



Higher Education Review of Hartlepool Sixth Form College

January 2015

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Hartlepool Sixth Form College. The review took place from 19 to 23 January 2015 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Kevin Kendall
- Miss Kate Wicklow (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Amended judgement June 2016

Introduction

In January 2015, Hartlepool Sixth Form College underwent a Higher Education Review, which resulted in 'meets UK expectations' for the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies; the quality of student learning opportunities; and the quality of the information about learning opportunities. However, the College received a judgement of 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' for the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

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

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

The follow-up process included four progress updates and culminated in the review team's scrutiny of the College's progress reports and the supporting documentary evidence, along with a one-day visit on 14 April 2016 with one reviewer. During the visit the team met senior and academic staff and students to discuss progress and triangulate the evidence base received over the preceding months.

The visit confirmed that the recommendation relating to the enhancement of student learning opportunities had been successfully addressed. Actions against recommendations and good practice relating to the maintenance of academic standards, the quality of student learning opportunities and the quality of information about learning opportunities which received positive judgements, had also been completed on schedule and contributed to the progress against the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

QAA Board decision and amended judgement

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

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

Findings from the follow-up process

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

Recommendation – Enhancement

Take deliberate and systematic steps, at provider level, to identify, disseminate, implement and monitor good practice and evaluate its impact on the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

There is a revised and more effective reporting and line management structure overseen by the newly introduced Higher Education Committee which has clear terms of reference and membership comprising higher education staff and students. This new structure ensures that the College's Vision for Enhancement is strategically delivered and overseen at a senior level. Revised monitoring processes, peer observation and regular formal meetings with student representatives ensure that improvements and good practice are identified, shared and used as a foundation for enhancement initiatives.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Hartlepool Sixth Form College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Hartlepool Sixth Form College.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Hartlepool Sixth Form College.

- The integration of the programme into the wider professional qualifications needed to pursue a career in law (Expectation A1).
- The involvement of experienced practitioners in the delivery of live scenario-based learning and assessment (Expectation B3).
- The recognition of the distinctive needs of staff who teach on higher education programmes, the support for enhancing teaching practice and the opportunities to engage in scholarly activity (Expectation B3).
- The effective links between the College and University in monitoring and reviewing the programme (Expectation B8).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Hartlepool Sixth Form College.

By June 2015:

- formalise the College's internal approval process of programmes prior to entering the University's validation process (Expectation B1)
- ensure that students are informed about the role and identity of the external examiner and bring to students' attention the availability of external examiner reports (Expectation B7).

By September 2015:

- review the formal committee structure to ensure its effectiveness in light of planned programme expansion (Expectation A2.1)
- clarify the University support services agreement and subsequently review the College's own support services in light of current student numbers and planned future expansion (Expectation B4)
- establish formal processes to engage students as partners in the management of learning opportunities (Expectation B5)
- take deliberate and systematic steps, at provider level, to identify, disseminate, implement and monitor good practice and evaluate its impact on the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities (Enhancement).

By December 2015:

- formalise relationships between the College and employers to ensure work-related opportunities are delivered effectively (Expectation B10).

Theme: Student Employability

Student employability is firmly embedded in the current higher education provision at the College, as the Foundation Degree provides clear progression opportunities and integration into wider professional qualifications. Student employment aspirations and the development of employability skills are supported by various means. An employment-focused module helps students develop professional skills relevant to the law industry. Guest practitioners are invited into the College to offer their advice and expertise as well as delivering live scenario-based learning and assessment. The College is actively developing links with local employers and networks to encourage greater learning and career opportunities for its students.

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

About Hartlepool Sixth Form College

Hartlepool Sixth Form College (the College) has approximately 1,100 full-time students, with 100 students studying a Foundation Degree in Law. In 2010 the College underwent a £24 million new-build programme, which allowed it to increase its student capacity.

The College's mission statement is to 'provide a high quality learning environment to a diverse community'. In offering education and training opportunities, improving students' achievements is the College's highest priority; as such, the College is committed to access, teaching excellence and the enjoyment of learning, comprehensiveness, lifelong learning, partnership building and economic development'. It achieves this through its strategic objectives.

The College has recently appointed a new Principal and Deputy Principal, the latter of which currently oversees the existing higher education provision which is validated by the University of Sunderland (the University).

The College established its relationship with the University in March 2008 and was approved as a partner of the University. Approval by the Joint Academic Stage Board also represented the Law Society of England and Wales and the General Council of the Bar. The partnership, in accordance with the University's collaborative processes, is reviewed within a six-yearly cycle. The College plans to further expand its higher education provision in the near future.

This is the College's first review undertaken by QAA.

Explanation of the findings about Hartlepool Sixth Form College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies

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 appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ are discussed during the design of the course and are ensured through the validation and periodic review of the programme. The programme was initially approved in 2008 by the University and by the Joint Academic Stage Board which represents both the Law Society of England and Wales and the General Council of the Bar.

1.2 The awarding of credit is primarily the responsibility of the University as the awarding body and regular checks are made through the Partner Annual Report.

1.3 The review team met staff from across the College, as well as the Head of Law and the Programme Leader from the University. Documentation seen included the periodic review 2011 documents and the current Programme Specification. The Partner Annual Report for 2013-14 shows regular monitoring of the national benchmarks.

1.4 The course team have a good understanding of the national benchmarks and how they inform curriculum development. The Programme Specification shows how the course is mapped against the Subject Benchmark Statements and the Partner Annual Report

highlights relevant parts of the Academic Infrastructure and how it is embedded in the programme.

1.5 The College has also mapped the programme against the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEx) framework and been given an exemption for students to automatically qualify for the Level 3 CILEx qualification on completion of year 1 of the Foundation Degree. The programme is also accredited by the Solicitors Regulation Authority and students are able to progress from the Foundation Degree onto an accredited BA or LLB qualification at the University. The review team finds the integration of the programme into the wider professional qualifications needed to pursue a career in law as **good practice**.

1.6 Ultimate responsibility for the approval of the award sits with the University; however, the College has taken responsibility to ensure that students are studying a course which is accredited by the legal profession and has been designed with accredited progression in mind. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A1 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

1.7 The College is subject to the University Quality Handbook and Operations Manual and the University assessment criteria which govern the management of standards for the programme. The College has a number of additional policies which apply to higher education students relating to student conduct, student support, complaints and equality and diversity.

1.8 The College has an internal committee structure to manage its higher education provision which has recently been revised. The College has developed a new Higher Education Operations Group which will oversee the management of higher education programmes. This group replaces a Quality Review Group which was a College-wide group. The group considers internal and external reports, discusses the quality of the higher education provision and shares practice across the staff teams.

1.9 The minutes from the Group are seen by the Senior Management Team.

1.10 The College's Law Department also operates informal team meetings every fortnight, which are reported through management meetings with the Performance Director, and relevant information is reported and actions monitored at the Higher Education Operations Group.

1.11 The College develops a yearly Quality Improvement Plan, which manages actions at department level and then across its whole provision. Actions relating to higher education are discussed at the Higher Education Operations Group. The College also has a quality and standards committee which is College-wide, and higher education management information is reported to this group as well as details of College complaints. These minutes are seen by the Board of Governors.

1.12 The College has recently undergone senior staff changes relating to the management of higher education. The Deputy Principal is currently fulfilling the Higher Education Manager's role, while the Course Team Leader for Law is managing the higher education programme.

1.13 The College does not operate any modifications to University policies and procedures. Ultimate responsibility for programme regulations lies with the University and staff from the College sit on the University Studies Board where the course is managed. College staff also attend University Exam Boards and College annual reports are discussed in University internal committees.

1.14 The team met senior staff at the College as well as course team staff and representatives from the University. The College provided the team with the following higher education-specific College procedures: team structure, reporting chart, committee minutes, and terms of reference.

1.15 Clarification was required several times during the review about the current deliberative structures in place and the roles and responsibilities of those managing the

provision. The current internal management of higher education works informally through Departmental Management meetings and the Higher Education Operations Group. There is no transparency of decisions made at a departmental level and how these feed into central management functions. Changes to the regulations and the programme are communicated to the Course Team from the University but as there are no formal recording of these and therefore no receipt of University communications taken at any other forum, the review team **recommends** that the College review the formal committee structure to ensure its effectiveness in light of planned programme expansion.

1.16 Staff are aware of the University Operations Manual and any changes to it are effectively communicated through the University Programme Leader, the Studies Board or the University Higher Education in Further Education Working Group.

1.17 Through the academic staff meeting, the review team noted that the course team had developed a good rapport with the Programme Leader at the University. As part of the Joint Franchise agreement, the University visits the College at least twice per year to support the operational management of the programme and follow-up actions. The University is well informed about the staff changes and is satisfied with the new approach to managing the programme.

1.18 The College follows its responsibilities in accordance with the University's agreement with the frameworks and regulations to secure the award of credit to be appropriate and effective in operation. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation A2.1 is met but the associated level of risk is moderate due to the lack of transparency of local decision making within the College committee structure.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.19 Responsibility for this area primarily sits with the University. The College does, however, maintain its own student records and provides data to the University to inform the annual quality monitoring process.

1.20 The Programme Specification and Module Descriptors are the property of the University who also design the modules which map onto the BA or LLB progression routes. All other module descriptors are written by the College course team and are checked by the University.

1.21 As part of the University's responsibility, it ensures that all new content developed by the College meets its expectations before the commencement of delivery.

1.22 The review team saw the Programme Specification, module descriptors, Module Annual Monitoring Reports and Partner Annual Reports, and met with both academic staff at the College and staff from the University.

1.23 It is clear that the process outlined by the staff team is working in practice. The Module Annual Monitoring Reports show where changes are being made and each Module Guide refers to the module descriptors. Staff are clearly using management information in the Partner Annual Reports, and are given access to the University's student records system to update information. Sign-off for Programme Specifications and Module Descriptors happens at the University Studies Board.

1.24 The College understands and carries out its responsibilities effectively in relation to the University's agreement. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A2.2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.25 The franchise agreement between the University and the College allows the College to deliver a programme that is reflective of its needs and local market. The Joint Franchise model retains University ownership of the programme so that it can be offered on campus or to other partners. A partner may have input into the design and development of a programme as well as into its delivery and assessment. The University also has a periodic review of the partnership every six years.

1.26 The College became a partner of the University of Sunderland in 2008 when it was approved to offer the Foundation Degree in Law and stage 1 LLB under a Model B (Franchise) collaboration. The University initially designed and developed the programme, but now the responsibility for programme development and modification is shared with the College.

1.27 Curriculum development is discussed at the Module and Programme Studies and Assessment Boards at the University, which College staff attend. All amendments are presented to the Academic Quality and Standards Policy Committee at the University.

1.28 At the College, all proposals for new programmes go to the Senior Management Team for discussion and approval; they then go through the same process with the College Governing Body. Once approved at this stage, meetings take place between the relevant Head of Department at the College and University representatives, before entering the University validation process.

1.29 The University approval and review processes supported by the College prior to approval by the Senior Management Team enable the Expectation to be met.

1.30 The review team considered all the relevant documentation, including the Self-Evaluation Document and the Programme Specification, and met the Principal, and senior and academic staff.

1.31 The College has not yet validated any further programmes although it plans to do so for a 2016 entry. The above processes have been followed effectively and are understood by staff. Minor modifications have also taken place, for example to change module structure and delivery which was requested by the Programme Coordinator at the University. Proposals for modifications would normally be proposed through the Annual Programme Review, Periodic Review or the College Partner Annual Report.

1.32 Overall, the processes for the external approval of new programmes through the University and the internal approval through the Senior Management Team are in place and understood by staff. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.1 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

1.33 The Foundation Degree in Law Programme Specification states that the programme has been designed to be consistent with the Foundation Degree Benchmark and the Law Subject Benchmark and the specification contains mapping of programme outcomes to these benchmarks. The programme comprises 120 credits at level 4 and 120 credits at level 5.

1.34 The College staff write the assessments according to the module descriptors for non-core programmes; they are then internally verified at the College and also approved by the University.

1.35 Student grades are internally verified at the College, moderated by the University and examined by the external examiner. They are entered directly into the University central electronic system by the College and dealt with at the University exam boards.

1.36 The College and the University operate an effective internal verification process for both assessment briefs and student work and external examiners' reports confirm that assessments meet the required academic standards. These processes enable the College to meet the Expectation.

1.37 The review team examined all relevant documentation including programme specifications and policies, and procedures relating to assessment. They also met academic and senior staff, and students.

1.38 Programme outcomes are stated in the programme specifications and there is a clear link to assessment tasks. The College and the University have an effective system in place to internally verify assessments and marked work and external examiners' reports confirm that academic standards are met.

1.39 Overall the College has systems in place to ensure that the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable, and that the award of qualifications and credit is based on the achievement of intended learning outcomes. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation A3.2 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

1.40 The College and University responsibilities with regard to the approval, periodic and annual review of programmes are set out in Annex 2 of the Franchise Agreement. The details of the processes for the annual and periodic monitoring of collaborative provision are set out in the University's Academic Quality Handbook, which is available on the University website.

1.41 The Course Leader at the College submits an annual review of the programme to the Faculty of Law at the University who is responsible for monitoring the programme through the Programme Studies Board. The Programme Team at the University produces an Annual Report and Action Plan which is fed back to the College, the Associate Dean (Student Experience) and Faculty Quality Officer at the University. The Annual Report is informed by the external examiners' reports. The Associate Dean (Student Experience) oversees the review of all the Faculty Partnership Annual Reports for the Faculty and produces a high-level report which informs a University-wide report for all four faculties identifying key issues for specific partners or for collaborative provision as a whole. The Collaborative Provision Annual Report is considered by the Senior Management Team at the College and the Governors Quality and Standards Subcommittee. The University also undertakes a periodic review of College programmes every six years; the last one was in 2011.

1.42 The University has systems in place as detailed in the Academic Quality Handbook which enable the University to ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which address whether academic standards are being maintained. The University processes combined with the College systems for programme monitoring and periodic review enable it to meet the Expectation.

1.43 The review team examined documentary evidence showing the University and College systems for programme monitoring and review and also reports and minutes from meetings where programme quality issues are discussed. They also tested the application of these quality assurance processes in meetings with senior staff, professional support staff and academic staff.

1.44 The University has sound procedures in place to ensure the maintenance of academic standards. Staff at the College share a common understanding of how programme monitoring works and follow the University procedures effectively. External examiners confirm that academic standards are met.

1.45 Overall, there are procedures in place by the University to ensure the maintenance of academic standards at the College, which are followed and understood by College staff. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.3 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

1.46 The College has several examples of where external expertise is used at key stages in setting and maintaining academic standards. External professional bodies involved in the approval and periodic review process include the Joint Academic Stage Board, representing the Solicitors Regulation Authority. The Foundation Degree is also linked to the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives qualifications.

1.47 External examiners are appointed according to the University procedures detailed in the Academic Quality Handbook, and they visit the College, examine student work and submit an annual report on whether academic standards have been met, with recommendations and features of good practice. The Programme Coordinator and the Head of the Faculty of Law at the University also provide continuing support and guidance to the College staff.

1.48 Teaching and learning has input from the legal profession which often involves scenario setting and professionals, such as magistrates and judges, having input into the process through, for example, helping with assessment. The scenarios simulate the real working environment and students role play representing a client at a hearing. Through this process employers have a say in the design and assessment of the course in the future.

1.49 The ongoing approval by the Joint Academic Stage Board (JASB), the effective use of external examiners, the support from staff at the University and the involvement of the legal professional in teaching, learning and assessment enable the College to meet the Expectation.

1.50 The review team tested the use of external expertise by reading external examiners' reports and annual reviews of the programme, and through meetings with students and staff.

1.51 The joint validation by the JASB and CILEx exemption works successfully, giving students progression opportunities to either Level 6 CILEx or a top-up to a two-year LLB programme. The external examiner system plus support from University tutors is very effective in the monitoring and review of the programme. There have been some problems with professional input into the programme through the loss of a solicitor who made a significant contribution to the programme; however, the College is addressing this and is compiling a database of employers, both as potential visiting speakers and also as work placement providers.

1.52 The review team is satisfied that external and independent expertise is used appropriately by the College through various mechanisms and concludes that Expectation A3.4 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: Summary of findings

1.53 In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of the of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.54 All of the applicable Expectations in this area have been met. The risk is judged low in all but one case. Expectation A2.1 is met because the current arrangements are adequate for the one course on offer. However, the risk of A2.1 is considered moderate due to potential risk to programmes in the informal reporting structures between department and the higher education management, and a recommendation to review the formal committee structure to ensure its effectiveness in light of planned programme expansion is made.

1.55 There is one feature of good practice in this area which refers to the varied pathways established in the course.

1.56 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the College's degree-awarding body **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 established its relationship with the University in 2008 when, following approval by the University and the JASB of the Foundation Degree in Law, the University approved the College to become a partner of the University. The College is approved to offer a Foundation Degree in Law and stage 1 LLB under a Model B (Franchise) collaboration. These collaborative arrangements involve the Faculty of Business and Law at the University. The University also undertakes a periodic review of the partnership every six years.

2.2 Proposals for subsequent modifications to the programme are proposed through the Annual Programme Review, Periodic Review or the College Partner Annual Report. Curriculum development for the programme is discussed at the Module and Programme Studies and Assessment Boards at the University, which College staff attend. All programme amendments are presented to the Academic Quality and Standards Policy Committee at the University for approval.

2.3 The College has written a document on the development of higher education at the College which proposes a new Foundation Degree to start in 2016, preceded by Access to Higher Education programmes in 2015. These proposed new programmes are to meet the needs of local employers and provide a progression route for students who are already studying at the College.

2.4 At the College, all proposals for new programmes go to the Senior Management Team for discussion and approval of the business case; they go through the same process with the College Governing Body. Once approved at this stage, meetings take place between the relevant Head of Department at the College and University representatives, before entering the University validation process.

2.5 The College has extensive employer networks through its A Level provision and plans to use these in the development and design of the new programmes.

2.6 The University approval and review processes supported by the College prior to approval by the Senior Management Team enable the Expectation to be met. However, the College has no current formal processes in place to internally approve curriculum content. The College has confirmed planned programme expansion from September 2015, but current practice does not support approval of validation documentation or content matter to be reviewed and approved before going through the University's validation process. Therefore the review team **recommends** that the College formalise the internal approval processes for new programmes prior to entering the University's validation process.

2.7 The review team took account of relevant documentation, including University approval documentation, and the College Higher Education Development document, along with collaborative provision annual reports and periodic review reports, and met the Principal and senior staff.

2.8 The College has not yet validated any further programmes although it plans to do so for a 2016 entry. The above processes have been followed effectively and are understood by staff. Minor modifications to the programme have also taken place, for example changing module structure and delivery requested by the Programme Coordinator at the University. Proposals for modifications would normally be proposed through the Annual Programme Review, Periodic Review or the College Partner Annual Report. The Higher Education Development document clearly demonstrates that the College ensures that there is a market and a rationale for each proposed new programme. The rationale confirms that each new programme is valid, and is designed to meet the needs of students and employers. The process of approval through the College Senior Management Team should ensure a sound business case for programme development. The process is well understood and clear to College staff. There is no formal process for the involvement of employers but it is the College's intention to consult them in future programme developments. Following the approval to go ahead by the College Senior Management Team, the relevant Head of Department at the College would liaise directly with the appropriate person at the University to prepare the documentation for validation.

2.9 Overall, the College has some mechanisms in place for the design and approval of programmes but does not have an internal approval process in place to ensure that the standard of validation documentation and subject matter are in line with College expectations. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B1 is met but the associated level of risk is moderate because there is insufficient emphasis given to assuring quality in the planning process.

Expectation: 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

2.10 The College operates the recruitment and admissions of students in accordance with University policies. The University has overall responsibility for admissions but the College has a responsibility to market the course to prospective students.

2.11 The application process is managed via UCAS, and the University informs the College to whom to make offers. Criteria for eligibility are set by the University and all applications with non-standard qualifications must be referred back to the University before a provisional decision is made. Before students are enrolled on the course, they are also interviewed by the College to ensure that they understand the commitment needed to complete the course successfully.

2.12 The College is provided with target enrolment numbers from the University Partnerships Office, and once students are enrolled their progress is monitored through a SWOT analysis, which feeds into the Annual Partner Report.

2.13 The Expectation is met in theory by the Admissions Policy provided by the University.

2.14 The review team were provided with the University Partner Admissions Policy and the Annual Partner Report, and were able to test the process through meeting with students, College and University staff. The team had access to the College Quality Reviews group minutes and the terms of reference for the Quality and Standards Committee.

2.15 Staff from the College had a sound awareness of their role in the recruitment and admissions process. Although the admissions policy stated that the College are allowed to enrol direct applications to the College, the review team were informed that this was misleading, and all enrolment must go through the University. The 2013 Annual Partner Report highlighted that there had been some issues with the turnaround time for providing offers to applicants, but this had now been dealt with through the new Admissions Policy. Students also confirmed that the process outlined in the Admissions Process was accurate and they were all offered an interview before their enrolment. As well as recruitment targets being monitored through the University, the College also showed sound management of their recruitment numbers in annual reports to the Quality Review Group and data relating to recruitment is also reported at the College's Quality and Standards Committee. It is unclear how a student who failed to gain a place on the course would be able to appeal the decision.

2.16 Admissions onto the Foundation Degree programme are ultimately the responsibility of the University; however, the College provided the review team with clear evidence that it is taking responsibility for overseeing the process. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation B2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.17 The College has a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy which is College-wide and details staff and student expectations in relation to teaching and learning. The College has recently developed a higher education-specific Teaching and Learning Strategy, which maps out themes in which to enhance their teaching practices for higher education programmes.

2.18 All staff within the College are educated to at least degree level and the University approves the appointment of all new members of staff who will be teaching on the Foundation Degree. The College has a staff development policy which provides staff with the opportunities to undertake further study which is financially supported by the College. All staff teaching on the programme are provided with an annual allowance of time to their contracted teaching hours to update their professional knowledge.

2.19 The College has developed a specific peer observation process for staff teaching on the programme, and staff are observed three times per year. Students are able to comment on the quality of teaching through informal feedback and through the new observation process. As well as staff observations, staff are monitored through an annual performance review.

2.20 As indicated in the partnership agreement, the College is responsible for the quality of all the learning and teaching, and the provision of suitable work-related learning opportunities. To ensure this, staff at the College invite guest practitioners to deliver role play sessions, lecture on specific topics and offer feedback to students on law practice and legal skills. Although it is not a formal part of the curriculum, students are encouraged to find a work placement to further their practical knowledge. College staff do not find students a work placement, but encourage students to use the support of the College to secure one for themselves. Developing work-related opportunities for students is cited as an objective in the Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy.

2.21 Local employers are able to offer informal advice through connections with the College's teaching staff, on practical assessment tasks and scenario setting, which forms a major part of student assessment. Staff at the University also have mechanisms to do this for assessments that they have set for the College.

2.22 The review team were given access to the College and higher education-specific teaching and learning strategies, the College recruitment policy, lesson observation documentation, periodic review and annual monitoring documentation, and access to the College virtual learning environment (VLE), and met College and University staff and students.

2.23 Staff are aware, understand and engage in the new higher education staff observation process and know how the outcomes of these observations will feed into their continuing professional development (CPD), Quality Improvement Plans and appraisal activities. Staff confirmed how they share good teaching practice across the College through

'carousel' sessions with other teaching staff. The University also provides support to College staff through higher education in further education enhancement days and developmental engagement meetings, where staff can share practice and learn about changes to the Quality Code and other national expectations. Teaching staff also informed the review team of how they are using their CPD time and their annual abatement in developing their professional knowledge and engaging in scholarly activity. Students across the programme are very happy with the quality of teaching and found the course stimulating. The review team wish to highlight the recognition of the distinctive needs of staff who teach on higher education programmes; the support for enhancing teaching practice and the opportunities to engage in scholarly activity is **good practice**.

2.24 Guest speakers and external practitioners used by the College are also qualified teachers who understand the programme's learning outcomes. The Practical Legal Skills module offers students understanding of the requirements of being a practitioner and an opportunity to practise their law skills. The formative and summative assessments within the module reflect realistic professional practice. Students are positive about the practical nature of the module and the external examiner noted the enhanced employability the module brings to students. Therefore, the review team confirms the involvement of experienced practitioners in the delivery of live scenario-based learning and assessment is **good practice**.

2.25 Although the College's higher education Learning and Teaching Strategy is yet to be operationalised, the review team found widespread consideration for the quality of teaching and learning on the programme. The College invests in its staff both financially and through giving staff the opportunity to develop their professional and research skills, and students commented favourably both on the quality of teaching and the knowledge of staff. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation B3 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

2.26 Responsibility for offering students support services and academic resources is shared between the University and the College. The College has its own policies in relation to resources and support, including a learning resources policy and a learning support policy. If departments want to bid for additional resources, they can do this by following the College's Resources Allocation Policy.

2.27 Students have access to both the University and the College library services and virtual learning environments. They are also entitled to support offered by both the College and University student support teams and students have an induction at both University and College sites. The University VLE provides students with careers guidance, which is complemented by the College careers team. The College VLE is used to give students access to course materials, including module guides, assessment tasks and seminar preparatory work.

2.28 All students are allocated a Personal Tutor within the College. Staff are given access to the University Personal Tutor Handbook.

2.29 The team met with students, senior staff, teaching staff and support staff at the College. Evidence was provided by the College of their support policies, their franchise agreement, responsibilities checklist, periodic review documentation and programme specification for the course, as well as module annual monitoring reports, annual partnership reports, partnership leader annual reports and terms of reference for the Higher Education Operations Group.

2.30 The College's student support services are not specific to higher education students and they do not treat higher education students differently to College students when they engage in their services. There was no evidence presented that the support services are reviewed to ensure they meet the specific needs of higher education students. Although the team found references of discussions of student support at the Quality Review Group, the Senior Management Team have overall responsibility for decisions relating to resources and therefore the review team were unable to view how the College strategically develops its student support services for higher education students. The University's partners are required to produce an annual partner report which evaluates the student support offered to students.

2.31 Students gave the review team a mixed response as to what they thought of the support services available to them. Student primary support is given through the course team which is considered variable, and central support from the College and University services is seen to be inaccessible. The College has recently developed a lounge for higher education students to offer them a space away from the rest of the College to study and meet and has invested in obtaining additional books for the College library. Students commented that it is difficult to obtain books from the University, and were unaware that an inter-library loan scheme was operating. Students also have access to electronic books through the University library services and are given a talk on how to use this service at the beginning of the academic year. Students are currently unable to formally feedback about the support services offered to them.

2.32 Students with additional learning support needs found it difficult to access University services which added to a feeling of disconnect from the University. Support for the dyslexia test was cited as a particular challenge as well as help with Disabled Student Allowance funding. There was uncertainty from students and staff about where the responsibility of support provided for students with learning needs lay and therefore the review team **recommends** that the College clarify the University support services agreement and subsequently review the College's own support services in light of current student numbers and planned future expansion. Unlike the teaching team, College support staff do not have an ongoing relationship with the University student support team but future meetings between College and University staff are planned.

2.33 Students have regular sessions with their personal and subject tutors. Staff are happy with their role as a personal tutor and through the personal tutoring system and student support services students can develop an individual learning plan which helps them to set targets and highlight areas for academic improvement. The personal tutoring system at the College and academic staff support in general is cited as good practice by the University in their 2013-14 Partnership Annual Report.

2.34 Students follow the University's Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct Policy. Details of these are also included in student handbooks and module guides. Students had an understanding of what is expected of them; however, they were unsure where to find policies relating to academic conduct.

2.35 Students use the College VLE weekly and the University VLE infrequently. While all course learning materials sit on the College VLE, the review team noted that some key information for students such as student handbooks, access to regulations, and University learning resources are available only through the University VLE. The College acknowledged that they could do more to signpost useful resources on the University VLE to College students, and to encourage them to engage in the platform. The College also spoke about potential developments with their VLE, within the new Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, and is actively encouraging staff to use the tool more effectively.

2.36 The College teaching staff and careers team are able to offer students support in developing their CVs to obtain a work placement. The College also holds a central record of law firms in the area which student can use in their search.

2.37 The College has a number of measures in place to ensure there are adequate resources and support in place for students to achieve their academic potential. Mechanisms include a personal tutor system, online and library resources and the availability of a VLE hosting key course documents and information. Support for learning needs is available; however, clarification of the responsibilities in that area between the University and College is required. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B4 is met but the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.38 The Franchise Agreement with the University states that the College will establish a staff-student liaison committee, or equivalent forum, for ensuring that student feedback is obtained which can feed into the annual monitoring process, communicate to students the outcomes of actions taken in response to feedback and ensure that students are given the opportunity to represent the wider student body. Students are also invited to the Programme Studies Board meetings at the University.

2.39 Each year of the programme has elected student representatives whose role is to present the views and concerns of all students to the higher education team and, where appropriate, the Senior Management Team. These meetings have been informal and not minuted, although email evidence was provided to confirm dialogue with student representatives.

2.40 Termly meetings with student representatives and the Deputy Principal to raise and discuss issues related to their student experience were recently established.

2.41 Students' views on academic matters are sought through module questionnaires, and the feedback informs module leaders' annual reports and subsequently the Programme Annual Report.

2.42 There is a Student Code of Conduct, which is College-wide and is mainly concerned with behaviour expectations. It does not refer to student engagement as partners in their learning. The Student Council is also College-wide and includes higher education student representation; however, this would not be an effective forum to discuss specific programme issues.

2.43 The University recognised that the College did not specifically have a staff-student liaison committee in their review in 2011, but agreed that there are other routes for gathering formal and informal student feedback. Students and staff acknowledged that there are a number of informal ways for students to discuss issues with the College. As far as opportunities for students to formally engage with the University are concerned, students are invited to the Programme Studies Board but none have attended.

2.44 The newly established Higher Education Operational Group does not refer to students in its terms of reference, and its remit does not include the student voice. It also does not have students on the membership. Therefore, current systems are not in place to engage higher education students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience that would enable Expectation B5 to be met.

2.45 The review team examined University and College documents, which refer to student engagement and met students and staff at the College.

2.46 The College does not provide formal training for course representatives but there are plans for this to take place through the University. Students were not able to attend the Programme Studies Board meetings at the University despite being invited, due to timing and having little knowledge of the Board's function. However, the strong informal links between students and staff at the College is acknowledged. The College states that there

would be no advantage in having a staff-student liaison committee for only one higher education programme but acknowledges that this could change in view of the planned expansion in provision.

2.47 The meetings with student representatives have been informal, but the College has plans for a more formal process without forgoing the informal ad hoc meetings with representatives between these if appropriate. There are plans to have monthly meetings between a member of staff and students and the Deputy Principal, who will also meet students formally or informally at any time. A recent meeting with second-year students raised a range of academic and non-academic issues which were responded to by the Law Team and the College is making efforts to develop more effective lines of communication with higher education students.

2.48 The National Student Survey results in recent years have been generally encouraging and in 2014 there was very positive feedback about the quality of teaching, academic support, learning resources and personal development.

2.49 The review team acknowledges that as well as the meetings referred to above, there are strong informal processes and an open-door policy from staff. However, especially in view of the planned expansion in higher education programmes, the review team **recommends** that the College establish formal processes to engage students as partners in the management of learning opportunities.

2.50 The College has some mechanisms in place for students to engage in the assurance of their learning experience. Some formal and informal opportunities are established for student feedback and a student representation system has been established. However, an independent student voice is lacking in formal settings and the absence of representative engagement in committees makes it difficult to achieve critical distance between collecting student feedback and deliberating upon it. The College acknowledges that more needs to be done to ensure that all higher education students are engaged as active partners, especially in view of the College's planned expansion in its higher education portfolio. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B5 is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate as there is a weakness in the operation of part of the College's governance structure.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.51 The Foundation Degree in Law programme has been designed to be consistent with the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* and the Subject Benchmark Statement for Law. The Programme Specification contains mapping of programme outcomes to these benchmarks and comprises 120 credits at level 4 and 120 credits at level 5. The College staff write the assessments according to the module descriptors for non-core programmes, LLB modules written by the University; they are then internally verified at the College and also approved by the University. Responsibilities of the College and the University are detailed in a Responsibilities Checklist.

2.52 The assessment procedure follows the University Operations Manual and the University Assessment Policy, which contains clear and detailed information about assessment requirements. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy includes guidelines for first and second marking and the verification/moderation processes.

2.53 The College is responsible for the design of all Foundation Degree assessments except the JASB foundation modules. The University is responsible for the design and moderation of LLB and JASB Foundation Degree modules. Where the College designs the assessment, it is approved by the University.

2.54 Programme Handbooks and Module Guides provide students with detailed schedules, which enable them to plan their learning. They also contain information on all assessment matters such as grade boundaries, format of assessment, submission, plagiarism, extenuating circumstances and appeals.

2.55 Student grades are internally verified at the College, moderated by the University and examined by the external examiner. They are entered directly into the University central electronic system by the College and dealt with at the University exam boards. Feedback to students is in accordance with the University Feedback to Students Policy.

2.56 The College follows the University's Academic Misconduct Regulations, and Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct Policy. The University's Policy on Prior Learning has not been required as no suitable students have applied.

2.57 Processes are in place according to University policies and the College follows these to ensure that assessment is robust, valid and reliable. External examiners' reports confirm that assessments are appropriate and programmes meet the relevant academic standards. These policies and procedures followed by the College enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.58 The review team examined all the College and University documentation relating to assessment, including the documents referred to above, and held meetings with students and staff.

2.59 Assessments are well timetabled, enabling students to plan their workload. Timely and developmental feedback is given to students to help with future assessments. The College has an effective internal verification system in place, which assures the quality of assessment tasks and ensures that they address the relevant learning outcomes; this is confirmed by external examiners.

2.60 Module tutors write assessments mapped against module outcomes according to the Module Description, which are mapped against programme learning outcomes. These are internally verified in the College and also through the University. There is evidence of some very useful feedback following moderation of marked work from the Head of Law at the University to the College.

2.61 The College claims to be innovative in its approach to assessment, and although it must follow University guidelines, there is some evidence of interesting and innovative assessment that promotes learning, such as creating a portfolio which includes a court application and a mock live court scenario.

2.62 The University's policy on the recognition of prior learning has never been used and the policy and procedures are not clearly understood by staff.

2.63 Module tutors at the College enter student grades directly onto the University electronic system and the University has responsibility for the Assessment Board process. The College is, however, represented on the board. Students are able to appeal through the University Academic Appeals Procedure.

2.64 Overall, the policies and procedures for the assessment of students are in place and effective. Students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B6 is met and the level of associated 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

2.65 The programme is allocated an external examiner by the University whose role is clearly defined in the Academic Quality Handbook. The College is responsible for providing the external examiner with the information that they require to carry out their role.

2.66 External examiners' reports are received annually by the programme leader at the College, and then submitted to the Higher Education Operational Group. These are logged before being distributed to the programme team and for inclusion in the Annual Partner Report which is sent to the Programme Coordinator in the Faculty of Law at the University.

2.67 Students are encouraged to access external examiners' reports, which are available on the University VLE but not on the College VLE.

2.68 The external examiner visits the College every year to review academic standards and student work and attend Programme Assessment Boards. External examiner reports are considered as part of annual programme review and external examiner reports are available to students on the University VLE. The use made of external examiners enables the College to meet the Expectation.

2.69 The review team scrutinised external examiners' reports for the last three years, looked at relevant University policies on the use of external examiners and held meetings with staff and students.

2.70 The external examiner reports for the last three years have all confirmed that the standards set for the award are appropriate as defined in the FHEQ and the standards of student performance are comparable with similar provision in other UK institutions, and in one case these standards have been exceeded. In addition, no particular issues of concern are reported in any of the reports and in fact the College would welcome some specific comment on modules to enable it to respond appropriately. The College and the University are working together to identify how external examiner reports can be more specific about individual modules. The review team, however, did see evidence of how recommendations from external examiner reports are planned to be taken forward and contribute to programme review. The process works effectively for the Foundation Degree in Law but planned programme expansion would require a structure of oversight of reports to identify common problems or identify good practice.

2.71 Although external examiner reports are available to students on the University VLE, students confirmed that they had not seen a report or met an external examiner. Therefore the review team **recommends** that students are informed about the role and identity of the external examiner and the availability of external examiner reports is brought to their attention.

2.72 The review team considers that the College's processes for considering issues raised by external examiners are sound. Students are not aware of the external examining process but appropriate consideration is given to reports in quality assurance processes at both programme level and higher management level in the College. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B7 is met and the level of 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

2.73 The College and University responsibilities with regard to the approval, periodic and annual review of programmes are set out in Annex 2 of the Franchise Agreement. The details of the processes for the annual and periodic monitoring of collaborative provision are set out in the University's Academic Quality Handbook.

2.74 The Course Leader at the College submits an annual review of the programme to the Programme Coordinator at the University, using the template in the Academic Quality Handbook. The Faculty of Law at the University is responsible for monitoring the programme through the Programme Studies Board. The Programme Team at the University identifies areas for improvement and good practice, resulting in an Annual Report and Action Plan which is fed back to the College as well as to the Programme Studies Board, the Associate Dean (Student Experience) and Faculty Quality Officer at the University. The Associate Dean (Student Experience) oversees the review of all the Faculty Partnership Annual Reports for the Faculty and produces a high-level report, which informs a University-wide report for all four faculties identifying key issues for specific partners or for Collaborative provision as a whole. The Collaborative Provision Annual Report is considered by the Senior Management Team at the College and the Governors Quality and Standards Subcommittee. They also receive information on student achievement, progression and recruitment which is then reported to the full Governing Body. The Annual Quality Cycle is described in several documents, notably the Annual Quality Cycle, the Annual Review Guidelines for Partners and the Higher Education Partner Report on the Programme. The University also undertakes a periodic review of College programmes every six years, with the last one taking place in 2011.

2.75 The design of quality assurance processes by the University enables this Expectation to be met, particularly so when the internal processes within the College are considered. The module tutors at the College produce annual module reviews, which inform the Annual Programme Report along with external examiner reports and student feedback. Therefore information from all the main stakeholders is used to compile the report before it goes to the University. Historically these reports also went to the Quality Review Group at the College, but from Autumn 2014 they now go to the newly formed Higher Education Operational Group, then the Senior Management Team and, where appropriate, to the Board of Governors. In practice this means that the College does not have to wait for the University processes before it acts on any issue raised in the Annual Programme Report. The University processes combined with the College systems for programme monitoring and periodic review enable the Expectation to be met.

2.76 The review team examined documentary evidence showing the University and College systems for programme monitoring and review and also reports and minutes from meetings where programme quality issues are discussed. The team also tested the application of these quality assurance processes in meetings with staff, professional support staff and academic staff.

2.77 Staff at the College share a common understanding of how programme monitoring works and follow the University procedures very well. The review team noted the effective links between the College and University staff in monitoring and reviewing the programme

which they considered **good practice**. There is particularly strong communication at programme level which ensures that actions are immediately addressed. There is also clear evidence of actions being addressed through Law Department meeting minutes, Programme Leader Actions following the Review Meeting and one-to-one meetings where targets are given to the Course Leader. The other route where actions are monitored is through the department Quality Improvement Plan which is also informed by the Programme Annual Report.

2.78 The College's processes for the annual monitoring and periodic review of programmes and systems to monitor actions are effective. Staff are clear about their responsibilities in the process of monitoring and there are effective and positive relationships between College and University staff to enable the effective monitoring of the programme. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.79 The Joint Franchise Agreement states that the College manages all complaints in the first instance in accordance with their standard procedures. If this does not resolve the issue the student has a right to complain to the University and enter stage 2 of the University process. The College must ensure that students have access to information and advice about the University complaints process.

2.80 Complaints about issues which are not relevant to the University's provision, including non-academic matters, continue to be the responsibility of the College.

2.81 There are therefore two complaints procedures; one is the University procedure and the other is the College procedure, which applies to all students at the College, including higher education students.

2.82 All academic appeals are managed through the University according to their Academic Appeals Procedure; this describes the difference between a complaint and an appeal and lists the possible grounds for an appeal. It is the responsibility of the College to ensure that students have access to information and advice about the appeals process.

2.83 The Student Complaint Procedure and Academic Appeals Procedure are referred to in the Student Handbook, with a link to the full procedure on the University website.

2.84 The College follows the procedures for complaints and appeals established by the University although no formal complaints or appeals have been considered for students studying with the College by University Academic Services. There has been one complaint recently which is being dealt with by the College. These arrangements enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.85 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the arrangements for handling complaints and appeals by scrutinising policies, looking at published information and holding meetings with students and staff.

2.86 The complaints procedures are very thorough and very clear regarding the types of complaint and what a student should do if they need to complain. The University Appeals Procedure is also very clear about the grounds for appeal and guidance on what the student should do. The College states that it does not have any complaints or appeals but this is largely because any issue arising is dealt with informally by the student going to see either the Course Leader or another member of staff at the College. The students are clear about what to do and where to find information if they have a complaint or appeal and they confirmed that initially they would informally meet the Course Leader.

2.87 The review team concluded that the College and University processes for complaints and appeals are available and understood by students. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B9 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.88 As indicated in the Partnership Agreement, the College is responsible for the quality of all the learning and teaching, admissions, induction procedures and student support, and the provision of suitable work-related learning opportunities. These opportunities are delivered through guest lecturers, realistic assignment setting and the Practical Legal Skills module.

2.89 The College encourages students to undertake a work placement while enrolled on the course, but no teaching or learning happens offsite. No management of the work placements takes place at the College, including health and safety checks.

2.90 The College does not offer any formal teaching and learning outside of the College provision. However, it is working with local employers to give students an understanding of the professional practice needed for a career in law through guest lectures. Therefore the review team consider this Expectation relevant to report on.

2.91 The review team met senior and academic staff as well as students and University staff. Periodic review documentation was considered as well as the programme specification of the course.

2.92 The College staff use their professional networks to source guest lecturers to support the teaching of part of the course. These practitioners are involved in role play activities and give lectures on specific topics related to the legal work environment. The current practitioners are qualified teachers, and staff take time to ensure that the guest lecture content meets the learning outcomes of the module. The College previously had a relationship with a law firm who set up a law clinic on campus. This gave students opportunities to work on real-life briefs. Neither the guest lecturers nor the law clinic have a formal agreement in place to ensure that the learning opportunities are in accordance with College and student needs. This therefore puts the standards of those learning opportunities at risk. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College formalise relationships between the College and employers to ensure work-related opportunities are delivered effectively for both current and future higher education students. The College are aware that they can do more to develop networks with local law practitioners, but acknowledge that the legal sector is a difficult area in which to develop strong employer links.

2.93 To develop their links with employers, the College has recently joined the North East Chamber of Commerce as well as the Local Enterprise Partnership. They are also in talks with the Local Authority to secure work opportunities for their law students in the council legal teams. Within the College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, a key theme is related to developing more work-based and placement learning for their higher education programmes, and to strengthen links with employers. The College is proactive in developing these employer connections for the new courses they anticipate will run in 2016, and is able to use current links through further education provision.

2.94 The College staff use their informal connections to successfully offer work-related opportunities to students through the guest lecture scheme. However, due to the informal

nature of these links at present, there is a potential risk to the students' learning opportunities. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B10 is met but the associated level of risk is moderate as there is insufficient priority given to assuring standards in the College's planning processes.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.95 The College does not offer research degrees.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.96 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.

2.97 Of the 10 applicable Expectations, nine are met. Of those met Expectations six have associated low levels of risk. Expectations B1, B4 and B10 have moderate levels of risk.

2.98 Expectation B5 is the only Expectation within the area of the quality of student learning opportunities that is not met, and the associated level of risk is moderate.

2.99 There are three features of good practice in this area: the recognition of the distinctive needs of staff who teach on higher education programmes (Expectation B3), the involvement of experienced practitioners in the delivery of live scenario-based learning and assessment (Expectation B3), and the effective links between the College and University staff in monitoring and reviewing the programme (Expectation B8).

2.100 There are five recommendations in this area: to formalise the College's internal approval process of programmes prior to entering the University's validation process (Expectation B1), to clarify the University support services agreement and subsequently review the College's own support services in light of current student numbers and planned future expansion (Expectation B4), to establish formal processes to engage students as partners in the management of learning opportunities (Expectation B5), to ensure that students are informed about the role and identity of the external examiner and bring to students' attention the availability of external examiner reports (Expectation B7), and to formalise relationships between the College and employers to ensure work-related opportunities are delivered effectively (Expectation B10). The team found that there was evidence that the College had adequate and effective systems in place to manage its current higher education provision and quality of learning opportunities, but some of the current systems and practices are informal and require a more considered and structured approach, especially with planned programme expansion anticipated. Most of the actions recommended will not require or result in major change to structures, processes or practices.

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

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The University's central Marketing and Recruitment Service is responsible for approving information about the Foundation Degree and the University also has a Collaborative Marketing Approval Process which the College follows.

3.2 The College and University validation processes ensure that documents provide the basis for accurate information and the latter provide core information for programme and module handbooks to which the College adds information about local delivery where required. The College publishes its own Student Handbook which is jointly branded with the University. Students also receive a copy of the University policies handbook and the College Handbook at induction. Students are also required to sign a College code of conduct when enrolling at the College which provides students with the rules of the College. The University is responsible for providing certificates and transcripts to students on completion of the course.

3.3 Both the College and the University provide a VLE to give students access to course materials and key information about the programme such as weekly tasks, assessments and handbooks. Communications about changes to the timetable are sent to students through the College VLE.

3.4 Staff are able to access information through the College intranet. Documentation includes validation documents, programme specifications, handbooks, placement planning, policies, and regulations. Staff also have access to internal meetings through this space. Minutes for University committees of relevance to staff are emailed to the College team by the University Programme Leader.

3.5 The University has overall responsibility for all information provided to the public and students about the course. Staff are well aware of the approval process of all information and it is managed by the College Senior Management Team.

3.6 The review team met students and staff of the College and University, and received copies of student handbooks, module guides and the student code of conduct. The team also had access to the College's VLE, as well as minutes of some internal College committees.

3.7 Staff in the College are well aware of the process for having information approved internally by the management team and externally by the University. All information including web pages, student guides and tweets must go through the Performance Director at the College before being sent off to the University for approval.

3.8 Students are satisfied that all information provided to them both before enrolment and during the course is helpful and accurate. However, there have been some issues between staff and students in relation to communication. Personnel changes within the College have led to some confusion over what communications channels are operating. Current information for students was shown to the review team by accessing the College

virtual learning environment, and issues may have arisen due to the period of transition of staff and processes. Some information of importance to students currently sits on the University VLE. Students confirmed they very rarely use this and it is not signposted from the College VLE. The claim that the external examiners' reports are on the University VLE could not be verified.

3.9 The handbooks provided to students at both module and course level are very thorough and include substantial useful information to ensure that students can get the best out of the course, and information if they get into difficulty.

3.10 Although the College have a staff intranet to keep documentation relating to quality in one place, during the review it became apparent to the review team that minutes of departmental meetings were not regularly placed in a centrally accessed folder. Due to staff changes before the review, this left the College with a gap in their evidence base in showing the review team how the course was managed on a day-to-day basis. Although at present departmental meetings may be informal management meetings, they are not documented or centrally housed to ensure a definitive audit trail of issues and actions.

3.11 There are rigorous checks in place to ensure that the information provided to students and the public is accurate. The College VLE is accessible and well used by both staff and students, although the University's equivalent is less accessible. Course information for students is appropriate and accurate. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.12 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations, affirmations or features of good practice. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 A new management team has recently been established at the College and has written a document, HSFC HE Development 2014-17, which gives details of the rationale for offering higher education, the proposed curriculum development and the management and governance of higher education, including staff, facilities and employer engagement. In this document it is proposed that foundation degrees in health and social care, sports and sports science, music, and computing will be offered from 2015-16.

4.2 Another recent document titled Enhancement at HSFC states that the vision for higher education is that all students feel welcome, receive high-quality provision, and are successful and able to contribute to their own success and that of their course. This will be achieved through open and honest communication, impact-assessing College policies and quality assurance, monitored and acted on by the College's Senior Management Team.

4.3 Currently, the enhancement of learning opportunities is initiated through the quality cycle as described in Expectation B8. The College submits an annual review of the programme to the University. The University produces an Annual Report and Action Plan which are fed back to the College. The Annual Report is considered by the Senior Management Team at the College and the Governors Quality and Standards Subcommittee.

4.4 Historically the annual reviews of the programme also went to the College Quality Review Group, but from Autumn 2014 they have been sent to the newly formed Higher Education Operational Group, then the Senior Management Team and, where appropriate, the Board of Governors. The review also informs the departmental Quality Improvement Plan.

4.5 The College has also recently developed a new Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and a specific Observation Policy, which, although in the early stages, will contribute to the enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly through sharing good practice.

4.6 The College has an effective programme monitoring and review cycle in place based on both University and College procedures. This programme monitoring and review process enables areas for improvement to be identified and acted on and good practice is shared. The College is developing ways of using technology to enhance learning opportunities with students, for example the use of enhanced technology methods for online tutorials and interactive lectures. The lesson observation process also enables sharing of good practice as noted under Expectation B3.

4.7 Although there is an effective quality cycle in place, and this is likely to be further improved when the newly formed Higher Education Operational Group becomes fully embedded, College staff do not have a clear understanding of enhancement at a strategic level.

4.8 The review team examined all the documentation relating to programme review and reporting, particularly the summary documents and the University procedures, and met senior and academic staff.

4.9 Consideration of information to identify good practice and opportunities for further improvement and inform the development of initiatives at a strategic level is not fully developed. The application of these initiatives as actions that impact on the quality of student learning opportunities and the monitoring of their effectiveness has also yet to be established. Therefore the systems are not yet in place for the Expectation to be met. The review team **recommends** that the College take deliberate and systematic steps, at provider level, to identify, disseminate, implement and monitor good practice and evaluate its impact on the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

4.10 Although there are some examples of enhancement initiatives, overall there is limited College-level oversight for improving the quality of learning opportunities. Review mechanisms for assessing the impact of initiatives are not in place and systems for identifying and monitoring good practice are not yet fully developed. The College has introduced new policies and a management structure which will formalise the strategic approach to enhancement, but these have yet to be embedded and evaluated. Therefore, the review team concludes that the College does not currently meet the Expectation for Enhancement and the associated level of risk is moderate as there is insufficient emphasis given to the enhancement of learning opportunities in the College's planning processes.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11 In reaching its 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook and identified two recommendations.

4.12 The review team based the judgement relating to the enhancement of student learning opportunities on the limited oversight of enhancement and the lack of impact monitoring of any implemented initiatives. While the College demonstrates a commitment to its students and improving the quality of their learning, it was unable to provide evidence of a consistently articulated and understood institutional-level approach. There are examples of positive developments to enhance student learning opportunities and initiatives as a direct response from student feedback, but these do not consistently emanate from an overarching institutional-level approach to enhancement explicitly monitored through College processes.

4.13 Although this Expectation is not met, this is deemed to pose a moderate rather than a serious risk. There is insufficient emphasis placed on the institutional approach to enhancement in the College's planning processes but this can be addressed by the implementation of the recommendation provided.

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

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

- 5.1 The College currently offers students work-related opportunities which support their employability in the legal profession.
- 5.2 Students are encouraged to find themselves a work placement, and the College has a list of local law firms and contact details. Academic and support staff are able to help students develop their CVs and offer mock interviews.
- 5.3 The Practical Legal Skills module which sits within the programme offers students a number of opportunities to understand what is expected of them as a practising lawyer. Students confirmed that they find this module very useful in understanding what is required of them in the profession.
- 5.4 Students are also afforded assessments, both formative and summative, throughout their course, which test their skills and give them an understanding of the practice of law. Informally, through connections with teaching staff at the College, local employers are able to offer advice on practical assessment tasks and scenario setting. The University also does this for the assessments they set for the College. The external examiner for the programme has commented favourably that the practical nature of the modules enhance the employability of the students.
- 5.5 The College team invite guest practitioners to some of the classes to offer their advice and guidance to students, and much of the course is taught by the College teaching team who are themselves qualified solicitors. This enables the College to offer a different learning experience to students and enables them to develop formative and summative assessments which are realistic to the profession. The College teaching team's approach to integrating employability skills into the course was considered good practice by the University periodic review panel. The report previously highlighted the involvement of experienced practitioners in the delivery of live scenario-based learning and assessment as good practice.
- 5.6 The course has also been designed by the College to integrate into both the BA and LLB course offered by the University. This gives students a clear progression route. completing the foundation degree and students are very clear on progression opportunities. As well as accreditation being granted from the Solicitors Regulation Authority, the programme modules are also mapped against CILEx level 3 accreditation, allowing students to be granted exemptions from this additional qualification. The report previously found the integration of the programme into the wider professional qualifications needed to pursue a career in law as good practice.
- 5.7 Students are satisfied that they feel prepared for the world of work. Although these students said that they had not used the career service, both the College and the University operate face-to-face (and on their respective VLEs) for students to gain support in developing their employability skills. The current Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education statistics for the course show that 98 per cent of students are in further study or employment six months after graduating.
- 5.8 In light of their future planned expansion of higher education courses, the College is actively developing its links with the local employer community through joining the North East Chamber of Commerce as well as the Local Enterprise Partnership. They recognise that they have more steps to take to improve relations with employers in the local region but are working hard to ensure that students benefit from local engagement.

Glossary

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

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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