



# Higher Education Review of Hereford College of Arts

November 2014

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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 Hereford College of Arts. The review took place from 10 to 12 November 2014, and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr H Burchell (reviewer)
- Ms T Counsell (reviewer)
- Mr S Cannell (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Hereford College of Arts

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Hereford College of Arts.

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

### Good practice

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

- The College has managed major transitions in a careful and effective manner, while at the same time delivering improvements in the quality of the experience of its higher education students, in particular by the targeted deployment of staff development (Expectation B4).
- The College takes an imaginative approach to supporting and engaging its higher education students in an environment which strengthens their academic and personal development and career prospects (Expectation B5).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendation** to Hereford College of Arts.

By September 2015:

- ensure that the institutional strategy underpinning enhancement is further developed, and explicitly articulated in a clear policy framework with measurable outcomes (Enhancement).

### Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The College gives high priority to engaging students in quality assurance and enhancement; the overwhelming majority of students both value the opportunity they have to influence policy and practice; and specific instances of this influence having been beneficial were found in the course of the review.

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

## About Hereford College of Arts

Hereford College of Arts has delivered higher education programmes for over 20 years: its mission is to provide outstanding education and employability in the creative arts. Its current higher education portfolio consists of 13 programmes in the broad areas of art, media and design, of which 11 lead to undergraduate and two to postgraduate awards. All higher education programmes are validated by the newly established University of Wales Trinity St David, and, following a major revalidation exercise, commenced operation in their present form in September 2014. The student roll stands at around 850, almost wholly full-time; higher education numbers account for almost half the student population.

In addition to the recent revalidation exercise and the consequential transfer of all students and programmes to the new awarding body, the main change since its last QAA review in April 2010 has been the relocation of all higher education provision to a single site. As a result, higher education students now have facilities and services of better quality and for their exclusive use. The College has recently adopted a new Strategic Plan which, while embracing both further and higher education, includes reference to expanding higher education, enhancing student learning opportunities and strengthening employability: the College regards these emphases as both good in themselves and as steps towards its long-term goal of achieving taught degree awarding powers.

The College's main challenges include developing its academic (including scholarship) and administrative (including recruitment and marketing) infrastructure to support higher education expansion within a rural location and in the context of a declining unit of resource in further education.

The College's last QAA review identified 10 features of good practice (noting in particular the vibrancy of its higher education community and its success in preparing students for employment), and made two advisable and three desirable recommendations. Of the advisable recommendations one related to the transparency of some elements of assessment and one to software compatibility. The desirable recommendations related to student induction into specialist workshops, the consistency of programme handbooks and the clarity of assignment briefs in one area. All recommendations were addressed in full, and the responses were signed off internally in May 2011 and by QAA the following month.

## Explanation of the findings about Hereford College of Arts

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 While these responsibilities (and all others relating to the maintenance of academic standards) rest ultimately with the awarding body, the College meets in full the relevant requirements, expectations and guidance delegated to it, and the review team anticipates that it will continue to do so in its newly-established relationship with the University of Wales Trinity St David. Undergraduate course design adheres to the national credit frameworks in terms of credit values, learning hours and the accreditation of prior learning. The review team confirms that the College discharges its responsibilities in this area. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.2 The College's contribution to maintaining academic standards is clearly specified in the Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Wales Trinity St David, which maps the respective responsibilities of the two institutions against the Quality Code. The review team confirms, on the basis of meetings with senior higher education managers and teaching staff, that all relevant external reference points are understood and used appropriately across higher education provision.

1.3 The College fulfils its obligations in respect of reference points for academic standards. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

### **Findings**

1.4 Responsibility for maintaining a definitive record of programmes and qualifications rests with the awarding body. Appropriate levels of detail are provided in the validation documentation, and the College's responsibilities, which are clearly expressed, relate largely to disseminating information to students, for example in programme specifications and handbooks. The review team explored how effectively students are guided through programme, module and assessment information, and established both that staff are aware of and meet their responsibilities in this respect, and that students are aware of and use programme specifications and module documents.

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

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



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

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

## **Findings**

1.6 The College's contribution to implementing this requirement and disseminating relevant information to both staff and students is competently undertaken. Programme documentation confirms that Subject Benchmark Statements align programmes with threshold academic standards, and the validation report confirms that they were taken into account in programme development.

1.7 The review team noted that the validation report suggests that some undergraduate modules at different levels were initially designed with similar or even identical learning outcomes. When the team explored this issue with managers and teaching staff it was assured that extensive use had been made of all relevant external reference points in staff development sessions in preparation for validation and review. An awarding body representative confirmed that the College had addressed all reference points in validation, explaining that while some elements of the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* required a more detailed approach, this approach had now been delivered.

1.8 The review team noted the involvement of external academic advisers at validation events, and confirmed both from documentation and senior staff that the views of professional practitioners also contributed to programme development and had been influential in a number of programmes. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.9 The College meets its responsibilities for implementation and dissemination of the relevant information by means which include a detailed Assessment Handbook for teaching staff which makes appropriate reference to the recently approved Higher Education Assessment Policy. The review team noted that teaching staff had been involved in its development and that those who met the team fully understood the nature and extent of their responsibilities.

1.10 Draft assessment briefs are submitted to the University and external examiners for approval. At the time of the review this remained work in progress. The review team confirms that examination board procedures meet the expectations of the Quality Code and that external examiners are closely involved throughout.

1.11 The review team explored the means by which module leaders and other relevant staff are supported in developing assessment methods, and confirms that this is achieved through targeted staff development. Course leaders are required to participate in a formal module evaluation procedure which includes student questionnaire evaluations. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

### **Findings**

1.12 The College's contribution to implementing this requirement and disseminating relevant information is discharged in annual monitoring, with reports submitted by course leaders and reviewed annually by the Academic Board.

1.13 Procedures exist for incremental changes to be made to modules and programmes. The awarding body is responsible for overseeing the process and cumulative impact of such changes, although at College level they are tracked by the Vice Principal. Procedures exist to ensure that any associated updating of programme documentation is reliably undertaken. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.14 The awarding body appoints external examiners, external members of validation panels and external moderators to act as a critical friend to course teams in programme delivery and development. The College nominates external examiners in a timely fashion and is happy with the arrangements. The University inducts external examiners, but the College is invited to attend relevant sessions and to participate in discipline specific aspects of the event. Although the validation is in its initial year, the University will distribute external examiner reports to curriculum and course leaders for course team discussion and comment on challenges and areas of good practice. A formal response will then be submitted to the University. It is a College responsibility to ensure that report recommendations are conscientiously followed up, and the review team found evidence that procedures to meet this responsibility, which closely resemble those of the previous awarding body, are in place and fit for purpose.

1.15 Seven members of College teaching staff act as external examiners at other institutions. The College states that it has found their experience useful in, for example, programme validation and revalidation. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

## **The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of awarding bodies: Summary of findings**

1.16 Hereford College of Arts fulfils its contractual commitments to its awarding body. It engages appropriately with external participation in assessment, and responds reliably and constructively to advice and recommendations from external sources.

1.17 The academic standards of the awards on programmes offered by Hereford College of Arts on behalf of its awarding body are secure. The review team concludes that the maintenance of academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of the 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 and Approval***

### **Findings**

2.1 The review team confirms the comprehensive scope of the College's documentation for the revalidation exercise; that its responsibilities are clearly delineated; that appropriate developmental opportunities have been, and continue to be provided; that independent experts were involved in the process; and that in the minority of cases where validation conditions were imposed the College's response was sound and professional.

2.2 The review team scrutinised internal course approval procedures, including those for the two MA programmes and confirms that course development is rigorous and appropriate, and that the respective roles of institutional committees in approving and monitoring programme development are clear and understood. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission***

**Findings**

2.3 The College's admissions-related responsibilities are clearly expressed in the Memorandum of Agreement. The Academic Board has overall responsibility for admissions issues generally; executive oversight rests with the Vice Principal; administration is a Registry duty; and the College explains its Admissions Policy in appropriate language on its website and in its Prospectus. The College offers advisory interviews to potential applicants; guidance is made available to selectors; feedback is available to rejected applicants; and applicants who declare special needs meet a specialist staff member to discuss whether and how they can be met.

2.4 In cases where a decision rests on the recognition of prior (experiential) learning, interviewers make a recommendation to the awarding body. The review team confirms that the College's responsibility is restricted to implementing awarding body procedures, that the College is clear as to its responsibilities, and that admissions staff are appropriately trained and supported.

2.5 The College monitors the admissions process, and students who met the review team confirmed that open days (where almost all interviews take place) are positively evaluated, both orally and in questionnaire responses. The College regards the interview as akin to a first tutorial in helping candidates establish whether they are applying for the correct course. While students particularly welcomed this element of the procedure the team noted that, unlike other aspects of admissions, it is not supported by specific training events. As the College expands it may wish to consider introducing such training to ensure that the standard of the best becomes the norm. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.6 The College's Student Engagement Strategy includes, in addition to a well-developed representative system, focus groups, an internal survey, course review, and learning and teaching evaluations. Its Learning and Teaching Strategy, which was, like the Strategic Plan, approved only two months prior to the review, is appropriate; and it is confirmed that staff development ensures that all staff understand and discharge their responsibilities.

2.7 Staff recruitment procedures, which include comments from students, pay close attention to teaching ability, scholarly potential and, where appropriate, professional experience and qualifications. Induction is provided, a mentoring procedure operates throughout the probationary period, and a system of peer teaching observation is well-conceived and adhered to by those concerned.

2.8 The College produced a detailed and helpful summary of staff development undertaken during academic year 2013-14 for the Academic Board: the review team found it illustrative of the institutional commitment to developing teaching and scholarly practice. The team found many examples, written and oral, of students making positive comments about the quality of teaching, assessment and feedback provided.

2.9 Students appreciate the improved facilities resulting from the relocation of higher education provision and the newly-upgraded virtual learning environment (VLE) (see paragraph 3.3). In discussion with the team, students stated that learning and assessment, including the tutorial system, the fact that many staff are also practitioners, and the College's use of external experts make particularly distinctive contributions to helping them meet the learning outcomes of their programme. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

2.10 The College's responsibilities for helping students develop their academic, personal and professional potential are clearly delineated and well understood. The review team found the College's resource allocation procedures responsive to student needs and they are systematically monitored and evaluated. Both teaching and support staff spoke positively of the collaborative manner in which the bidding process is undertaken.

2.11 The review team found that student representation and feedback methods operate effectively, with representation in place at all levels of governance, management and operations. Opportunities exist for students to evaluate their programmes in the reasonable expectation that criticisms will be taken seriously, not least through the rolling course annual action plans.

2.12 Students reported that they particularly value the use of expert practitioners and work-based and work-related opportunities, which, in combination with high-quality academic support and facilities (notably from technical demonstrators and in workshops), serve to broaden their perspectives, increase their confidence and improve their communication skills. They also observed that more cross-course collaboration could further their knowledge and understanding of the creative arts sector as a whole.

2.13 The review team viewed the high levels of satisfaction expressed by students about all aspects of their educational experience in a context in which a transition to a new campus was achieved simultaneously with a revalidation exercise. The team noted in particular the planned and systematic manner in which relevant and effective staff development supported these changes, ensuring continued high-quality educational delivery. The College's careful and effective management of major transitions, while at the same time delivering improvements in the quality of the experience of its higher education students, in particular by the targeted deployment of staff development, is **good practice**.

2.14 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement**

**Findings**

2.15 The College's informative Student Engagement Strategy explains the mechanisms employed to engage students as partners in their education from the point of acceptance onwards, and emphasises the centrality of such engagement to policy and practice.

2.16 In addition to its well-developed representative system the Higher Education Student Forum was found, from documentary study and discussion with students, to be an effective means of capturing and responding to student opinion. The College is currently piloting a student mentoring system whereby more senior students support their junior counterparts in their transition to the next year of study: students reported that they viewed this experience as extremely valuable to both parties involved.

2.17 The review team explored the Student Ambassador scheme, the responsibilities associated with which include involvement in open days to provide a student perspective on the College and the relevant course. A formal selection procedure is followed by training, and successful candidates are paid an honorarium: ambassadors consider the role a privilege, and applicants and ambassadors alike benefit from its existence.

2.18 Student representatives, including the Higher Education Governor, reported that they had received appropriate training, and that the College listens to and respects their views. The review team heard many examples of student feedback being captured and acted upon: in one case this involved the complete restructuring of an unpopular module to ensure its alignment with students' career aspirations - a beneficial change largely attributable to students' consistent expressions of concern.

2.19 The College engages students through many other activities, including the appointment of new staff, and plans to involve them also in sample course monitoring (see paragraph 2.28) from January 2015. The review team shares students' view that these developments epitomise the systematic and thoughtful manner in which the College engages with its higher education students.

2.20 The College prioritises continuing engagement with graduates. In particular, the Creatives in Residence Scheme involves selecting up to four creative practitioners or graduates with a minimum of one year's post-college experience to produce a body of work alongside current students, making use of the well-equipped studio and workshop facilities. This culminates in an exhibition accompanied by presentations by participants: it is widely valued by those involved.

2.21 The College has systems and processes in place to ensure effective engagement by higher education students in their educational experience. Students confirm that multiple channels exist at all levels of the institution for them to make their views known, and that, as a result of their involvement, changes occur which enhance their educational experience. The team identifies as **good practice** the College's imaginative approach to supporting and engaging its higher education students in an environment which strengthens their academic and personal development and career prospects. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.22 The College's responsibilities for assessment are clearly delineated and disseminated to relevant staff in policy documents. The positive student views expressed about the quality of feedback on assessed work found in a range of survey responses and the student submission were evident also, both in tutorial reports and assessment forms and in oral evidence.

2.23 Students are aware of their minimum tutorial rights and obligations, and of the availability of additional tutorials on request: they describe academic staff as supportive and accessible. While the student submission suggested some variability in the effectiveness of a peer assessment system, in discussion students explained that while it requires careful explication, informally assessing one's fellow students offers valuable learning opportunities. The team confirms, from course and module documentation and from discussion with staff and students, that assessment responsibilities are widely understood, appropriately implemented and effectively supported by developmental activities.

2.24 Sample course monitoring, a detailed internal quality review procedure, involves programme-level evidence of effective and complete assessment and feedback. Actions arising form part of course annual action plans, which are live documents subject to continuing monitoring by the Academic Board. The review team confirms that sample course monitoring is an effective part of the College's quality management system. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.25 The College is responsible for orchestrating an institutional response to external examiner reports by means of course action plans and annual course reports, both of which include extensive reference to student evaluations and contribute to the College's Annual Institutional Review report to the awarding body.

2.26 External examiners meet students, and students selected for meetings are appropriately briefed; external examiner reports are readily available; and students are represented on the Joint (with the University) Board of Studies, where external examiners' comments are discussed in an open manner. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.27 The College's internal review procedures include sample course monitoring and the work of programme boards; in addition the Senior Management Team meets the Higher Education Curriculum Leader each semester to review the higher education portfolio in considerable detail. Those involved described this as a valuable event.

2.28 Sample course monitoring, designed to provide a general health check on the course concerned (including the identification of good practice), is conducted by independent peers from within the College. Students are not involved as panel members (although the College has plans for them to be so by January 2015) but provide monitoring teams with a consumer perspective. The review team would encourage this development, and found the reports extensive in scope and fit for purpose.

2.29 Progress in responding to recommendations from sample course monitoring is included in annual monitoring and subject to Academic Board oversight. Reports are discussed in programme boards, the cross-curricular membership of which facilitates the sharing of good practice across disciplines, and signed off by the Academic Board. All aspects of internal monitoring contribute to the College's Annual Institutional Review report to the awarding body, a document designed to highlight good practice as well as issues being addressed, and which is subject to extensive internal discussion prior to formal sign-off. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.30 The College's Complaints Policy is clear and detailed. Complaints (but not appeals, which go directly to the University) are dealt with initially at College level, but may, at the student's behest, be referred to the University in the event of non-resolution. The Policy has four stages, from informal resolution (normally at departmental level) through formal hearings (at institutional level) and internal appeal to referral to the awarding body.

2.31 The College's dedicated Complaints Officer oversees all complaints. Support for complainants is available from the Students' Union, although only five complaints have reached the second (formal) stage in the past five years, and none beyond that. The review team confirms from meetings with staff and students that the Policy is effective and accessible, and that students are aware of the procedures involved. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk.

**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**

2.32 The College, as a non-degree awarding institution, has no collaborative provisions involving the delegation of powers, although it does engage with the higher education sector in a range of partnerships with other institutions at home and abroad. It takes full responsibility for the quality assurance, assessment and feedback associated with students undertaking work-based learning and off-campus placements. It makes information available online, and in programme specifications and course and module handbooks. This information and the College's partnerships with other organisations were scrutinised by the review team and found to be satisfactory. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.33 The College does not offer research degrees.



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

2.34 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team found that the College's higher education students receive a level of support which provides them with the opportunity to fulfil their potential, and that the College's commitment to the present learning opportunities and future prospects of these students is tangibly expressed in a manner always competent and sometimes exceptional.

2.35 The review team identifies two features of good practice: the College's signal achievement in continuing to strengthen the learning opportunities of its higher education students while both relocating learning and teaching to a new campus and preparing for and undergoing a revalidation deriving from a change of awarding body; and the imaginative as well as sound manner in which the College supports and engages its higher education students academically, professionally and personally. These features of good practice are cultural as well as organisational, permeating the ethos as well as the management of higher education provision.

2.36 The quality of learning opportunities at Hereford College of Arts is **commended**. The review team found both virtual and face-to-face teaching to be effective, and the College to have a systematic and successful approach to staff development. The College engages in a planned and active manner with its higher education students and its outward-facing approach to the local community in aligning its students with local networks for the furtherance of their career prospects is successful.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

3.1 The College makes information available to the public through a well-designed and regularly updated website; to potential applicants through a well-produced and informative Prospectus; and to its own students through a commercial VLE and a suite of handbooks containing materials ranging from broad information about the College itself down to programme specifications and module details. It meets its obligation to publish its Key Information Set. The review team, while noting some inconsistencies in handbook style and content, confirms that the information provided is appropriate for its intended audiences.

3.2 Clear lines of responsibility exist, leading to prospective information being signed off by the Marketing Manager, in collaboration with course teams and the awarding body as appropriate. The review team found these arrangements sound in conception and execution.

3.3 Students consider the information they receive fit for purpose and accessible. The newly integrated VLE is well regarded by staff and students, and the review team noted that hits had increased from 1,500 to 50,000 in the first year of operation. The VLE serves not only (and not primarily) as a repository for information but also as an interactive medium for staff-student communication across the higher education spectrum. Usage is managed by course leaders and supported by staff development, the current year's theme for which is technological development. The team found instances of innovative and creative practice on the part of staff, noting that this derives not only from individual enthusiasms but, more significantly, from a strategic determination to optimise the educational benefits of technology.

3.4 The College currently monitors the information on partner institution websites annually. While the monitoring is systematic and competent, the College may wish to assure itself as to the sufficiency of an annual procedure. It also monitors social media to identify and respond to any comments which may be made, and aims to develop careful and appropriate policies and guidelines on its use and management.

3.5 The review team found that the College has in place sound procedures to ensure that its information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Therefore 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

3.6 The information which the College publishes online and as hard copy is appropriate for its audiences, fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Information management has remained robust during the recent transitional period. The College's recent upgrade of its VLE has heralded a significant and universally welcomed increase in usage.

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

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College's Strategic Plan 2011-14 speaks of the College having a continual process of raising standards in everything it does. While the review team was informed that this Plan drives enhancement, at the time of the review a Higher Education College Enhancement Plan was also under development to identify actions arising from the Strategic Plan. Progress against the actions outlined in this Enhancement Plan is to be reported to the Senior Management Team, the Academic Board and, normally, a newly constituted Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Group. This Group's terms of reference describe its primary function as monitoring and developing the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy: it has, however, yet to be fully populated or met.

4.2 Some actions identified in the draft Strategic Plan were rather vague (for example, 'accelerate the sharing of excellent practice in teaching, learning and assessment'; 'further develop a robust academic quality infrastructure'), and it is not clear how they are to be measured. The review team is also uncertain as to how the proposed interrelationships among the Strategic Plan, the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the Enhancement Plan are to be put into action.

4.3 While the College describes itself as having a cohesive vision for the enhancement of its higher education provision, the review team initially found it difficult to locate a deliberate and overarching strategy underpinning quality enhancement. Subsequently, the team established the existence of an incipient strategic approach to enhancement. This is apparent in, for example, the cyclical and self-critical approach to developing good practice in sample course monitoring; the annual Higher Education Symposium; the forthcoming review of Student Services following the relocation of higher education to a single campus; the targeted deployment of staff development; the systematic use of student feedback; the extensive use of practitioners for learning and teaching; the emphasis on employability throughout all courses and levels and its alignment with institutional priorities; and the strategic approach to the deployment of educational technology.

4.4 The review team confirms that these and other approaches derive from a strategic approach to quality enhancement, albeit one which has yet to be fully formulated. It follows that further work is required for the College's approach to quality enhancement to be fully strategised, with outcomes measured and discussed and the outcomes reliably fed back into a fully-realised enhancement framework. The team **recommends** that the College ensures that the institutional strategy underpinning its enhancement activities is further developed and explicitly articulated in a clear policy framework with measurable outcomes. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

4.5 The College's commitment to improving the quality of student learning opportunities is unequivocal, and in the course of the review numerous examples of how this is done were presented to the review team. It was harder, however, to discern a strategic approach which, because it underpinned these positive activities, would ensure their continuation in a systematic and planned way. Nevertheless, such an approach did emerge, although the College remains in the early stages of conceptualising and measuring it, and identifying how it can be developed and fed back into policy development.

4.6 This nascent strategic approach to quality enhancement consists of elements which include the systematic use of student feedback; the range of community engagements linked specifically to employability; the strategic sampling of courses, both to address problems and to disseminate good practice; the planned review of higher education student support; the clear alignment of staff development with institutional priorities; and the systematic use of digital and other forms of technology in higher education. These are more than isolated features of good practice: they are driven from the centre and manifest themselves at all institutional levels. Nevertheless, the process of systematically aligning them into a coherent institutional policy has yet to be completed; their outcomes have yet to be consistently captured and measured; and they have yet to be reliably fed back into enhanced practice.

4.7 For these reasons, while the College **meets** the Expectation in Enhancement, the risk level has been set at moderate. The task of translating numerous improvements into a developed and coherent enhancement strategy is under way but not as yet complete.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

### Findings

5.1 That the College gives high priority to engaging students in quality assurance and enhancement is clear: its Student Engagement Strategy, for example, articulates students' central role in assuring and enhancing their educational experience. The College has a comprehensive representation system; it undertakes, analyses and responds to a range of surveys, publicising its responses in 'You Said, We Did' posters; it involves students in staff appointments and peer review of teaching; it makes available a suggestion box, all contributions to which are read by the Principal and responded to within 10 days by the Student Liaison Officer; and a biannual Student Forum has both information and discussion functions.

5.2 The student submission reports that 82 per cent of students believe they are 'listened to'. Students are involved in many activities to help improve the College and its courses. While such involvement is by no means a high priority for many students, the review team found, on the basis of documentary study and discussion, that students are overwhelmingly positive about their involvement with College policies and practices, and that the College makes genuine efforts, albeit with variable levels of success, to involve its small number of postgraduate and part-time students.

5.3 The College's comprehensive and well-developed representation system includes a Higher Education Student Forum, which enables students to contribute to any aspect of College life. Other meetings in which students may raise issues range from the Board of Governors to programme boards and course meetings, for all of which student representatives receive effective training and support. The review team heard many examples of student feedback being captured and acted upon, ranging from the complete rewriting of an unpopular module (see paragraph 2.17) to the co-preparation of syllabuses prior to and during revalidation.

5.4 The student voice is in evidence at all levels of the institution, and contributes systematically to quality assurance and enhancement.

## 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 27-29 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#)

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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



### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

### **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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