student experience.

2.75   The Director of Higher Education reports regularly to the Governors' Learner Experience Committee incorporating developments, performance and impact of government policies. The timing of these reporting mechanisms has been improved for 2015-16 to strengthen the higher education input and information to the Committee.

2.76   In addition, there are informal and formal opportunities for employers to feed back on provision, and the Contract Review meetings form additional monitoring where the employer can track student recruitment, progress and engagement.

2.77   On the basis of the evidence provided, the team concludes that the College operates effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and reviewing

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.78 In collecting regular student feedback, the College believes that the majority of issues raised by students are solved quickly. For more formal appeals and complaints, higher education students may lodge complaints using the Furness College Complaints and Compliments policy, available on the website. Where a solution is not achieved through this process, students also have the right to complain to their awarding body. This process is included in the course student handbook. If the issue is still not resolved satisfactorily, the student can then use the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). This three-level process is detailed in the College's Policy.

2.79 Complaints are dealt with at a very senior level by the Deputy Principal for Curriculum and Quality. The Furness College policy states that complaints will be acknowledged within two days and a response sent within 15 working days. In the last year there have been three complaints specifically linked to higher education. Any complaint is usually investigated formally by the Director of Higher Education, unless direct involvement has already occurred via formal or informal means. Complaints are reported termly at the Quality Improvement Group and Principalship Strategic Team. All complaints were dealt with satisfactorily.

2.80 As with all student feedback, complaints are used to ensure continuous improvement. Results of complaints and actions taken are reported to the Governors' Learners Experience Committee termly.

2.81 Academic appeals are subject to the awarding body regulations, and information is available in student handbooks with links to awarding body regulations. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.82 The team tested the Expectation through scrutiny of relevant documentation and discussions with students and staff.

2.83 The College's Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy articulates both the policy and process. This is a College-wide process but it includes advice that higher education students have a right of access to the OIA if the College's and awarding bodies' processes have been exhausted. The Policy can be accessed via the College's website and students are advised of the policy and process at induction and via programme handbooks.

2.84 The majority of complaints are managed informally, but where this is not possible the process is followed appropriately with effective use of a Progress Tracking Form. A regular report on all College Complaints is made to the Quality Improvement Group, the Principalship Strategic Team and the Learner Experience Committee. There are very few formal complaints about higher education provision and none that has led to referral to the OIA.

2.85 The team also saw evidence of an employer complaint about a particular exam process, which was satisfactorily resolved and led to improvement in processes to ensure effective invigilation and booking of rooms suitable for an examination.

2.86   Academic appeals are subject to awarding bodies' regulations and information is available in programme handbooks. Both students and staff are aware of these processes.

2.87   The team concludes that there are effective procedures for handling complaints and academic appeals and for recording them. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.88   The University partners of the College have ultimate responsibility for the strategic approach and maintenance of academic standards and quality assurance for their programmes, and Pearson takes responsibility for the programme in Art and Design.

2.89   With oversight from the College Work Placement Coordinator, students are encouraged to secure their own work placements in the first instance, to develop their ownership and confidence, and the College maintains oversight of placement opportunities through visits and monitoring of students' development plans. The College manages work experience and placements in conjunction with the Work Placement Coordinator. Work placement requirements differ by programme and are set by the awarding organisation; for example, the Foundation Degree in Children, Young People and their Services and the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care have mandatory work placement requirements. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.90   The team tested the Expectation through scrutiny of evidence and discussions with relevant staff and students.

2.91   Students are informed of placement and work experience requirements at interview, during induction and in programme handbooks. Students have to adhere to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks as defined by the nature of the work they do. The Work-Related Learning Procedure lays out the practical arrangements for undertaking a work placement, including legal obligations, and tutors provide a range of advice and guidance based on programme requirements and individual circumstances. When students experience difficulties in finding a suitable placement, support is available from the College Work Placement Coordinator or from the Course Leader.

2.92   The HNC and BEng Programmes are referenced to the UK Standard for Professional Engineering Competence (UK-SPEC). This sets out the competence and commitment required for registration as an Engineering Technician (EngTech), Incorporated Engineer (IEng) or Chartered Engineer (CEng).

2.93   Employment and employability are at the heart of the College higher education curriculum and support the development of employment opportunities and employability skills for students, including those already in employment. This was confirmed in meetings with staff, students and employers, by the review of programme handbooks and work-related learning procedures, and in the review of employer and College contract meetings. Those students whom the team met who were not in employment, and who were on courses where mandatory work placement opportunities are not included as part of their programme of study, reported that they are very satisfied with the help and support from tutors in securing a placement or work experience.

2.94   Students spoke passionately about the effective management of work experience and formal work placements offered and supported by the College. Similarly, employers engaged with the College praised the effectiveness of engagement in securing and monitoring work experience/placements with them. Both processes are supported by

constant, seamless integration of employer and College priorities, monitored and developed through highly productive contract meetings, which indicate a symbiotic partnership between the College and employers, with shared objectives and a common desire to help students to progress.

2.95   Overall, the team considers that the way in which the College works with others in managing its provision is effective, to the benefit of the student experience and enhances their learning opportunities. The team concludes, therefore, that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

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

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.97   In reaching its judgement, the team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.98   All of the Expectations in this area are met, with low risk in each instance.

2.99   The recommendation associated with Expectation B5 concerns the implementation of formal structured training for student representatives, which, the team suggests, would provide a more assured and consistent approach to the effective implementation of the newly implemented Higher Education Student Forum and Student Engagement Strategy.

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

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1   The College website provides a comprehensive range of publicly accessible information about the College's higher education provision, College strategy and performance.

3.2   Prospective students can access detailed information about the College's courses from electronic course information sheets, available online and in hard copy, if required. The website contains information on admissions criteria, application procedures and fees.

3.3   The website contains extensive information on being a higher education student at the College, including details on the University partners, facilities and student support. Each course page provides information on start dates, the duration and modes of study, awarding bodies and enrolment information.

3.4   The College has arrangements in place so that publicly available programme information is updated annually by the Higher Education Coordinator in consultation with course tutors, and includes information on programme modules or units, learning outcomes, assessment strategies, and progression. The College has a sign-off procedure for updates to their publicly available information whereby the Curriculum Manager is ultimately responsible for checking changes and ensuring accuracy across the College websites and publications.

3.5   All marketing materials for University courses are subject to approval by the relevant awarding bodies and are required to follow their requirements for presentation. This approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.6   The team tested this Expectation through scrutiny of relevant documentation, the College website and VLE and through meetings with staff, awarding body representatives and students.

3.7   The College website provides a comprehensive resource for all stakeholders, including clear information about courses for current and future students.

3.8   Publicly available programme information is updated annually by the Higher Education Coordinator in consultation with course tutors. Information about higher education provision is subject to approval by the awarding bodies and there is a clear procedure for the production, control and maintenance of publicity material, which articulates the responsibilities for individuals, with the Director of Higher Education having overall responsibility. Course tutors are responsible for information contained in programme handbooks and module guides, which reflect the requirements of the awarding bodies and are subject to approval by those awarding bodies.

3.9   Each programme is required to meet minimum standards for its VLE content, student course handbook, external examiner report, and materials and resources, for example electronic slide presentations, assessment instruments and hand-in dates.

Each VLE site is rated bronze, silver or gold, reflecting its content, and every course page identifies the rating with advice on how to improve the site. In addition, many students are able to access additional materials through the University partner VLEs.

3.10   Information available through Student Services is extensive, and comprises information on admissions, careers, tutorials, personal support, financial support and student engagement. The Higher Education Coordinator supports the provision of IAG higher education information and aids students in applying to university, and with Student Loans Company applications and enrolment with partner Universities. The College website has clearly signposted information about each of these services. The VLE provides similar information for current students, including contact details, so that access to help and advice is clearly signposted and available.

3.11   External examiners' reports are available on the VLE and there is clearly signposted access to information relating to each awarding body through a dedicated higher education section of the VLE.

3.12   Students consider that comprehensive electronic information is readily available to support their studies both on and off-campus, and that the information provided during the application process is accurate and reliable.

3.13   The team concludes that the College produces information for its intended audiences about the higher education it offers that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.14   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.15   The review team scrutinised a range of documentation (both published in hard copy and electronic versions) made available to prospective, current and former students and other stakeholders.

3.16   Overall, the team found that the College has considered the formal requirements of Expectation C and has ensured that it can demonstrate its compliance with the broad Expectation. The College has approval mechanisms in place for ensuring that published information is accurate.

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

4   Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1   The Quality Improvement Group and the new Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Group have responsibility for the oversight, reviewing and enhancing of higher education provision, and contribute to the monitoring of the College Higher Education Enhancement action plan. The College's Higher Education Enhancement action plan is developed from many sources: student, staff and stakeholder feedback; good practice from other Colleges; data analysis; local requirements; and external examiner and awarding body feedback. This would enable the Expectation to be met.

4.2   The team tested the approach through meetings with staff, students and external stakeholders and through analysis of a range of evidence.

4.3   The College's approach to enhancement is embedded across activities, from the strategic vision to module delivery and development. A range of data is brought together, through regular review of Subject Level Assessment Reports (SARs) and annual monitoring processes, to Curriculum Area Enhancement Plans, where actions are aligned to relevant chapters of the Quality Code. College-wide actions are tracked via the College Higher Education Enhancement action plan, which aligns actions against the College's strategic aims and the Quality Code. Enhancement actions identified through these processes are monitored via the Quality Improvement Group, the Principalship Strategic Team and the newly formed Higher Education Quality Enhancement Group. This group is an enhancement to the existing committee structure following a review of the higher education reporting structures.

4.4   The team considered a range of examples of enhancements including the development of the Higher Education Centre in the new build, which was informed and welcomed by students. As previously stated under Expectation B5, the College has adopted a proactive approach for 2015-16 of deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively. Recognising the difficulties associated with engaging with all higher education students, given the dispersed nature of programme delivery, and to bridge the gap from course level to the Higher Education Governor, a new Student Higher Education Forum has been created to develop more engagement with student representatives and to formally discuss and propose solutions for cross-College higher education enhancements. The Student Engagement Strategy explicitly links engagement with strategy, and meetings with staff and students clearly showed the formal and informal engagement with each other that leads to appropriate enhancement of the student experience. Students are not only appreciative of the opportunities available to them to feed into College developments and raise issues relating to their specific programmes, but they also understand that the College needs to ensure the integrity and quality of the provision and that it cannot meet all demands for change.

4.5   The team saw evidence of the ways in which the College operates as a major player in the economic development of the local area, proactively seeking enhancement opportunities. This has included, in 2015, commissioning an economic impact assessment report, 'Demonstrating the Economic Value of Furness College', that analysed the social and economic impact of learning. The results demonstrate the value of the College in terms of its learners, businesses, the community and society. Working with local stakeholders, including

the MP, the LEP and employers, the College has responded to an identified need for advanced manufacturing capacity through the construction of an Advanced Manufacturing and Technology Centre, supported via the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Catalyst fund. The College drew on a range of feedback from employers to inform this development to ensure that it will meet the needs of regional industry.

4.6   The team considers that the College has a culture of enhancement and that it actively seeks information on improving the student experience through dialogue (formal and informal) with students and employers. It is evident that there is a symbiotic partnership between the College and employers, with shared objectives and a common desire to help students to progress, as referred to under Expectation B10.

4.7   Two examples demonstrate this approach: construction students were finding it difficult to access particular specialist e-resources. A local employer advised the College about the Timber Research and Development Association (TRADA) which provides the required resources. The College subscribed and students can now access these resources via the VLE.

4.8   A local project has been established to set up an Arts and Music Academy with support from the local council. Through discussions with the College, the design of the conversion of the space has become a live brief for higher education Construction students, enabling them to get hands-on experience as part of their learning, teaching and assessment as well as accessing specialist input to enhance their understanding.

4.9   As a consequence of scrutiny of the evidence, the team considers that the culture of enhancement that pervades all aspects of the College's higher education provision is **good practice**.

4.10   Through discussions and consideration of documents, the team considers that the evidence indicates that enhancement is deeply embedded within the College and that all stakeholders (staff, students, employers, PSRBs, awarding bodies) have a voice in the process of enhancement. The team considers that the strategic approach enabling all stakeholders to work together to identify and seamlessly develop enhancement opportunities of mutual benefit is **good practice**.

4.11   These deliberative steps taken at provider level, the development of a culture of enhancement throughout the College, and the proactive approach taken by the College to involve all stakeholders in enhancing student learning opportunities ensure that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.12   In reaching its judgement, the team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.13   The Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

4.14   The review team was able to examine a range of examples of enhancement that demonstrated a symbiotic relationship between the College and employers. The team concludes that the College has established a particularly effective strategic approach that enables all stakeholders to work together to identify and seamlessly develop enhancement opportunities of mutual benefit. This has contributed to a culture of enhancement that pervades all aspects of the College's higher education provision. Both of these are identified as features of good practice.

4.15   The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College is **commended**.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The College prides itself on the local and national employment opportunities that it fosters for its students. It actively consults *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code in the design, validation and delivery of its higher education programmes. The Director of Higher Education and curriculum managers are in constant contact with local employers to ensure that the curriculum is current and meets employment needs; for example, the Foundation Degree in Computing awarded by the University of Cumbria developed new modules to respond to new and emerging technologies. All curriculum areas also hold employers' forums throughout the year and formal contract arrangements with major employers are held to consider programme development and employment opportunities. Programme Teams also invite guest speakers to talk to students to enrich learning, including speakers from local SMEs who form a considerable element of the local employment provision. The College also arranges visits to organisations where appropriate, so that students can contextualise their learning in the workplace.

5.2   There is a clear focus on the development of professional skills through work-based learning, and students have support from tutors and workplace supervisors. Work experience and Professional Development Phase (PDP) modules form the core of the building of employability in the Foundation Degree in Children, Young People and their Services, Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care, and BA (Honours) in Education. The FdSc Computing, FdA Business with Project Management and FDSc Construction Management programmes each contain at least one module on work-based learning.

5.3   Supplementary skills are developed and understood by learners to help increase their chances of employment, for example IT or accountancy skills for students undertaking the Foundation Degree in Business with Project Management and First Aid for those undertaking the Foundation Degree in Children, Young People and their Services. The College also holds an annual Jobs and Skills Fair where employers can talk directly to students to aid their recruitment processes.

5.4   Student feedback demonstrates that they feel strongly that their Furness College learning experience has increased their employability and employment opportunities.

5.5   The team was able to identify a wide range of examples of how employability is embedded in the curriculum. These include the use of highly productive employer contract meetings, which enable effective programme development, and an employer-led project to renovate a local building that has been incorporated into an assignment in the Construction Management programme. These examples demonstrate the seamless integration of employer and College priorities.

Glossary

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

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

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 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.