



# Higher Education Review: Wales of Gower College Swansea

May 2016

## Contents

<b>About this review .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Amended judgement - June 2017 .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Key findings .....</b>	<b>5</b>
QAA's judgements about Gower College Swansea .....	5
Good practice .....	5
Recommendations .....	5
About Gower College Swansea .....	6
<b>Explanation of the findings about Gower College Swansea .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations .....	8
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities .....	22
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities.....	44
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities .....	48
5 Commentary on Internationalisation .....	51
<b>Glossary .....</b>	<b>52</b>

## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review: Wales conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Gower College Swansea. The review took place from 16 to 18 May 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Colin Stanfield
- Dr David Wright
- Miss Lucy Bannister (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Gower College Swansea 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: Wales 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 institution's approach to internationalisation
- 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 5. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

In reviewing Gower College Swansea, the review team has also considered internationalisation as a review theme.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>2</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review: Wales](#)<sup>3</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [Glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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

<sup>2</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Review: Wales web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Higher-Education-Review-Wales.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Higher-Education-Review-Wales.aspx).

## Amended judgement - June 2017

### Introduction

In May 2016, Gower College Swansea (the College) underwent a Higher Education Review: Wales, which resulted in the following judgements: the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisation meets UK expectations; the quality of student learning opportunities meets UK expectations; the quality of the information about learning opportunities requires improvement to meet UK expectations; and the enhancement of student learning opportunities meets UK expectations.

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

The College published an action plan in June 2016 describing how it intended to address the recommendations and good practice identified in the review, and has worked over the last 12 months to demonstrate how it has implemented that plan.

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

The desk-based analysis confirmed that the College had successfully addressed recommendations relating to the quality of the information about learning opportunities judgement area and appropriately disseminated good practice identified by the review. Actions in response to recommendations relating to the maintenance of the academic standards of awards, the quality of student learning opportunities and the enhancement of student learning opportunities, which received positive judgements, had also been completed on schedule and contributed to the progress against the quality of the information about learning opportunities judgement area.

### QAA Board decision and amended judgements

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and other 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 review team found that the College had made progress against the recommendations as follows.

### **Recommendation - Expectation A3.1**

With regard to programme approval processes, the College has revised its programme proposal form and now includes new sections that require programme teams to comment on the alignment of the proposal with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement. The Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group (HECQMG) approved the new process and communicated it to Curriculum Leaders through the Higher Education Operational Group.

### **Recommendation - Expectations B1 and A3.1**

In relation to ensuring that all programmes are fully approved before students enrol, the College has a new internal validation procedure approved by the HECQMG. A Strategic Planning Group must approve programme proposals and an Internal Validation Panel must approve any new Pearson programmes. The College holds a curriculum planning event for each learning area, which results in a list of the courses the College will run in the forthcoming academic year. Faculty Administration Officers check that all listed programmes are approved both internally and externally; only then will course codes be generated that enable students to enrol. Additionally, College staff cannot market or add a new higher education programme to UCAS without approval from the Higher Education Manager.

### **Recommendation - Expectation B2**

In respect of recognition of prior learning, the College now provides relevant information to applicants via course cards and course pages on its website - although in some cases the links do not work. Nevertheless, the College now specifies the individuals and committees responsible for the quality of information provided for students. The review team resolves that the implementation of actions taken in response to this recommendation are not fully effective.

### **Recommendation - Expectation B5**

In relation to engaging students through the Learner Involvement Strategy, the College has developed a Learner Involvement Framework for higher education students, which specifies how the College will further the involvement of higher education students in programme approval and module reviews, and how it will train student representatives. It also clarifies responsibilities for student engagement and the committees that students may be represented on. There is senior-level oversight of the Framework. Student engagement at course-level is appropriate.

### **Recommendation - Expectation C**

The College has taken appropriate steps to ensure that information provided for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. It introduced a Higher Education Information Planner, and Roles and Responsibilities document, which lists the required activities for ensuring the accuracy and timeliness of information. Overall responsibility for ensuring the quality of information lies with the Higher Education Manager, working with academic, marketing and admissions colleagues. The College has audited programme handbooks, introduced minimum standards for information on its virtual learning environment, and now shares external examiner reports with students. Minutes of the HECQMG and Higher Education Operational Group confirm that the College gives the quality of information due importance. An amendments log supports the checking and audit of information. While the review team noted some discrepancies between the College's website and its UCAS entries, the team resolved that

these represented a need to amend or update details in documentation where the amendment will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change. The review team concludes that the College is making sufficient progress against this recommendation.

**Recommendation - Expectation B8**

With regard to articulating an internal programme monitoring process, the College has since introduced a new quality cycle for programme monitoring and review. The Higher Education Quality Planner provides a sound basis in which the internal processes, roles and responsibilities for programme monitoring and review are defined. The Planner sets out how College processes link with those of its awarding bodies, and similarly, how programme monitoring and review links to student feedback, assessment boards and moderation processes, including external examination. Overall responsibility for the process now lies with the Higher Education Manager, while the Quality Manager has responsibility for its operation and has communicated the quality cycle process to staff.

**Feature of good practice - Expectation B2**

In respect of the comprehensive Higher Education Course Offer booklet, the College has continued to use and provide the booklet to students and is developing a tailored electronic booklet for part-time students, which it plans to introduce by April 2017.

**Feature of good practice - Expectation B3**

With regard to staff development, the College continues to emphasise effective staff development. It is extending its 'Bridging the Gap' training, which is specific to higher education staff and supported by the Welsh Government. This series of events, in partnership with two of its partner universities, explores differentiation in teaching on higher education programmes. Since the review, two members of College staff have become fellows of the Higher Education Academy, and the College has been able to offer bursaries for scholarly activity to four members of staff.

**Feature of good practice - Expectation B5**

In relation to the student conference, the College has continued to deliver a combined student conference for further and higher education students and is monitoring the size of its higher education cohort to assess whether a separate event could be viable in the future. The conference focused on preparing for success and the Learner Involvement Framework, and included an opportunity for students to bid for funding to improve their College experience. The College has further identified how to enhance the conference for 2017-18.

**Feature of good practice - Enhancement**

In respect of higher education advocates, the College has continued the role in all professional support areas; the review found examples of advocates continuing to identify and address the specific needs of higher education students.

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Gower College Swansea

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

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

### Good practice

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

- The helpful and comprehensive offer booklet, which aids students' entry to higher education (Expectation B2).
- The College's commitment to, and promotion of, staff development, which impacts positively on student learning (Expectation B3).
- The student conference, which promotes student engagement with their learning opportunities (Expectation B5).
- The role of the higher education advocates, which enhances students' learning opportunities (Enhancement).

### Recommendations

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

By October 2016:

- ensure that alignment with national frameworks for programme qualifications is explicitly considered in its internal programme approval procedures (Expectation A3.1)
- ensure that all programmes are fully approved before students commence their studies (Expectations B1 and A3.1)
- ensure that the opportunity to gain recognition of prior learning is made explicit to students during the application process (Expectation B2)
- ensure that the Learner Involvement Strategy systematically engages students at both operational and strategic levels (Expectation B5)
- ensure that the information provided for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (Expectation C).

By December 2016:

- articulate internal processes, roles and responsibilities for programme monitoring and review, to assure and enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities (Expectation B8).

## About Gower College Swansea

Gower College Swansea (the College) was established in August 2010 from the merger of Gorseinon College and Swansea College. It has four campuses in the Swansea area, with its main campus at Tycoch being the base for its higher education programmes. The College has 12,500 students and an annual turnover of £37 million. There are currently 403 higher education students, of which 230 are on programmes within the scope of this review.

The College's vision is to be the best college in Wales and it aims to achieve this through a range of measures, including excellence in leadership, staff, the curriculum, students' learning experiences, opportunities and services to employers. Its strategic direction is set by the Principal and the Strategic Planning Group, overseen by the College's Corporation. The College's Strategic Plan highlights the high standards it plans for learners to achieve, with a performance-based culture and a strategic approach to partnership.

Higher education has been a niche provision of the College, focusing largely on Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), but it is now extending its range of programmes, and to support this expansion has made the key appointment of a Higher Education Manager, who is currently developing a Higher Education Strategic Plan. The strategic lead for the College's curriculum is the Vice-Principal Academic Services, and, operationally, programmes are managed by learning areas under the appropriate deans. A Higher Education Operations Group brings together key functional staff, with strategic oversight from the Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group. Each functional area, such as admissions or the library service, has a 'higher education advocate' who promotes the needs of higher education students. There are plans to improve facilities for higher education students, including a specific centre at the Tycoch campus, which will provide a focus for their needs and an environment enabling the further development of a higher education culture.

The College has three partner universities with whom it offers franchised and other programmes: the University of Wales Trinity Saint David; the University of South Wales; and Swansea University. It also offers Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and HNDs through Pearson. In total, the College offers nine foundation degrees, six HNDs and four HNCs, together with a PGCE and a Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector programme. There are 113 part-time higher education students and 117 full-time students; a mode of study that is increasing.

The College was involved in the Higher Education Reviews: Wales of Swansea University, the University of South Wales and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, with the latter two universities having good practice identified for their partnership arrangements. The current QAA review is the first review of the College itself. The College, in its self-reflection, has seen this as an important developmental activity.

## Explanation of the findings about Gower College Swansea

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.1 The awarding bodies and organisation with which the College works in partnership set the academic standards of programmes, and the College is responsible for maintaining these standards.

1.2 Responsibilities of the College and the awarding partners are set out in the agreements and memoranda of understanding that the College has with the University of South Wales (USW), Swansea University, the University of Wales Trinity St David (UWTSD), and Pearson.

1.3 Additionally, the College's responsibilities are clearly shown in a responsibilities checklist from each awarding body or organisation.

1.4 Senior managers, teaching and support staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities.

1.5 Given the clear articulation of responsibilities that are placed on the College for the maintenance of academic standards, and the understanding of these responsibilities held by staff at the College, the arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.6 The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing a self-evaluation document submitted by the College for this review, and by considering the agreements and memoranda of cooperation that the College has with its awarding bodies, alongside the responsibilities checklists for each partner. Similarly, the team considered the agreement that the College has with its awarding organisation against the relevant responsibilities checklist. The team also met senior staff, teachers and support staff from the College, and link tutors from two awarding bodies, to consider this Expectation. Reports from external examiners and standards verifiers were also considered.

1.7 The College works closely with its awarding bodies to ensure any delegated functions are carried out in line with the relevant awarding body requirements. It is supported in this role by its close links with its awarding bodies at a course and strategic level.

1.8 For its Higher National programmes, the College has a longstanding and effective relationship with Pearson. College nominees are well placed to support teaching teams.

1.9 The College mostly uses programmes and modules that have been developed by its awarding bodies or Pearson. However, for the Foundation Degree in Analytical and Forensic Sciences, the College developed two modules in partnership with USW. Staff at the College who engaged in this development were supported and guided in this activity by colleagues from USW.

1.10 The College monitors standards for its franchised and validated programmes in accordance with the expectations of its awarding bodies, and similar approaches are adopted for its Higher National programmes. External examiner and standards verifier reports contribute to this monitoring and generally confirm that standards are being maintained. For example, the standards verifier and external examiner reports for the HNC in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, and for the Foundation Degree in Electrical Engineering, confirm that the College is operating in accordance with the standards requirements of Pearson and the awarding body.

1.11 Additional overview is undertaken by the awarding bodies through, for example, the partner overview report of UWTSD.

1.12 Given the central role of the awarding bodies and Pearson in setting academic standards, and the College's effective adherence to the requirements of its partners, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.13 The College's agreements with its awarding bodies confirm that responsibilities for the frameworks and regulations for the award of academic credit and qualifications lie with the relevant awarding body, and that the College is required to operate in accordance with these frameworks and regulations. The College also recognises its responsibilities to Pearson in this respect. These are set out in the Pearson standards agreement and expressed in the related responsibilities checklist. Senior managers and teaching staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities.

1.14 Given the clear articulation of responsibilities that are placed on the College for the maintenance of academic standards, the extent to which College senior staff understand the academic frameworks and regulations within which they are required to work, and the understanding of these responsibilities held by senior staff at the College, the arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.15 The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing the College's self-evaluation document, and by considering the agreements and memoranda of cooperation that the College has with its awarding bodies against the responsibilities checklists for each partner. Similarly, the team considered the agreement that the College has with Pearson against the relevant responsibilities checklist. The team also met senior staff and teaching staff from the College and with link tutors from two awarding bodies.

1.16 The College works closely with its awarding partners to ensure that it operates in accordance with their frameworks and regulations of academic governance. It is supported in this role by its close links with its awarding bodies at a course and strategic level.

1.17 For its Higher National programmes, the College has a longstanding and effective relationship with Pearson, and College nominees are well placed to support teaching teams to ensure that they operate in accordance with Pearson frameworks and regulations.

1.18 For both its franchised and validated provision, the College, in partnership with its awarding bodies, ensures that the award of credit and qualifications aligns with the expectations of the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* and *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). For Pearson, the College develops programmes in accordance with programme specifications based on the Pearson unit framework. Senior staff recognise the role of these frameworks in establishing the basis for the award of credit but teaching staff are less aware of their role.

1.19 Programmes are approved on the basis that they align with these frameworks, and both the College and its awarding bodies monitor and review programmes against these frameworks. There are effective processes in place to allow this to happen, with valuable support from awarding body link tutors.

1.20 Given the central role of the awarding bodies and Pearson in establishing frameworks and regulations for the award of academic credit and qualifications, and the

College's effective adherence to these frameworks and regulations, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

1.21 USW, UWTSD, Swansea University and Pearson have academic frameworks and regulations that outline responsibilities for standards, quality and enhancement. The universities and Pearson take the lead in setting standards and the College takes the lead in maintaining standards. The responsibility for maintaining a definitive record of programme approval, monitoring and review rests with the universities for their awards and with the College in the case of Pearson provision.

1.22 For the College's franchised provision, programme records are maintained at a programme level by the relevant awarding body. Copies of programme records are held in a central electronic repository within the College, for which the Higher Education Manager is responsible. The College's Quality Manager has oversight of handbooks for Pearson programmes and awarding body programme leaders have oversight of their respective programme handbooks. There are College and university-devised templates for the creation of programme handbooks, which ensure that the content is comprehensive and complete, but the information differs depending on the awarding body.

1.23 The College's processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.24 The review team tested the Expectation by considering documentation produced by the College, including various responsibilities checklists; frameworks provided by the awarding bodies and Pearson; programme handbooks and templates that ensure these are consistent across all courses. The team also met awarding body representatives, and senior and academic College staff.

1.25 The College has recently developed a central electronic repository to store the definitive records of study. This system is overseen by the Higher Education Manager, and access is given to relevant departments. Any amendments made to this information are recorded by the Higher Education Manager in a recently developed Amendments Log.

1.26 Programme specifications provide a definitive record of the College's provision, and the College has devised a new process for recording amendments. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.27 The College does not have degree awarding powers and, therefore, programme approval follows the procedures defined by the regulations of the awarding bodies and Pearson.

1.28 Awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring that the structure and content of programmes and associated threshold academic standards align with national frameworks. They also appoint suitably qualified external subject specialists and academic staff from within their own institutions to scrutinise standards at validation, and to confirm that programmes align with their own frameworks and regulations.

1.29 Pearson is responsible for designing and approving its own Higher National qualifications and gaining their recognition by Ofqual. For these awards the College follows the approved Pearson programme specifications that, for each unit, define the academic level, learning outcomes and threshold academic standards required.

1.30 These procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.31 The review team examined a range of validation documentation, including programme specifications and module descriptions, and reports of internal and external assessors and validation panels. It also conducted audit trails of the approval process for several Higher National and foundation degree programmes. The validation process was also discussed with senior and teaching staff from the College and with link officers from the awarding bodies.

1.32 Proposals for new programmes are developed by curriculum teams and initially considered by the College's Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group. They must then be approved by the College's Strategic Planning Group before they can proceed to validation following the appropriate process. The internal approval process enables the College to assess the fit of the proposed programme with its strategic priorities and its capacity to deliver it. However, the process does not require specification of the alignment of the proposed programme with the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales*, the FHEQ, the Quality Code or Subject Benchmark Statements, and does not require any details of the curriculum, for example the modules to be taught at each level and their credit value. Nor has it been applied consistently to all programmes. These points are explored further in relation to Expectation B1.

1.33 The review team recognises that, at present, the College's programmes are either franchised or follow the specification provided by Pearson and that programme approval is ultimately the responsibility of the awarding bodies and Pearson. In order to fully evaluate any new proposal, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure that alignment with national frameworks for programme qualifications is explicitly considered in its internal programme approval procedures.

1.34 In programmes approved by the awarding bodies, academic standards are set at the time of validation. Approval panels confirm that programmes are aligned with the FHEQ, the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* and the appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements. Engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies is primarily the responsibility of the College's awarding bodies. For example, the PGCE is designed to follow the Lifelong Learning UK professional standards. In the case of the programmes approved by Pearson, the specification prescribes the structure of the programme in terms of the number of units at each level and any that are compulsory, although the College is able to select some optional units from those that are available.

1.35 Notwithstanding the recommendation relating to the College's internal approval procedures, the awarding bodies and Pearson's processes for the approval of taught programmes ensure that academic standards are set at a level that meets the threshold standards for the qualification, and are in accordance with the frameworks and regulations of the awarding bodies and Pearson. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.36 The awarding bodies and Pearson have overarching responsibility for ensuring that credit and qualifications are only awarded where UK threshold and their own academic standards have been satisfied. Programme and module learning outcomes are defined in programme specifications and assessment strategies are agreed at the time of programme approval. Processes for the approval of draft assessments and moderation of marked student work incorporate scrutiny by suitably qualified independent external subject specialists, who are required to comment on the standards set and those achieved by students. Regulations for progression and the award of qualifications are defined by the awarding bodies and Pearson, in line with their own academic frameworks.

1.37 These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.38 The review team looked at validation documentation, student handbooks, assignment briefs and the policies and regulations of the College, awarding bodies and Pearson. Assessment processes were also discussed in meetings with senior, teaching and administrative staff of the College and with academic staff from the awarding bodies.

1.39 Processes for setting assessments vary according to the programme and awarding body. However, all draft assessment tasks and grading criteria are scrutinised by a relevant member of staff of the awarding body and must be approved by the external examiner before they are administered. There are systems in place to ensure equivalence of assessment practices across programmes when a module is delivered by both the College and the awarding body, or when it is franchised by the awarding body to two or more delivery organisations.

1.40 In programmes that are approved by Pearson, assessments are internally verified and subsequently checked by the standards verifier as part of the annual monitoring process.

1.41 Assignment briefs are clear and specify the learning outcomes being tested and the criteria associated with different levels of student performance. College staff are responsible for the first-marking of student work. Responsibility for second-marking lies either with the College or is shared with the awarding body. Where the awarding body franchises a programme to other delivery organisations, cross-moderation activities, together with the use of a single external examiner for all programmes, ensures parity of standards and promotes the sharing of best practice between College staff and those of other delivery organisations.

1.42 Marked student work is moderated in all programmes, either by the external examiners (in the case of programmes approved by the awarding bodies) or the standards verifier (in the case of programmes approved by Pearson). Their reports confirm that assessment methods are appropriate and that the grading criteria used are of a standard



appropriate to the qualification level. They also confirm that examination and assessment boards are conducted efficiently and effectively.

1.43 The College's assessment processes ensure that assessment tasks and grading criteria are set at an appropriate level, and that credit, and hence qualifications, are only awarded where achievement of learning outcomes has been demonstrated by assessment. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.44 The College's higher education provision is subject to the annual monitoring and periodic review processes of its awarding bodies and Pearson. Academic standards are monitored on an annual basis by suitably qualified external examiners and standards verifiers appointed by the awarding bodies and Pearson respectively. These processes are supported by curriculum teams and curriculum leaders within the College, who are responsible for completing annual monitoring reports. The College maintains oversight of its awards via the Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group, which receives all external examiner, standards verifiers and annual monitoring reports. It reports to the College Management Team and the Strategic Planning Group.

1.45 These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.46 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising annual monitoring and external examiners' reports and the minutes of the relevant College committees. The review team also discussed the monitoring and review process with students, senior and teaching staff from the College and those with link officer roles from the awarding bodies.

1.47 In the case of programmes approved by the College's awarding bodies, external examiners' reports confirm that assessment methods and the standards set are appropriate, and that student performance is comparable with the standards of similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions with which they are familiar. In the case of programmes approved by Pearson, the standards verifiers' reports confirm that the design and nature of the assessments permit the aims and learning objectives of the programme to be met and are of a standard appropriate to the qualification level. Data on student retention, progression and achievement is recorded as part of the annual monitoring process, thereby enabling the College to monitor these key performance indicators. Annual monitoring processes require any issues identified by external examiners to be addressed by curriculum teams in the form of an action plan.

1.48 The College maintains effective oversight of academic standards and student achievement in its portfolio of higher education programmes via the Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group, which receives all external examiner, standards verifier and annual monitoring reports, and via the College Management Team, which receives data on student retention, progression and award. These processes ensure that the College can effectively monitor the standards of its academic programmes, and identify and address any cross-cutting and other issues that may arise.

1.49 The awarding bodies are responsible for the periodic review of the programmes they approve within the College, following their own procedures and regulations. At the time of the review, only the PGCE had been operating long enough for it to be subject to a periodic review, which confirmed that its standards aligned with the relevant national frameworks and professional body expectations.

1.50 Processes for programme monitoring and review are robust and allow the College and its awarding bodies to monitor the achievement and maintenance of academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.51 The College is influenced in its strategy for its higher education provision by its work with national and regional partners, which helps to determine the nature and scope of higher education programmes.

1.52 The College's draft Higher Education Strategy 2016-19 illustrates how it is responding to local and Welsh needs for skills development and its aim to develop a curriculum with an emphasis on vocation and employment. The Strategy states that new programme development will be informed by Future Directions for Higher Education in Wales, with a focus on meeting local industry demand. The College's work with TATA Steel to develop a bespoke HNC in Chemical Sciences is an illustration of this in practice.

1.53 At programme level, the use of external independent expertise to maintain standards is part of the programme approval process that is applied both internally and in the formal external approval processes to which the College is subject with its awarding bodies.

1.54 External examiners and standards verifiers also contribute valuable independent external expertise in respect of maintenance and achievement of threshold standards.

1.55 The external-facing strategic approach that the College takes in setting its overall strategy, and for its higher education programmes, takes into account local, regional and national priorities. Both the internal and awarding body programme approval processes require the use of external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards. The role of external examiners and standards verifiers, and the way in which College processes are designed to respond to these external inputs, would allow this Expectation to be met.

1.56 The review team tested the process in meetings with the College Principal and with senior staff. The College's self-evaluation document, Strategic Plan and Higher Education Strategy 2016-19 were also considered, along with reports from external examiners and standards verifiers. The team also reviewed a range of course monitoring reports.

1.57 The College's internal process for the approval of programmes is differentiated in respect of proposals with existing or new awarding bodies or organisations. In each case, however, initial proposals and a rationale for consent to pursue approval must include a consideration of 'strategic fit' with the College's overall Higher Education Strategy. Staff involved in the initial proposal must evidence how they have engaged with external expertise (employers, for example) in making the case for the new programme.

1.58 Successful proposals move forward to the approval processes of the awarding bodies and organisations, which again require evidence of independent expertise to support the rationale for the proposal. This works well in so far as proposals are able to make a

strong rationale for new programme development. College staff have good links with employers. However, in terms of subsequent curriculum development, the review team did not see any evidence that the College systematically and consistently uses independent external expertise to inform curriculum content and assessment strategies.

1.59 Monitoring and review of existing programmes is informed to some extent by employers and relevant sector bodies, and through external examiner and standards verifier reporting. External examiners and standards verifiers receive and comment on samples of marked work and attend assessment boards, at which student grades are confirmed and academic standards are considered. The College is effective in the way it manages and responds to reports from external examiners and standards verifiers. It is able to capture common themes of good practice or areas for development by considering all reports at Higher Education Operations Group and Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group meetings.

1.60 The College engages with independent external expertise in a range of ways at a strategic and an operational level. While evidence is weaker that the College uses independent external expertise systematically and consistently to inform programme development and assessment strategies, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

1.62 All seven Expectations in this judgement area are low risk.

1.63 The College's arrangements with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation ensure that qualifications are positioned at the appropriate level of the FHEQ, although a recommendation has been made that the College's internal programme approval processes should explicitly consider alignment with national frameworks for qualifications.

1.64 Learning outcomes align with the qualification descriptors and take account of Subject Benchmark Statements. There are appropriate and transparent frameworks and regulations in place and these are adhered to in practice. Definitive programme records are maintained following approval and any subsequent changes agreed in accordance with due processes.

1.65 Design and approval processes involving the College, and the awarding bodies and Pearson, are in place, although the recommendation relating to programme approval made in relation to Expectation B1 also has application to Expectation A3.1.

1.66 Credit is achieved only when students meet learning outcomes, as attested by moderators and external examiners. External and independent expertise is employed at key stages to ensure the appropriate setting and maintenance of academic standards.

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

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The College has recently expanded its portfolio of higher education programmes, with five new full-time programmes commencing in 2014-15 and a further four commencing in 2015-16.

2.2 Proposals for new programmes are developed internally and must first be considered by the College's Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group and subsequently approved by the Strategic Planning Group before proceeding to validation. New programmes are developed in response to regional and national needs but emphasis is placed on those that are vocational and which provide progression options for the many level 3 programmes at the College. The College does not have degree awarding powers and therefore programme approval follows the procedures defined by the awarding bodies and Pearson. It is currently delivering programmes approved by three awarding bodies but is exploring the possibility of establishing programmes with others.

2.3 These procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.4 The review team examined a range of validation documentation, including programme specifications and module descriptions, and reports of internal and external assessors and validation panels. It also conducted audit trails to follow the approval of Higher National and foundation degree programmes. Programme approval processes were discussed with senior and teaching staff from the College and link officers from the awarding bodies.

2.5 The College's internal approval process enables the College to assess the fit of the proposed programme with the College's strategic priorities, the potential market and the College's capacity to deliver it. The College is developing ways to consistently and more formally include the views of students in programme approval. Student focus groups are now being used to inform the early design process, and students on the HND in Hair and Beauty Management had input into the new Foundation Degree in Spa Management and Advanced Therapies.

2.6 College staff work with those of the awarding body during programme development and can influence curriculum content, for example in the case of the Foundation Degree in Sports Development and Management by including specific coaching modules. Employers can also provide input into programme development.

2.7 Validation processes follow the regulations of the appropriate awarding body. In all cases validation panels include independent external subject specialists and a member of academic staff from a cognate discipline within the awarding body. College staff also participate in the validation process. Validation processes confirm that the programme and module learning outcomes, curriculum content, and teaching, learning and assessment strategies are appropriate. They also confirm that the College has adequate resources to support the programme and its students. Any staff that teach on the programme must be

approved by the awarding body. Approval panels also confirm that programmes are aligned with the FHEQ, the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales*, and appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements.

2.8 Once a programme has been formally approved, the validation documentation is translated into programme handbooks and module descriptions by the Learning Area Manager and curriculum leader. Meetings with the relevant teaching staff ensure that they are aware of the requirements of the programme and the relevant quality assurance processes that apply to it. Ongoing support is also provided by the link officers from the awarding bodies. Any changes to programmes are identified via annual monitoring processes and negotiated with the relevant awarding body.

2.9 The College commenced teaching an HNC in Chemical Sciences for industry in September 2015. This two-year, part-time programme was developed in partnership with TATA Steel in order to meet the specific training needs of its laboratory technicians. At that time the programme had not been considered by the College's Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group. The programme was initially considered by the Strategic Planning Group in November 2015 but was referred back and only approved in January 2016. The programme was first submitted to Pearson, the awarding organisation, in October 2015. However, it was not fully approved until just after the students had completed their first year of studies. The review team was informed that students had undertaken assessments as normal during the academic year but no grades had been confirmed.

2.10 The review team notes that in allowing the programme to commence without formal consideration of the proposal by the Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group or the approval of the Strategic Planning Group, the College was in breach of its own procedures and the safeguards outlined in relation to Expectation A3.1. In addition, the fact that the programme was not fully approved by Pearson at the time the students commenced their studies represented a risk to the students, the company and the College. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure that all programmes are fully approved before students commence their studies.

2.11 The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met. However, the team notes that the programme follows Pearson's specification and that the College is an 'approved centre' for the award of its qualifications. Hence, the team concludes that, in relation to Pearson programmes, the level of risk is moderate.

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



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

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

**Findings**

2.12 The College has a comprehensive Admissions Policy, which adheres to the principles of fair admission. The Policy covers both higher education and further education, applies to full-time and part-time students, and is made available to applicants on the College website. The Policy outlines the application process, from enquiry and making an application through to registration and enrolment.

2.13 The College seeks to recruit, select and admit students who meet appropriate entry criteria. These are set by the College for Pearson provision and by the awarding bodies for the franchised higher education provision. Applicants applying to the College for full-time study apply via UCAS, and applicants applying for part-time study apply directly to the College.

2.14 The Admissions Policy and associated processes are clear, detailed, transparent and inclusive, and would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.15 In considering the Expectation, the review team examined key documents relating to recruitment, selection and admissions, including the College Admissions Policy, the offer guide that communicates the admissions and enrolment process to applicants, and the fees policy. Aspects of the admissions process were also explored through discussions with students and staff.

2.16 The College's Admissions Policy refers applicants to a separate student appeals procedure, which is also made available via the College website, should they wish to appeal an admissions decision. The College is also in the process of introducing generic offer codes that would allow it to publish the entry criteria in marketing materials and standardise the admissions criteria across all higher education courses offered by the College.

2.17 Admissions interviews are conducted by academic staff delivering on their respective courses. Staff conducting admissions interviews do not receive higher education-specific training, but there is College-wide training as staff work across further and higher education. Academic staff conducting interviews on franchised provision receive training and strict entry criteria guidelines from the respective awarding bodies. Opportunities to declare a specific learning need are provided at application, interview and arrival, in order to ensure that support is in place as quickly as possible.

2.18 The College provides a concise higher education offer booklet for applicants successful at interview stage. The booklet is an effective communication mechanism with applicants, and includes Student Finance and Disabled Students' Allowance application information, transport information, enrolment details and documents required at enrolment. The helpful and comprehensive offer booklet, which aids students' entry to higher education, is **good practice**.

2.19 The awarding bodies' recognition of prior learning policies are made available to students via links to the universities' websites in their programme handbooks. USW provides

guidance and a recognition of prior learning workshop for College staff. Pearson also has a recognition of prior learning policy, but, although the Quality Manager checks enrolment forms for recognition of prior learning eligibility, it is unclear as to how prospective students would access this information before making an application. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure that the opportunity to gain recognition of prior learning is made explicit to students during the application process.

2.20 The review team found inconsistencies in course information across the different information platforms of course cards, the College website and UCAS. An example of this was the HND in Spa, Hair and Beauty Management, which, at the time of the review, was not consistently titled. Students completing the course actually receive an award entitled HND Hair and Beauty Management, although hair modules are not, in practice, part of the curriculum that College students cover. This information is given on the College website but not on the course cards. The UCAS entry now makes clear the difference between the course title and the award that students will receive.

2.21 Another example is the lack of information about Disclosure and Barring Service requirements on the course cards and College website for courses that require such clearance. These courses are the Foundation Degree in Early Childhood, the Foundation Degree in Learning Support, and the Foundation Degree in Sports Development and Management; the requirement of a Disclosure and Barring Service check is not outlined on the College website for any of these programmes, and is only stated on the UCAS website for the Foundation Degree in Early Childhood, but not for Foundation Degree in Learning Support. The Foundation Degree in Sports Development and Management is not listed on the UCAS website. Students also reported mixed views on the accuracy of programme information they received prior to their application. A recommendation under Expectation C in section 3 of this report responds to these issues of missing or misleading information.

2.22 The College has clear and comprehensive policies and procedures for the recruitment, selection and admission of students, which are underpinned by appropriate structures and processes. Practices are fair, generally transparent, and supportive. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.23 The College Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy sets out the College's vision for the delivery of excellent teaching and learning experiences for all its students. Developed by the Excellence in Teaching and Learning Group, which is made up of representatives of all learning areas and includes tutors from higher education programmes, the Strategy covers all sections of the College, including higher education, and sets out key objectives for improving learning and teaching.

2.24 The College recognises the importance of staff development in achieving this Strategy and has processes in place to enable staff to undertake scholarly activity.

2.25 Progress towards meeting the objectives of the Strategy is determined through annual monitoring and self-assessment, informed by student and staff input, and on the outcomes of a whole-College formal lesson observation process.

2.26 The focus on the quality of learning opportunities articulated in the College Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, and the comprehensive reporting structure that encompasses the College's higher education programmes, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.27 The review team tested the process through detailed scrutiny of the College's self-evaluation document and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. The College's approach to lesson observation was explored in meetings with senior staff and tutors, and an audit trail of observations was reviewed. The College's (draft) Human Resources Strategy was considered in the context of staff development. The team also discussed the student experience of teaching, learning, assessment and support in a meeting with students from a range of programmes, and considered the student submission to this review.

2.28 Students commented positively on their experience of teaching and learning, and on the extent to which they are developed and challenged as they transition into study at higher education level. They confirmed that tutors seek to develop students as independent learners and support students in this journey. Students were enthusiastic in their acknowledgement of the support that they get from their tutors and on the extent to which all staff at the College are approachable. Students commented that they see evidence of staff scholarly activity coming through in teaching sessions.

2.29 Students recognised the academic level at which they were studying and value the information, advice and guidance they are given in respect of learning outcomes and assessment criteria, noting that feedback on assessment was timely and useful in helping them to enhance their academic performance. Staff confirm that they see assessment as a tool for learning as well as a means to check on attainment.

2.30 Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship is a key theme at all levels of the College curriculum, and is embedded into the College's higher education

programmes. The theme is a key consideration in formal lesson observations. For the Engineering, Science and Spa Management programmes, an understanding of the theme of sustainability is emphasised, due to the nature of waste management and resourcing within these industries. Welsh language and culture, and the place of Wales in the international context, is also a theme embedded in the College's higher education provision.

2.31 Students are able to feed back on the quality of their learning experience in a variety of ways, including through module feedback questionnaires. However, the review team found that this process is not consistently implemented and that oversight of the outcomes of the process is not complete.

2.32 Student outcomes are analysed on an annual basis and also form part of the monitoring process for learning and teaching. Success rates and trends are examined to assure the quality of student outcomes.

2.33 The College's virtual learning environment (VLE), as well as those of its awarding partners, is used as a platform to share learning materials and, in some programmes, for the submission of student work. Plagiarism-detection software is used for some programmes as a tool within the VLE to enable students to check work before the submission deadline. Innovative ideas and generic materials for learning and teaching are available on the College's staff VLE, Teachers' Zone, which has a specific area for higher education staff. Currently, the College does not have a mechanism to evaluate the quality or consistency of the VLE as a tool to support teaching and learning.

2.34 The College does not have a specific induction programme for staff new to teaching higher education, although staff do benefit from a generic induction and the support of a named mentor.

2.35 The College offers a range of continuing professional development activities for all its staff, who are required to undertake 30 hours of continuing professional development annually. Specific training opportunities to enhance learning are developed within learning area teams and College-wide initiatives are organised by the Quality Manager for Teaching and Learning Development in conjunction with the human resources department. Individual staff development needs are identified through annual performance review.

2.36 Staff on higher education programmes are well qualified and many have recent relevant sector experience. Most staff hold a formal teaching qualification: many have higher degrees and some hold membership of a relevant professional body. Staff are also required to have recognised teacher status from the appropriate awarding university to teach on its programmes.

2.37 The College was successful in 2015-16 in gaining Welsh Government funding to support a training programme for teachers of higher level skills. These funds, which were part of the Skills Priorities Programme, are used to give bursaries for staff to undertake scholarly activity, and each recipient will publish their findings at the end of the academic year. The fund is also used for the training programme Bridging the Gap, which is specific to higher education staff. This series of events, in partnership with USW and UWTSD, explores differentiation in teaching on higher education programmes. Outcomes were disseminated across the College at a sharing practice event in July 2015.

2.38 The College is increasing its engagement with the UK Professional Standards Framework and is matching its approach to learning and teaching with the key principles of the Standards. It enjoys valuable support in this from USW.

2.39 The College's commitment to, and promotion of, staff development, which impacts positively on student learning, is **good practice**.

2.40 Physical resource requirements for programmes are a key consideration at the course proposal and approval phases. Subsequent resource requirements are identified through annual monitoring and business planning, which are in part informed by student feedback on their learning experience. Students were mostly positive about the quality of resources and the extent to which these are available to support them in their learning.

2.41 The strategic approach taken by the College ensures that learning opportunities are enhanced through a commitment to staff development and the provision of appropriate resources for all programmes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.42 The College seeks to develop provision that meets the needs of students who wish to study close to home and develop employment-related vocational skills.

2.43 The Vice-Principal Academic Services and deans of faculty have responsibility for student welfare. The College's Strategic Plan makes specific reference to this responsibility to ensure that learners achieve high standards and to provide the best guidance and support for learners while promoting health and wellbeing.

2.44 Deans of faculty take the strategic lead for students' services and student support. The Learning Support Manager has operational responsibility for students with additional learning needs. This role includes supporting teaching staff with adjustments to the physical and learning resources of the programme and coordinating individual support and assessment concessions.

2.45 The College's Strategic Equality Action Plan 2015-18 aims to ensure that all students and staff are treated with equity. The Plan is monitored by the College's Equality and Diversity Group. Each learning area identifies examples of good practice in embedding equality and diversity into learning and teaching activities through the annual learning area review.

2.46 Additionally, annual programme monitoring enables the provision and impact of student support to be monitored, and actions developed to build on good practice and address areas for improvement. Reports are considered by the Higher Education Operations Group and the Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group.

2.47 The extent to which the College takes a strategic approach to support learners to meet their potential, and the reporting structures by which oversight of the elements of the strategy is maintained, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.48 The review team tested the process by detailed scrutiny of the College's self-evaluation document and the student submission to this review, and in meetings with senior, teaching and support staff. The Expectation was considered in the context of the College's Strategic Plan, Higher Education Strategy 2016-19 and Strategic Equality Action Plan 2015-18.

2.49 The review team talked with students and considered minutes from meetings of the Equality and Diversity Group, the Higher Education Operations Group, and the Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group. The team reviewed evidence illustrating tutorial activity and measures taken to support students with identified additional learning needs.

2.50 All students are prompted at application and enrolment to declare if they have a specific disability or need for support. In the case of those students progressing internally, support for specific needs is often already well established. Specific learning support is provided to students who have identified additional learning needs. Students are positive about the extent to which they are able to disclose additional needs and how there are naturally occurring opportunities taken during their studies to identify such needs, through

coursework for example. They were equally positive about the effective response of the College to such needs and the support that is put in place.

2.51 All full-time students belong to a tutorial group to support their studies and progress. The tutorial programme includes one-to-one sessions where tutor and student discuss current performance. Students value these tutorial sessions, although not all recognised them as separate elements, given that they enjoy close and readily available support from their tutors.

2.52 The College's Learning Resource Centre and its staff play a valuable role in supporting programme teams and in providing direct support to students in developing independent learning skills.

2.53 On the commencement of their studies, students engage in a range of induction activities, which are organised by each department in the College. For some full-time programmes, the relevant awarding body also contributes to these induction activities. Students value these as a means to make a successful transition to their higher education studies. The College is seeking to enhance its induction for all full-time students through the introduction of a joint programme, to promote a greater sense of higher education collegiality among its students.

2.54 All functional areas of the College have a higher education advocate to ensure the needs of higher education students are represented in all policies and procedures. Staff value the role of these advocates in raising the profile of higher education provision and in helping to ensure that the needs of higher education students are met.

2.55 The College has effective processes in place to support students in their transition to study at a higher education level. Where additional learning needs are disclosed or identified, physical and staff resources are deployed to meet such needs. The role of the higher education advocate helps to raise the profile of the higher education student in this respect and the College has effective monitoring processes in place to be aware of the impact of its student support activity. The review team concludes 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**

2.56 The College has a cross-College Learner Involvement Strategy, which outlines student communication and consultation mechanisms and how learners are to be engaged in student representative groups and in curriculum development. It also specifies the performance indicators that indicate the effectiveness of the Strategy. The College engages with students predominantly on an informal basis, through student tutorials and group discussions with teaching staff. More formal mechanisms in which the College engages with students are learner surveys, having recently developed a higher education-specific survey in order to identify feedback.

2.57 The student engagement mechanisms in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.58 In considering this Expectation the review team examined relevant documentation such as strategies, committee terms of reference and minutes, responses to student surveys and action plans. The team tested its findings in meetings with senior management, academic and support staff, students and student representatives.

2.59 The College's Learner Involvement Strategy, which covers both higher and further education students studying at the College, does not sufficiently outline the Strategy in engaging higher education students. For instance, the review team received inconsistent reports from students regarding the selection, representation and training of student representatives. Selection of student representatives is largely on a voluntary or nomination basis. Representatives attend the cross-College Student Council and focus groups, from which minutes and action plans arise. Some course teams invite student representatives to attend parts of course team meetings, although this is carried out on a handful of courses and is not an approach that is systematically applied across all higher education courses. The review team received evidence of student representative training and handbooks, although the students met by the team reported that they were unaware of these materials. The College has two student places on its board of governors but neither of those are currently higher education students and there are no higher education students in attendance at higher education deliberative committees. Taking into consideration the obstacles in achieving consistency across the programmes, given the challenges to inclusivity presented by having various validating partners and modes of study, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure that the Learner Involvement Strategy systematically engages students at both operational and strategic levels.

2.60 The College has a code of conduct that outlines College expectations, which is applicable to all College students.

2.61 Students feed into curriculum development via module reviews, which are carried out at the end of each module and feed into the annual programme review. However, the review team received a mixed response on whether students complete these in all cases. Students feed into the decision to offer new higher education provision, acting as a consultative body at a focus group level prior to the strategic decision to validate new programmes. However, they are not involved in validation or approval events.



2.62 The College hosts an annual student conference open to all its students. The conference consists of aspirational key speakers and opportunities for students to submit funding bids for equipment in their subject area. This provides students with a sense of ownership of their areas, and develops broader skills such as teamwork, networking and leadership. The College also has an evaluative approach to this event, and seeks student views in order to improve it year upon year. The student conference, which promotes student engagement with their learning opportunities, is **good practice**.

2.63 During the review visit the team explored how the College reports any changes that have been made as a result of student views. When the team met students they reported that this is predominantly done on an informal basis at course level, and gave examples of improvements that had been made as a result of their feedback.

2.64 The College currently has a predominantly informal approach at course level to student engagement, which is largely due to the diverse nature of the College's higher education provision and the challenges that various awarding bodies and modes of study present. However, the review team recognises the steps being taken to ensure a consistent approach across the provision, with the introduction of the learner involvement framework and the higher education-specific surveys. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.65 The awarding bodies and Pearson have overarching responsibility for ensuring that assessment processes enable students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes. Programme approval processes involve scrutiny of assessment strategies to ensure that they are appropriate in design. Processes for the approval of assessment tasks and grading criteria, and the regulations for progression and award of qualifications are defined by the awarding bodies and Pearson. The College also has its own internal procedures relating to assessment and the conduct of examinations, for dealing with any mitigating circumstances reported by students and for consideration of any appeals against an assessment decision. Recognition of prior learning is also the responsibility of the awarding bodies and Pearson but the College supports students through the process.

2.66 These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.67 The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing validation documentation, module descriptions, student handbooks, assignment briefs, and the policies and regulations of the College, awarding bodies and Pearson. Assessment processes were also discussed in meetings with senior, teaching and administrative staff of the College, and with link officers from the awarding bodies.

2.68 The process of setting assessments varies according to the procedures and regulations of the awarding body and Pearson, and the nature of the programme concerned. Assessment tasks may be set by the relevant member of the College's teaching staff or by a member of teaching staff of the awarding body. However, in all cases draft assessment tasks must first be approved by a relevant member of the awarding body's own academic staff and then by the programme's external examiner to confirm that they are fit for purpose before they are administered. Systems are in place to ensure parity of assessment where a module is delivered by both the College and the awarding body, or where it is franchised by the awarding body to two or more delivery organisations. All staff involved in setting assessments must have recognised teacher status with the awarding body.

2.69 In programmes that are approved by Pearson, assessments are internally verified and checked by the standards verifier as part of the annual monitoring process.

2.70 Assignment briefs are clear and specify the learning outcomes being tested, grading criteria, marking scheme and submission date. Online assessment diaries help students keep track of submission deadlines, so that they are able to submit work on time, and also indicate when feedback is due. When students are assessed in the workplace, standard templates and reporting procedures ensure parity between observers.

2.71 Programme handbooks detail the different methods of assessment used in each module and their contribution to the overall module mark. They also indicate how to report mitigating circumstances and appeal against an assessment decision. For information relating to progression and the award of qualifications, students are directed to the

regulations of the relevant awarding body. Students whom the review team met confirmed that they understand how the different parts of their programme are assessed and that they are aware of the regulations that applied to their award, including those relating to reassessment.

2.72 The College has a Welsh Language Scheme and students are able to submit written work in Welsh. Where this takes place, the College works with the relevant awarding body to ensure that it is appropriately marked and moderated.

2.73 Timeliness of feedback is monitored by Learning Area Managers. College policy is that feedback is expected within 20 working days. The majority of students believe that their feedback is timely and helpful.

2.74 The College has procedures in place for preventing and identifying unacceptable academic practices. Students are aware of what constitutes plagiarism, and comprehensive guidance on how to avoid it and other forms of unfair practice is provided in student handbooks. Plagiarism-detection software is used both as a training tool for students and as a means for teaching staff to detect it. Any instances of potential unfair practice are either referred to the relevant awarding body or, in the case of the Pearson programmes, dealt with under the terms of the College's assessment and appeals policy, as appropriate.

2.75 External examiners' and standards verifiers' reports confirm that methods of assessment are appropriate and that they have had access to sufficient information and marked student work to enable them to fulfil their role.

2.76 Examination boards, which College staff attend, are convened and chaired by the awarding bodies. Decisions relating to student progression and the award of credit and qualifications are made in accordance with their regulations. Assessment boards for the Pearson programmes are convened by the College. Where required, any reassessment follows the procedures of the awarding body or Pearson, and teaching staff and curriculum leaders provide advice to students on what is required.

2.77 Recognition of prior learning is the responsibility of the awarding bodies, although the College supports students through the process. However, the opportunity to gain recognition of prior learning is not explicit on the College website or other programme information. This is referred to further in this report in relation to Expectations B2 and C.

2.78 The College operates appropriate and reliable assessment processes. External examiners and standards verifiers endorse the effectiveness of procedures and students comment positively on the quality of feedback they receive. The College adheres to the regulatory procedures of its awarding bodies and hence students can be assured that any award they gain is equivalent to that made to students following an equivalent award in the home institution. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.79 External examiners and standards verifiers provide independent external expertise with regard to the maintenance of academic standards, and confirm (or otherwise) that threshold academic standards are being met. They check that internal processes and procedures for assessment and the award of academic credit are fair and consistent.

2.80 The appointment of external examiners is the responsibility of the relevant awarding body, which also determines the terms of reference for the appointment. Pearson appoints standards verifiers for its programmes and these have the role as set out in Pearson's Quality Review and Development document.

2.81 External examiner and standards verifier reports are received by the programme teaching team and further considered by the College's Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group.

2.82 Comments made by external examiners and standards verifiers are also addressed in programme annual monitoring reports.

2.83 The College's reporting structure enables an overview of external examiner and standards verifier reports to be taken to identify both programme-specific and common themes of good practice and areas for development. The development of action plans in response to such reports is also a feature of the College's processes. This would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.84 The process was tested by careful scrutiny of the College's self-evaluation and a consideration of how the College management and reporting structures allow external examiner and standards verifier reports to be received and responded to. Minutes from relevant committee meetings were reviewed, as were programme annual monitoring reports. The Expectation was further explored in meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and with awarding body representatives. A wide range of external examiner and standards verifier reports were considered.

2.85 External examination is undertaken through an annual visit, which encompasses a review of a sample of assessed work and attendance at assessment boards. For Higher National programmes, the standards verifier meets with students to gauge their opinion on the assessment processes and access to resources. The standards verifier also checks internal verification documentation for assignment briefs and assessment decisions, as well as staff curricula vitae. In all cases, a report is generated that confirms whether threshold academic standards are being met. Reports check that internal processes and procedures for assessment and the award of academic credit are fair and consistent.

2.86 Reports looked at by the review team confirm that academic standards are being met. For example, the external examiner report for the PGCE and Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) programmes with USW comments favourably on the quality of assessment, marking and the outstanding annotation of scripts. The external examiner report for the Foundation Degree in Sports Development and Management validated by UWTSD confirms that learning outcomes are aligned with assessment methods, that grades awarded are commensurate with grading criteria, and that modules and assessments are aligned with relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

2.87 In some cases, the external examiner or standards verifier identifies aspects that the course team should address. For example, the standards verifier's report for the HND in Hair and Beauty Management in May 2015 suggests that assessors should review assignment briefs to ensure that the tasks will allow students to present evidence for all pass criteria, and to ensure that all six higher level criteria are correctly targeted and contextualised. The standards verifier's report for the HNC in Construction and the Built Environment (Building Services Engineering) notes that internal verification of assignment briefs is taking place, but feedback is brief and opportunities for improvement not identified.

2.88 In all cases, annual reports from the external examiners and standards verifiers form a key part of the College annual monitoring of programmes. Reports are initially considered by the programme team, which makes the response to the awarding body or Pearson. Responses at programme level are systematic. The curriculum leader for each programme presents the external examiner report to the Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group, at which point any significant recommendations are discussed and actions agreed. Additionally, the Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group considers an overview of all reports, enabling themes to be identified.

2.89 The College notes that an area for development is to make external examiner and standards verifier reports more widely available, beyond the teaching team and College managers, and, in particular, to students. It is seeking to ensure that such reports are shared with students on the College VLE. Students confirmed that their access to and awareness of these reports is inconsistent.

2.90 The College is effective in working with its external examiners and standards verifiers to enable them to perform their roles. External examiners and standards verifiers confirm that standards are being met, and where they make recommendations, course leaders provide consistent responses. College reporting structures enable effective oversight of all such reports, responses and actions arising from them.

2.91 The review team concludes that 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**

2.92 The awarding bodies and Pearson are ultimately responsible for ensuring that programmes are monitored and reviewed in order to maintain academic standards and enhance students' learning opportunities. However, in practice, programme monitoring and review is a joint activity involving staff of the College and its awarding bodies. College staff undertake annual monitoring of modules, receive and respond to external examiners' reports, and complete annual monitoring reports. In the case of programmes approved by Pearson, the College completes its own internal review and the programme is subject to annual monitoring by the standards verifier. Institutional oversight is provided by the Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group, which receives all external examiner, standards verifier and annual monitoring reports. It reports to the Management Team and Strategic Planning Group.

2.93 These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.94 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising module evaluation and review forms; external examiner, standards verifier and annual monitoring reports for a range of foundation degree and Higher National programmes; and the minutes of the relevant College committees. The review team also discussed monitoring and review processes with students, senior and teaching staff from the College, and link officers from the awarding bodies.

2.95 Students have an opportunity to provide feedback on the extent to which they are satisfied with their teaching and learning, the clarity of assessment tasks, and the timeliness and quality of feedback they receive via end-of-module questionnaires. Completed questionnaires are reviewed by Learning Area Managers. In some cases, the responses are collated and teaching staff receive quantitative feedback, whereas other Learning Area Managers provide more general feedback.

2.96 Teaching staff complete module reviews in which they reflect on student performance and feedback, external examiners' comments, and any difficulties that have arisen during delivery. These feed into annual monitoring reports, which are completed by curriculum leaders with the support of curriculum teams, where appropriate, using templates provided by the awarding body. Annual monitoring reports are comprehensive and include an analysis of student performance, a commentary on the external examiner's report and a response to issues raised, feedback from employers, a review of the previous year's action plan and a new action plan for the coming year. The review team was provided with a number of examples of changes that have been introduced as a result of annual monitoring, which have impacted positively on students' learning experiences. Annual monitoring reports are submitted to the appropriate committee of the awarding body and any actions required are followed up by the appropriate link officer.

2.97 The College's reporting structures enable it to maintain oversight of the outcomes of annual monitoring and respond to any issues that arise. The Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group receives all link officer, annual monitoring, external examiner and external verifier reports. It reports to the College Management Team, which also receives summary data on student retention, progression and award. The College's two

main awarding bodies, UWTSD and USW, require the College to compile an overview report covering all of the provision that they approve within the College. These reports are also considered by the College's Management Team and the Curriculum and Quality Subcommittee of the College's governing body.

2.98 The College has a defined reporting structure for its higher education programmes in which the membership and terms of reference of the various committees involved are defined. Quality planners are produced to ensure that course teams are aware of the annual schedule of committee meetings. However, the College's internal procedures for the monitoring and review of programmes and modules are not documented. Hence, the review team **recommends** that the College articulate internal processes, roles and responsibilities for programme monitoring and review, to assure and enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities.

2.99 The awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring that programmes are subject to periodic review according to their own regulations. At the time of this review, only one programme has been operating long enough for a periodic review to be required. This programme, the PGCE that the College franchises from USW, was subject to periodic review during 2013-14 and successfully renewed.

2.100 No programme is discontinued without suitable arrangements for any remaining students being made. In line with its strategy of withdrawing level 6 qualifications from further education colleges, USW has recently withdrawn its BA Professional Certificate in Education, but not before all students were able to complete their studies at the College.

2.101 The College operates regular and systematic procedures for programme monitoring review, which enable it to maintain academic standards, and assure and enhance the learning opportunities of its students. Notwithstanding the need for the College to document its internal procedures more fully noted above, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.102 The Complaints Procedure is made available via the College website and in programme handbooks. Appeals information is made available via the College website or programme handbooks, which link students to the relevant awarding body policies.

2.103 The College's Complaints Procedure is clear and detailed, and describes the scope of the policy; the process; the timeframe for the College response, which is within three weeks; and appeals information. The College also has an Appeals Policy that clearly outlines the process. Students have the right to make an appeal to the appropriate partner university and thereafter the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for higher education, should they be dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled. The Policy also directs students to their awarding bodies for academic appeals procedures.

2.104 The College has a comprehensive academic appeals procedure, which is predominantly used for further education students and those studying on Pearson courses. For courses that are awarded by UWTSD and USW, the College directs students to awarding body appeals policies. Links to these policies are included within the course handbooks.

2.105 The College's policies, processes and the accessibility of this information to students would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.106 The review team examined documents, including College and awarding body policies and procedures for complaints and appeals, and tested the process in meeting with staff and students to explore how these are made available to students.

2.107 All of the handbooks include appeals information that is specific to the relevant awarding body. A report on complaints is submitted to the Corporation Board's Curriculum and Quality Subcommittee annually, listing complaints received, actions taken and status of resolution.

2.108 Students met by the review team were not clear on where they would find complaints and appeals information should they need to access it, although they felt confident that they could ask their tutors should they require it.

2.109 The review team is satisfied that the College makes its complaints and appeals procedure available. Numerous opportunities are provided to inform students of the process. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

2.110 The College has agreements to work in partnership with a number of awarding bodies: Swansea University, USW and UWTSD. The College also has a memorandum of understanding in respect of its Initial Teacher Education provision, which operates under the auspices of the South West Wales Centre of Teacher Education. It also delivers Higher National programmes with Pearson.

2.111 In all cases, its work with such bodies is governed by its memoranda of cooperation and partnership agreements, and in the case of Pearson, by Pearson's frameworks and regulations.

2.112 The College's responsibilities within these agreements are clearly shown in a responsibilities checklist from each awarding body and Pearson.

2.113 The College offers a number of programmes that include elements of work-based learning, which in some instances are a required element of the programme and attract academic credit.

2.114 The College's partnership with its awarding bodies and Pearson is explored in more detail under Expectations A1 and A2.1. Since the process is determined by its various memoranda of cooperation and agreements with them, this aspect of delivering higher education in partnership with others would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.115 The College has in place a wide range of processes by which it manages work-based learning, and many of these processes are aligned with the requirements of the various awarding bodies and Pearson.

2.116 The review team tested the Expectation by careful consideration of the College's self-evaluation document and its various memoranda of cooperation and agreements with its awarding bodies and Pearson. The Expectation was explored in meetings with senior, teaching, and support staff, meetings with students, and in a meeting with one employer. The review team also reviewed documentation used to implement work-based learning processes.

2.117 The College has a number of programmes that include work placement activities and many of the College's part-time programmes include students who are currently employed and can use their vocational experience on the course. For example, the Foundation Degree in Sports Development and Management requires 360 hours of industrial placement in a sports or leisure setting, and the HND in Spa, Hair and Beauty Management requires one day per week work placement in an appropriate vocational setting.

2.118 Where students undertake work placement that is an essential element of the course, the course team works with the student and work-based learning provider to organise the placement. Emphasis is placed on the student in this respect, as this is seen as part of the development of their employability skills. Students confirm that staff are supportive when necessary.

2.119 HNC and HND programmes in engineering include students who are also completing apprenticeships. The apprenticeship element requires assessment in the workplace as part of their work-based learning studies. Arrangements for such assessments are made by the College's work-based learning assessors.

2.120 A comprehensive range of supporting documentation from the various awarding bodies is in place to enable College staff and students alike to prepare for, experience and review the work placement. Importantly, this includes appropriate reference to, and consideration of, the health and safety of students in the workplace, albeit that the primary responsibility is placed on the work placement provider.

2.121 Material is also available to inform employers of the nature and expectations of work-based learning.

2.122 Course teams engage in post-placement review, in liaison with employer and student, to identify what went well and what could be improved. Programme annual monitoring reports also comment on work-based learning where this is an element of the programme. Students commented positively on their experiences of work-based learning and on the support that they received from College staff on this aspect of their learning experience.

2.123 The College has effective processes and resources in place to support students to find and undertake work-based learning, which contributes to the development of student employability. These processes are aligned with the requirements of the awarding bodies. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

### **Findings**

2.124 The College does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

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

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

2.126 All but one of the Expectations in this area are met and there are three features of good practice relating to admissions, learning and teaching, and student engagement.

2.127 Four recommendations are made in relation to the quality of learning opportunities. Three are in relation to Expectations that are met and carry a low risk: that recognition of prior learning opportunities should be made explicit; that the Learner Involvement Strategy should engage students both at operational and strategic levels; and that responsibilities within monitoring and review processes should be fully articulated.

2.128 The recommendation relating to programme approval arose from the discovery that a particular programme had already been running for a year before approval was obtained from the awarding organisation. While this affected only a part of the College's provision and approval has now been secured, the substantial delay carried potential consequences for a particular group of students. Moreover, the failure of the College to abide by its own procedure for approval in this instance puts into question more generally the rigour of its processes. Therefore, Expectation B1 is not met, although the level of risk is assessed as moderate.

2.129 The one Expectation not met is not considered a severe risk and affects only a small part of the provision. All other Expectations are met and the four recommendations are balanced by three features of good practice.

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

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

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

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

##### **Findings**

3.1 The College provides a range of information about its higher education provision to students, staff and external stakeholders in a variety of ways, including print and digital formats. Communications are underpinned by the Higher Education Marketing Guidelines and Higher Education Marketing Activity Action Plan, which align with the Higher Education Growth Strategy and outline the targets for expanding the College's higher education provision.

3.2 The College provides information about its higher education provision principally through its website and the higher education course cards, which detail key information about each course. Programme teams and the Higher Education Manager are responsible for checking the accuracy of programme-related information. Course information regarding the College's franchised provision is approved by the awarding bodies prior to publication and Pearson marketing guidelines are observed for Pearson provision.

3.3 The College's higher education-specific marketing strategies would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.4 The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing policies and procedures, together with a range of published information, including web-based information about the College and its higher education provision. The team looked at the content and accessibility of the website and had a demonstration of the College's VLE and recently developed Amendments Log. The team also discussed the effectiveness of the College's practices and procedures for the publication of information with students and senior, academic and professional support staff.

3.5 The College has both a Higher Education Marketing Activity Action Plan and Higher Education Marketing Guidelines, which link into the Higher Education Growth Strategy. The College's vision and values, policies and procedures are all available on its website. The Admissions Policy refers applicants to the College Appeals Policy for admissions appeals, which is available via the College website. Recognition of prior learning policy is not available via the College website and it is unclear how an applicant would access this information other than by applying directly to the College. This point is covered further in relation to Expectation B2. Awarding body policies are available via the respective university websites and links are provided in the relevant programme handbooks.

3.6 The College meets criteria for publishing the Key Information Set. However, at the time of the review, the College acknowledged that it had not published its Key Information Set widget, as directed by a circular from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, which stipulates that Key Information Set data must be published by September 2015 in order to ensure that prospective students can make fully informed choices about their programmes.

3.7 The College publishes course information via course cards, on its own website and via the UCAS website. The Higher Education Manager, the course leaders and the awarding

bodies check and approve published information relating to their respective courses, and provide the College with branding guidelines. The review team examined the course cards and websites, and found errors and inconsistencies in course information. Some foundation degrees were wrongly titled on the website and a particular example of inconsistency of course information related to the title of the Spa, Hair and Beauty programme, which varied across the course card and the College website as discussed under Expectation B2. The course was marketed as HND Spa, Hair and Beauty Management, but the award by Pearson is HND Hair and Beauty Management, and the College does not deliver any of the hair-specific optional modules. Staff met by the review team were confident that students and employers were not misled but acknowledged that there was a problem with the award title, which would be resolved by recruiting students in future to a new foundation degree programme. However, the review team was unable to speak to either group to independently check their understanding of the award title or content. Changes have been made to information available to prospective students, which have clarified the position to some extent. However, at the time of the review visit, the disparities between the award title advertised, the curriculum covered and the award actually made were potentially misleading to prospective students and employers.

3.8 The review team also found that courses where a Disclosure and Barring Service check is required do not detail this on the course cards or in the course information provided on the College website, which has entry and financial implications for applicants. These oversights could potentially put the College at risk of scrutiny from the Competitions and Markets Authority, despite the College's awareness of the Authority's guidelines. Further analysis of information for prospective students is covered under Expectation B2. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure that the information provided for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.9 Awarding bodies provide templates for the format of programme handbooks; for university provision, the handbook provides students with links to their awarding body policies, which includes academic appeals, mitigating circumstances, and academic misconduct. Programme handbooks are checked by awarding bodies, and the Quality Manager checks the handbooks for Pearson provision. The review team did find some errors in the handbooks, for instance the Business and Accounting Handbook refers to Business and Marketing. It is therefore unclear how rigorously these documents are checked in practice.

3.10 The College has recently developed an Amendments Log, in order to track amendments to published information, and allocate tasks and accountability. The log is set up in such a way that only those responsible for each individual area and senior staff with oversight have access. While this system is in its infancy, the review team received positive feedback from staff who use it at an operational level.

3.11 During the review visit, the review team received a demonstration of the College's VLE, which is clear and easy to navigate. Students reported mixed views, but they mainly found it easy to use. The College does not have minimum standard guidelines for courses, which leads to some inconsistency of use across the courses. The College has a Teachers' Zone area of the VLE, which is a dedicated space for those delivering higher education at the College. It is used as an information repository and includes materials such as the Quality Code. The team heard plans to use the Teachers' Zone to disseminate good practice across different courses.

3.12 Following a successful admissions interview, the College provides a clear and detailed higher education offer booklet, which includes links to Student Finance Wales, Disabled Students' Allowance, transport to college, and enrolment details. The booklet is

identified in this report, under Expectation B2, as good practice. For applicants who require more information on College support, the information can be found in the Student Experience section of the website, which holds information about student support and bursary information, as well as UCAS, student finance and higher education guidance notes on how to apply.

3.13 The College has the relevant policies, procedures and guidelines in place in order to meet this Expectation. However, there are inconsistencies in the rigour with which these procedures are followed. A key example of this is the checking of published information, particularly for applicants, which is central to the recommendation made in this area. The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

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

- 3.14 In reaching its judgement about the quality of information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.
- 3.15 The Expectation in this judgement area is not met and the level of associated risk is assessed as moderate.
- 3.16 There is a single, overarching recommendation that the information provided for all intended audiences should be fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.
- 3.17 The shortcomings found with respect to information are largely in information for prospective students, employers and the public, rather than for existing students: specifically the lack of statistical information through the key information set widget, inconsistencies between course titles and qualifications, and lack of information on Disclosure and Barring Service requirements, despite the feature of good practice identified in relation to Expectation B2, the offer booklet, which demonstrates that the College is capable of producing very effective information for prospective students and their families. Additionally, developments in IT systems and oversight processes for checking course information, such as the Amendments Log, indicate that the College is developing appropriate structures to allow this Expectation to be met.
- 3.18 Nonetheless, at the time of the review, the review team found shortcomings in the accuracy and completeness of information, which had the potential to cause misunderstandings for applicants and the wider public. The shortcomings therefore indicated failings in the rigour with which checking procedures have been applied and pose a moderate risk.
- 3.19 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.



## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College's processes for identifying enhancement themes have developed in parallel with the expansion of its portfolio of higher education programmes. Specific targets and indicators for higher education are included within its Annual Operational Plan and a new Higher Education Strategy has recently been approved. Enhancement themes can also emerge from annual monitoring and evaluation processes and the Learner Voice Survey. Responsibility for promoting systematic improvements within the College's higher education portfolio lies mainly with the Higher Education Operations Group, which reports to the Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Management Group.

4.2 These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.3 The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing the College's strategies and action plans; annual monitoring, external examiner and standards verifier reports; and the minutes of the committees involved. Discussions were also held with the College's senior management and teaching staff.

4.4 The outcomes of module evaluation and review by students and teaching staff, and the reports of external examiners and standards verifiers, feed into annual monitoring processes, as described under Expectation B8. These result in action plans for specific programmes but can also foster enhancements in other programmes elsewhere in the College. For example, following the identification of difficulties in accessing electronic resources being highlighted by students on the Foundation Degree in Care and Support, it emerged that this was an issue affecting all students on programmes approved by the same awarding body. The issue was raised at a senior level by the Higher Education Manager and Vice-Principal Academic Services and ultimately resolved to the benefit of all affected students. Students on the Foundation Degree in Sports Development and Management raised concerns about the lack of dedicated space for higher education learners at the College. This issue was also raised by a curriculum leader in the Higher Education Operations Group. This matter is now recognised as a priority by the College and it has plans to establish a new higher education centre at the front of the Tycoch Building, subject to funding and planning consent.

4.5 The Learner Voice Survey was the first specific survey conducted by the College across all its full and part-time higher education provision. Following this, the College has devised a Higher Education Learner Voice Action Plan, identifying objectives, actions, individual responsibilities and milestones to ensure that the issues raised are addressed in a timely manner.

4.6 The College has dedicated higher education advocates for each of its functional areas. These enable the College to more effectively identify and address the specific needs of its higher education students. The review team learned how the higher education advocates have enhanced marketing materials, students' awareness of avenues for obtaining financial support, and student representation within the College. The role of the higher education advocates, which enhances students' learning opportunities, is **good practice**.

4.7 The College has had limited direct involvement with the Future Directions for Higher Education in Wales programme, although it has addressed some of its themes. Reflecting the Learning for Employment work strand in Future Directions, the majority of the College's higher education programmes are vocational in nature and some allow students to gain additional qualifications. For example, students on sports programmes can gain additional gym instructor and steward qualifications alongside their awards. Many of the College's programmes incorporate work-based learning, reflecting the Learning in Employment work strand.

4.8 Until recently, the College has had limited engagement with the UK Professional Standards Framework, but there have been recent developments in this area. For instance, following a recent training event organised in conjunction with one of its awarding bodies, 12 staff are now attending training sessions with a view to achieving accreditation.

4.9 At the time of the review, none of the College's full-time programmes had completed a full cycle. The College is therefore at an early stage in terms of identifying and implementing enhancement themes. However, the College has systems and procedures in place to enable such themes to emerge and be addressed. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

4.11 Although higher education is not yet well developed, and the identification and development of enhancement themes is at an early stage, the College has a Higher Education Strategy and an action plan with targets for higher education. It gathers themes from annual monitoring and the Learner Voice Survey, and has devised a specific higher education version of the survey, which will have its own action plan.

4.12 Already, outcomes from individual programmes have brought about changes that have impacted positively on the wider higher education portfolio. Additionally, a Higher Education Manager has recently been appointed and there are plans to build a new higher education centre. The appointment of higher education advocates, who look after the interests of higher education students in the functional areas of the College, has resulted in demonstrable improvements and is identified as a feature of good practice.

4.13 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on Internationalisation

### Findings

5.1 The College has a dedicated international department managed by an international manager and has full Tier 4 licence status. This includes liaison with international managing agents and the arrangement of homestay accommodation.

5.2 The international manager has operational responsibility for the College's international provision and a dean of faculty takes the strategic lead. Currently, the cohort of international higher education students is very small. The International and Higher Education Managers are currently exploring opportunities for increased provision, in particular with partner vocational colleges in China, and the College engages in European Erasmus projects.

5.3 Welsh language and culture, and the place of Wales in the international context, is also a theme embedded through the College's higher education provision.

5.4 For programmes validated through the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, internationalisation is a theme that is considered in all proposals.

5.5 Teaching staff take naturally occurring opportunities to explore international dimensions and have, for example, used local multinational employers, organisations and events in this respect. Overseas study tours are organised on some programmes.

5.6 Other areas that are developed alongside the subject-specific content of the programme include employability and independent study skills. In so doing, the College is equipping students to obtain employment overseas, particularly in areas of high demand such as engineering and computing. Students are helped in this respect by, in some cases, the availability of internationally recognised additional qualifications, which supplement their degree or Higher National award.

## 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 22-24 of the [Higher Education Review: Wales handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See **technology enhanced or enabled learning**.

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

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

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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