



# Higher Education Review of Highbury College Portsmouth

September 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 Highbury College Portsmouth. The review took place from 29 September to 1 October 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Miss Claire Morgan
- Mrs Sally Powell
- Mr Stuart Cannell (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Highbury College Portsmouth 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 threshold 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 6.

In reviewing Highbury College Portsmouth 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/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/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 Highbury College Portsmouth

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

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

### Good practice

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

- The range of opportunities extended to higher education staff to undertake personal development and scholarly activity to enhance their learning and teaching practice (Expectation B3).
- The work of the Centre for Entrepreneurship to support staff and students in developing employability skills (Expectation B4).
- The contribution of departmental higher education self-evaluation and programme quality review processes to the quality assurance of higher education (Expectation B8).

### Recommendations

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

By February 2015:

- put in place a process to ensure adherence to its policy for the return of assessed work to students (Expectation B6)
- take steps to increase student awareness of the availability and location of external examiner reports (Expectation B7).

By September 2015:

- ensure there is appropriate externality and student representation on internal validation panels (Expectations B1, B5, B8 and A3.4)
- implement an effective process for monitoring and evaluating all student support services (Expectation B4)
- implement an effective process for the monitoring and review of student engagement arrangements (Expectation B5 and Enhancement)
- establish a mechanism to provide an overview of all complaints raised by higher education students (Expectation B9)
- introduce an integrated strategic and operational framework for the management and oversight of higher education students' learning opportunities delivered with all employers (Expectation B10).

## Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action that the Highbury College Portsmouth is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The roll-out of the piloted virtual learning platform by June 2015 (Expectation C).

## Theme: Student Employability

Highbury College Portsmouth (the College) has clear aims, objectives and targets relating to student employability and the development of entrepreneurial skills. The College has a dedicated Centre for Entrepreneurship, a Centre for Work-Based Learning and a Centre for Skills for Work and Life, and has established a range of learning companies each with its own management board with student and staff roles.

Staff are supported, through training opportunities, to develop entrepreneurial activities within the curriculum. Employability in the curriculum takes the form of work-related learning and placement work experience opportunities. Students are prepared for placements through a Personal and Professional Development module. Work-related learning in the curriculum includes real work projects. Employers have opportunities to advise on curriculum content and delivery through employer-led expert advisory boards.

The College has worked in partnership with business to introduce Higher Level Apprenticeships. In Engineering, teaching teams work closely with multinational companies to develop assessments that are closely linked to work-based practice. Employers are also engaged with assessment centre days which are conducted by external companies.

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

## About Highbury College Portsmouth

Highbury College Portsmouth opened in 1963 as Highbury Technical College. It is a large general further education college in Portsmouth with six centres. The College's higher education programmes in Engineering, Construction and Built Environment, Computing and Business are taught at the Highbury Campus with Hospitality and Travel and Tourism programmes offered at Highbury City of Portsmouth Centre. The College's mission is to 'enable all our students to succeed'.

The College works with two degree-awarding bodies, the University of Portsmouth and the University of Sussex, and Pearson is the awarding organisation for higher national certificates and diplomas (HNCs and HNDs). Approximately 227 students were studying on the College's higher education programmes at the time of the review. The College employs around 250 academic staff, with 35 being involved in the delivery of higher education provision within the scope of this review.

There have been changes in the College management structure since the previous QAA review. College oversight of higher education provision has now been consolidated into the one role of Head of Quality, Learning and Higher Education Development, reporting to the Executive Director Collegiate College who has overall responsibility for higher education development, direction and strategy. A separate Executive Director post was created in 2014 for Student Support and Alumni Services and this post works closely with the Executive Director Collegiate College on the higher education student experience with respect to

support and student engagement and involvement. A Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning was established to create a greater focus on pedagogy and scholarly activity.

The College highlighted a number of key challenges faced, including responding both to the continued funding changes in the sector and to the general economic uncertainty. Among the major changes at the College since the last QAA review is a new 2020 Vision and a new Higher Education Strategy. The College's Higher Education Work Related Learning Strategy and the Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy have also been updated, particularly with respect to entrepreneurship. The Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy aligns with the UK Professional Standards Framework. The College has addressed effectively the small number of recommendations from its last review by QAA in 2010.

## Explanation of the findings about Highbury College Portsmouth

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.1 The College's framework for the maintenance of academic standards is governed by the requirements of its degree-awarding bodies, the University of Portsmouth and the University of Sussex, and its awarding organisation, Pearson, who have responsibility for setting the academic standards of their awards.

1.2 The College designs the higher education programmes which are then validated by the awarding bodies. Once validated, minor changes to programmes are notified to the relevant awarding body through a minor amendment process. In addition, for foundation degrees and top-up bachelor's degrees, the College has its own internal validation procedure. The College produces programme specifications for each of its higher education programmes and has an Advisory Assessment Tariff Guide which lists the main types of assessment tasks, against weightings and volume for a 10-credit module at each academic level. It is the role of external examiners to confirm academic standards.

1.3 The review team checked that appropriate referencing is made to the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and other external reference points in programme specifications. Through validation and revalidation documentation the team considered the use of levels in the FHEQ as applied within the design process for new and revised programmes. External examiner feedback was scrutinised, including sections on management of standards (Pearson) and standards set by the two degree-awarding bodies.

Meetings were held with academic staff at all levels to confirm staff understanding of the processes involved in the College's maintenance of academic standards.

1.4 A review of HNC/HND programme specifications showed reference to FHEQ levels and links to the Qualification and Curriculum Framework (QCF) and appropriately worded aims and learning outcomes for each programme. In the original programme specifications for HNCs and HNDs there was no reference to Subject Benchmark Statements but those drafted under the piloted template included reference to Subject Benchmark Statements and National Occupation Standards, and showed a closer alignment of assessment strategies with learning outcomes. Programme specifications for University of Sussex and University of Portsmouth programmes showed appropriate aims, learning outcomes, qualification frameworks, credit values, levels and Subject Benchmark Statements. Programme specifications for foundation degrees include reference to the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*. Standards are appropriate for the qualification level and the volume of study.

1.5 Re-recognition reports from the University of Sussex have confirmed appropriate use of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Some of the College's guidance documents and templates make reference to FHEQ descriptors, Subject Benchmark Statements, and volume and type of assessment, but not all. Good staff awareness of FHEQ and threshold academic standards has been commented on via successful re-recognitions and is supported by staff development events. The review team's meetings with staff confirmed a clear understanding of the use of levels, the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. Staff confirmed that the Advisory Assessment Tariff Guide is used at the design stage of a module and is followed through in the description of the assessment tasks in module specifications. The students who met the team also showed a good understanding of the different demands expected at different academic levels and how these impact their experience of learning, teaching and assessment.

1.6 An example of revalidation makes reference to discussion on FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and assessment tariffs. Programme specifications are included in submissions to degree-awarding bodies. External examiners' reports confirm that academic standards are being met at appropriate qualification levels.

1.7 The College's policies, procedures and documentation make appropriate reference to relevant national levels and frameworks for qualifications. Staff understanding and awareness of the use of levels and relevant benchmark statements is strong. External examiners confirm that assessments and awards are at an appropriate level and standard. The review team concludes that the College meets Expectation A1 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**

1.8 The degree-awarding bodies are responsible for the validation of programmes and the award of academic credit. These responsibilities are detailed in Partnership Handbooks and Memoranda of Agreement. The University of Portsmouth has its own set of academic and assessment regulations governing the award of credit and qualifications. The College has assessment regulations governing University of Sussex awards and any change to the regulations requires approval from this degree-awarding body. Pearson HNC and HND programmes are governed via wider Pearson Review and the annual external examiner system. The College has a governance structure for the management of higher education set out in its academic framework and produces its own assessment regulations for higher education programmes.

1.9 Documentation from degree-awarding bodies and the awarding organisation shows a clear process and governance structure for the management of the College's responsibilities for academic standards. The College has a clear overview of the academic and assessment regulations governing different programmes. The formal process for approving changes to regulations is appropriate. The College's own assessment regulations are regulations governing the assessment process rather than the award of academic credit and qualifications.

1.10 The review team reviewed programme specifications and assessment regulations to confirm the use of appropriate and relevant assessment frameworks. Documentation on the College's own internal validation process was reviewed to evidence the appropriate application of the awarding bodies' academic frameworks, along with the College's submissions to the awarding bodies. Consideration was also given to reports on the appropriate operation of examination boards. External examiners' reports (and the College's implementation of actions arising out of these reports) were scrutinised to demonstrate whether the requirements of the assessment and academic framework are followed. The team's meetings with staff confirmed their awareness of the use of different academic frameworks and regulations.

1.11 Programme specifications for all the awarding bodies include reference to national credit frameworks, qualification characteristics and volume of assessment. The national framework for external examining confirms the appropriate award of credit and qualifications and the degree-awarding bodies and organisations are provided with feedback on College progress against actions arising out of external examiner reports (see also Expectation B7). The College uses its own internal quality assurances process with standard templates, which are consistent with the requirements of its awarding body partners. A review of outcomes of submissions to awarding bodies confirms appropriate use of frameworks for the award of credit and qualifications.

1.12 The College's engagement with its two degree-awarding bodies and Pearson is positive and there are overarching higher education strategies and policies set within the College. Confirmation of adherence to assessment regulations and processes is reported via the Chair of examination boards and at a higher level via annual reports to awarding bodies, and feedback is provided by the awarding body to the College in the case of the University of

Sussex. Academic staff demonstrated clarity of understanding between the requirements of different awarding bodies and their respective regulations. Students understood how their work is assessed and knew what they would need to do to achieve higher grades.

1.13 In working with the two degree-awarding bodies and the awarding organisation, the College operates a clear framework for the award of credit and qualifications. There are processes governing assessment and these are verified by external examiners and reports on the operation of examination boards are submitted to the degree-awarding body. The review team concludes that the College meets Expectation A2.1 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**

1.14 The review team's findings under Expectations A1 and A2.1 have already referred to programme specifications in providing evidence for the College's effective use of UK, European and degree-awarding bodies' reference points for academic standards.

1.15 As noted, the College produces programme specifications for the foundation degrees and top-up bachelor's degrees and has recently launched a pilot template for the programme specifications for HNC and HND programmes. The programme specifications for Pearson HNC and HND programmes now include information about relevant benchmark statements to inform programme design and progression to degree programmes.

1.16 The review team considered course handbooks and programme and module specifications to check for the inclusion of reference points for academic standards that would be monitored by the respective degree-awarding body. The team discussed the definitive records of individual programmes with senior managers and academic staff. The College's programme specifications are published on the website and its quality assurance processes are effective in maintaining them as the definitive records of the higher education programmes.

1.17 The review team concludes that the College meets Expectation A2.2 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**

1.18 Clear guidance and agreed operating frameworks between the College and its partner awarding bodies facilitate effective design and approval of programmes. The FHEQ and the Quality Code are incorporated into the requirements of the degree-awarding bodies and have also been mapped against the College's own processes. The degree-awarding bodies maintain oversight of standards.

1.19 Since the previous QAA review, the College has continued to develop relationships with its partner degree-awarding bodies, leading to validation and revalidation of its higher education provision. The University of Sussex has approved the College's own regulations which were devised to reflect and incorporate the University's requirements. Following initial validation of programmes by the University of Sussex, new internal validation procedures were introduced in 2011-12 to improve rigour. Four foundation degrees and two top-up degrees were successfully validated or revalidated in 2013 using these revised procedures, which include more testing and enhanced preparation. The College undertakes initial programme development prior to presentation to the University for approval for further development and validation. The University convenes a validation panel, including subject specialists and external representative(s) from outside the University, and examination of programme quality review (PQR) reports suggests that the programmes are running effectively. Two foundation degrees were validated through a new relationship with the University of Portsmouth in 2010; there followed a successful Periodic Collaborative Partnership Review by the University in May 2014.

1.20 Pearson programmes are required to be revalidated every three years. They are designed using existing modules and follow a development process overseen by the external verifier, leading to internal validation.

1.21 Employers contribute to curriculum development through active links with programme teams or via expert advisory groups. For Pearson programmes employers are closely involved in negotiating optional units to complement students' work-based learning. The team noted, however, that internal College validation processes did not require an employer or other external representative to be part of the scrutiny panel (see recommendation under Expectation A3.4).

1.22 Staff are offered development and support for their roles in programme design and approval activity, including awareness of threshold standards and the Quality Code. Support is also provided by the Head of Quality, Learning and Higher Education Development and the Head of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

1.23 In developing relationships with the partner degree-awarding bodies, the College has agreed clear processes for the design and approval of new programmes. These processes include steps to ensure that academic standards meet UK threshold academic standards. The effective communications between partners allow for the consistent application of agreed processes and their continuing review. Programme development is responsive to the views of local employers. Validation and revalidation procedures are

clearly set out in documentation and are well understood by staff. The team therefore concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met and that 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**

1.24 The College manages the conduct of assessment and examination boards, with oversight from the degree-awarding bodies. External examiners attend examination boards and provide reports, via a completed template, to the awarding bodies. The College takes responsibility for ensuring that module learning outcomes are met and makes recommendations to examination boards. This is achieved through a College-chaired interim examination board which confirms appropriate application of the College internal moderation procedure.

1.25 The College has developed its own assessment regulations and policies, incorporating the requirements of the University of Sussex and including principles expressed in the University of Portsmouth regulations. The University of Sussex has approved these regulations for use and they are reviewed annually at examination boards. University of Portsmouth regulations are used for Portsmouth-validated programmes. The College has an academic framework which sets out committees' responsibilities for maintaining standards.

1.26 Regulations, policies and guidance for assessment are comprehensive and clear. The mechanisms for aligning with threshold academic standards are fully explained in documentation and through the practice of validation. External examiners are asked to comment on the achievement of academic standards. An assessment framework is in place that enables the achievement of learning outcomes to be appropriately demonstrated.

1.27 The team considered a range of documentation including partnership agreements and supporting documentation, regulations, records of examination boards, programme specifications, validation documents and assessment guidance. Meetings were held with senior and teaching staff, including Chairs of Examination Boards and representatives of partner degree-awarding bodies. The team also met with a cross-section of students. Employers were asked about their involvement with assessment.

1.28 University of Sussex examination boards are chaired by a University representative, and the College Head of Quality, Learning and Higher Education Development acts as Deputy Chair. The University of Portsmouth sends a representative to the examination board which is chaired by the College. This cooperative working illustrates the effective arrangements between the College and its partner awarding bodies.

1.29 The Head of Quality, Learning and Higher Education Development also chairs the HNC/HND examination board for Pearson programmes. Introduced in 2012-13, this examination board operates a more formal process than the previous individual programme examination boards for HNCs/HNDs and has helped the College improve consistency and share good practice in assessment across Pearson programmes.

1.30 Guidance from partner degree-awarding bodies specifies how the College should refer to threshold academic standards regarding assessment. Adherence to this guidance is tested at validation, for example during the University of Sussex revalidation of Computing and Business Management which had conditions to adjust/realign learning outcomes and types of assessment.

1.31 Programme specifications including learning outcomes and assessment requirements are available for all provision. These are approved at validation or revalidation and are made available to students via programme handbooks and on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Programme specifications for Pearson programmes have recently been enhanced to include additional external reference points, specifically the FHEQ, and to align them with other higher education provision.

1.32 Following a recommendation from the University of Sussex validation of the FdA Business Management in 2010, the College developed an Advisory Assessment Tariff Guide which aids assessment design in development and approval stages and is now used across all higher education provision.

1.33 External examiner reports are summarised by the College into an action plan which is considered and monitored by the Academic Policy and Standards Committee. Academic Board has oversight of this process. Action points are followed up and assessment practice is reviewed via examination board reports and annual programme quality review (see Expectations B7 and A3.4). External examiners make favourable comments about the conduct of assessment and achievement of academic standards.

1.34 In the 2010 Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) report, staff understanding of external reference points was identified as a feature of good practice. The College's programme of staff development has continued to address issues of relevance to staff understanding of the Quality Code and threshold academic standards, including level 6 outcomes and changes made to the Quality Code. Staff continue to be well engaged with these external reference points.

1.35 The review team concludes that the College works effectively with its partner degree-awarding bodies in the maintenance of academic standards. Appropriate systems are in place for conducting and managing assessment. The College and its partners regularly review these processes. Measures are in place to ensure that learning outcomes are appropriately assessed and results moderated. External examiners are fully involved with assessment. The team therefore concludes that the College successfully meets Expectation A3.2 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**

1.36 Degree-awarding bodies work with the College to ensure that academic standards are appropriately set and maintained. The College undergoes revalidation of programmes and institutional re-recognition by the University of Sussex every three to five years. The University of Portsmouth undertakes a Collaborative Partnerships review every three years and a periodic review of collaborative programmes every six years. The College is a Pearson Approved Centre and this is monitored and reviewed through external examiner reporting.

1.37 The College has a clear framework for the monitoring and review of programmes, set out in the Higher Education Quality Cycle. This is designed to flow information through the College's Higher Education committees on an approximately monthly basis. Self-evaluation is in use throughout the College, from programme and departmental level upwards. A revised system of self-evaluation, mapped against the Quality Code, was introduced in 2014. Self-evaluations both inform and are informed by the comprehensive annual programme quality review (APQR) process, which together feed into the higher education operational targets and from which quality improvement plans are derived. Composite reports and cross-College action plans are prepared and issues can be followed through committees and actions tracked.

1.38 The Academic Policy and Standards Committee considers a synthesis of monitoring reports from across programme areas and a summary of cross-College feedback from external examiners is produced with a College action plan with progress reported to Academic Board, and subsequent reports to Academic Board. Examination Board minutes provide a further means of review relating to assessment issues and the oversight of the degree-awarding bodies. These are similarly reported through the College committee structure.

1.39 The clear and comprehensive arrangements for monitoring and review of academic standards by the College in conjunction with its degree-awarding partners provide an appropriate framework within which the Expectation can be met.

1.40 The review team considered documentary evidence of monitoring and review mechanisms, including validation/revalidation records, departmental higher education self-evaluation reports, APQR reports, examination board minutes and annual reports to partner degree-awarding bodies. Staff of the College and awarding body representatives were asked about their understanding of these processes and invited to comment on their effectiveness. Students and employers were asked to comment on their involvement in review processes.

1.41 The record of committees provides clear evidence that the above processes are working effectively. Issues raised can be tracked through action plans. The College has undergone a series of successful institutional approval and programme validation/revalidation events in recent years.



1.42 The College introduced a revised internal validation procedure in 2013 in response to comments from the University of Sussex (see Expectation A3.1). The team noted, however, that although external views are considered at this stage of approval, panels used do not routinely include external specialists or advisers. The review team makes a recommendation about this matter in the text under Expectation B1.

1.43 The departmental higher education self-evaluation and APQR processes are closely defined and templates are provided for completion. All aspects of programme or departmental operation are considered, and quantitative and qualitative data are examined. Student feedback is considered, including the results of surveys and focus groups. External examiner comments are included in these processes, and are also brought together in a College-wide composite report of external examiner comments considered through the committee structure.

1.44 The Higher Education Practitioners' Forum plays a role in maintaining academic standards and quality through its work in addressing issues identified through the above processes. For example, an issue regarding the quality of referencing raised by the external examiner for the Foundation Degree in Business and Management was discussed at the forum and action points prepared. The review team was also shown evidence of development of the new virtual learning platform to enhance learning and assessment, led by Higher Education Practitioners with the Head of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

1.45 In the light of the above findings, the review team concludes that the College has in place sound and comprehensive processes for testing the achievement of threshold academic standards and their effective monitoring and review, and that these processes are appropriately approved and overseen by partner degree-awarding bodies. The review team concludes that the College meets Expectation A3.3 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**

1.46 The degree-awarding bodies have a process for the appointment of an external examiner for all programmes to ensure independent and external review of threshold standards and independent external expertise in the approval and reapproval of programmes. The College has processes for working with external examiners in terms of review of external examiners' reports, reflection and commentary in annual review, reporting back to the degree-awarding body and monitoring actions arising out the external examiners' reports by the College.

1.47 The College makes use of expert advisory boards to advise on curriculum content, student experience and placement. Some programmes receive recognition for associated membership from professional bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Builders and the Institution of Engineering and Technology.

1.48 External and independent expertise is included through the degree-awarding bodies' processes for the validation and revalidation of programmes. External scrutiny of the award of credit and qualifications is through the use of the external examiner systems and the appropriate monitoring of actions arising out of external examiners' reports.

1.49 The review team considered approval and reapproval documentation both of degree-awarding bodies and those produced through the College's internal quality assurance processes. The review team reviewed external examiners' reports, the summary of external actions, annual PQR and subject area higher education self-evaluations and met with academic staff to hear views on their involvement with independent and external input into quality assurance processes. The team also held telephone meetings with several employers. The team considered minutes of College's expert advisory boards and relevant governance structures, such as the Corporate Board of Studies.

1.50 The College and awarding bodies make use of the external examiner system to demonstrate independent and external scrutiny of the achievement and maintenance of academic standards. External examiners' reports confirm that academic standards are being met at appropriate qualification levels. External examiners' reports are included in annual review processes, actions are clearly monitored by the Academic Policy and Standards Committee (APSC) and regular reports are also sent to the degree-awarding bodies.

1.51 Scrutiny of validation and revalidation reports confirms that the degree-awarding bodies use independent external expertise in their recognition and re-recognition panels and in approval, revalidation and periodic review. The College's internal validation panels do not make use of externals as panel members, though validation panels include staff from outside the subject discipline but internal to the College. Internal validation documents did not contain references to wider employment relationships. There have been no student members on the internal validation panels.

1.52 The College makes use of expert advisory boards in early discussion about the design and approval of programmes. Minutes of advisory boards show that a range of issues are discussed including curriculum content, student experience and work experience placements. The STEM Steering Group shows evidence of early discussion on a proposed Engineering Systems programme with a good level of external engagement.

1.53 The review team's meetings with staff demonstrated engagement with externality via expert advisory boards (EAB) but showed a variable understanding of how the views gathered through EABs feed into the College's decision-making bodies more formally. There were very few references to EABs in the College's governance structures such as the Higher Education Board of Studies minutes or heads of department reports to the Higher Education Board of Studies. There is limited mention of the outcomes from EABs in the Corporate College Board of Study.

1.54 The team found that the degree-awarding bodies use independent and external participation in the approval and reapproval of their programmes. Maintenance of academic standards is monitored by the external examiner system and the process for the follow-up of actions arising from external examiner reports is robust. The College's own internal validation processes do not require external members or student members as panel members, and though the College actively engages with external stakeholders, these do not feed directly into the maintenance of academic standards. A recommendation relating to the use of externality is included under Expectation B1.

1.55 Overall, there is independent and external expertise used in the maintenance of academic standards, and the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation A3.4 and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

1.56 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area were met and each of the associated levels of risk were low. In all aspects of this judgement area the College complies with the requirements of its two degree-awarding bodies and the awarding organisation. The team identified one recommendation which links to this judgement area. The recommendation, made in Expectation B1, relates to the addition of externality on the College's internal validation panels. The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **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 processes for programme design, development and approval have been outlined under Expectation A3.1.

2.2 The Head of Quality, Learning and Higher Education Development chairs internal validation panels, and reports outcomes to Academic Policy and Standards Committee and Academic Board. Processes for monitoring and review feed into these committees and inform future programme development. The College's portfolio of programmes reflects subject associations with industry and developments within those industries.

2.3 The Highbury Pedagogical Framework is used in developing and designing teaching, learning and assessment strategies for new programmes. The Framework supports active learning to complement and strengthen work-based skills and engagement in the workplace. Teaching teams are fully engaged in programme design and development, drawing on their industry expertise and links with employers.

2.4 There are clearly defined arrangements for design and approval of programmes. Established relationships with partner degree-awarding bodies and with local employer networks facilitate programme development to match national quality requirements and the College's strategic intentions.

2.5 The team examined documentation relating to programme design and approval, including teaching, learning and assessment strategies. Meetings were held with senior staff responsible for strategic planning, managing higher education provision, and championing employability and teaching and learning. The team also met with representatives of programme teams and with a range of students. Telephone conversations were held with employers offering a wide variety of work-based learning and placement experiences.

2.6 The College has undergone a series of successful validation and revalidation events with its degree-awarding partners since the previous QAA review in 2010. Staff are well prepared for and engage effectively with programme development.

2.7 The College's higher education provision is focused on programmes that support employability. As well as a suite of foundation degrees and recently launched bachelor's degree top-up programmes in Computer Networking and Business Management (validated by the University of Sussex), the College has a long history of providing HNC and HND programmes which have supported vocational learning in industries local to Portsmouth. There is therefore a portfolio of Pearson programmes. The team was informed that the flexibility offered by Pearson programmes matches the needs of the College's large proportion of employed part-time students. Employers informed the team that they were consulted by programme teams and were able to negotiate the inclusion of suitable units within programme design. The Foundation Degree in Construction was recently closed and replaced by an HNC Construction following advice from the employer-led expert advisory group that this would prove more flexible.

2.8 The HNC and HND programmes in Engineering, IT Telecommunications and Construction and Surveying form a significant part of the Higher Level Apprenticeship scheme, which has been developed by the College in close cooperation with local employers.

2.9 Following recent validation events, partner universities have complimented the College on its links with industry and the approaches shown to employability and entrepreneurship.

2.10 Although employers are consulted regarding programme development, they are not currently involved in internal validation processes, and the team found that the consideration of employer or subject expert views was not always formally documented in the record of programme design and development. Nonetheless, employers spoken to by the review team were complimentary about communications with College staff, and the overall offer of the College, though views varied as to the extent of their involvement in programme development.

2.11 Student feedback from class representatives, surveys and focus groups is widely referred to in developing new programmes. The Student Support and Involvement Strategy is being updated; this and the Higher Education Quality Cycle set out the ways in which students may engage with the quality assurance and enhancement of their provision. The College is piloting student involvement in validation panels, but as yet none have been able to be directly involved. Students met by the team were not yet aware of this opportunity, but they noted that part-time studies (predominating in the higher education student body) can make engagement more challenging.

2.12 The team concludes that although validation processes are working well, they could be enhanced by greater involvement of employers or other external specialists. The team also considers it would be beneficial for students to become fully engaged in internal validation activity. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College ensures there is appropriate externality and student representation on internal validation panels (see also Expectations B5, B8 and A3.4).

2.13 The College maintains effective links with its partner degree-awarding bodies and effectively implements its responsibilities in the design, development and approval of programmes. There is an emphasis on providing programmes that meet employer requirements and that promote the acquisition of employability skills by students. The review team concluded that the College meets Expectation B1 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**

2.14 The College has a clear and detailed admissions policy for students. There is also a range of other related policies, for example for students with complex disabilities, the recognition of prior learning and applicants with criminal records. Together these policies aim to ensure that the process of admitting students is fair and in line with the awarding bodies' requirements. The College has a Higher Education Growth Group which monitors the number of higher education applications. The Equality and Diversity Committee monitors the implementation of the recruitment and admissions procedure.

2.15 The College has systems, processes, policies and procedures in place for achieving the fair admission of students. The College provides information about the institution, its programmes and its admission policies in a variety of formats to ensure that applicants understand the programme of study they are applying for.

2.16 The review team examined documents that set out the College's policies and procedures for the admission of students including a generic interview template and committee minutes. The team held discussions with senior staff, academic staff and students about their understanding and experience of the admissions process.

2.17 The review team found that the systems, policies, processes and procedures described are followed and implemented fairly. Currently there have been no appeals against an admissions decision. There is no formal training for staff who interview applicants, although there is a staff buddy system in place in which new members of staff can shadow an experienced colleague interviewing applicants. There is also a standard interview template to follow. The admissions policy has recently been reviewed and updated and is monitored effectively by the Equality and Diversity Committee. Students who met the team said they found the admissions process straightforward. Where students are engaged with a course involving a work experience placement (see Expectation B10), it is common for the employer to interview candidates and agree appointments in partnership with the College.

2.18 Overall, the review team concludes that the College successfully meets Expectation B2 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**

2.19 The College has a clear Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy which states 'a commitment to maintaining high quality teaching and learning, that enhances the success and employability' of its graduates. The College Higher Education Strategy, supported by the Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, has core strategic objectives for higher education staff development to support staff in scholarly activity and research. There is also a Higher Education Work Related Learning Strategy. A College-wide strategy on learning and development also exists. For scholarship and research, the Development, Scholarship and Research Committee, chaired by the Head of Quality, Learning and Higher Education Development, takes the lead in such activity and is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this strategy.

2.20 Examples of individual continuous professional development include secondments, work shadowing, updating qualifications, membership of networks and undertaking research. Training and development programmes include all staff training days, the annual teaching conference, higher education planning days and events at partner institutions. The College has advanced practitioners for the support of higher education learning and teaching and a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

2.21 In principle, the College takes deliberate steps to ensure that its staff are involved in continual professional development and scholarly activity, with strong and multiple examples of development. The strategy for staff development is aligned to the Higher Education Strategy and is linked to operational targets and key performance indicators. There is clear oversight of this activity in place. The drive to improve higher education learning and teaching, the approach to developing scholarly activity and the support for student academic achievement, in theory, would allow students to develop as independent learners, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

2.22 The review team examined the Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, the Learning and Development Strategy for the College, the minutes of the Development, Scholarship and Research Committee and its annual report to consider the steps that the College takes to improve higher education learning and teaching and how it evaluates such activities. The review team considered minutes of the Higher Education Board of Studies and annual review documentation to consider how the College integrates its scholarly activity and continuous professional development into annual review at programme level, and the minutes of Academic Board and APSC to consider strategic-level oversight. Staff development materials were reviewed by the team along with higher education-specific teaching observations. Support for learning and teaching activity was discussed in meetings with staff and students and in a demonstration of the virtual learning environment.

2.23 The review team finds that there is a deliberate and strategic drive to improve support for learning and teaching through staff development. This was confirmed at all levels of staffing at the College. There is a clear strategy overseen by the Development,



Scholarship and Research Committee. This Committee provides direction for such activity (though not for higher education in isolation) and is a forum for presentation of scholarly activity and research.

2.24 There is an annual report to Academic Board (Impact of Higher Education Staff Training Report), prepared by the Head of Quality, Learning and Higher Education Development, on the impact of learning and development activities on the quality of higher education. This annual report to Academic Board shows strategic oversight of this developmental activity and demonstrates a clear alignment of strategy, actions and targets. It reviews the impact of learning and development activities on the quality of higher education teaching, support and services. There is evidence of discussion of the functions and activities of the Development, Scholarship and Research Committee in Academic Board minutes.

2.25 There is a wealth of developmental opportunities available to staff both internally within the College and externally with degree-awarding bodies. College staff are aware of and engaged with these opportunities. The College has a defined set of scholarly activities, supported by a scheme for the adjustment of teaching hours to free time for scholarly activity. The review team heard through its meetings that there is a culture of continuous improvement in learning and teaching for higher education, and the College has in place 10 advanced practitioners to mentor and coach staff. The Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning has developed a series of initiatives, including the Highbury Pedagogical Framework, a set of pedagogical principles to guide education. The College recognises the benefits to be gained from undertaking research and produces its own Journal of Applied Pedagogy. There are numerous examples of innovative approaches to learning and teaching, in particular in the area of academic technological support with clear use of e-learning strategies.

2.26 The College has a tiered system of teaching observation with compulsory and optional elements. The higher education teaching observation system is designed for higher education activity based on the UK Professional Standards Framework. Teaching observation results form part of an annual report on the Impact of Higher Education Staff Training to Academic Board, subject area higher education self-evaluations and programme quality reviews. Staff confirmed that training needs and observations are discussed in a higher education-specific appraisal system.

2.27 The review team finds that there is a clear strategy for improving the learning and teaching skills of staff in higher education. Learning opportunities for staff are provided in depth and breadth. The strategy is clearly implemented within the College, reviewed and evaluated systematically and oversight is maintained at senior level. Staff at all levels are aware of and engaged with these opportunities. The range of opportunities extended to higher education staff to undertake personal development and scholarly activity to enhance their learning and teaching practice is **good practice**.

2.28 In summary, the College has well developed systems and processes in place to support the development of staff in their learning and teaching practice. Students are supported to develop as independent learners at a level appropriate for higher education. 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**

2.29 The College's Higher Education Strategy supported by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy defines a commitment to having in place arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. These strategies outline the academic framework for the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of these arrangements and resources via the governance structures of the Higher Education Board of Studies, APSC and Academic Board. Progress against operational targets is monitored by the College Leadership Team.

2.30 Professional development opportunities are provided to ensure staff are competent and up to date in their own skills and knowledge (see Expectation B3).

2.31 Support services are available to students and include: a counselling and welfare guidance service, additional learning support, English and mathematics workshops, work-related learning resources, physical and online library resources, interview and assessment workshops, and careers, employment and alumni services. Study spaces and creative learning spaces are provided for higher education students.

2.32 The University of Portsmouth also provides support including access to resources at its campus, such as training and study skills support for students. Support services are described in the student handbook. There is a Student Charter and policies on equality, race equality and disability.

2.33 The College has a Student Support and Involvement Strategy for 2011-13, covering both further and higher education. At the time of the review visit, a draft of the Strategy for 2014-16 had been prepared.

2.34 Employability and enterprise are key features of the student experience at the College, with strategies in place for higher education work-related learning and supporting academic modules for students in personal and professional development. As resources for students, the College's Employment Services, its Centre for Skills for Life and Work and Centre for Entrepreneurship support these skills provision. Entrepreneurial skills development is embedded in the curriculum.

2.35 The College offers a policy of one-to-one tutorials. Students have individual personal development plans which are reviewed on a one-to-one basis. A common induction event for higher education students has been introduced to develop a stronger higher education ethos. Student feedback is gathered via a number of internal College surveys, module/unit surveys, focus groups and through the student representative system.

2.36 The Executive Director for Student Support and Alumni Services is responsible for oversight of the Student Support and Involvement Strategy. The draft Student Support and Involvement Strategy (2014-16) details key performance indicators but does not include any explicit mechanisms for monitoring or evaluating the strategy. Elsewhere, in terms of monitoring and evaluation, the review team noted mechanisms are outlined in some strategy documents for employment services, health and well-being, equality and race equality policies and higher education work-related learning.

2.37 In principle, the strategic commitment to student support, the level of resources available to students, and the mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation such as reporting to the Higher Education Board of Studies, APSC and Academic Board should mean that students are able to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.38 The review team considered the various forms of feedback about student support such as College survey results, the National Student Survey, module and unit surveys, and focus groups. Annual review documentation in the form of PQRs and subject area higher education self-evaluations were scrutinised for evidence of a programme level and College-level evaluation of the arrangements in place to support students, along with minutes of relevant committees (such as Higher Education Board of Studies and Academic Board). The team's meetings with staff and students included discussions of the availability, suitability and evaluation of various student support services.

2.39 The review team found students are satisfied with the level and availability of support. Students confirmed that there were a variety of support mechanisms in place at course level that they can access if they need help. Some students confirmed they had had one-to-one tutorials but this was not consistent across all programmes.

2.40 Student feedback on support services is collated via a number of sources. A review of these student feedback mechanisms and results such as internal College surveys, Student Voice and focus groups showed a focus on quite general questions about satisfaction with the support they received. The review team considers that the responses provided offer very little by way of targeted feedback on specific aspects of student support services. Although included in the PQRs, these do not show evaluation of the various sources of student support as they are more focused on programme-related information. There are pockets of wider evaluation of some services. For example, there was a focus group and evaluation of (and changes to) MyCourse which was effective. In addition, there was a report on progress and evaluation of health and well-being to the Equality and Diversity Committee and of employment services to Academic Board.

2.41 Meetings with staff outlined that student support is evaluated and oversight is maintained via PQRs, subject area higher education self-evaluation reports and the Higher Education Board of Studies and Academic Board. The review team found that individual student or course-level issues were commented on in PQRs and in subject area higher education self-evaluation. Higher Education Board of Studies study minutes make mention of a routine student support services oral report, but discussion is about application and progression to higher education. Evidence of College-wide evaluation of student support services, either individually or collectively, was not apparent in Higher Education Board of Studies, Academic Board or APSC which are the structures that would be expected to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of student support services. There are some examples of evaluation of health and well-being and employment services. The review team therefore **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College implements an effective process for monitoring and evaluating all student support services.

2.42 The College offers a wide range of student services to support students to develop and achieve their potential. Among these services, the work of the Centre for Entrepreneurship to support staff and students in developing employability skills is **good practice**. The review team concludes that, on balance, the College meets Expectation B4. Given the limited strategic oversight of student support services and lack of evidence of evaluation of the impact of these services on the student experience, the review team considers the associated level of risk to be 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**

2.43 The College's latest Student Support and Involvement Strategy was in draft at the time of the review visit. The College has a student representative system in place in which students are elected to represent their associated course through attending course-level meetings and, for some students, higher-level committee meetings. The College has also developed a Higher Education Quality Review Cycle document which shows when the College engages students in surveys and questionnaires.

2.44 Programme quality review reports include student feedback for each higher education course. There is a pilot scheme inviting student representatives to sit on the internal validation panels; however, student representatives have yet to take part in this (see recommendation under Expectation B1). Higher education students are invited to attend the annual student conference; however, out of 14 students in attendance there was only one higher education student. Students are also invited to present at the annual teacher conference. Although there are pockets of activity, the outcomes of a strategic approach in the development of student engagement were not evident.

2.45 The review team examined documentation provided by the College and relevant material associated with student engagement. The team asked students, student representatives and the Students' Union about ways in which their views and opinions were heard, recorded and then acted upon. The team held discussions with academic, support and senior staff about the ways in which they receive and act upon feedback received from students.

2.46 The review team heard from students that most communications are at course level and are informal. Most students stated that if there were any issues they wished to raise about their higher education experience, they would usually go directly to their course tutor. While this style of communication has advantages and suits some students, not all students will engage in this way. The team considered that the connection and quality of communications between the College and students could be improved.

2.47 The College trains student representatives studying at the Highbury Campus while students taught at the University of Portsmouth undergo separate training. The team considered that this may result in developing the student representative to two different levels. The team viewed the related training material and considered it not to be an effective description of how a student representative would carry out their role. The training does not focus on the role of a student representative and how a student can effectively perform the role; instead it focuses on training the students in how to carry out focus groups and improve their presentation skills. The team received mixed feedback from student representatives and heard that if students did not bring transferrable knowledge or experiences, they might struggle with the role.

2.48 The College conducts three Centre student voice meetings a year in which a member of senior staff chairs a meeting with students, discussing matters arising that may be of interest. Additional focus groups, chaired by a senior manager, are held with higher education class groups. The review team determined that the structure in place regarding the student voice meetings is effective as the minutes are discussed at College committees; however, the attendance of higher education students and breadth of discussion could be

more effective. On average, there were four students present in each of the last four meetings, and sometimes as few as three, which the team does not consider to be a fair representation of the higher education student community. Clearly, low attendance acts to diminish the quality of formal feedback from the students that can be fed into the College committees. Furthermore, students who met the review team had little knowledge that this type of meeting takes place and what the purpose of it is.

2.49 The review team acknowledges that, due to the type of courses and modes of delivery offered at the College, engaging all higher education students is challenging. However, engagement at the College is characterised by its informal nature. This approach contributes to creating a disconnection and a lack of effective communication by not informing students how their feedback is being monitored and acted upon. Therefore the team **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College implements an effective process for the monitoring and review of student engagement arrangements (see also Enhancement).

2.50 Overall, the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B5; however, the College's strategic approach within this Expectation is not evident and therefore the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: 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 As noted under Expectation A3.2, the College has its own higher education assessment regulations incorporating those of the University of Sussex and covering principles of regulations of the University of Portsmouth.

2.52 The College Assessment Policy for Higher Education sets out its approach to assessment, in line with the College's mission and vision and *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code. Assessment strategies are considered during validation and approval and are regularly reviewed. Programme handbooks include clear guidance on assessment to be undertaken, and associated information required by students. The virtual learning environment is used to support assessment but the extent of this differs across subjects (see Expectation C).

2.53 The College has an Accreditation of Prior Learning policy and this is mainly used for the admission of HNC/HND students without traditional qualifications. The internal moderation policy includes prior approval of assessments and an approach to anonymous marking wherever practicable. External examining supports the degree-awarding bodies' oversight and comments are systematically used by the College (see Expectation B7). Staff receive regular updates on assessment matters.

2.54 Systems, procedures and policies for assessment are clearly established and are overseen through the committee structure of the College. Assessment is designed to contribute to learning as well as to measure achievement, and students are able to access appropriate support for their assignment tasks. There is therefore a suitable infrastructure for the above Expectation to be met.

2.55 The review team reviewed key documentation relating to assessment, including regulations, policies and guidance, as well as relevant parts of validation materials and programme handbooks. The team also reviewed minutes of meetings relating to assessment and results, and considered external examiners' reports. Meetings were held with senior staff responsible for determining strategy and overseeing conduct of assessment, as well as members of programme teaching teams. Part-time and full-time students across subjects were asked about their expectations and experiences of assessment. A range of employers were asked about their involvement with planning and conducting assessments and the relevance of assignment tasks to the workplace setting. The team also viewed the current and proposed virtual learning platforms.

2.56 Staff have a clear understanding of assessment and are well prepared and supported in their roles as assessors. The recent streamlining of examination boards, through the use of overarching College regulations and bringing together HNC and HND programmes, is appreciated by staff. They reported how validation activity, the College's departmental higher education self-evaluation, and programme quality review identify issues relating to assessment and gave an example of how a foundation degree had been revised to provide additional academic challenge to students.

2.57 The College is in the process of developing a new virtual learning platform that is intended to further support teaching, learning and assessment activity (see Expectation C). There is variable use of the existing platform as some staff are less engaged with its use. However, basic assessment information, including assignment information and deadline dates, is widely available. Part-time students find this means of obtaining assessment information particularly helpful.

2.58 The College's policy on academic misconduct is communicated effectively to students and anti-plagiarism software is in use for checking assignment authenticity. Students sign to indicate understanding of these processes on a standard assessment cover sheet.

2.59 Where possible, anonymous marking is used to improve the reliability of marking; however, in small groups or with project work this is not feasible. This and other practices relating to marking work are expressed in the internal moderation policy, which aims to standardise assessment across higher education provision, and together with the Assessment Policy provides a comprehensive source of guidance for staff.

2.60 Students are generally satisfied with assessment on their programmes, including the range of tasks, the timing and spacing of assignments and the support they receive in preparing for assessments. They are able to submit drafts for advice on improving their work; this facility is clearly differentiated from submitting work for marking. Students feel that assignment tasks relate well to their required skills and employability and that they assist learning. This was endorsed by employers spoken to by the team. Marks and feedback are normally made known to students within an agreed maximum of 15 working days. External examiners report that students receive detailed feedback. However, although there is a College policy on the return of assessed work, students met by the team reported variable experiences. Some students were not even clear that they should expect work to be returned. The review team **recommends** that, by February 2015, the College puts in place a process to ensure adherence to its policy for the return of assessed work to students.

2.61 In conclusion, the College has in place a comprehensive higher education assessment framework that facilitates students' demonstration of the achievement of learning outcomes. Assessment practices are generally robust, equitable and reliable. Students are broadly satisfied with their experiences of assessment. The College has well established processes of self-evaluation and review, is responsive to its degree-awarding partners and has continued to enhance assessment practice through recent changes, for example to examination boards. The review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B6 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

2.62 External examiners for each programme are appointed by the degree-awarding bodies. In the case of the University of Sussex, there is a protocol for the College to nominate external examiners with the College's Academic Board approving the nominations.

2.63 External examiners submit an annual report commenting on the management of assessment and academic standards and on the wider student learning experience. Programme teams conduct an analysis of external examiner feedback and this is fed into the annual subject area higher education self-evaluation which includes a quality improvement plan with a section for responses to external examiner reports.

2.64 A summary of cross-College feedback from external examiners is produced with a College action plan and is monitored by the College's Academic Policy and Standards Committee with progress reported to Academic Board.

2.65 External examiners receive copies of action plans. Annual reports to degree-awarding bodies also include overviews of external examiner feedback. External examiner reports are made available to students on MyCourse and are discussed with students at programme boards as part of the programme quality review process.

2.66 The College has in place procedures for responding to external examiners and for monitoring the actions taken as a result of external examiner feedback and has mechanisms for sharing this information with students.

2.67 The review team examined external examiners' reports and audited the trail of responses via annual review mechanisms and minutes of the Academic Policy and Standards Committee. In meetings with staff and students, the team discussed the role of external examiners and the College's response to, and distribution of, external examiner reports.

2.68 The review team found that the College is responsive to comments raised in external examiners' reports and has effective oversight of this area. Subject area higher education self-evaluation reports show evidence of inclusion of matters raised by external examiners, including areas of good practice, areas for improvement and updates on actions in progress within quality improvement plans. Subject area higher education self-evaluation reports are scrutinised by self-evaluation validation panels, chaired by the Principal.

2.69 A review of APSC minutes and Academic Board minutes confirmed receipt of a whole-College action plan and progress reporting against actions. Annual monitoring mechanisms show evidence of the College's notification to its degree-awarding bodies of the actions it was taking in response to external examiners' reports. The review team saw evidence of student engagement with programme boards as part of the programme quality review process which involved discussion of responses to external examiner reports. The external examiner reports demonstrate that some external examiners meet with students. In terms of sharing external examiners' reports with students more widely, the College makes the reports available to all students online via MyCourse. Although students who met the review team were aware of the purpose of the external examiner system more broadly, they were not aware of the availability or location of external examiners' reports. The review team therefore **recommends** that, by February 2015, the College takes steps to increase student awareness of the availability and location of external examiner reports.



2.70 The review team found that the College has in place robust mechanisms for responding to feedback from external examiners. There is clear monitoring at College level and a scrupulous use of external examiners in the quality system. The team concludes that the College meets Expectation B7 and the associated risk level 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**

2.71 The main structures and systems for monitoring and reviewing higher education provision are described under Expectation A3.4.

2.72 The Head of Quality, Learning and Higher Education Development oversees the Higher Education Quality Cycle. The Cycle includes all those activities that contribute to the monitoring and review of programmes, including lesson observations and audits of schemes of work as well as the production of programme quality reviews, quality improvement plans and self-evaluations. Self-evaluations are validated by a panel chaired by the Principal. A report on the College's higher education provision is compiled and submitted to the Higher Education Board of Studies. It is then passed through the Academic Policy and Standards Committee as the overarching quality committee of the College, and on to Academic Board. This informs the higher education operational targets and in turn the College's Strategic Plan. Feedback on achievement of higher education targets is reported at the Higher Education Board of Studies. Partner degree-awarding bodies are kept informed through regular contact and via annual reporting processes.

2.73 The College's academic framework of committees, its structure of higher education reporting, its approach to critical self-evaluation and action planning approaches provide an effective system for the monitoring and review of higher education provision.

2.74 The review team considered the full range of committee, departmental and programme reports relating to monitoring and review. The team looked at how action points were progressed and monitored through the College's mechanisms and how this impacted on the quality of provision. Staff and student meetings informed this process and the team sought to assess the degree of engagement by staff and students in monitoring and review processes.

2.75 Staff are well informed of quality matters via the policies available in the Quality Manual which is provided on the intranet. They are kept abreast of practice and developments through briefings, committee meetings, the Higher Education Practitioners' Forum and the Higher Education Planning Day. Staff met by the team were able to articulate clearly their engagement with formal and informal quality processes, showing understanding of their relationship with partner degree-awarding bodies, employers and other stakeholders. Annual programme quality reports and departmental higher education self-evaluations demonstrate the importance of these links to the achievement of the College's strategic objectives. The contribution of departmental higher education self-evaluation and programme quality review processes to the quality assurance of higher education is **good practice**.

2.76 Student feedback is collected through module evaluations, surveys and focus groups, and is referred to in review activity. A student representative system is in operation, but students reported that this is variably successful.

2.77 The review team makes a recommendation relating to student engagement under Expectation B5 and a recommendation under Expectation B1 about the involvement of

student representation and externality on internal validation panels (see also Expectations B7 and A3.4).

2.78 The College demonstrates a strong commitment to the principles of critical self-evaluation, monitoring and review and that it has in place a sound and effective framework for fulfilling this commitment. The team noted evidence of continuing improvement and enhancement as a result of monitoring and review. The review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B8 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 College has an academic appeals procedure and a complaints procedure. Information about how to make a complaint or appeal is included in the student handbook, programme specifications and on the website. The Head of Quality, Learning and Higher Education Development has responsibility for investigating complaints while the Executive Director Collegiate College has responsibility for determining whether there are grounds for an appeal. These procedures are then monitored in respect of equality and diversity indicators by the Equality and Diversity Committee.

2.80 Staff actively engage with students at an informal stage but if the issue is not resolved the appeal or complaint will go through the relevant procedure. If the student is unhappy about the outcome of an academic appeal, they can further appeal to the awarding body. If the student is not satisfied with this outcome, they can appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, whose decision is final. The procedures seem to be effective methods in assuring that students will receive a fair outcome.

2.81 The review team looked at documentary evidence including policy documents and annual reports. These were considered in relation to the student submission and additional relevant evidence. The team also discussed academic appeals and complaints processes with senior staff, academic staff and students.

2.82 The review team found that the procedures in place to deal with formal issues by the College are effective. There has been one academic appeal in the past two years that was successfully resolved as there were mitigating circumstances that the student was previously unable to report. Additionally, in 2013-14, there were two formal complaints which were resolved by the programme leaders.

2.83 Students demonstrated variable awareness of the academic appeals and complaints procedure, but they said if there were any issues they could go either to their lecturer or programme leader. The review team confirmed this approach when in discussion with academic staff. The College reported that it was confident that if a trend of informal complaints were arising across courses and departments, they would be able to detect this and then address the underlying issue. The review team considered, however, that at College level, without a mechanism for capturing the resolution of informal complaints it would be difficult to pick up on trends in student complaints arising across courses. Therefore the team **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College establishes a mechanism to provide an overview of all complaints raised by higher education students.

2.84 Overall, the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B9 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**

2.85 The College delivers higher education learning opportunities with employers, the nature of which depends on the subject, mode of delivery and the type of higher education award. The two main types are work experience placement and work-based or work-related learning.

2.86 Work experience placements are compulsory for all full-time students on foundation degrees. Two of the College's departments (Business, Computing and Digital Technologies; Travel, Hospitality and Catering) offer full-time foundation degrees and at the time of the review these departments were managing the placements of around 72 students. The latter department also provides an industrial placement manager to manage all aspects of the compulsory industrial placement for the University of Portsmouth BA (Hons) degrees in Hospitality Management and Hospitality Management with Tourism. A total of 42 students were registered on these programmes.

2.87 Work-based or work-related learning is a feature of the HNC and HND programmes which are typically part-time programmes for students employed in the relevant industry. Two of the College's departments (Business, Computing and Digital Technologies and Engineering and Sustainable Technologies) provide these programmes for around 110 students. Students undertake assessments with a focus on the skills required by their employers within their workplace. Two departments also provide for 12 students a higher-level apprenticeship route leading to an HNC or HND for employees within the context of their employment. Assessment tasks encourage student reflection on current or previous work experience.

2.88 Delivering learning opportunities with employers flows from the aims and objectives of various College strategies. The College's approach to the management of learning opportunities delivered with employers has been articulated in the Higher Education Work Related Learning Strategy.

2.89 Placements for full-time students are organised by programme leaders with support from the College's Employment Services. Risk assessments of all workplaces are carried out by the Health and Safety Officer, and key policies such as the employer's equality and diversity policies are audited to ensure that the practices are consistent with those of the College. The Executive Director Student Support and Alumni Services has strategic responsibility for work experience placements.

2.90 Preparation of full-time students for the work placement takes the form of the Personal and Professional Development module. A work experience agreement is completed by each student. Placements are planned and allocated in negotiation with students, taking into account their areas of interest and future career goals. Students are interviewed by employers as part of the placement process to ensure that the placement meets their expectations, as well as identifying the contribution the student can make to the work of the company.

2.91 Both students and employers are briefed on placement requirements through Placement Handbooks; in the case of employers, this information is discussed at a pre-placement meeting with staff to ensure that the placement provides opportunities for students to demonstrate the required learning outcomes in their assessed work. Students are assessed through a placement project (via the internship of work experience unit) which enables them to undertake directed reading and research so that their experiences are placed in the context of current theory and/or practice. Students present their projects to a panel and employers are, wherever possible, involved in providing feedback on students' work performance in the workplace and on their presentation. However, employers do not formally assess work-related elements.

2.92 For programmes involving work-based or work-related learning, the College's approach to the management of the learning opportunities is described briefly in the Higher Education Work Related Learning Strategy. Work-based projects are part of the formal assessment process. For part-time students, assessments draw on the students' paid or voluntary work practices; employers contribute to projects by helping individuals identify areas of inquiry that will be of benefit to the student and the workplace. Work-based learning for higher-level apprenticeships is within the scope of the College's Centre of Work-Based Learning and there is a relevant handbook. A service-level agreement, setting out the three-year delivery model for an advanced apprenticeship framework followed by an HNC, exists for the College's relationship with a multinational engineering employer.

2.93 The review team considered the documentation that exists on work experience placement and also on work-based or work-related learning. The review team held telephone discussions with a number of employers and discussed work experience placements and work-based and work-related learning in meetings with senior staff, academic and support staff and with students. The team scrutinised annual monitoring and examination board documentation to consider evidence of the management of learning opportunities delivered with employers at a strategic or College-wide level.

2.94 The review team's discussions with a sample of employers highlighted a spectrum of arrangements and relationships for managing the College's delivery of learning opportunities with employers. This spectrum of arrangements and the implications for the College could be articulated more comprehensively in the College's documentation together with the approaches for supporting, managing and monitoring those arrangements at College level.

2.95 Records of employers providing work placements for students are mainly kept by departments at course level, though the College is looking at a new system to centralise information. Currently no complete record of work experience placement or work-based learning activity is held centrally.

2.96 The College has organised its more centralised units for the support of learning opportunities delivered with employers broadly into those that support work experience placements and those that support work-based learning for higher-level apprenticeships. Management reporting lines therefore follow different routes for the two main types of activity.

2.97 The College's relationships with employers delivering learning opportunities, whether directly through placement or less directly as employer, are managed mainly at departmental level and this is where oversight and accountability for the activity is also mainly located. With five departments involved in managing these opportunities and centralised support offered through different routes, there is a risk that the quality of learning opportunities could be variable.

2.98 A review of the Higher Education Board of Studies and Academic Policy and Standards Committee minutes showed limited discussion of learning opportunities delivered with employers (Higher Education Board or APSC). The line of accountability at senior College level could be clearer. Scrutiny of annual reports to awarding bodies and examination boards also showed minimal reflection on the quality of work experience placements and work-based learning.

2.99 Examples of course-level evaluations were also seen by the review team along with reviews of PQRs, but evaluation of work-based learning is limited in scope and depth and focused at module level. The review team saw evidence of feedback on individual student performance, template surveys for employers and completed reports.

2.100 Meetings with students confirmed that they receive visits from College staff while on placement and value the Personal and Professional Development module in preparing them for their work experience placement. Students were able to explain the support available to them from course teams for their work experience placement. Course handbooks did not provide information on work-based learning. Students were not aware of the opportunities to give general feedback to the College on the quality of their work experience placement.

2.101 Employers were not aware of College information produced for employers offering work experience placement and work-based learning, though many employers said they received information from course tutors. Employers said they give feedback on individual student performance but are not routinely asked for feedback by the College to evaluate the effectiveness of placement or work-based learning arrangements more generally.

2.102 The review team concludes that the College has a strategy for learning opportunities delivered with employers. Students appreciate the value of work experience placements. Placements are managed mainly at programme level within an overall framework. The College's relationships with employers are mainly informal throughout the lifecycle of the placement with little information about the spectrum of arrangements being considered at College level. Relations with employers delivering learning opportunities through students' employment are also managed mainly at programme level and in a less formalised framework. Evaluation of learning opportunities delivered with employers is on an individual, unit and module level with little information collated and discussed at College level. Overall, the review team considers that, at College level, the monitoring and oversight of learning delivered with employers could be strengthened. Therefore, the team **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College introduce an integrated strategic and operational framework for the management and oversight of higher education students' learning opportunities delivered with all employers.

2.103 There are arrangements in place broadly to implement and manage students' higher education learning opportunities with employers and, overall, the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B10. Given the gaps in the strategic oversight across this area at College level, the team concludes that the associated risk level is moderate.

**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**

2.104 The College does not offer research degrees.



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

2.105 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. All applicable Expectations have been met and the level of risk is judged as low in six of the Expectations and moderate in three Expectations. Three features of good practice were identified, covering three of the 10 applicable Expectations in this judgement area. Recommendations related to eight of the Expectations in this judgement area. Several recommendations relate to a strengthening of monitoring and oversight at College level. The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

3.1 Information about the College, its courses, policies and procedures is made available widely to applicants, students, staff and external stakeholders through the College website and printed materials including prospectuses, handbooks and leaflets. This includes key documents such as information about the College's mission, vision, values and strategy. The College also uses MyCourse as a virtual learning environment (VLE), which has mixed feedback regarding its effectiveness from current students.

3.2 The College employs a Freedom of Information Officer and a Data Protection Officer to ensure that information is made available under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, 2000 and the Data Protection Act, 1998.

3.3 All policies and procedures are approved through the College's academic framework. Programme leaders provide the College's published information about courses, which is checked by the Head of Department, proofread by the Marketing department and then signed off by the appropriate department.

3.4 The College has systems, processes, policies and procedures in place that ensure information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The College has also invested in developing the VLE as a result of feedback from students.

3.5 The review team examined the documentation that describes the College's policies and processes for the production of information for internal and external stakeholders, and asked staff about the operation of these policies. The team examined examples of hardcopy and electronic format information produced for applicants, students, staff and external stakeholders, including the general public. The team asked students about the usefulness of the information they received, and heard from academic and professional staff about the information available to them to support them in the management of academic quality and standards.

3.6 The review team received a demonstration of the current and piloted VLE platforms. The piloted new VLE platform showed an improved design, functionality and accessibility for the user. The College has tested the new platform including providing students with audio and visual feedback via this system with the results being well received. The team **affirms** the College's roll-out of the piloted virtual learning platform by June 2015.

3.7 The College has a number of other platforms that will operate alongside the main VLE. This gives elements of freedom for different course areas to produce a more bespoke learning and teaching experience. The team saw an example of a website currently in use by the Mathematics and Computing students. The website contained a number of videos that related to each lesson that the students could engage with before the lesson. The team judged this to be a positive example of activity that could be transferrable to other subject areas.

3.8 The College has a number of other positive examples of initiatives supporting information sharing. A higher education staff portal, in which good practice can be shared, is in the early stages of development. Some courses, including FdA Business Management, use social media within their course, where appropriate. This has resulted in a successful, though less conventional, approach to engaging external stakeholders.

3.9 Overall, the review team concludes that the College successfully meets the Expectation in Part C 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

3.10 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk was low. There was one affirmation identified in this judgement area relating to the roll-out of a new virtual learning platform. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College's approach to enhancement centres around its culture of self-evaluation and continuous improvement through the use of annual programme quality review and quality improvement plans. These processes involve the consideration of a wide range of information at programme and departmental level, including qualitative and quantitative data regarding students' completion and progression, survey outcomes, matters raised by external examiners, curriculum developments and progress made against identified areas for improvement. The review team has identified that the contribution of departmental self-evaluation and programme quality review processes to the quality assurance of higher education is good practice (see Expectations B8 and A3.3).

4.2 The College Higher Education Strategy states the College's intention to 'enhance the success and employability of our graduates through outstanding learning opportunities'. Other strategic documents, such as the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the Work Related Learning Strategy, endorse and develop this aim. The outcomes of review, evaluation and improvement planning inform the College's annual higher education operational targets, progress on which is reported to the College's leadership team and informs future strategy. Examples of enhancement from a strategic level include: the introduction of the Advisory Assessment Tariff; a specific higher education induction programme; entrepreneurship and employability skills support; access to specialist resources or information technology outside class time; and target setting to improve completion rates (see Expectations B1 and B3 and the Theme).

4.3 There is clear leadership for enhancement at the College. The Principal chairs panels for approval of departmental higher education self-evaluations and the Head of Quality, Learning and Higher Education Development takes a lead in programme review and other quality initiatives. The Executive Director Collegiate College has overall responsibility for higher education, chairs the Higher Education Board of Studies and is a member of the leadership team. The Head of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has led the creation of a more distinct higher education ethos through work on the Highbury Pedagogical Framework. There is a Governors' Liaison Scheme to support the enhancement of a specialist curriculum.

4.4 The committee structure allows for the specific consideration of higher education matters at the Higher Education Board of Studies and their reporting to the Academic Policy and Standards Committee and thence to Academic Board. Enhancement initiatives and good practice are disseminated within the College through higher education planning days, the Higher Education Practitioners' Forum and by higher education practitioners' role in championing new initiatives and pedagogical advances, such as the virtual learning platform.

4.5 Staff demonstrate a clear understanding of, and are actively engaged with, processes for ongoing self-evaluation and programme review. They are able to articulate how their practice supports the enhancement of learning opportunities and how the College facilitates their personal and professional development to achieve this aim. The College promotes the ongoing development of learning, teaching and assessment through the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and encourages development that relates to professional or industry skills, including secondments, work shadowing, updating

qualifications and membership of networks. There are core strategic objectives to support staff in scholarly activity and research. The Development, Scholarship and Research Committee, chaired by the Head of Quality, Learning and Higher Education Development, takes the lead in this activity and oversees the implementation of this strategy.

Expectation B3 concludes that the College takes deliberate steps to ensure that its staff are involved in continual professional development and scholarly activity, with strong and multiple examples of development, and that the range of opportunities extended to higher education staff to undertake personal development and scholarly activity to enhance their learning and teaching practice is good practice (see Expectations B1, B3 and B8).

4.6 The College actively seeks feedback from students to inform its monitoring and review activities, and thereby to contribute to enhancement activity, but this tends to be more informal in nature. Initial attempts to invite students to attend conference days and participate in validation panels have met with limited success. The review team recognised the challenge of engaging with part-time students. Processes for formal feedback to students in response to issues raised, and full involvement in quality assurance processes, are not yet well established. Expectation B5 provides a recommendation for the monitoring and review of student engagement arrangements.

4.7 The previous QAA review in 2010 identified 'a productive relationship between the College and employers that enhances the quality of provision'. The College has continued to work very closely with employers in the development and design of the curriculum and has established expert advisory boards to inform curriculum development. Employability and entrepreneurship have been further embedded in the curriculum through the process of programme revalidation, and the College has established the Centre for Entrepreneurship with its associated initiatives (see Expectation B10 and the Theme). In relation to its role in enabling student development and achievement (Expectation B4), the team found that the work of the Centre for Entrepreneurship to support staff and students in developing employability skills is good practice.

4.8 During the review the team noted that communications with employers, both for placement arrangements and for monitoring the learning opportunities offered for those students in employment, are managed mainly at programme level and in a less formal framework. This contributes to limited oversight at College level, and the team therefore **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College introduce an integrated strategic and operational framework for the management and oversight of higher education students' learning opportunities delivered with all employers.

4.9 In conclusion, the team notes that overall there is a strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities and that there is significant integration of enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner at provider level. The team was able to identify an ethos that expects and encourages enhancement of learning opportunities. Although there is some scope for development in certain areas, as identified above, quality assurance procedures are used to identify opportunities for enhancement. There is an effective infrastructure for the identification, support and dissemination of good practice. The Expectation for Enhancement is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

4.10 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk was low. One recommendation, made under Expectation B5, is particularly linked to this judgement area. This relates to the monitoring and review of student engagement arrangements. The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The College has clear aims and objectives relating to student employability and the development of entrepreneurial skills. These are articulated in various interrelated strategies and operational targets relating to student employability.

5.2 The College actively promotes entrepreneurship and the College's strategies reflect this priority. The College is a member of Gazelle Colleges - a group of colleges that aim to develop 'entrepreneurial attributes throughout education'. The College has a dedicated Centre for Entrepreneurship, a Centre for Work-Based Learning and a Centre for Skills for Work and Life.

5.3 Examples of the College's engagement in enterprise include 'Collective Futures', the College's enterprise society and involvement in national entrepreneurship activities, competitions and funding bids.

5.4 The College has established a range of learning companies including restaurant, fashion show and marketing/media companies within a Learning Company Framework. Each learning company has a management board with student and staff roles and membership. For example, the iX Digital Learning Company is set up with staff in IT professional services within the College and 'provides a supportive environment for any College student who is considering working in or running a software application development business'. The learning company also aims to enable students' ownership of a business as well as prepare them through work by providing a real work environment. The College is actively expanding its learning company provision and intends to extend the opportunity to all higher education students to participate in such ventures.

5.5 As well as free-standing and extra-curricular activities, both employability and entrepreneurship have been embedded in the curriculum through the process of programme revalidation. The College has a Highbury Pedagogic Framework which is used to outline the necessary skills (social, affective, practical and cognitive) that students need to become active in their learning and to succeed in the world of work. The framework shows clear integration of the College's teaching approach with curriculum design and assessment.

5.6 Employability is also embedded in the curriculum in the form of work-related learning and the provision of placement opportunities (see Expectation B10). Students are prepared for placement study through a Personal and Professional Development module. Examples of work-related learning include real work projects and work placements. Programme specifications clearly outline skills for employability.

5.7 Staff are supported, through training opportunities, to develop entrepreneurial activities within the curriculum. Staff also benefit from the widespread use of a systematic methodology to increase creative thinking and problem solving, promoting wider continuous professional development through staff entrepreneurship.

5.8 Employers and other external bodies were consulted on the College's Vision and their views feed into the College's Corporation Committee meetings. Employers also have opportunities to advise on curriculum delivery and content through their involvement in expert advisory boards which are in place for subjects such as IT, hospitality and tourism, creative and cultural, and engineering and construction.

5.9 The College has developed a new Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) strategy in partnership with the NEF: Innovation Institute. Links with



STEM employers have led to the establishment of the Engineering Curriculum Advisory Group. Consultation with employer-led expert advisory boards has led to changes in the way higher education programmes are delivered.

5.10 The College has worked in partnership with business to introduce Higher Level Apprenticeships in Construction and Surveying IT Telecommunications and Engineering. In Engineering, teaching teams work closely with multinational companies to develop assessments that are closely linked to work-based practice. Employers are also fully engaged with assessment days which are conducted by external companies.

## 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 to 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* (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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