

# Higher Education Review of Gateshead College

March 2015

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Gateshead College. The review took place from 9 to 11 March 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Carol Vielba
- Mr Clive Turner
- Mr Stuart Cannell (student reviewer)

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 6. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 10.

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

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)<sup>4</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [Glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code)

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

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

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

## Amended judgements December 2016

### Introduction

In March 2015, Gateshead College underwent a Higher Education Review, which resulted in a judgement of 'meets UK expectations' for the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies, the quality of student learning opportunities, and the quality of the information about learning opportunities, a judgement of 'does not meet UK expectations' for the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of Pearson, and a judgement of 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' for the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

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

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

The follow-up process included three progress updates and culminated in the review team's scrutiny of the College's progress reports and the supporting documentary evidence, along with a one-day visit on 12 September 2015 with one reviewer. During the visit the reviewer met senior staff and students to discuss progress and triangulate the evidence base received over the preceding months.

The visit confirmed that the recommendations and affirmations relating to the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of Pearson and the enhancement of student learning opportunities had been successfully addressed, and the good practice appropriately disseminated. Actions against recommendations and affirmations relating to the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies, the quality of student learning opportunities and the quality of the information about learning opportunities, which received positive judgements, had also been completed on schedule and contributed to the progress against the judgements on the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of Pearson and the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

### QAA Board decision and amended judgements

The review team concluded that the College had made sufficient progress to recommend that the judgements on the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of Pearson and enhancement be amended. The QAA Board accepted the team's recommendation and the judgements are now formally amended. The College's judgements are now as follows.

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

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

## Findings from the follow-up process

The College has made progress against the recommendations as follows.

- Develop, approve and implement a regulatory and procedural framework for the assessment and award of credit for Pearson programmes in line with the latest published guidelines from the awarding organisation - Expectations A2.1, A3.2, B6 and B9

The team found that the College's review of its regulatory and procedural framework for the assessment and award of credit for Pearson programmes had resulted in the new framework being produced, published and implemented internally. The revised regulatory and procedural framework is published on the Learner Portal, and is clearly accessible to both staff and students.

- Work with its degree-awarding bodies to develop and implement a mechanism that ensures the College has a formal record of decisions made at assessment and award boards - Expectations A2.1, A3.2 and B6

The team found that records had now been put in place for all assessment and award boards. Curriculum Leaders have been reminded of the requirements of assessment boards during a series of higher education institution meetings. Assessment and award boards had been recorded in the higher education calendar and higher education tracker and are monitored by the Standards and Performance Team.

- Confirm with the College degree-awarding bodies the extent of its delegated authority in academic malpractice, recognition of prior learning, reasonable adjustment, mitigating circumstances, academic appeals and the conduct of assessment boards - Expectations B6, A2.1 and B9

The team found that the College has designed and published matrixes that detail the respective responsibilities of the awarding body and the College. These have been shared with the Higher Education Quality Board and with students.

- Put in place structures, policies, and procedures to ensure the effective strategic oversight of higher education at provider level to inform enhancement initiatives - Expectations B8 and B3, Enhancement

The team found that the College has established a robust Higher Education Strategy and Higher Education Enhancement Framework, which encompass the higher education reporting structure, the enhancement structure and Higher Education Quality Board Terms of Reference.

- Develop and implement a process for the periodic review of the College Pearson programmes - Expectations B8 and A3.3

The team found that the College has both developed and published a Periodic Review Framework that draws on good practice from elsewhere but is bespoke to the needs of the College.

The College has made progress against the affirmations as follows.

- The introduction of a robust, formal, internal programme approval/reapproval process - Expectations B1, A3.1 and B8

The team reviewed the considerable progress being made in this area and welcomed the formalising of the role of the Programme Approval Panel, which ensures appropriate links to the periodic review process.

- The introduction of a differentiated teacher observation process between higher education and further education - Expectation B3

The College has introduced a teaching observation procedure that differentiates between further and higher education for higher education teaching that is now embedded and which is well regarded by staff.

- The setting up of the student representative group formalising student engagement in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience - Expectation B5

Students are engaged in the new Student Representative Group through their Student Representatives, who attend formal meetings twice a year to report to the College on student feedback and suggestions. This has resulted in improvements.

- The introduction of the Course Review and Evaluation Process in response to the recommendations from the 2010 review report - Expectations B8 and A3.3

The Course Review and Evaluation Process covers course delivery, teaching and student achievement and draws on a broad range of evidence including student statistics, external examiners' reports, student feedback, employer feedback, and module evaluations. Reviews are reflective and identify programme strengths and weaknesses, and include action plans to address weakness.

The team found that the College has made progress against the good practice as follows.

- The provision of learner voice input to the teacher observation process - Expectation B3

The further development of the learner voice framework has resulted in greater utilisation of learner focus groups to provide a more detailed insight into the experiences and views of Gateshead College higher education learners.

- The collaboration between the college and a commercial dance organisation to deliver teaching and assessment by industry professionals in a real setting which enhances the student learning experience - Expectations B4, B3 and B10

The College has maintained and developed its relationship with a commercial dance organisation, which is much appreciated by dance students.

- The extensive use of visiting speakers from industry across a variety of programmes to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential - Expectations B4 and B10

The team found that the College had maintained the initiative and had instigated an enhancement evaluation, carried out by the Head of Teaching, who produced a subsequent report that highlighted good practice and areas for development. This report was shared with the Teaching and Learning Committee of the Governing body.

- The use of in-house developed software to provide a single source for information on courses with multiple sign-offs that is annually updated and ensures that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy - Expectations C and A2.2

The College has maintained and further embedded the Course Builder software to improve the robustness of information. It has established a Higher Education Operations group, which brings together key individuals involved in the administration and management of higher education courses at the College to underpin the requirement for all higher education courses to be processed through Course Builder.

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Gateshead College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies **meets** UK expectations.
- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of Pearson **does not meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

### Good practice

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

- The provision of learner voice input into the teacher observation process (Expectation B3).
- The collaboration between the college and a commercial dance organisation to deliver teaching and assessment by industry professionals in a real setting which enhances the student learning experience (Expectations B4, B3 and B10).
- The extensive use of visiting speakers from industry across a variety of programmes to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectations B4 and B10).
- The use of in-house developed software to provide a single source for information on courses with multiple sign-offs that is annually updated and ensures that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (Expectations C and A2.2).

### Recommendations

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

By September 2015:

- develop, approve and implement a regulatory and procedural framework for the assessment and award of credit for Pearson programmes in line with the latest published guidelines from the awarding organisation (Expectations A2.1, A3.2, B6 and B9).

By January 2016:

- work with its degree-awarding bodies to develop and implement a mechanism that ensures the College has a formal record of decisions made at assessment and award boards (Expectations A2.1, A3.2 and B6)
- confirm with the College degree-awarding bodies the extent of its delegated authority in academic malpractice, recognition of prior learning, reasonable adjustment, mitigating circumstances, academic appeals and the conduct of assessment boards (Expectations B6, A2.1 and B9)

- put in place structures, policies, and procedures to ensure the effective strategic oversight of higher education at provider level to inform enhancement initiatives (Expectations Enhancement, B8 and B3).

By April 2016:

- develop and implement a process for the periodic review of the College Pearson programmes (Expectations B8 and A3.3).

## **Affirmation of action being taken**

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

- The introduction of a robust, formal, internal programme approval/reapproval process (Expectations B1, A3.1 and B8).
- The introduction of a differentiated teacher observation process between higher education and further education (Expectation B3).
- The setting up of the student representative group formalising student engagement in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5).
- The introduction of the Course Review and Evaluation Process in response to the recommendations from the 2010 review report (Expectations B8 and A3.3).

## **Theme: Student Employability**

Gateshead College (the College) prides itself on student employability at all levels of student attainment. The College's statement of mission and values defines the College purpose as to 'shape and nurture the most highly prized students in the job market'. As such employability is a key strategic objective for the College and is embedded within its 'One College' ethos.

The College encourages all programmes to incorporate work placements, work-based projects, work-related learning and work-based learning, as appropriate. The College requires all programmes to have an Employer Advisory Board (EAB) to ensure currency and relevance of its programmes. The College encourages employers to contribute to the design and evaluation of programmes and actively seeks feedback from local employers to ensure that the employability skills developed in College programmes are relevant and current.

As part of its teaching and learning strategy the College encourages visiting speakers from local business, public sector organisations and the creative industries to visit the College to embed employability into the delivery of programmes. Some programme go further, for example, the BA Dance Professional Practice is delivered in the premises of a professional dance studio and is taught by professionals engaged in the industry.

To support students, the College provides a specialist careers guidance service with matrix Standard accreditation, which is the quality framework for organisations to assess and measure their information, advice and guidance services.

Overall employability is integrated across the College's academic curriculum and through additional activities. Employability and raising student aspirations is an embedded ethos at the College.



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

## About Gateshead College

Gateshead College (the College) is a large general further education college situated in Gateshead in the north-east of England. The College occupies new buildings on six sites, spread across Gateshead. The main building is the Baltic Campus (completed in 2008) on Gateshead Quays at the heart of Gateshead's business and cultural development centre. Sport is based at a new centre, completed at the same time, adjacent to Gateshead International Stadium. Engineering, Automotive and Construction are also based in new buildings on Gateshead's Team Valley Industrial Estate. The College has a further centre, known as The Skills Academy for Sustainable Manufacturing and Innovation (SASMI), adjacent to the Nissan factory in Washington. This centre specialises in green technologies.

The College has around 7,000 full-time further education students and up to 20,000 part-time further education students, including numerous off-campus arrangements. At the time of the review the College had 431 full time equivalent (FTE) higher education students. These students are spread across 19 programmes that are validated by three degree-awarding bodies and Pearson awarding organisation for the college Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs). The College's degree-awarding bodies are Northumbria University Newcastle, University of Sunderland and Teesside University. The higher education programmes are contained within their relevant curriculum areas (known by the College as Groups) and not separated into a specialist higher education faculty. The College employs a Higher Education Coordinator to provide coherence across the provision.

Since the College's previous review in 2010, a major staffing restructure took place in 2012 including senior and middle management and all teaching staff and was intended to reposition the College to face the challenges of the new educational landscape as well as those presented by the current economic climate of the region, the country and the global market. The staffing structure has continued to change with the most recent changes being in June 2014. The College refers to the new structure with the term 'One College' in order to describe a joined-up approach to all aspects of how it conducts its business.

The College has identified its key challenges particular to higher education as: increasing progression rates from existing level 3 programmes into its existing higher education offer; gaining new HEFCE numbers to support growth and demand from students; and being able to respond rapidly to the changing curriculum to reflect the needs of students and employers. The College has seen little change in overall student numbers but this has been achieved by making significant changes to the higher education portfolio. The College believes that the changes to numbers controls from 2015 will have a positive impact on the realisation of the College's strategy for higher education.

Gateshead College had a review in September 2010, and the report was published in November 2010. In February 2014 the College had a full Ofsted inspection. This inspection produced a disappointing result for the College as it was judged to be an overall Grade 3. This was particularly challenging for the College as the previous Ofsted inspection had also resulted in a Grade 3. The College is expecting another Ofsted inspection imminently. In general the College has responded positively to the outcomes of the 2010 review report. One recommended action (to produce a separate teaching and learning strategy for higher education) the College decided not to pursue, partially as it did not accord with their 'One College' ethos. The College has been slow to implement fully a recommendation from the 2010 review report 'to ensure that all its annual self-evaluations are more evaluative and specifically focused to enable them to be used more effectively in the management of higher

education'. The first part of this has been addressed by a new annual monitoring process and this has led to an affirmation. However, the College is still not making full use of the reports at senior level and this has contributed to the negative judgement in Enhancement. Other recommendations from the previous review report have been acted upon.

## Explanation of the findings about Gateshead College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.1 Bachelor and Foundation degree and the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)/Certificate in Education (Cert Ed) programmes are validated or approved as franchised provision by three degree-awarding body partners: Teesside University, the University of Sunderland and Northumbria University Newcastle. For each university partner there is a written Memorandum of Understanding or Memorandum of Agreement which sets out the respective responsibilities for the College and the University.

1.2 The Higher National programmes are developed by Pearson awarding organisation. Pearson publishes the specifications, which provide reference points for staff and students for teaching learning and assessment. Pearson publishes guidelines, including the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment (Level 4-7), which set out its requirements for the operational policies and procedures which the provider is required to develop and put in place, effectively creating a framework of regulations for these programmes

1.3 Programme specifications are required to address the requirements of the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and other external reference points.

1.4 The design of policies and procedures in place at the College allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.5 The team tested the Expectation by examining a range of documents including partnership agreements, programme specifications, validation documents, procedural and policy documents, external examiner reports, by holding meetings with academic and support staff including representatives from the validating degree-awarding bodies and by observing the operation of the College management information system (MIS) software in operation.

1.6 The College has a clearly articulated process for course design and approval detailed in the Higher Education Operations Manual and this is further articulated in an operations manual for each programme. The approval process is summarised in a flow document. For all programmes the College uses software to record the progress of approvals through the process which ensures that there is an appropriate sign-off at each stage of the process. Programmes have published programme specifications which are the products of both internal consideration and a formal validation event by the degree-awarding body. For Pearson programmes the College publishes a programme specification which is based on the specification published by Pearson. The team finds that the processes are understood and that the College adheres to the policies and procedures for programme approval. Validation documents indicate that the external reference points such as subject and qualification benchmark statements are addressed and discussed during the approval process. External examiner reports provide further evidence that the standards of the awards are met.

1.7 The ultimate responsibility for ensuring that approved programmes meet threshold academic standards and that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level in the FHEQ lies with the College's degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The team concludes that the College is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities in meeting this Expectation through close adherence to awarding partners' policies and procedures. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk 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**

1.8 With respect to the programmes it offers under the arrangements in place with its degree-awarding body partners the College does not produce any regulations or procedures for their governance. For these programmes, foundation and bachelor degree programmes and the PGCE, the College relies entirely on the regulatory frameworks designed and published by its degree-awarding body partners. With respect to these programmes therefore the design of the academic frameworks and regulations allows the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.9 With respect to the Pearson Higher National qualifications the College states that it relies entirely on the published regulations and procedures of Pearson, the awarding organisation, for the governance of these programmes. Pearson publishes a range of guidance and support for centres offering programmes leading to the award of their qualifications of which the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment (Level 4-7) most recently published in September 2014, is the most significant. This document contains both guidance and, crucially, its requirements for the systems, policies and procedures that an approved centre should have in place to govern assessment including the composition and procedures of assessment boards, academic malpractice, the recognition of prior learning, reasonable adjustment, mitigating circumstances, and academic appeals. The fact that the College does not have any of the required policies and procedures and hence lacks any regulatory framework does not allow the Expectation to be met in theory for Pearson programmes.

1.10 The team examined a range of documents including records of meetings at which assessment decisions were noted, external examiner reports, induction programmes for students and conducted meetings with academic and support staff and students to explore this Expectation.

1.11 The team's findings are differentiated with respect to the programmes leading to the awards made by the College degree-awarding body partners, and those leading to awards made by Pearson.

1.12 For programmes validated by the College degree-awarding bodies, the College receives the regulatory frameworks governing awards under the terms of its partnership agreements and is then required to operate within these regulations. The regulations are referenced in programme handbooks and via the College virtual learning environment (VLE). The College provides an induction checklist to ensure coverage of key information in the induction process, induction programmes and materials. Meetings with staff and students confirm that students are introduced to the regulations at the commencement of their programmes. Meetings with students confirm that they understand that there are regulatory frameworks for their programmes and that they know how to find the information they require.

1.13 Meetings with staff and informal notes of assessment boards show that the College does not maintain academic records of student achievement in the form of formal minutes of assessment boards that confirm academic decisions nor, it states, does it have access to the records maintained by its degree-awarding bodies. In order to monitor the progress and

achievement of its students therefore, the College maintains its own informal records of assessment and awards boards. In order to assure itself of the reliability and accuracy of the information used to advise students of their academic progress the College needs to have a formal record of these academic decisions. The team **recommends** therefore that by January 2016 the College work with its degree-awarding bodies to develop and implement a mechanism that ensures the College has a formal record of decisions made at assessment and award boards.

1.14 Meetings with staff reveal a lack of clarity in the delegated authority of the College in the operation of policies and procedures concerning academic malpractice, the recognition of prior learning, reasonable adjustment, mitigating circumstances, academic appeals and the conduct of assessment boards. For example, it is not clear whether or not and, if so, up to what point, the College has any authority to hear and deal with a representation by a student about an academic judgement. Similarly, it is not clear whether or not and, if so, to what extent, the College has authority to deal with applications for accreditation of prior learning (APL), extensions, mitigating circumstances and special adjustments. The team concludes that there is a risk to the future maintenance of academic standards if the College responsibilities remain uncertain. This leads to the team's recommendation in Expectation B6.

1.15 With respect to the Pearson Higher National awards the team sought and requested evidence of the regulations and academic frameworks governing the operation of programmes leading to the award of Pearson qualifications. The team examined documentary evidence of one assessment board and sought further clarification of the procedures followed during meetings with staff. The team asked for terms of reference for, membership of and regulations governing assessment and awards boards. In meetings with staff the College maintains that it is not allowed to put such a framework in place as the awards are governed by Pearson regulations. The team examined the *BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment (Level 4-7), September 2014*, published by Pearson, and finds that this document sets out the awarding organisation's requirements for the regulations and procedures which it requires the provider to have in place. While the document and other guidelines do provide advice and guidance for providers as to what these regulations and procedures should contain, it is not of itself a framework of regulations. The Guide advises that

To conform to the QAA Quality Code, your centre will need to develop and publish its own assessment regulations relating to BTEC higher level programmes [and] Each centre should have a published set of regulations for its Assessment Boards. (BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment: Level 4 to 7 - Issue 6: September 2014 pp43 and 49)

1.16 This lack of a formal regulatory framework, despite being required by Pearson, together with the lack of formal minutes of assessment and examination boards means that the college has no formal basis on which to recommend the award of credit and no formal record of how it has arrived at its decisions. The maintenance of academic standards for Pearson programmes is thus at serious risk. Therefore the team **recommends** that by September 2015 the College develop, approve and implement a regulatory and procedural framework for the assessment and award of credit for Pearson programmes in line with the latest published guidelines from the awarding organisation.

1.17 In conclusion, for the College's degree-awarding bodies, the academic decisions determining the award of credit and qualifications are ultimately supervised by and conducted in accordance with the regulations of these awarding bodies and so in respect of these programmes the Expectation is met but the lack of clarity in the College's delegated authority presents a moderate risk. However, for Pearson programmes, in the light of the

absence of a formal framework of procedures and regulations governing the award of credit and awards, the team concludes that this Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is serious.

**Expectation: Met for degree-awarding body partner programmes**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**Expectation: Not met for Pearson programmes**

**Level of risk: Serious**

**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**

1.18 The College has a memorandum of agreement between each of their awarding bodies outlining the responsibility for maintaining a definitive record of programmes and qualifications, which ultimately rests with the awarding body. The College keeps all appropriate documentation on the internal T-Drive, including but not limited to, programme specifications, module descriptors, external examiner reports, and annual monitoring reports (AMR). This information is directly referred to when the College monitors and reviews each of their courses. The College has an internal course approval system that they use before each of the courses is then sent to their respective awarding body

1.19 The College's awarding bodies do not expect them to have an internal course approval system, however, they have a rigorous process in place, and in which the bespoke software enables the College to have multiple checks in place for every course at every year to be confirmed annually. This allows the College to meet this Expectation in theory.

1.20 The review team examined this process through meetings with staff and a demonstration of the T-Drive and Course Building software

1.21 The review team saw the very clear display of the Course Building software in which the College formally signs off every course annually. There are six areas that need to be signed off before the course is allowed to progress. Within the current process the Higher Education Coordinator and the Strategy Manager for Curriculum have the most responsibility. This ensures that when each of the courses reaches the respective awarding body it has already been validated through the College's internal procedure. The team heard that the relevant staff members appreciate and understand how to use this software. The rigorousness of this system has led to a feature of good practice that is located within Expectation C.

1.22 The College has rigorous internal procedures in place to ensure that any changes it might propose would be formally signed off prior to submission to the awarding body. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

1.23 Responsibility for the development, design and approval of programmes is shared between the College and its awarding organisation, Pearson, and its university partners. Detailed frameworks for HNC and HND qualifications, which align with the Quality and Credit Framework (QCF), are provided by Pearson. The College offers franchised and validated provision in partnership with three local universities. These degree-awarding bodies have processes and procedures in place to approve programmes offered at the College and to approve major amendments during the life of a validated programme. Alignment of such provision with the FHEQ is checked in the course of the universities' approvals processes.

1.24 Programme approval is a two-stage process. All new programmes are developed initially using the College's Higher Education Programme Approval Process. This involves the development of a business case and a full set of programme documentation including a programme specification, and details of learning outcomes and assessment. The second stage involves the submission of the proposed programme to the degree-awarding body responsible for giving final approval to the proposed provision. Throughout the approval process attention is paid to alignment of curricula, learning outcomes and assessment to external frameworks. The College uses its Course Builder single source system to store programme details and to log sign-offs by responsible staff. Aspects of the College's programme approval procedures were recently reviewed and changes proposed. The processes for programme approval and amendment are discussed further in section B1.

1.25 The review team finds that the policies and processes in place for programme approval are designed to ensure the alignment of content and assessment with the UK threshold standards contained within either the QCF or the FHEQ. These policies and procedures allow Expectation A3.1 to be met in theory.

1.26 The review team looked at College policy and process documents relating to programme approval and modification. The team met staff with responsibility for programme approval and saw a demonstration of the electronic system used to log approval decisions. The review team also read documents relating to recent approvals of new programmes and changes to existing programmes.

1.27 Recent examples of programme approval and programme amendment demonstrate that the processes described above operate effectively and as intended. Attention is paid to standards throughout the preparation and approval of new programmes and modification of existing ones. The internal programme approval procedures at the College require executive sign-off at various stages, but the wider internal processes of programme development and design are often informal. The College has recognised that greater formality would be beneficial and would assist in the embedding of standards and development of a higher education ethos. The action being taken to strengthen the process of internal programme approval through the introduction of a requirement for Programme Approval Panels to agree documentation for a proposed programme formally before it is sent to an awarding body has led to an affirmation in B1.

1.28 The review team concludes that the College, with the support of Pearson and its university partners, has appropriate policies in place for the approval of programmes that ensure they are set at a level that meets UK threshold standards. Processes are also in place to ensure that UK threshold standards continue to be met after programmes have been amended. Staff are aware of these policies and implement them effectively. Expectation A3.1 is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.29 The College works within the frameworks for assessment provided by its awarding organisation, Pearson, and university partners. Pearson supplies expected learning outcomes and processes for the internal and external verification of their achievement. Pearson's programmes are aligned to the QCF. The frameworks provided by the College's partner universities are aligned to the FHEQ. The College's degree-awarding bodies maintain oversight of learning outcomes and assessment through the implementation of their assessment regulations and procedures. Implementation is also checked and monitored through programme approval, annual review, and the work of external examiners.

1.30 The review team considers that the College has overarching systems, processes, policies and procedures in place designed to implement the frameworks provided by its awarding organisation and university partners in relation to the achievement of learning outcomes. These policies and procedures allow Expectation A3.2 to be met in theory.

1.31 The review team looked at documentation setting out assessment requirements, including programme specifications and handbooks. The team read examples of internal moderation, and external examiners' reports. The team looked at operations manuals, responsibility lists, minutes of exam boards, and general guidance available to staff on assessment. The team talked to staff about assessment processes and the conduct of assessment boards.

1.32 The review team found that there is an effective system for the assessment of students which requires them to demonstrate that they have met learning outcomes which meet UK threshold standards. Robust systems of internal and external moderation are in place and implemented thoroughly. Guidance, support and development are provided to staff to ensure that assessment is appropriate and effective.

1.33 Pearson and the College's university partners provide processes and guidance on the handling of reasonable adjustment, mitigating circumstances, academic malpractice, recognition of prior learning, academic appeals, and the conduct of assessment boards. However, as discussed in greater detail in Sections A2.1 and B6, the College has not yet developed and implemented a full set of internal regulations, procedures and protocols, to ensure that the policies of Pearson and the College's university partners regarding these matters are handled consistently. The lack of a regulatory framework for Pearson programmes has led to a recommendation in A2.1. In addition, for the College degree-awarding body programmes the College showed a lack of clarity of its delegated powers and this has also led to a recommendation in A2.1.

1.34 The College's university partners and Pearson provide frameworks, policies and procedures for assessment and the award of credit and qualifications that are designed to

ensure that UK and awarding partner standards are met, and which the College is required to follow. The review team thus concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met. However, the College's inconsistent management of some aspects of assessment practice, lack of clarity of its delegated powers from its awarding partners and, in the case of Pearson, lack of an academic framework to cover academic governance, as discussed more fully in Expectation A2.1, means that the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

1.35 Responsibility for the monitoring and review of standards is shared between the College and its awarding organisation, Pearson, and its university partners. Systems for internal and external moderation, discussed in detail in section B6, ensure that programmes are delivered as approved and that standards of the College's awarding bodies, aligned with the QCF and the FHEQ, are met. The academic health of programmes is addressed through annual monitoring. Programmes delivered with the College's three university partners are subject to periodic re-approval which checks that standards are appropriate. There is no periodic review of the Pearson provision. The external verifier provides ongoing assurance of the standards of this provision.

1.36 The review team finds that the policies and processes in place for programme monitoring and review are designed to ensure that standards are aligned with those of the College's partners and, through them, with UK threshold standards. These policies and procedures allow Expectation A3.3 to be met.

1.37 The review team looked at documents which set out the processes and procedures for annual monitoring and read examples of annual monitoring reports. The review team also examined the approval of programmes that had run previously and were thus examples of re-approval. The team met staff responsible for assessment and monitoring.

1.38 The review team found that the processes of assessment and moderation operate effectively. External examiners are asked specifically to comment on achievement of threshold standards and, where issues are identified, remedial action is taken. In response to recommendations in the previous review report, the monitoring of programmes has been strengthened by the introduction of a Course Review and Evaluation process (CRE). CREs are produced annually by each programme in addition to Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) produced for provision offered in conjunction with university partners. The process of annual monitoring is discussed in detail in section B8, including an affirmation of the action taken by the College to strengthen the process. CREs and AMRs monitor student achievement and external feedback on curricula and delivery and assessment.

1.39 Programmes offered with the College's three university partners are subject to the periodic review and re-approval by the relevant degree-awarding body using that institution's policies and procedures. The College has recently strengthened its internal programme re-approval processes which precede the submission of the programme to the awarding body responsible for giving final approval. Throughout the approval process attention is paid to the alignment of curricula, learning outcomes and assessment with external frameworks. Pearson programmes are in open-ended approval and are not currently subject to periodic review or re-approval. This has led to a recommendation in B8 that the College should develop and implement a process for the periodic review of the College's Pearson programmes in order to provide further assurance of standards.

1.40 The review team concludes that the College, with the support of its awarding bodies and organisation, has the appropriate policies in place for ongoing monitoring and review of

the standards of approved programmes that ensure that they meet UK threshold standards. Staff are aware of these policies and processes and implement them effectively. Expectation A3.3 is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.41 The College has in place policies and procedures set down by their validating partners that ensure that external and independent expertise is used in the setting and maintaining of academic standards. Pearson designs its programmes and the College applies the same approval processes as for its degree-awarding body validated programmes when programmes are to be approved. These procedures are embodied within and supplemented by the College's own internal policies and procedures which are set down in the Higher Education Operations Manual and related documentation. These College procedures for programme design and development incorporate an internal approval process and specify that employers and other independent stakeholders are consulted during the design phase. These procedures require that reference to qualification and Subject Benchmark Statements and to the FHEQ is clearly embedded in programme specifications and documentation used to support the validation/approval process. The College makes scrupulous use of external examiners (see Expectation B7) who have a key role in the maintenance of academic standards.

1.42 The team concludes that the design of the processes in place for ensuring that external independent expertise is used in the setting and maintenance of academic standards allows for the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.43 The team tested the Expectation by examining a range of relevant documents including the partnership agreements for the three awarding bodies and the associated responsibility checklists; the HE Operations Manual; the operations manuals for individual programmes; procedural documentation for programme approval; records of two successful approval events; approval of a new programme and approval of modifications to an existing programme; records of employer involvement in initial programme design; course handbooks and a range of external examiner reports. The team investigated the operation of these processes during meetings with staff and employers. The team followed the progress of an approval through the College's management information system which confirmed that appropriate senior level sign-off at every stage of the approval process must be in place before a programme can run.

1.44 The team finds that the College follows these processes and procedures with rigour and that independent external expertise is applied in the approval and re-approval of programmes and in the ongoing maintenance of academic standards. The team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

1.46 Six of the seven Expectations in this judgement area are met with the associated level of risk identified as low in five out of six cases. The exception is Expectation A3.2 where the level of risk is identified as moderate, due to the inconsistent practice in the College's assessment framework. The seventh Expectation, A2.1, has a split judgement, with the Expectation being met, but with a moderate risk, for programmes awarded by the College's degree-awarding bodies and not met, with a serious risk, for programmes awarded by Pearson awarding organisation. The issues in this Expectation are around the College regulatory framework.

1.47 There is no good practice associated with this judgement area, though the good practice identified in Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision is also relevant to this judgement area. Similarly there are no affirmations associated with the judgement area although the affirmations given in B1 around the introduction of a more formal and robust approval/re-approval process and in B8 around the strengthening of the College annual monitoring process, are relevant to this judgement area.

1.48 There are two recommendations in this area, both located in Expectation A2.1. The first relates to putting in place a regulatory and procedural framework for Pearson programmes; the second relates to the College working with its degree-awarding body partners to ensure it has a formal record of assessment boards. In addition the recommendations in B6 and B8 are also relevant to this judgement area.

1.49 In terms of the programmes awarded by the College degree-awarding bodies, the College lacks clarity as to the extent of its delegated powers from the degree-awarding body and has no access to the formal records of assessment boards. This lack of clarity has led to the recommendation in B6 and that Expectation is not met, though with a moderate risk. Both of these issues have the capacity to put academic standards at risk. However, the ultimate authority for academic standards is that of the degree-awarding body and the latter ensures compliance by the College with its regulations and procedures. There are no serious risks identified in this judgement area for programmes validated by the College degree-awarding bodies. On balance therefore the team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding bodies **meets** UK expectations.

1.50 In the case of Pearson programmes, the awarding organisation requires the provider to have in place systems, policies and procedures to cover such matters as academic misconduct, mitigating circumstances and the conduct of assessment boards. The College has none of these systems, policies and procedures and moreover maintains that it is prevented from having them by the regulations of the awarding organisation. This lack of a regulatory framework means that the College has no formal basis on which it can award credit and indeed no formal records of the reasons for the decisions it has made. This lack of a regulatory framework puts academic standards at risk. The College has no recognition of these major problems and indeed insists it is prevented from addressing them by the erroneous belief that the awarding organisation does not allow it to have such regulations. The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of Pearson **does not meet** UK expectations.



## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 Responsibility for the development, design and approval of programmes is shared between the College and its awarding organisation, Pearson, and its university partners. Pearson provides detailed programme specifications for its awards. The College also offers franchised and validated provision in partnership with three local universities. These degree-awarding bodies have processes and procedures in place to approve programmes offered at the College including requirements relating to consultation during the development stages of a programme. They also approve major amendments during the life of a validated programme. The College provides advice and support to staff related to programme approval.

2.2 Programme approval involves both College and awarding organisation stages. All new programmes are developed initially using the College's HE Programme Approval Process. This involves the development of a business case and a full set of programme documentation including a programme specification, and details of learning outcomes and assessment. The process is steered by the HE Coordinator, who works with an ad hoc panel known as a Programme Approval Panel drawn from the relevant curriculum area. The role of the panel is to guide the development process, liaise with awarding partners, and oversee the production of documentation. The College consults students and employers during the development phase of programmes. The College uses its Course Builder single source system to store programme details and to log sign-offs by responsible staff, including senior managers. This system is discussed in further detail in section C.

2.3 The second stage involves the submission of the proposed programme to the awarding body responsible for giving final approval to the proposed provision. All the College's partners have formal processes for programme approval. In the case of Pearson this involves notification of proposed provision. The three partner universities have more extensive approval processes. College processes are designed to take account of student opinion and the views of employers. External academic advice is built into partner processes. Roles and responsibilities are clear and communicated through College documentation. The team finds that the College has appropriate systems, processes, policies and procedures in place for the design, development and approval of programmes and changes to existing programmes. These policies and procedures allow the Expectation B1 to be met in theory.

2.4 The review team looked at College policy and process documents relating to programme approval and modification. The team met staff with responsibility for programme approval and saw a demonstration of the electronic system used to log approval decisions. The review team also read documents relating to recent approvals of new programmes and changes to existing programmes.

2.5 Recent examples of programme approval and programme amendment demonstrate that the processes described above operate effectively and as intended. Before detailed

development of a new programme commences a business case is developed which is signed off by the College's Strategy Manager (Curriculum). New programmes must fit strategically with the College's mission. The HE Coordinator approaches the College's preferred partner and if the proposed course appears to be feasible, a Programme Approval Panel is established to develop the programme documentation to be submitted for formal external approval. During the planning stage, support services are involved and the College consults with students, alumni and employers. Approval by any of the College's three partner universities involves scrutiny of the proposed programme by a panel informed by external academic advice. These panels may set conditions for the approval of proposals which need to be completed and signed off before programmes commence. In the case of Pearson programmes, the awarding organisation provides detailed specifications and the external approval stage is much lighter. Forms and templates for amending programmes from partner universities are available to staff on the College's staff intranet. Approval of minor amendments is usually granted through a desk-based process.

2.6 The documentation produced in relation to the approval of new programmes and amendment of continuing programmes is thorough and provides a basis for assuring both the quality and standards of programmes. The processes of approval involve a broad range of stakeholders. The College's Course Builder system facilitates logging of decisions at key points during the approval process as well as the updating of documentation during the development phase. However, the College has recognised that aspects of the initial, College-based stage of programme approval are ad hoc and informal. Action is being taken to strengthen the processes deployed during the initial stages of programme development by formalising the role of the Programme Approval Panel in relation to signing off the final stages of the internal process. This is particularly relevant to Pearson programmes where the external stage is less extensive. This change is in the process of implementation and the review team **affirms** the introduction of a robust, formal, internal programme approval/re-approval process.

2.7 The review team concludes that the College, with the support of Pearson and its university partners, has appropriate policies in place for the design, development and approval of programmes in order to set and maintain academic standards and assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities. Staff are aware of these policies and procedures and operate them effectively. Expectation B1 is therefore met and the associated level of risk in this area 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***

**Findings**

2.8 The College has a combined approach when dealing with further and higher education provision. Most of the policies that the College uses to operate within reflect this dual approach. The College uses the HE Guide to Admissions to assist staff in the distinction of provision, also referring to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). The method in which students can apply is two-fold. Full-time students apply through the normal UCAS route and part-time students apply directly to the College. Programme leaders interview students for their respective courses.

2.9 The College has in place procedures for student recruitment which work effectively. Although the College currently does not have any international students, there is a staff member who has been appropriately trained in dealing with International student applications. Applicants have appropriate support if they need assistance from the College. This can be done either through face-to-face meetings or by phoning the College directly. The HE Guide to Admissions is the main reference document for staff who conducts interviews. The policies and procedures for admissions allow this Expectation to be met in theory.

2.10 The review team examined the relevant documentation that the College provided, including the HE Admission Flowchart, response letters that the College provides to applicants and all other relevant evidence and information provided within the self-evaluation document. This was then used as the basis for questioning the College through several meetings that included meeting students and teaching and support staff. The team questioned the staff about the effectiveness and questioned students on their experience regarding the recruitment, selection and admission process.

2.11 The two systems that the College has in place work effectively. There is a well established relationship between the curriculum staff and the admissions team, allowing for smooth transitions of information. All relevant staff are trained in the use of the UCAS software and in processing applications. The admissions team is able to process applications face to face or online. This was confirmed through the meetings the team conducted with staff and students.

2.12 All relevant students are appropriately informed regarding the APL.

2.13 Upon a new programme leader being appointed, a succession plan will be drawn up allowing for appropriate shadowing during interviews to ensure relevant knowledge.

2.14 The level of communication that the College has with each of its awarding bodies differs. However, the College effectively has delegated control over the recruitment, selection and admission process. There is no direct communication or prescribed documentation by Pearson regarding recruitment, selection and the College operates within the remit of their policy.

2.15 The support that the College provides to applicants is easily assessable and appreciated by students. The review team heard repeatedly that when a student needed

appropriate information or guidance the College responded promptly and resolved, where possible, any issues that the applicants had.

2.16 The review team finds that, although the College may not have detailed policies outlining every aspect of the recruitment, selection and admission process, that they carry out this task effectively and give appropriate support to applicants. Therefore the review team finds that the College meets this Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.17 With respect to its university-validated and franchised provision, the requirements for systematic monitoring review and evaluation are set down in its partnership agreements and detailed in the operations manuals for each programme. The College has in place therefore a requirement for systematic annual course review and evaluation which is required to take into account the views of relevant stakeholders, and which is underpinned by an organisational and committee structure. All programmes are required to produce an annual report (AMR and or CRE). The College uses a variety of mechanisms to gather student feedback and opinions including the Internal Student Survey (ISS), an annual survey of all College higher education students designed to gather their feedback on College programmes, learning resources and support networks, programme committees which include student representation and employer feedback reports on students in the workplace. The College has in place a policy of teaching observation for all staff. The teaching observation procedure is documented in the Observation Guide which is a report template and is linked to the College's Teaching and Learning Strategy. The observation process for higher education has criteria which are different from the further education-observation process.

2.18 Oversight of these processes and procedures lies with a formal committee structure consisting of the Teaching and Learning Committee (formerly the Academic Standards Committee) which is the senior College committee, the HE Quality Board (HEQB) and the Higher Education Practitioners Forum. The College employs a Higher Education Coordinator to lead, support and provide guidance in the fulfilment of these processes.

2.19 Pearson does not set down a formal requirement for periodic review of programmes but does require the College to have in place a similar system for their monitoring annual review and evaluation. Consequently, the College uses the same procedures and processes for annual monitoring and review for its Higher National programmes as for its undergraduate programmes.

2.20 The College has in place a Teaching and Learning Strategy which sets out the College's approach to continuous improvement in teaching and learning with a particular focus on the delivery of employability skills.

2.21 The team considers that the design of these processes and procedures allows the expectation to be met in theory.

2.22 The team tested the Expectation by examining a wide range of documentary evidence including minutes of relevant committees, AMRs (now replaced by CREs), external examiner reports, reports of the observation process, the staff development strategy and staff development records. The team met staff, students and employers to assess the effectiveness of these processes and procedure in practice.

2.23 The CREs which now incorporate the AMRs, reveal that the College processes are thorough and reflective and make appropriate use of student feedback and the reports of its

external examiners. These reports are prepared by programme leaders working with their course teams. The minutes of the HEQB, which is chaired by the Strategy Manager Curriculum, do not, however, show that these reports are systematically presented or discussed. Similarly the minutes of the Teaching and Learning Committee or its predecessor the Academic Standards Committee do not record any discussion of matters relating to Higher Education with the sole exception of the receipt and approval of the College SED in December 2014. The team considers that a more systematic consideration of the reports of the College Quality Assurance processes would inform the College's strategic approach to enhancement and a recommendation to that effect appears in the judgement on Enhancement.

2.24 Most CREs have clear action plans and course committee minutes show that these action plans are monitored.

2.25 The College gathers and analyses information from the National Student Survey and from its own internal student satisfaction surveys, from module evaluations and from the informal meetings of the EABs to ensure that its improvement strategies take account of the views of students and employers. Much of the outcome of these processes is brought together by the HE Coordinator in the form of an annual Quality Improvement Plan.

2.26 The HE Coordinator prepares annual summary of the issues and good practice identified by external examiners and this is presented to and discussed at the HEQB and the HE Practitioners' Forum.

2.27 The College teaching observation procedure is in the early stages of a differentiated approach for Higher Education teaching. The team **affirms** the introduction of a differentiated teacher observation process between higher education and further education and the links it has established so far to the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). As part of the observation process observers ask the teacher to leave so that they can have a twenty minute conversation with students about the teaching they are experiencing. This enables the observer to gather immediate student feedback on their perception of the quality of the teaching session and to gauge consistency of delivery. The provision of learner voice input into the teacher observation process is an example of **good practice**.

2.28 The support for and application of the principle of Constructive Alignment is understood by staff and ensures that assessment processes are clearly linked to intended learning outcomes.

2.29 The team found that students are well supported in their development as independent learners and are able to study their subjects in depth. They comment positively on the availability of learning and support resources and services, and on the availability and quality of the support they receive from both academic and support staff. They also comment positively on the content of and access to the College VLE and their access to learning resources at partner universities. The students comment positively on the use of visiting speakers and of the use of assessment strategies which clearly link their workplace or work placements to their programmes of study. Students on the BA Dance Professional Practice, whose programme is delivered at a commercial dance studio, and those on the performing arts programme, are particularly appreciative of their opportunities to learn in a real work environment. The team considers that the model of teaching and learning used on the BA Dance Professional Practice is an example of good practice as identified in Expectation B4.

2.30 The College's approach to staff continuous professional development (CPD) is formally recorded with respect to College-led initiatives but is less well recorded with respect to higher education processes or scholarly activity. College policy is to support such activity where it can be shown to be vital to the role of the applicant.

2.31 Overall the team considers that learning resources and support are in place to support student learning and achievement at a level appropriate for higher education and that there are effective assurance and review processes in place to ensure that the quality and standards of provision is maintained. Therefore the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.32 The College sets out its aspirations for the personal development of its students first in its Strategy document. These aims are then embedded into a teaching and learning strategy, programme specifications and course handbooks where in most cases there are clear statements of the academic, personal and professional development the programmes are designed to facilitate. The College has in place systems for the annual evaluation of the services it provides to support students' academic, personal and professional development. It also has a strategic commitment to ensuring that its staff are competent and up to date in their own skills and knowledge. There is a formal developmental process of teaching observation in place to ensure the quality of teaching and to provide support for teachers where necessary. The College provides a range of induction activities to ensure that students understand the range of services and facilities it provides. The main College campus accommodation is modern and well equipped with college-wide wireless computer access, extensive IT facilities with specialist support on-site, library, social and recreational space, a dedicated higher education learning space adjacent to the library and a range of catering facilities.

2.33 The team concludes that the design of the systems and services for student support together with the provision of resources allows this Expectation to be met in theory.

2.34 The team tested the Expectation by examining a range of documentary evidence including records of service evaluation and in meetings with staff and students. The services, resources and facilities which are focused on providing support to higher education students include the library, a VLE, a specialist careers advice and guidance service, and tutorial support for students. Students confirm that these services are accessible and facilitate their academic, personal and professional development.

2.35 The College has arrangements through the partnership agreements with its degree-awarding bodies for staff and student to use their resources which most students confirm they can use and find helpful.

2.36 The College makes extensive use of visiting speakers from industry, commerce and the professions to enhance the learning opportunities of students. Students confirm that they find this enriching, it gives them confidence that their learning programmes are current and relevant, and adds to the enjoyment of their programmes generally. The extensive use of visiting speakers from industry across a variety of programmes to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential is an example of **good practice**.

2.37 The College makes extensive use of its VLE to support student learning, and to encourage independent and research-based learning. The use of work-based and placement learning, of which the BA Dance Professional Practice is a particularly good example, ensures that students develop their learning and knowledge in a work-related context. Staff and students confirm that the ability to teach and to learn in this setting is a particular strength of this provision, giving the opportunity to understand theory and develop practice in a practical, professional dance setting. The collaboration between the College and a commercial dance organisation to deliver teaching and assessment by industry professionals in a real setting which enhances the student learning experience is an example of **good practice**.



2.38 The College teaching observation process is differentiated for its higher education teaching. College teaching staff and those responsible for conducting observations are aware of the UK Professional Standards Framework. The College is exploring developing alignment between the Framework and the criteria used to evaluate teaching.

2.39 College resources include a dedicated higher education study space attached to the library, College-wide wireless computer access and the VLE which is accessible off site.

2.40 Overall, the review team concludes that the College has in place a range of effective mechanisms for enabling student development and achievement. It is committed to developing an environment which supports its students and has in place processes for ensuring that the resources and services it provides are evaluated. The team concludes therefore 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**

2.41 The College does not have a specific student engagement policy, however, it does hold an aspirational target of having student representation on every committee to allow for a high level of transparency. The College actively elects student representatives from each course. The College provides funds for the Students' Union to elect a fully paid sabbatical officer. The Student Union President co-chairs the newly formed Student Representative Group (SRG). The President also sits on the Higher Education Quality Board (HEQB) and the Higher Education Forum (HEF). The College makes use of the National Student Survey (NSS) and uses the Internal Student Survey (ISS), which is conducted annually, to provide statistics on their provision. The College allow students to provide feedback while carrying out higher education teaching observations.

2.42 Although the College actively elects student representatives, they are not trained, with the exception of the Student Union President. The elected student representatives meet with their course tutors in a formal manner every semester to provide feedback, however, this may differ from course to course. The system the College has in place for the formalised capturing of student engagement, through the SRG, is progressive. However, as this is a new initiative, there is insufficient evidence to prove its effectiveness. The College actively sought to increase the intake of statistical data through setting up their own ISS. The use of student feedback in the higher education teaching observation allows students the chance to directly give formal feedback regarding the quality of their teaching. The team concludes that the systems the College has in place allows this Expectation to be met in theory.

2.43 The team examined the relevant documentation, including the data generated from the ISS and NSS, relevant minutes from meetings, the student submission, CRE and all other relevant information and evidence provided by the College. The team then used this as the basis to question students and staff about the effectiveness of student engagement within the College.

2.44 The review team found that student representatives were able to carry out their respective roles effectively, however, students commented that training could provide additional support and make the position more effective.

2.45 The College has formalised systems and approaches for engaging students. Students complete the ISS and NSS on an annual basis allowing for the College make changes as a result of the statistical data. The College's approach to formalising student engagement has led to the creation of the SRG, allowing student representatives a platform to provide feedback and receive regular updates. The SRG has a direct reporting structure that is linked to the HEQB and the HEF. The review team **affirms** the setting up of the student representative group formalising student engagement in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

2.46 The College also has an informal system of capturing student feedback conducted through weekly meetings that students have with their tutors. This may differ from course to course. However, as students appear to have an extremely good relationship with their respective tutors, they feel conformable to approach them regarding any issue. The team found that there are several issues that appear to be ongoing. However, the appropriate staff members are aware of what these issues are and what needs to be done to resolve them.

This reassured the team that the lines of communication between the students and staff are working effectively.

2.47 The review team found that the collection of module feedback is irregularly captured from course to course. As there is not a centralised process of capturing module feedback, each programme leader has control over how formal they make this process. The team found that this did not pose any issues as the students felt that they all had appropriate opportunities to provide feedback to their respective tutors directly and through Court Committee Meetings.

2.48 The review team finds that although there is not a centralised strategy regarding student engagement, the College provides ample opportunities for students to voice their concerns in a formal and informal manner. Therefore the review team finds that the College has met this Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.49 Assessment is conducted within the frameworks provided by the College's awarding organisation, Pearson, and its university partners. These frameworks detail the College's responsibilities for the design and scheduling of assessments, grading, moderation, the handling of matters related to individual learners, and the holding of assessment boards. The College provides guidance to staff on general principles of assessment for higher education and the requirements of its degree-awarding bodies and organisation. The College does not have its own separate assessment policies, procedures and protocols. Assessment requirements are made available to students in programme specifications and handbooks. Assessment information for each programme is made available to staff in operations manuals. All documents are accessible through the College's VLE and intranet.

2.50 The review team finds that there are weaknesses in the College's processes and procedures for aspects of assessment and the recognition of prior learning. The systems, policies, processes and procedures that are in place do not provide for the consistent application of Pearson or university partner regulations in all aspects and do not allow Expectation B6 to be met in theory.

2.51 The review team looked at documentation setting out assessment requirements, including programme specifications and handbooks. The team read examples of assignment briefs, internal moderation, and feedback provided to students on their work. The team looked at operations manuals, responsibility lists minutes of exam boards and general guidance available to staff on assessment. The team talked to students about their views on assessment and feedback and to staff about assessment processes and the conduct of assessment boards.

2.52 Assessment strategies are designed and approved by the College's awarding partners as part of the process of programme approval. The College is responsible for the setting of assignments, first-marking, second-marking and moderation, and giving feedback for all provision. In addition, arrangements are in place for external moderation by the relevant awarding organisation for all provision. All student work is checked using anti-plagiarism software. Students receive extensive advice and guidance on good academic practice. Students are clear about what is expected of them in order to demonstrate that they have met learning outcomes and what they need to do to achieve good marks. They confirm that assignments are relevant, provide progressively greater challenges, and that marking is fair. Students find the feedback that they receive on their work is timely and helpful.

2.53 The College states that it has no policies and procedures for the conduct of assessment boards as it is compelled to use the policies of its awarding bodies. Pearson, its awarding organisation, expects the College to develop and publish its own regulations and procedures and expects the College to hold assessment boards for its higher national programmes. These boards should have published regulations detailing scheduling, membership, terms of reference, operation and administration, appeals, assessment of students with disabilities and anonymity of students in assessment. Independence of chairing and of board secretaries is advised. None of these structures, policies and

procedures are formally in place at the College. This lack of regulatory framework for Pearson programmes has led to a recommendation in Expectation A2.1 to develop, approve and implement a regulatory and procedural framework for the assessment and award of credit for Pearson programmes.

2.54 The three degree-awarding bodies require that university regulations and procedures are employed, but the expected degree of College involvement and responsibility for assessment boards varies. The Northumbria University Newcastle regulations state that an examination board should take place at the College at the end of the academic year. It may be chaired by the University or the College. The board makes final decisions regarding progression; decisions on awarding degrees have to be ratified by the University's Progression and Award board. Teesside University operates two-tier assessment boards with module boards held at the College chaired by a university representative. The Operational Manual for degrees awarded by Teesside University states that the minutes of assessment boards and confirmed results are circulated between the College and the University for information and reference. In the case of the University of Sunderland, the University chairs and manages all assessment boards.

2.55 The College does not keep formal minutes of those boards that are held at the College which record academic decisions. Staff state that they do not have access to assessment board minutes compiled by degree-awarding body partners, and rely on informal notes. This lack of formal minutes has led to a recommendation in Expectation A2.1 to work with its degree-awarding bodies on this issue.

2.56 Pearson provides guidance to providers on appropriate processes and procedures for the handling of applications, for the recognition of prior learning, reasonable adjustment, academic misconduct and mitigating circumstances. The three university partners provide rules, regulations and guidance on these matters and reference is made to these regulations in programme handbooks for students and operations manuals for staff. While policies and procedures in relation to these matters are laid down by the university, they have to be operated by the College. There is no clear College guidance on the operation of these policies. Staff are not clear about the extent of delegation or their responsibilities in these matters. As a result, decisions on these matters are not made consistently or fully open to oversight and scrutiny, therefore potentially undermining the fairness and reliability of the assessment process. The review team **recommends** that by January 2016 the College confirm with its degree-awarding bodies the extent of its delegated authority in academic malpractice, recognition of prior learning, reasonable adjustment, mitigating circumstances, academic appeals and the conduct of assessment boards.

2.57 The review team concludes that the College does not operate fully equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment. While the operation of the processes of setting, marking, moderation and provision of feedback are effective, other aspects of the assessment regime lack clarity about responsibilities. College structures, policies and procedures have not been developed in line with the expectations of Pearson for its Higher National provision. Processes for assuring the effective implementation of university regulations are not fully developed. Students could be disadvantaged if these weaknesses in the operation of the College's governance structures are not addressed. The expectation B6 is not met and the associated level of risk in this area is moderate.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.58 The College relies on its degree-awarding bodies and Pearson for the selection and appointment of its external examiners. The terms of engagement and duties expected of the external examiners are set down by the degree-awarding bodies and Pearson but are all broadly similar. The degree-awarding bodies receive and own the external examiner reports which are then shared with the College. Each of the university partners sets out the requirements for external examiners to moderate student work, to attend assessment and awards boards and to prepare a report that identifies recommendations for action and examples of good practice. Similarly, Pearson determines the obligations for its external examiners with respect to the moderation of students' work and the preparation of reports. Pearson external examiners are not required to attend assessment or awards boards.

2.59 The College Higher Education Operations Manual and the operations manuals for individual programmes set out the procedure for consideration of external examiner reports and requires that the comments of external examiners are used to inform the annual course review and evaluation process and the production of an annual action plan. Responses to external examiner reports are managed by the awarding bodies and the College is required to send its comments to the relevant university for inclusion in the formal response. Formal responses to Pearson programmes are not required.

2.60 The design of the mechanisms for working with external examiners, disseminating information provided by external examiners and responding to issues raised in their reports allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.61 The team tested this expectation by examining external examiner reports, responses to the reports, annual review reports, minutes of course committee meetings, course team minutes, and minutes of the HEQB, meetings with staff and students.

2.62 Upon receipt from the partner university, or in the case of Higher National reports, from Pearson direct, the reports are considered by programme teams and by the HE Coordinator who prepares a summary report which is discussed at the HEQB. External examiner reports and the coordinator's summary are also discussed at the HEF. The College publishes its external examiner reports, redacted to prevent the disclosure of student names in the case of Pearson reports, on its VLE in order that students have access to them. Students confirm that they are aware of and have access to these reports. Reports are discussed in course committee meetings and are referred to in the production of the annual course review and evaluation reports. External examiner reports make it clear that the College responds to the recommendations for action and the dissemination of good practice they make.

2.63 In the case of franchised programmes, for example, Business Management, the external examiners have been asked to identify some commentary specific to each of the partnership providers and this been useful to the programme team.

2.64 The team finds that the College is responsive to external examiner reports: that they are available to and in some cases discussed with students, and that they are used to disseminate good practice and to promote improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Therefore the team concludes that there are processes in place to

make scrupulous uses of external examiners. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.65 The College is responsible for annual monitoring of its provision. All programmes are required to produce an annual CRE. This includes student data and feedback, targets, and an action plan. Where an AMR is produced for an awarding body, this is included in the CRE. The latter are submitted to curriculum heads and then to the HE Coordinator.

2.66 There is no College process for a periodic programme review. Programmes provided in collaboration with the College's three degree-awarding bodies are validated for a fixed period of time and are reapproved using the same processes as approval. Pearson programmes are in open-ended approval. Pearson is responsible for issuing updated and revised specifications.

2.67 The team finds that the policies and processes in place for annual monitoring of all programmes and the periodic re-approval of programmes offered with its university partners, are designed to assist in the setting and maintenance of standards and the assurance and enhancement of quality. There is no periodic review by the College of its Pearson programmes. Overall these policies and processes allow the Expectation B8 to be met in theory.

2.68 The review team examined documents which set out the processes and procedures for annual monitoring, and read examples of CREs and AMRs. The team examined minutes of the HEQB, Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) and its predecessor the Academic Standards Committee (ASC) and sampled minutes of course teams and course committees. The review team discussed the preparation of AMRs and CREs and the processes for re-approval of programmes with staff and students. The review team also examined documents relating to the re-approval of a programme which had previously run.

2.69 The College's systems, processes, policies and procedures relating to annual monitoring operate effectively at programme level. Programme monitoring takes place against clear criteria provided by the awarding bodies and the College.

2.70 Following a recommendation in the 2010 review report to develop course-level monitoring processes that were more evaluative, a new College annual programme monitoring process, the CRE, was developed. These cover course delivery, teaching and student achievement. Where produced, the AMR is included within the CRE and adds further dimensions to the review. All reviews draw upon a broad range of evidence including student statistics, external examiners' reports, student feedback, employer feedback, and module evaluations. Reviews are reflective and identify programme strengths and weaknesses; they also include action plans to address weakness. The review team **affirms** the introduction of the Course Review and Evaluation process in response to the recommendations from the previous review report.

2.71 AMRs for university partners and CREs are produced by programme leaders. CRE action plans are discussed at some course team meetings. However, there is no requirement for course teams to sign reviews off before they are submitted. Student feedback informs AMRs and CREs, but students are not directly involved in compiling them, nor is there a mechanism by which the completed reviews are shared with them.



2.72 CREs inform the work of the HE Coordinator, course leaders and departmental managers. Reviews are sent to curriculum heads responsible for the staff teaching on the programme. All CREs are stored on the T-Drive and accessible to staff. The HE Coordinator receives all AMRs and CREs and reads them to identify items of good practice and issues to be brought forward for discussion at HEQB and HEF. However, there is no formal requirement for CREs to be considered at a cross-programme level by HEQB or TLC thus limiting the ability of senior committees and the College to maintain oversight of its provision through annual monitoring. The use of quality assurance processes to inform Enhancement is discussed further in that section and has led to a recommendation to address the lack of strategic oversight.

2.73 Periodic review of programmes offered with the College's university partners takes the form of re-approval using the same processes as first time approval. The operation of the College programme approval system and its interface with the systems of its three partner universities has been discussed above in section B1, together with an affirmation of the action taken by the College to strengthen the initial internal stages of programme approval. Pearson makes periodic changes to its programme specifications and regulations in order to maintain currency. However, within the review processes operated at the College, there is no formal cycle of periodic review of its Pearson programmes in order to look at development and performance over a longer period. The review team **recommends** that by April 2016 the College develop and implement a process for the periodic review of its Pearson programmes.

2.74 The review team concludes that the College has appropriate policies and procedures in place for the annual monitoring of its academic provision and for the periodic review of its provision offered with partner universities. These processes are set out clearly and implemented effectively at programme level and meet the requirements of the College's partner universities where relevant. In the case of Pearson programmes which do not require regular re-approval, periodic review is absent. Expectation B8 is met, however, the risk in this area is moderate in the light of the limited College-level oversight of annual monitoring and the absence of periodic review of Pearson programmes.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

2.75 The College has a combined approach when dealing with further and higher education provision. Most of the policies that it operates within reflect this dual approach. The College operates within its Complaints Policy and their Academic Appeals Policy. Other relevant policies include the Harassment and Bullying Policy, the Student Disciplinary Procedure and the Fitness to Study Policy. They state a clear staged process in which a student can appeal an academic decision or make a complaint. They are largely the same process in which the student will first attempt to resolve the issue through the College's process before being refereed to their respective awarding body's appeal and complaint policy. Within the degree- awarding bodies, if the issue is still not resolved it can be passed onto the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). Within the Pearson provision it is unable to be passed to the OIA and must be resolved by the awarding organisation.

2.76 The College has a standard system that works correctly. It makes use of separate policies regarding academic appeals and student complaints, allowing for distinctions to be drawn. The College captures any formal complaints, through student services, in a spreadsheet. They give details of when the complaint was raised, by whom, and what the decision was upon resolution. The policies and procedures of the College allows the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.77 The review team examined relevant documentation, including all policies mentioned above, the student complaints database, external examiner reports, relevant minutes of meetings, CRE and all other relevant information and evidence provided by the College. The team used this as the basis for questioning the staff and students about how effective the processes and procedures that the College has in place are, paying close attention to the resolution of student complaints and academic appeals.

2.78 The review team found through both student meetings that all of the students felt confident in knowing what to do if they wanted to appeal an academic judgement or make a complaint. The students were appropriately told through each of their inductions and knew the information would be on the VLE and course handbook if they needed to know more specific information about the processes.

2.79 The College informed the team that although some of the complaints may be considered trivial, the student has the ultimate authority to formalise their complaint, regardless of the potential seriousness. Issues that are raised and resolved are not all recorded. For example, the review team noted two complaints that students raised directly with their course team and not through a course committee or alternative means. The result of students' actions led to a change of timetabling and module briefs. These were resolved at programme level and did not appear on the database which is not therefore a comprehensive depository of all student complaints in the wider sense raised over the past four years.

2.80 The College has only had two academic appeals over the past three years. Although it has an internal appeals system, in practice, both appeals were referred to the respective awarding body. In both cases the appeal was not allowed to proceed on the grounds of insufficient evidence as there had been no procedural issue and the grades had

been arrived at entirely fairly and transparently. This proves, in a somewhat limited sense, as both cases were resolved at the respective awarding body, that the system the College has in place to resolve academic appeals entirely rests with the awarding body. However, the review team was concerned at the level of confusion within the teaching staff around what are and are not valid grounds for an academic appeal. However, this has not manifested itself into any obvious side effects. The students understand the appeals procedure. Furthermore, although the College has an internal appeals procedure, in actuality all academic appeals would be referred to their respective awarding body for resolution. Due to the reasons given above this has led to a recommendation in Expectation B6 around clarifying the extent of the College's delegated powers.

2.81 The College has an insufficient regulatory and procedural framework for the assessment and award of credit for Pearson programmes. Although no student on a Pearson approved programme has made an academic appeal to date, the lack of a formally constituted College assessment board has potential serious implications for students who wish to make an academic appeal. The seriousness of this issue this has led to a recommendation in section A2.1.

2.82 The review team concludes that the College has sufficiently demonstrated the ability to resolve student complaints and academic appeals. The information on complaints is not captured in a consistent manner as only complaints that students choose to make formal are captured and logged. However the outcomes are fair and students had no concerns with the processes and procedures to date. Therefore the review team finds that the College has met the Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.83 The College does not have degree-awarding powers. The awarding bodies and organisation are ultimately responsible for the academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities of the awards the College delivers on their behalf. However, the College does have responsibilities for managing arrangements with employers for the management of work-based and placement learning where this contributes to the achievement of learning outcomes.

2.84 The College encourages all programmes to incorporate work placements, work based projects, work-related learning and work-based learning, as appropriate. The College requires all programmes to have an EAB to ensure currency and relevance of its programmes. Some of the foundation degrees require students to undertake learning in the workplace and Higher National programmes are designed to incorporate work-based, work-related or work placement learning. These requirements are set out in programme handbooks. The College does not share or delegate responsibility for teaching or assessment. It does however invite employers to comment on student performance in work or placement settings, such comments being taken into account by academic staff when making assessment judgements. The design of the process for the management and approval of work-based learning opportunities and work placements allows the Expectation to be met.

2.85 The operation of the EABs is variable and according to the College they are not formal meetings and are not minuted. Furthermore, while the Higher Education Operations Manual says that involvement of employers is essential to all provision, it goes on to say that 'an employer advisory board is very useful'. However, it is not a requirement. The College makes extensive use of visiting speakers from industry, commerce and the professions to enhance the learning opportunities of students. This is detailed in B4 and has been identified as an example of good practice. The College works with a private provider to enable students on the BA Dance Professional Practice to receive tuition and develop their knowledge and practical skills in a professional dance setting. This is detailed in B4 and is identified as an example of good practice.

2.86 The College, through its employer contacts, seeks to assure itself that work-based learning and work placement opportunities are appropriate for students in terms of resourcing and the relationship to the learning aims and objectives of their programme. The College does not provide employer handbooks relating to academic programmes but does provide Work Placement Guidelines for Employers which set out the respective responsibilities with respect to health and safety and safeguarding. The meeting with support staff confirmed that all work placements are checked by the College as suitable in terms of health and safety arrangements and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) requirements. This meeting also confirmed that, where programmes require work placements for students not in employment, students either select their own organisation to work with or the College provides them with support in obtaining a suitable placement. Meetings with staff confirm that employers are invited to provide feedback on student performance to support personal development.

2.87 Overall, the team concludes that the College has effective processes in place for managing and monitoring work-based learning opportunities provided through arrangements with employers. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk 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**

2.88 The College does not offer research degrees and so this Expectation is not applicable to this provider.

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

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

2.90 Of the 10 applicable Expectations in this judgement area nine are met, eight of which are judged to be low risk. The exception is Expectation B8 which, while met, is judged to be moderate risk because of the lack of College-level oversight of the annual monitoring process and the lack of a periodic re-approval process for Pearson programmes. Expectation B6 is not met, but judged to be a moderate risk. The issues are similar to those identified in Part A around the lack of a College regulatory structure for the award of credit and the lack of clarity of the College's delegated powers from its degree-awarding bodies. These issues mean that the quality of student learning opportunities could be put at risk. However, there is no evidence that students have been disadvantaged yet and the review team thus judged the risk as moderate, but with the potential to become serious if action is not taken to address the issues.

2.91 There are three areas of good practice identified in this judgement area, one in Expectation B3 about the use of the learner voice in the teacher observation process and two in Expectation B4, both concerned with the extensive use of employers in course delivery (these areas of good practice are also linked to Expectation B10).

2.92 There are two recommendations in this area, in Expectations B6 and B8. The recommendation in Expectation B6 is concerned with the confirmation of the College's delegated powers from its degree-awarding body partners and that in Expectation B8 with the development of a periodic review process for Pearson programmes. However, both of the recommendations in A2.1 are also highly relevant to this judgement area. In addition, the recommendation under Enhancement is relevant to this judgement area.

2.93 There are four affirmations in this judgement area, in Expectations B1, B3, B5 and B8. These are concerned respectively with the introduction of a more formal College internal programme approval process; of a differentiated teacher observation process; of a student representative group; and of a more robust annual monitoring process.

2.94 The review team notes that of the 10 applicable Expectations, nine have been met and one not met. While two Expectations have moderate risks attached there are no serious risk in this judgement area. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

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

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

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

##### **Findings**

3.1 The College has an information policy and an additional mapping document in which it allocates the responsibilities of each of the tasks relating to information. Additional policies include the social media policy. All relevant information is available to view on the College's website including, but not limited to, course documents, committee minutes, student support information and key College policies. On an annual basis, the College produces a prospectus that is strictly for their higher education provision, containing all relevant information for potential applicants. The College uses the VLE and an internal College drive to store all relevant information.

3.2 The four main groups that sign off published information are the marketing team, course teams, degree-awarding bodies and the HE Coordinator. Through following the structure laid out in the mapping document the College can effectively maintain a well checked output of information. The College has an effective structure for the publishing and maintenance of all appropriate information, which allows the Expectation to be met in theory.

3.3 The review team examined all relevant documentation, including, but not limited to, course handbooks, programme handbooks, module descriptors, the VLE and staff intranet. The team attended a detailed demonstration about how the College maintained and updated their information through the VLE, staff intranet and the use of the internal drive. Furthermore, the team questioned staff and students about the appropriateness, usefulness and effectiveness of the College's internal systems including investigations into the accuracy of information.

3.4 The use of the VLE is widespread throughout the College and is used in conjunction with all courses. The VLE is currently being updated and the College believes that will make it easier for staff members to access and upload information. The responsibility for uploading course information is delegated to the respective programme leaders. The College assesses the standard of documentation uploaded and the level at which each course uses the VLE by allocating a gold, silver or bronze award. Although the use of awards is general a good idea, ultimately there is no incentive to encourage each of the courses to reach a gold award. The team found that students responded very positively when questioned about their experience with the VLE and that staff receive appropriate training in how to use it effectively.

3.5 The College also publishes the external examiner reports on the VLE for the students to read, except the second part of the Pearson report as this contains direct information relating to each student. The team found that most of the students were aware that this report was held on the VLE and that some course teams used it as a forum to discuss the outcome of each of the reports.

3.6 On-track is part of the College's purpose-built internal system. It is used as a depository of information around each of the students. Within this software each student has the ability to set targets based around academic achievements. This can be seen in each of the respective VLE areas and can also be set by staff. The College can then use the collected information to produce general and bespoke reports.



3.7 The review team saw a detailed example of how the College creates and monitors the information around each of the courses, which is produced through Course Builder. Within this, the College is able to update, monitor and check the accuracy of all course information. Every year every course is updated and checked and requires a six stage sign-off before the course is allowed to run. This information is directly linked to the website and once it has been confirmed will automatically update all relevant fields. The College uses the same process when creating a new course before sending the relevant information off to their awarding body to be approved. All relevant documentation is then stored on the internal drive that can be accessed by staff. Therefore, the review team finds that the use of in-house developed software to provide a single source for information on courses with multiple sign-offs that is annually updated and ensures that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy is a feature of **good practice**.

3.8 The review team concludes that the College effectively manages and monitors all appropriate information that they have control over. Therefore, the review team finds that the College has met this Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

3.10 The Expectation in Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision is met and the associated risk level is low. There is one area of good practice in this judgement area associated with the use of software to develop a single source for information with multiple sign-offs. There are no recommendations or affirmations associated with this judgement area. In addition no recommendations, affirmations or areas of good practice located elsewhere in the report are particularly related to this judgement area.

3.11 Given that the applicable Expectation is met and low risk, the review team finds that the quality of the provider's information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The student experience is at the heart of the College's strategy document which covers all students under the One College approach. Within this overarching approach there are sub-strategies, for example, for teaching and learning, and a strategy for higher education. The College's deliberative bodies responsible for strategy are the Board of Governors and the TLC. Beneath these bodies, the HEQB has responsibility for discussing enhancement and initiating change to enhance the experience of learners engaged in higher education programmes. The HEF, which brings together staff who teach on higher education programmes, has in its remit the sharing of best practice and consideration of the means of enhancement. HEF has neither duties nor powers, but may propose items to HEQB for consideration. Although referred to as a subcommittee of the TLC, HEQB does not have a formal reporting line to the TLC. The terms of reference of HEQB are unclear on reporting arrangements, membership and chairing. There is no regular passage of business in the form of minutes or standing agenda items between HEQB and TLC. Communication between the HEQB and senior committees primarily depends on the presence of key individuals at meetings.

4.2 The systems, processes, policies and procedures in place at the College are designed to support enhancement through continuous improvement and dissemination of good practice. However, at a strategic level there is no clear path that facilitates the development of a higher education dimension to College strategy, nor any focused strategic plan for enhancing higher education provision which identifies deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The policies and processes in place do not allow the College to meet the Expectation in theory. A recommendation is noted in paragraph 4.8.

4.3 The review team read documents relating to the College's strategic plans and the College's structures and processes that support enhancement. This included reading minutes of College committees, AMRs and CREs. The team heard from academic and professional staff at different levels about the College's approach to enhancement. The College provided the review team with examples of recent enhancement initiatives and mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice. The team discussed the College's approach to feedback and continuous improvement with students and employers.

4.4 The review team found that the College has effective policies and processes in place to support continuous improvement and the dissemination of good practice at programme level, but lacks a strategic approach to the Enhancement of higher education provision at senior levels.

4.5 The College's processes for gathering and responding to student feedback, and for teaching observation, support an ethos of continuous improvement. Good practice and opportunities for enhancement are identified in AMRs and CREs. The HE Coordinator plays a key role in identifying opportunities for Enhancement raised by internal and external monitoring reports and referring these to the HEQB and the HEF. The HE Coordinator drafts an annual review document for higher education provision using the format of a Quality Assurance Agency Student Self Evaluation Document to complement the College's further education focused self-assessment report. There is no formal action plan for the enhancement of higher education. The Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan is a

working document which tracks actions identified by the HE Coordinator and HEQB in the course of their work.

4.6 The College collects and responds to feedback from students, external examiners and employers resulting in continuous improvement and enhancement of its provision. Students are encouraged to make suggestions for improvement through surveys and course committees and state that the College responds constructively to their input. A newly established cross-college meeting of higher education student representatives has been established to support student discussion and feedback. The teaching observation scheme, which has been developed specifically for those teaching on higher education programmes, identifies good practice and supports the continuous improvement of teaching. Good practice in teaching is disseminated through CPD events such as the annual conference. Good practice is also identified in AMRs and CREs, which staff can access through the College's intranet, and good practice informs College guidance such as the Higher Education Operations Manual.

4.7 The One College strategy, together with its sub-strategies, aims to meet the needs of all students as individual learners. Where higher education learners have specific needs, these are taken into account by the service concerned, for example in the provision by the library of a dedicated study space. The current HE Strategy is near the end of its life, and the College plans to develop a successor strategy over the coming months. The 2012 -2015 strategy focused on the broader context of higher education and the embedding of new management structures.

4.8 The HE Coordinator reads internal and external feedback and reports to identify good practice and issues to which a response is needed. These are channelled to the HEQB and HEF for discussion and action. This system, combined with effective programme and staff management systems supports continuous improvement and dissemination of good practice at an operational level. However, it does not facilitate the strategic oversight of higher education at institutional level or the engagement of management at the highest level. There is no formal, direct link between HEQB and the senior committees of the College or evidence that senior committees discuss higher education provision on a regular basis. Although staff with responsibility for higher education provision are members or attendees at TLC, the committee does not formally consider minutes or monitoring reports related to higher education. The College is also highly dependent on a small number of individuals, in particular the HE Coordinator, to drive enhancement. These weaknesses in the College's governance structure have the potential to result in insufficient emphasis and priority being given to enhancing quality of learning opportunities for higher education students in the College's high-level planning processes. In the light of these weaknesses, the team **recommends** that by January 2016 the College put in place structures, policies, and procedures to ensure effective strategic oversight of higher education at provider level to inform enhancement initiatives.

4.9 The review team concludes that the College does not have appropriate policies and procedures in place to fully allow deliberate steps to be taken to enhance the quality of learning opportunities. Procedures operate at an operational level and the College is open to student feedback that drives continuous improvement. Opportunities exist for the sharing of good practice. However, policies and procedures do not support a strategic approach to enhancement. College oversight of higher education is not practised at the highest level nor do governance structures ensure an upward flow of higher education related issues to senior committees. The present system has the potential to result in insufficient emphasis and priority being given to enhancing the quality of higher education provision. As a result of these failings the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

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

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

4.11 There are no areas of good practice or affirmations in this judgement area, nor are any of the areas of good practice or affirmations associated with other judgement areas particularly applicable to this judgement area. There is one recommendation in this judgement area which is concerned with a structure and policies for the effective oversight of higher education at provider level.

4.12 The Expectation on enhancement is not met, although the risk is judged to be moderate as the operational level works effectively. While the risk is currently moderate, the weaknesses identified in the College's governance structure for higher education could, without action, lead to serious problems over time with the management of this area. The College has been slow to implement fully a recommendation from the previous review report to 'ensure that all its annual self-evaluations are more evaluative and specifically focused to enable them to be used more effectively in the management of higher education' and is still not making full use of the self-evaluation reports at senior level. This suggests that the College may not be aware of the significance of these issues. The College has no plans for addressing these issues. The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement** to meet UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The College's statement of mission and values on its website defines the College purpose as to '...shape and nurture the most highly prized students in the job market'.

5.2 Employability is a key strategic objective for the College and is embedded within the One College ethos. The College encourages all programmes to incorporate work placements, work-based projects, work-related learning and work-based learning, as appropriate. The College requires all programmes to have an EAB to ensure currency and relevance of its programmes. The operation of the EABs is, however, variable and according to the College they are not formal meetings and are not minuted. It encourages employers to contribute to the design and evaluation of programmes and actively seeks feedback from local employers to ensure that the employability skills developed in College programmes are relevant and current. The College maintains a list of employers who contribute to this process. As part of its teaching and learning strategy the College encourages visiting speakers from local business, public sector organisations and the creative industries to visit the College to embed employability into the delivery of programmes.

5.3 The College provides a specialist careers guidance service with matrix Standard accreditation.

5.4 There was consistent assurance and reinforcement that employability is at the heart of the College's strategy for teaching learning and assessment and in the development of and delivery of programmes. The team considers that the arrangement in place to deliver the BA Dance Professional Practice in the premises of a professional dance studio is a particularly good example of the College's commitment to employability as students are taught by industry professionals employed by the college but working in a real professional dance environment.

5.5 Employers confirms that the College's provision is fit for purpose and prepares students for the world of work.

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

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 29-32 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#)

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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



### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

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

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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