Higher Education Review of Hopwood Hall College

May 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Hopwood Hall College. The review took place from 12 to 13 May 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dawn Edwards
- Polly Skinner
- James Lovett (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of 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 8.

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

The themes for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review webpages:
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Amended judgement October 2016

Introduction

In May 2014, Hopwood Hall College underwent a Higher Education Review, which resulted in a judgement of 'meets UK expectations' for academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities, and the quality of the information produced about its provision, and a judgement of 'does not meet UK expectations' for enhancement of student learning opportunities.

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

The College provided an action plan in 26 January 2015 describing how it intended to address the recommendations, affirmations and good practice identified in the review, and has been working to demonstrate how it has implemented that plan. A follow-up visit took place on 13 July 2015 with two reviewers. The review team reported positively on many of the recommendations, affirmations and good practice in its paper to the QAA Board on 2 October 2015, but recommended that, based on the evidence of progress provided, the QAA Board should maintain the judgement that the enhancement of student learning opportunities 'does not meet UK expectations'. This recommendation was approved by the QAA Board in October 2015. When the QAA Board does not amend negative judgements after the follow-up process, providers are subject to the application of HEFCE's Unsatisfactory Quality Policy (UQP). The UQP process reviewed the remaining recommendations relating to the enhancement judgement.

The UQP process included an initial visit with HEFCE and two progress updates. It culminated in the review team's scrutiny of the College's progress reports and the supporting documentary evidence, and a visit on 14 June 2016 with two reviewers. The review team met with senior staff, students, and academic staff, and examined a range of College documents. QAA conducted the review in accordance with the requirements of *Higher Education Review: A handbook for providers, June 2013* and the further guidance in *HEFCE's policy for addressing unsatisfactory quality in higher education institutions and further education colleges that are eligible for HEFCE funding from academic year 2013-14*.

The visit confirmed that the College had successful addressed recommendations relating to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. Actions against recommendations and affirmations identified in the original 2014 review, relating to academic standards, quality and information, had also been completed on schedule and contributed to the progress against the enhancement judgement area.

HEFCE and QAA Board decision and amended judgements

Following the visit on 14 June 2016, the review team concluded that the College had made sufficient progress to recommend that the judgement on enhancement be amended. The HEFCE and QAA Boards accepted the team's recommendation and the judgement is now formally amended. The College's judgements are now as follows.

- 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 produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Findings from the UQP process

The College has made progress against the remaining recommendations as follows.

Recommendation - Expectations A1, B7, B8 and Enhancement

The College has revised its higher education strategic committees: it maintains academic oversight through its Governors, Senior Management Team (SMT) and the Higher Education Support, Challenge and Intervention Panel (SCI). The revised College committee structure, terms of reference, annual monitoring and quality assurance cycle are appropriate for the academic oversight of its higher education provision. It clearly defines the roles of each group, with the Corporation, demonstrating its overarching and proactive oversight of the provision through its subgroup, the Standards Committee. The Higher Education SCI Panel notes outcomes from the College's awarding partners' external examiners' reports and ensures actions is taken when a programme area receives negative feedback. The Higher Education SCI Panel's remit includes maintaining academic oversight of annual monitoring, validating programme SEDs and its QIPs. The annual monitoring process identifies issues that need enhancement.

The Higher Education Committee systematically monitors and reviews the curriculum policies and procedures so that they align with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), as well as the operational processes that impact on the student experience, including teaching and learning practices. It also considers external examiners' and standards verifiers' reports. The Assistant Principal, a member of the Higher Education Committee and the Higher Education SCI Panel, reports on progress and new developments directly to SMT, and to the College's Corporation (the governing body). The College makes valuable use of representatives from its awarding partners.

Recommendation - Enhancement

The College has agreed an amended Higher Education Strategy, a three-year Enhancement Strategy, and an enhancement operational action plan commencing in 2015-16. These interact with the QAA Action Plan and the Higher Education Whole College QIP. SMT and the Higher Education Committee monitor actions and outcomes. The College developed a Higher Education Action Plan with actions to: develop a Higher Education Strategy; introduce an annual monitoring process that includes the identification, integration and dissemination of quality improvement; develop a Higher Education Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Policy focusing on enhancement; improve student engagement; and continue engagement in regional networks. The College has made progress in curriculum development to enhance its higher education provision.

A Higher Education Enhancement Framework identifies five 'Themes'. Theme subgroups have already made progress and the College plans to include students, employers and other stakeholders in them in the future. As a result of actions, staff feel they have their own distinct higher education identity, they share best practice and discuss enhancement initiatives. Given the short timeline since the inception of the Enhancement Plan, not all of the objectives and actions are complete; however, it updates progress as it unfolds. In addition, the College has developed a Training and Development Policy with a framework for the professional development of higher education staff which enables them to share best practice. The College has made progress in giving higher education students an independent voice. Students confirmed that they have a number of opportunities to provide feedback on their programme.

The College has made significant progress since the review follow-up visit in 2015. It has taken notable steps to develop a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning

opportunities, fully embraced by those involved in the management and delivery of higher education programmes. Though it is too early to be able to confirm that the steps taken are fully embedded and sustainable, the review team concludes that the College is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Hopwood Hall College

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

- 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 produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **does not meet** UK expectations.

Recommendations

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

By December 2014:

- clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of its deliberative and executive structures in the strategic oversight of its processes and outcomes in the management and quality enhancement of its higher education provision (Expectations A1, B7, B8 and Enhancement)
- develop internal procedures to ensure new programmes designed by the College align to appropriate subject benchmark statements and other relevant external reference points (Expectations A1 and A2)
- implement appropriate annual monitoring and action planning processes for higher education provision (Expectations A4 and B8)
- clearly define and articulate higher education assessment policies and procedures (Expectation A6)
- develop a procedure for handling appeals about recruitment, selection and admission of students (Expectation B2)
- take steps to ensure there is higher education student representation at all levels within the organisation and that all student representatives receive appropriate training and support for their role (Expectation B5)
- ensure that the internal processes and procedures for managing academic standards and assuring quality are clearly articulated and available to staff, students and external stakeholders (Expectation C).

By July 2015:

- develop a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities that ensures the identification, integration and dissemination of enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner across all of the College's higher education provision (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

The College has a number of initiatives and services to advise and support students in their employability needs, and at programme level a strong element of employability development is embedded in many of the programmes. Links between programme areas of local employers provide opportunities for work placements and guest speakers.

Many of the programmes offer a work placement or the student is required to be in paid employment or placement to undertake the programme. Students on placement are supported by workplace mentors. Students were very positive about their work experience placements and the support provided by the College while they were out on placement. Students felt that their work experience would benefit their future employment opportunities and progression.

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

About Hopwood Hall College

Hopwood Hall College (the College) is a medium-sized college in the Borough of Rochdale and operates on two main sites: at Middleton and in the centre of Rochdale. Higher education provision is delivered at both sites. Students are mainly recruited from the Borough of Rochdale and surrounding boroughs. There are 113 full-time and 93 part-time higher education students. The College offers two foundation degrees as well as six Pearson BTEC higher national certificates (HNCs) and higher national diplomas (HNDs). The provision falls within five of the College's six curriculum areas or centres, namely Arts and the Performing Arts, Early Years, Health and Social Care, Sports, and Engineering.

The Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Studies is offered through a franchise agreement with the University of Bolton. This is a long-standing relationship. The Foundation Degree in Coaching and Sport Development, validated by Manchester Metropolitan University, was introduced in 2010-11. Two other foundation degree programmes have been closed since the last QAA review.

The College mission is to 'aim to provide the widest range of quality education and training to learners in the borough of Rochdale and beyond, to ensure they achieve their individual, educational and employment goals, whilst meeting the skills needs of the region'. The College works collaboratively with other members of the Greater Manchester Colleges Group whose aim is to continually raise the quality of further education provision in the Greater Manchester area. The College's strategic plan, Hopwood Hall College Strategic Intentions 2012-15, sets out five developmental strands. One of the strategic aims of the College is to 'offer courses that attract students and meet the needs of individuals, employers and our community'.

Strategic responsibility for higher education lies with the Assistant Principal who works closely with the Centre Directors. Institutional quality assurance is managed by the Director of Quality and the relevant Centre Directors who oversee quality within their own centres.

The College received a positive outcome in its QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review in 2009 with a number of features of good practice, three advisable recommendations and five desirable recommendations. The review team found evidence that the College has sustained two features of good practice - the contribution of employers to the delivery of units and assessment in the workplace for the Foundation Degree in Early Years Childhood Studies, and the learner engagement strategy, although the team made a recommendation to strengthen the involvement of higher education students. For the two other areas of good practice, the Enhanced Wider Review was now absent and the policy on scholarly activity no longer existed although there was staff development activity in this area.

In relation to the advisable recommendations, two of the recommendations had been addressed although the improved approach to handling external reports had been implemented recently. The recommendation to articulate more clearly the internal processes and procedures for the quality assurance of the College's higher education had not been acted upon and forms a recommendation for this review.

In relation to the desirable recommendations, the team noted that the recommendation about the working relationships of certain deliberative groups was no longer relevant as the committee structure had been reorganised. A further recommendation that specific matters relating to higher education might be highlighted in the review/updating of the teaching and learning strategy has not been acted upon and is the theme of a recommendation for this review. Finally, in relation to the recommendation to consider how specific higher education

skills might be built into the lesson observation procedure, the team noted that the process now has some higher education focus.

Notable changes since the previous review in 2009 include the Business Transformation Project, a three-year project completed in 2012. The project has had a significant impact on the College and resulted in structural and organisational changes through streamlining and organising the College's provision, and has created the new centre structure. Higher education is embedded throughout the structure. Some changes and roles and responsibilities of strategic higher education groups have yet to be implemented and fully established.

Explanation of the findings about Hopwood Hall College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

Explanation of the findings about Hopwood Hall College

1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

Expectation (A1): Each qualification (including those awarded through arrangements with other delivery organisations or support providers) is allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: The national level*

Findings

1.1　　The College was not involved in the design and development of its two current foundation degree programmes, with both being delivered by the College under a franchise-type agreement. The review team were informed that Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of Bolton and Pearson are responsible for aligning the level of the award with the FHEQ, ensuring the programme aims and learning outcomes are appropriate to the level and that the volume of learning is sufficient to demonstrate that the learning outcomes are achieved. Responsibility for the standards of awards lies with the awarding bodies and these responsibilities are articulated in the respective agreements.

1.2　　Details of the FHEQ level of the programme, its aims and learning outcomes are made clear in the programme specifications for all the programmes delivered by the College.

1.3　　The review team concludes that the College effectively discharges its responsibilities, within the context of its agreements with its awarding bodies, for allocating qualifications to the appropriate level of the FHEQ and, therefore, meets Expectation A1 of the Quality Code.

1.4　　The Standards Committee of Hopwood Hall Corporation advises the Corporation of general standards and other matters. The Corporation has delegated to the Standards Committee responsibility for monitoring the standards of educational provision and considering the appropriateness of quality assurance systems. The review team did not see any evidence of the effective discharge of these responsibilities through the College committee structure. The College has three management groups: the Higher Education Strategy Group, the Higher Education Curriculum Group and the Journey to Outstanding Group, known as the J2O group, none of which have strategic oversight of, or responsibility for, maintaining academic standards. Further, the review team were informed that the Higher Education Curriculum Group has not met since its formation. The College explained that it has been immersed in the Business Transformation Project over the last three years and that structural and organisational change had made a significant impact on the organisation. Some changes and roles and responsibilities of strategic higher education groups have yet to be implemented and fully established. Consequently, the review team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College clarifies the respective roles and responsibilities of its deliberative and executive structures in the strategic oversight of its processes and outcomes in the management and quality enhancement of its higher education provision.

1.5　　Academic and senior staff at the College stated that assigning the level of the award and determining the volume of learning required to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes was undertaken by the awarding body and there was no engagement of College staff in this process. The review team found that staff were not cognisant of the FHEQ or the concept of levelness and were unfamiliar with the concept of volume of study. The review team noted that the group formed by the College to ensure staff are aware of the

Quality Code, the Higher Education Curriculum Group, has not met and it was unclear to the review team in its meetings with staff when this group would become functional.

1.6   The review team heard that the College has forged a new partnership for the delivery of a new programme, and of the College's intention to gradually increase its portfolio of higher education programmes with a greater involvement of the College staff in the design and development of programmes. The review team concludes that the College does not have appropriate internal processes and mechanisms in place to ensure that staff involved in the design, development and delivery of higher education programmes have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the Quality Code and other relevant reference points to ensure parity of awards and sound standards. Combined with the lack of strategic oversight of delegated responsibility for maintaining academic standards, the review team **recommends** that the College develop internal procedures to ensure new programmes designed by the College align to appropriate external reference points.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (A2): All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level*

Findings

1.7 The College's degree-awarding bodies, Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Bolton, are responsible for ensuring that the foundation degree programmes take into account subject and qualification benchmark statements during the design and development of the programme. The College does not have provision with professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements.

1.8 The programme specifications for the foundation degrees in Early Years Childhood Studies and Coaching and Sport Development, both prepared by the awarding body, make clear reference to the appropriate subject and qualification benchmark statements.

1.9 The review concludes that the procedures in paragraphs 1.7 and 1.8 meet Expectation A2 of the Quality Code.

1.10 The review team found that College staff have limited knowledge and understanding of, and engagement with, subject and qualification benchmark statements and how external benchmarks should be used in programme design and delivery. Staff informed the team that they have not received any support or training in using benchmark statements or other relevant external reference points. The review team noted that the group formed by the College to ensure staff are aware of the Quality Code, the Higher Education Curriculum Group, have not met and it was unclear to the review team in its meetings with staff when this group would become functional.

1.11 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met but that the College does not have appropriate internal processes and mechanisms in place to ensure that staff involved in the design, development and delivery of higher education programmes have sufficient knowledge and understanding of *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level* of the Quality Code. In noting the College's plans to develop a range of higher education programmes and to play a more active role in their initial design, the review team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College develops internal procedures to ensure new programmes designed by the College align to appropriate subject benchmark statements and other relevant external reference points.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (A3): Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: The programme level*

Findings

1.12   Definitive information on programme aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements are provided for students in the programme specifications for foundation degrees and in specifications for Pearson HND/HNC programmes.

1.13   The level of detail within the programme specifications varies but they contain all the information suggested in *Chapter A3: The programme level* of the Quality Code and are of a consistent format. Specifications are available to students on the virtual learning environment (VLE) and students are given a copy at induction.

1.14   Specific programme information for students is provided in course and module handbooks and for Pearson programmes in the course specification. Course handbooks are clear and contain all the information needed by students including programme aims, learning outcomes, details of assessment and the programme specification.

1.15   Comprehensive module information is provided for students through module handbooks that include details of the aims, learning outcomes, content and assessment for the specific module/unit.

1.16   In summary, the awarding body has responsibility for making and approving any changes to the programme or modules contained therein and for updating the programme specification, which is the definitive record of the programme. The review team concludes that Expectation A3 of the Quality Code has been met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A4): Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter A4: Approval and review*

Findings

1.17   The franchise agreements between the College and its degree-awarding bodies refer to procedures relating to approval, periodic review or revalidation, annual monitoring and quality management, the strategic level of the awarding body and designated College responsibilities for maintaining standards and quality. The agreements state that any proposed programme modifications will be considered and confirmed by the degree-awarding body. The arrangements for monitoring and review include internal subject reviews and continuous monitoring and improvement processes. These processes are clearly described and the process is both thorough and comprehensive. Pearson programmes are subject to the long-established procedures for review and validity of its content.

1.18   In meetings with the Principal and separately with senior staff, the College reported that they promote and develop higher education programmes with degree-awarding bodies as a response to two main influences: local economic strategic needs aligned to the Local Economic Partnership and, as a direct response to the existing College learners, to satisfy the need for appropriate progression routes. The review team heard that the College is focused on technology to deliver the curriculum using the VLE and is progressing this direction with a new degree-awarding body. As a result of this, the College is gradually increasing its portfolio of higher education programmes.

1.19   The review team heard that the Deputy Principal is responsible for the overall planning process and the Centre Directors are responsible for instituting three-year business plans to develop all subject-related provision. Within this context, the College develops programmes and works alongside University partners who guide them towards approval, ultimately ensuring the scrutiny of academic standards are met through the awarding bodies' revalidations and reviews.

1.20   There is a process for curriculum development, including a course request form, although this process was not evidenced for the review by the College. New BTEC HNC/HND programmes, while approved by Pearson, also go through the curriculum planning process and are subject to Edexcel Centre Quality Reviews.

1.21   The College has systems of module review, annual self-assessment and action planning that are overseen by the Senior Management Team (SMT). Employer evaluation contributes to the relevance of the programme content in the Foundation Degree in Early Years Childhood Studies. Pearson BTEC HNC/HND provision goes through the same College review system as the degree-awarding bodies' approved programmes. The review team confirmed this. External examiners' reports provide external verification of the standards and quality of each course within a programme.

1.22   Each College centre completes an annual Self-Assessment Report (SAR) that is informed by Ofsted's Common Inspection Framework criteria, in an all-inclusive College-wide SAR. In response to the actions emerging from the College SAR, each centre establishes programme-level action plans/Quality Improvement Plans for all levels within a subject area including the higher education provision. Action plans are monitored formally four times a year and on a monthly progress basis with staff.

1.23   The review team concludes that by including all programmes and levels in the self-assessment regime, the College misses opportunities for developing the validity, relevance and identity of higher education and compromises its ability to improve academic standards and quality. As a consequence the review team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College implements appropriate annual monitoring and action planning processes for its higher education provision.

1.24   The review team considers that the level of risk associated with not having an appropriate College system for annual monitoring and action planning for its higher education provision remains low while there are effective processes in operation for its current programmes with its degree-awarding bodies. This level of risk may change if the type of arrangement changes and/or the College takes on more responsibility in the development of new programmes. Overall, the review team concludes that the College mechanisms for maintaining and monitoring standards meet Expectation A4 of the Quality Code.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A5): Higher education providers ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards.

Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality*

Findings

1.25   External examiner appointments are the responsibility of the degree-awarding bodies. BTEC HNCs and HNDs follow Pearson procedures and regulations. All higher education programmes have a minimum of one external examiner that is sufficient to cover the relatively small student numbers on each programme. In addition, employers provide assessment of the learner's performance in work placements.

1.26   External examiner reports are processed through the College Quality Unit and reviewed and actioned by both the Director of Centre and Programme Manager. Actions are reviewed monthly. The College has now decided that, in the future, the Higher Education Strategy Group will receive the reports. As yet, it is uncertain when this will begin. Actions arising from external examiners' reports inform the centre SARs. The College makes operational use of external examiner comments in quality processes.

1.27   The review team heard of several instances to demonstrate that the College responds to external examiners' action points. For example, the College invested in new staffing resources to support the delivery of Performance Arts where previously the higher education students were taught alongside further education level 3 students. In another instance, the College responded in a timely manner to an examiner's recommendation to train staff in assessment.

1.28   The review team noted that an internal review commissioned by the College had recommended the College to ensure summaries of external examiners' feedback are communicated to students in a timely manner. Students reported that although some have met with the external examiner and reports are hosted on the virtual Higher Education Common Room, they are not aware of the reports.

1.29   Overall, the review team was assured that while some processes are yet to be put in place, the use made of external expertise in quality assurance processes is appropriate, and therefore the College meets Expectation A5 of the Quality Code. The team considers that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A6): Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Quality Code, *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes*

Findings

1.30   Programme specifications and intended learning outcomes are set by the degree-awarding bodies and set out in the programme handbooks. The Pearson programmes provide detailed module/unit handbooks and identify where the opportunities for assessment to achieve the intended learning outcomes are available.

1.31   The agreements of its degree-awarding bodies signpost to concise descriptions of the intended learning outcomes and how these can be achieved and demonstrated. External examiners' reports confirm that assessments are appropriate for the subject and outcomes. The University of Bolton Assessment Regulations clearly provide defined regulations for College staff delivering the University's degree programmes.

1.32   There is a College-wide Teaching, Learning and Assessment policy which details the learning that all Hopwood Hall students receive but there is currently no separate guidance in place for the assessment of higher education. There is also a draft Assessment Practice and Internal Verification Strategy which was recently considered by the J2O group, who decided to add higher education to the strategy. It was unclear to the review team how these policies could be applied to show how the College, higher education teaching staff, and internal verifiers can be sure and confident that assessment is robust, valid and reliable and at an appropriate level. The team also noted that in the documentation provided by the College, one external examiner reported that there is a need for a dedicated assessment policy for BTEC Higher National programmes to be clearly indicated in the course handbook. In the absence of a dedicated policy for higher education, the review team was informed that the College relied on external examiners' reports to confirm the appropriateness and level of assessment. As a consequence, the review team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College clearly define and articulate its higher education assessment policies and procedures.

1.33   The review team noted that one of the actions arising from the independent internal review is for the College to conduct a programme of higher education-specific teaching and learning observations by September 2014 to provide a clear picture of the quality of higher education teaching, learning and assessment.

1.34   The University of Bolton Undergraduate Curriculum Framework discussion paper provides useful clarity for programme delivery staff regarding specific information about good practice in assessment, including guiding staff as to the number of times the intended learning outcome should be assessed. The College confirmed to the review team that although this framework, currently in its first year, is now available to College staff to implement, it is not yet used widely.

1.35   It is evident to the review team that some staff are unsure about marking and feedback at higher education level and the meaning of volume of assessment. When there was concern around awarding merits and distinctions for BTEC HNC and HND programmes, the College contacted the moderator for help in interpreting the grade statement. Since that visit in June, the moderator has confirmed that the assignment briefs are fit for purpose. Recent assessment training has addressed a range of these issues and there has been some positive feedback about the improvement by an external examiner.

1.36   Students are aware of marking guidelines, moderation and mitigation processes, agreeing that assignments are very clear and that they receive clear formative and one-to-one feedback. HNC and HND Engineering students say that they find the workbooks extremely helpful as they can work on tasks at an individual pace.

1.37   Overall, the review team found that the College is responding to shortfalls in staff members' knowledge, understanding and confidence, in a range of assessment-related issues, by commissioning training and implementing a higher education action plan that emerged as a result of the independent internal review of higher education provision in January 2014. In general, external examiners' reports confirm the assessment of students is robust; however, in the absence of adequate assessment policies and procedures for the College's higher education provision, the team assesses this area as moderate risk.

1.38   The review team concludes that the College's assessment of students meets Expectation A6 of the Quality Code.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.39   In reaching its judgement regarding academic standards, the review team considered its findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations relating to the maintenance of threshold academic standards are met. The risk is considered low for three Expectations, and of moderate risk for three Expectations: specifically, the allocation of qualifications to the appropriate level of the FHEQ, account of relevant subject and qualifications benchmark statements, and assessment.

1.40   Although the College's degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation have ultimate responsibility for setting academic standards as stated in the partnership agreements, the responsibility for monitoring these standards is delegated by the Corporation to the Standards Committee of the Corporation. The review team did not find any evidence of the effective discharge of these responsibilities through the College committee structure and, furthermore, found that some changes and roles and responsibilities of strategic higher education groups have yet to be implemented and fully established. To address this, the team recommends that by October 2014 the College clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of its deliberative and executive structures in the strategic oversight of its processes and outcomes in the management and quality enhancement of its higher education provision. In addition, the team found that College staff were unfamiliar with external reference points used in the setting and maintenance of academic standards; when taking into account the College's plans to increase its portfolio of higher education programmes, the team recommends that by December 2014 the College develops internal procedures to ensure new programmes designed by the College align to appropriate external reference points.

1.41   Although the College has responded effectively to addressing staff training needs in a number of assessment-related issues, there is no separate guidance in place for the assessment of higher education; instead staff rely on a College-wide Teaching, Learning and Assessment policy. As a consequence, the team recommends that by December 2014 the College clearly defines and articulates its higher education assessment policies and procedures.

1.42   Overall, the team concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered at the College on behalf of its awarding bodies and organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval*

Findings

2.1   The existing higher education programmes have been designed and approved by the awarding bodies and are delivered in partnership with the degree-awarding bodies, for franchised provision, and Pearson. There are agreed and clearly expressed processes for modifying the foundation degree programmes. The awarding body is ultimately responsible for the quality of staff delivering any franchised programme leading to an award. This is monitored at programme approval and during revalidations.

2.2   Through its scrutiny of evidence and through meeting with a range of staff and students, the review team were able to confirm that the Deputy Principal is responsible for the overall planning process and the Centre Directors are responsible for introducing three-year business plans within which new programmes are developed. Business plans are submitted to the College Executive Group, comprising Principal, Deputy Principal and Assistant Principal, for discussion, feedback, and to consider possible awarding partners and potentially approval to progress further. The Executive Group considers programme areas for approval in a strategic response to the local economy. Plans are often presented to the Executive Group on several occasions. New programmes are developed with all College service areas informing the process about appropriate resourcing such as staffing, costing and physical resourcing needs.

2.3   In the development of the Foundation Degree Sports Coaching proposal, programme staff developed the draft and Manchester Metropolitan University redesigned the content, with the College staff taking an active part and being consulted. The same system is applicable for the University of Bolton and, in both cases, any further changes are negotiated in partnership, facilitated by the link tutors who, when the programme is being delivered, also verify moderation.

2.4   The review team concludes that the College works effectively within the guidance provided by its awarding bodies and awarding organisation and on this basis meets Expectation B1 of the Quality Code. The associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions*

Findings

2.5   The College has a clear and unambiguous Admissions Policy which is used during their admissions process, and covers applications which are made to higher education courses through UCAS, or more often, internal applications which are handled by the Learner Services Department. This policy is available online or in hard copy from the College upon request. Through its scrutiny of evidence, the review team was able to confirm that there is no formalised appeals policy for applicants who are unsuccessful in their application for admittance to higher education programme. As a consequence, the review team **recommends** that by December 2014, the College develop a procedure for handling appeals about recruitment, selection and admission of students.

2.6   The Admissions Policy is available on the College's hub, and admissions information and details of how to contact the College for further advice are readily accessible on the College's public website. Applications for entry are reviewed by the course teams and programme managers, leading to decisions which are then signed off by the programme managers for each subject area. Entry requirements are available for each course via the College's website. Staff and students were satisfied that the admissions process was fair and facilitated entry for suitable candidates.

2.7   The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and that while the College lacks an appeals procedure for the recruitment, selection and admission of students, this represented a low level of risk.

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

2.8   The College places development and training of staff at the core of its strategy and all staff are required to be suitably qualified for their role, resulting in an imperative that they have or obtain their full Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector level 5 or 6. Where a tutor is to deliver a qualification at level 6, then a master's qualification with the opportunity to engage in scholarly research, or a willingness to work towards this, is required. Staff qualifications are checked at the programme approval stage and on the appointment of new staff by the College's awarding bodies.

2.9   Through meetings with staff, the team confirmed that new tutors to the profession, or to the College, receive an appropriate induction to their department by their line manager, and also attend a corporate induction programme, followed by further mentoring tailored to their needs and level of experience by their dedicated Teaching and Learning Coach. All teaching staff undergo observed teaching as part of their annual appraisal procedure, and those requiring improvement are given an improvement plan and then re-observed to ensure that they meet the required standard, and staff were positive about the importance of this supportive atmosphere in encouraging their development.

2.10   Full-time tutors are required to complete 30 hours of continuous professional development annually, and can apply via their line manager and the Training and Development Department to attend appropriate external staff development events as one means of achieving this. The College also holds Teaching and Learning Conferences as a means of disseminating good practice and further developing staff skills and knowledge in this arena.

2.11   To develop student independence in learning, the College provides study skills training and IT facilities training during a comprehensive induction to allow students the opportunity to reach their potential.

2.12   The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and the risk to the quality of learning opportunities 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*

Finding

2.13   Oversight of higher education provision is conducted by the HE Strategy Group which reports to the Standards Committee of the Corporation. Strategic responsibility for higher education lies with the Assistant Principal who works closely with the Centre Directors. The HE Strategy Group draws its membership from all relevant areas of higher education provision across the College, and evaluates the resource provision to ensure this meets student requirements and reports progress on strategic decisions.

2.14   Through its scrutiny of evidence and meeting students, the review team was able to confirm that students all receive an online induction with relevant information to their course and the College procedures. Students also receive a learning resources induction and tour.

2.15   The College makes appropriate use of management data to drive improvements in provision for students, including internal questionnaires which allow senior management direct insight to gauge the provision at the College.

2.16   There has been extensive investment in facilities, services and IT, with over £23 million being spent since 2010. The College provides appropriate physical and virtual resources to support teaching and learning. The College has also provided an online higher education virtual common room hub as part of its VLE which is specifically for use by higher education students, and which provides an avenue for dissemination of important information and policies to higher education students, of which students were complimentary.

2.17   There is a developed system of pastoral and academic support through a dedicated onsite student support service, with external counselling available to students if necessary. Students expressed satisfaction with the College's open-door approach to dealing with academic or pastoral issues, and explained that they were aware of how to raise issues, and with whom, with all students having a designated personal tutor for support and advice regarding personal development planning.

2.18   The library resources for particular courses are reviewed regularly by programme managers and Centre Directors, and the review team heard that in almost all cases, resources in this area are deemed appropriate, with students particularly appreciating the provision of books online. Students also have access to the University of Bolton and Manchester Metropolitan University library facilities, and while some felt that the travel required precluded their access to this service, others were very positive about the efforts made to accommodate them when they visited these providers' facilities.

2.19   The review team considers that the College has appropriate arrangements and resources in place to enable students to develop their potential during their studies. The team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation and the risk to the quality of learning opportunities in this area is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student engagement*

Findings

2.20   The College uses an array of mechanisms for ensuring that higher education students are engaged in the development of their educational experiences.

2.21   There is a system of student representatives for each of the higher education courses, although the take-up is not universal, and the College notes that there can sometimes be issues in terms of student take-up of opportunities to represent their peers, although the opportunity for training is always available. There are a range of committees at the College in which the higher education student body can become involved, including the Student Leadership Team and the Board of Governors, but unfortunately there are no higher education students on either of these important and influential bodies, with both student places on the Board of Governors being taken by further education students at the College. The College is considering involving higher education students on an invitational basis with the HE Strategy Group and the HE Curriculum Group, but higher education students are not involved with Boards of Study or other important centre groups. The review team scrutinised a range of documents and met with both students and staff. The review team heard from students that while student representatives for some programmes were well supported, students on other programmes had not received training. Despite the lack of formal representation on College bodies, higher education students seem satisfied with the level of input that they have, and the responsiveness to that input from the College and centres. The review team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College take steps to ensure there is higher education student representation at all levels within the organisation and that all student representatives receive appropriate training and support for their role.

2.22   The Principal conducts a termly forum called 'Principal's Question Time' which is a means of students giving and receiving feedback on the activities of the College, and to directly propose initiatives or enquire as to different aspects of life at the College with the senior management.

2.23   There are numerous in-house student surveys which allow the College to evaluate the effectiveness of its provision for students, along with regular focus groups, and the College is active in terms of its promotion of student engagement with the National Student Survey. The College also pursues several methods of communicating the outcomes of student engagement, including the posting of 'You Said, We Did' on notice boards around the College and on the VLE, and the outcomes from 'Principal's Question Time' are also distributed in the same fashion. Student reps receive minutes from focus groups, and results of all student surveys conducted among the student body, and these are available in the new HE Common Room section on the VLE. The learner services team provide weekly bulletins on activity within the College which are distributed on notice boards and on the VLE.

2.24   The review team considers that the College provides effective mechanisms for engagement of students, although there are some weaknesses in the representation of higher education students within its representational and decision-making structures which led to the team's recommendation. The team concludes that the Expectation has been met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.

Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning*

Findings

2.25   Regulations and procedures for the recognition of prior learning and exemptions with regard to modules and/or units for the foundation degree programmes lie with the awarding body. Likewise, Pearson governs all other courses that the College delivers. All entry criteria are specified in the HE Prospectus, UCAS and the College website. Students are made aware of any prior learning and exemptions via these resources. Many students progress from the College to the higher education programmes.

2.26   The Manchester Metropolitan University agreement specifies concise descriptions of the intended learning outcomes for the programmes and how these outcomes can be achieved and demonstrated. Module handbooks for the University of Bolton programmes detail programme specifications including learning outcomes.

2.27   Through its scrutiny of evidence, the review team was able to confirm that the College HE Assessment Board Regulations also apply equally to Examination Boards and Boards of Study. The regulations are clear about membership, timing of activity and systematic recording of assessment decisions. The reference to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* previously published by QAA, however, needs updating with accurate referencing. In the absence of a College quality framework on assessment for higher education provision, staff currently use a range of awarding body documents.

2.28   The recent assessment training has addressed the inconsistency in programmes between grades, the appropriate levelness and match to the intended learning outcomes of assessment tasks.

2.29   The new HE VLE Threshold Standard paper (January 2014) sets out for staff the minimum content for programme handbooks. Staff are offered the opportunity of uploading the handbooks and to clearly detail the student's opportunities to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Not all programmes have taken the opportunity to participate in the VLE initiative. The review team find that students using the VLE to view programme and module handbooks agree that these are accurate and contain relevant information about the content of their programmes.

2.30   The review team heard that there are diverse ways employed to assess students. For instance, students on Pearson BTEC HNC/D engineering programmes say that they find the workbooks very helpful in enabling them to make progress at a steady, individual pace, allowing for the opportunity to improve.

2.31   Students met by the review team reported that they are very clear about marking guidelines and moderation processes. Students also generally agree that assignments and grading criteria are clear. There are appropriate opportunities to gain merits and distinctions and reasonable adjustments evidenced, all supported by timely and appropriate feedback.

2.32   Higher education course tutors engage students in how they have assessed their assignments through verbal and written feedback. Students are given advice on what they are being assessed on and what learning outcomes need to be achieved.

Students appreciate the diverse assessment opportunities set by the staff. Students confirm that feedback is prompt and provided on a one-to-one basis for each assignment.

2.33   Many staff involved in higher education delivery have industry experience which enables tutors to confidently assess knowledge, skills and competencies.

2.34   Students are aware of mitigating circumstances, and have personal experiences of where the policy had worked for them. The students were not so sure about an extension policy.

2.35   The review team concludes that the College, through use of its awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's procedures and guidance, ensures that students have appropriate opportunities to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. The development of assessment policies and procedures to clearly define and articulate the achievement of higher education learning outcomes under Expectation A6 was a recommendation made by the review team. In terms of the students having the appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes, the team concludes that the College meets the Expectation 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

2.36   Regulations and procedures for the roles and responsibilities of external examiners and expectations of the scrutiny of student work are set out by the awarding bodies for the College's foundation degrees. Awarding bodies are responsible for the appointment of external examiners. All higher education programmes have a minimum of one external examiner, sufficient to cover the relatively small student numbers on each programme. External examiners should be invited to the Assessment Board but are not necessarily required to attend.

2.37   All Pearson BTEC HNC/D programmes follow the regulations and procedures of Pearson, including the appointment of external verifiers.

2.38   Awarding bodies are responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of the roles and responsibilities of the external examiners in relation to the reports they produce via their own procedures. Manchester Metropolitan University external examiners inform the University's continuous monitoring and improvement process, as do the external examiners for University of Bolton who inform the University's Internal Subject Reviews.

2.39   The College states in the self-evaluation document that it recognises problems in the past with the timely consideration of external examiner reports.

2.40   Through its meetings with staff and students, and through the scrutiny of evidence, the review team found that the College is heavily reliant on the Quality Manager supported by the Assistant Principal to have oversight of external examiners' reports and subsequent actions. All reports are read and logged by the College Quality Manager; they are then directed to the Centre Director responsible for the provision, who highlights issues to be addressed, who transmits the reports to the Programme Team for actioning. Monthly monitoring of the action plans has been introduced but it is not entirely clear to the review team if this is carried out effectively.

2.41   The self-evaluation document states that it is the Colleges' intention to grade external examiner reports to ensure the sharing of good practice and that the HE Curriculum Group, aligned to the HE Strategy Group, would be responsible for the sharing of good practice. Reports are not yet graded, no timescale has been given, and the HE Curriculum Group has not met during the last year. The review team notes that it had been the College's intention for the strategic oversight of the reports and action plans to be the remit of the HE Strategy Group or the HE Curriculum Group; however, it is still unclear which group has the strategic overview or when decisions will be decisively made to enable this to be in place.

2.42   There is partial achievement in some curriculum areas to incorporate external examiner feedback into the College's Self-Assessment Report (SAR) but it is still inconsistent across the higher education provision.

2.43   The review team noted that the College is responsive to addressing external examiners'/verifiers' concerns where they have been serious. The College responded to concerns about minimal compliance with academic standards for some Pearson BTEC HND programmes by commissioning a customised Pearson training day in January 2014. In another example, the College has specifically addressed the external examiner concern in the Performing Arts programme, where higher education students were being taught

together with level 3 further education students, by reorganising the timetabling and employing new staff.

2.44　　Although students have access to external examiner reports via the HE Virtual Common Room, none of the students in the review meetings used the site and they had minimal recall of meeting with external examiners.

2.45　　The review team found that the responsibility for strategic oversight of external examiner reports and resulting action plans is not yet contributing to a reliable college-wide monitoring system, although there is evidence that the College has effectively responded and addressed issues raised in individual external examiner reports. The review team is satisfied that the regulations and procedures in place through its awarding bodies and organisations provided a framework and system that enable the College to meet the Expectation. On the basis of a lack of strategic oversight by the College of the wider relevance and importance of external reports, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation:　Met
Level of risk:　Moderate

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review*

Findings

2.46   Both awarding bodies have established review procedures for franchise provision that the College follows. The process for the University of Bolton is the Internal Subject Review (ISR) and the Manchester Metropolitan University process is Continuous Monitoring and Improvement (CMI). The College Programme Manager attends meetings with the partner link tutors for both awarding bodies, and employers attend and contribute to these reviews. All parties are kept informed of review outcomes and any actions to be taken.

2.47   Both awarding body processes are fully described in definitive documents supporting the maintenance of standards and assurance of consistency of learning opportunities. The ISR process is valid until the year of their next scheduled internal review proceeding through a revalidation process, giving a validation period encompassing five academic years. The CMI is a 'live' process and updated throughout the academic year.

2.48   Link Tutors from the awarding bodies, the main point of contact between the Universities and the programme teams, are responsible for overseeing the academic standards, general management and operation of the foundation degree programmes, ensuring that the Programme Committee recommendations and other strategic and operational communications are brought to the attention of the Head of Department/Centre.

2.49   Staff met by the review team agree that they have a good working relationship with their awarding bodies and spend two days at the end of every academic year at the partner institution to evaluate how successful the programme has been in the previous year and any proposed modifications to improve or respond to the student need.

2.50   The College's annual SAR is by overall centre and programme level and there is an opportunity for the higher education programme teams to become fully involved in this process, although the assessment criteria is not focused on higher education standards. Contribution to the SAR is made by Management Information Services who, with the Head of Quality, are responsible for providing extensive student and programme data to identify the level of the higher education programmes' success. HEFCE-derived and required data and National Student Survey data specify student numbers, withdrawals, pending applications and student completions. Awarding partner reviews and module reviews also inform the SAR. The SAR stimulates the Action/Quality Improvement Plan in which programme teams identify actions and timescales for completion. The College annual Performance Management system and Business/Development Planning and Service areas identify development plans for the next few years.

2.51   The College acknowledges that the SAR process for higher education provision is not yet fully developed in all areas (see Expectation A4). The review team concurs with the independent internal review that states, about the College SAR system, that 'this all-encompassing process does not allow sufficient opportunity for the HE programmes to be assessed and evaluated in depth, to clearly define HE and its development to improve academic standards or the quality of the student learning opportunities'.

2.52   While the College's systems do not provide a sufficient locus for its higher education provision for the College to take strategic oversight of its higher education provision, the policies and procedures followed by the College for routinely monitoring and periodically reviewing provision are largely derived from its awarding bodies and awarding organisation,

and these are operated effectively. The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and the risk to the quality of learning opportunities is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals.

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals*

Findings

2.53   The College has a complaints procedure for all students and an academic appeals procedure for its Pearson BTEC HND/HNC programmes, both of which are available on the VLE. Students on the Foundation Degree in Coaching and Sport Development use the College complaints procedure and those on Early Years Childhood Studies use either the complaints procedure of the College or University depending on the service(s) to which the complaint relates. Foundation degree students use the academic appeals procedure of the awarding body, details of which are in the programme handbook.

2.54   The review team were able to test this process through the examination of evidence and through meetings with staff and students. Students stated in their written submission that they know about the complaints procedures and are introduced to this during induction. This was confirmed in the review team's meeting with students. The agreement with the University of Bolton states that students may invoke the complaints procedure of either the College or the University according to whether the subject of their complaint relates to services provided by the College or the University. The agreement with Manchester Metropolitan University states that the College should have in place a student complaints procedure which is comparable to their own. This was confirmed by the review team through scrutiny of the College's Customer Services Policy which includes information of how it deals with complaints from a range of stakeholders including students. The complaints procedure contains procedures for both informal and formal resolution. Student complaints are reported to the awarding body who is responsible for issuing the Completion of Procedure letter when all processes in the complaints procedure have been followed; however, to date there have been no appeals or complaints by students.

2.55   Students on foundation degree programmes were clear that they would follow the academic appeals procedure of the awarding body and the College's own academic appeals procedure for those on Pearson BTEC HND/HNC programmes. Students on the Foundation Degree in Early Years Childhood Studies are advised of this in the University of Bolton's Student Handbook for off-site provision which contains details of the process to follow as well as the grounds for an academic appeal. It was not evident to the review team where students on the foundation degree in Coaching and Sports Development would find details of the University's academic appeals process as neither the programme handbook nor programme specification contained this information.

2.56   The College has its own academic appeals procedure which applies to its further education and Pearson BTEC HNC/D provision. This was approved by the SMT. The procedures comprise an informal and formal stage with clear timescales attached. The responsibility of the student is clearly identified at each stage.

2.57   The review team finds that the College's complaints procedure and its academic appeals procedure for its Pearson programmes provide fair, effective and timely approaches for handling students' complaints and academic appeals. The team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and the risk to the quality of learning opportunities 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

2.58   The College offers students the opportunity to undertake work placements on the foundation degrees in Early Years Childhood Studies and Coaching and Sport Development. In both cases students are well supported through dedicated staff at the College and mentors in the workplace. Guidance on assuring the quality and standards of the work placement is provided by the awarding body. Students on Pearson BTEC HND/HNC programmes do not undertake formal work placements. The review team considered the procedures to meet Expectation B10 and reflect the Indicators of sound practice therein.

2.59   Through its scrutiny of evidence, the review team was able to identify that the University of Bolton provides information on work settings for the Foundation Degree in Early Years Childhood Studies. Students are assigned a practice trainer who is a member of staff of the College and whose role is to visit the student, agree personal action plans for development and ensure that there is a link between the content of the programme and the application of skills and knowledge in practice. Students are also allocated a workplace mentor; a member of staff within the workplace who acts as a critical friend. The mentor is supported and trained by the practice trainer who meets with the mentor during and at the end of the placement to ensure the quality and standard of the placement. The workplace mentor has no formal role in assuring the quality of the placement; only confirming the student has attended and completed the placement according to the module requirements. A workplace observation record is completed by the practice trainer to record how the student has met the assessment criteria. The students who met the review team commended the usefulness and quality of their placement, stating it had helped them progress in their employment.

2.60   Details of work-based learning within the Coaching and Sport Development foundation degree are provided in the programme specification. Students are responsible for finding their placement which must be agreed with an employment tutor. They are assigned a work-related learning officer to support them but it was unclear to the review team whether this was a member of College staff, a mentor in the workplace or a member of staff of Manchester Metropolitan University. Students commended the usefulness and quality of their placement in their meeting with the review team, stating it had helped them gain employment.

2.61   Students know what is expected of them in the work placement through the module guide and additional information provided by the College relating to behaviour during a work placement, including a traffic light guide for students on behaviour during work placements. The review team were not informed of how this is used or what happens if behaviour is not as expected. There is also guidance on attendance and punctuality but it was not clear to the review team how this is communicated to students.

2.62   Responsibility for the standard and quality of the work placement resides with the Programme Manager. The College has mechanisms to remove a student from a placement if it is not enabling them to meet the module learning outcomes and the review team heard of an instance of this and where the student was found an alternative placement in their meeting with students. The effectiveness and standard of placements are reviewed within

programme teams through meetings with tutors and the College and mentors in the workplace.

2.63   Overall, the review team regards the procedures for work placements as effective and concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research degrees*

Findings

2.64   The College offers no postgraduate provision, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.65   In reaching its judgement on the quality of learning opportunities, the review team considered its findings against the criteria outlined in Annex two of the published handbook. All Expectations relating to the quality of learning opportunities are met. The majority of associated risks are considered to be low; in two areas where there are moderate risks, these are associated with shortfalls in strategic oversight by the College.

2.66   Factors contributing to the positive judgement include: the investment in the College's estate; the many mechanisms that the College has in place for listening to the student voice and the College's responsiveness to student feedback; the quality of student support and feedback that students receive on their assessments; the quality and support of student placements; the commitment of staff working at higher education level; and the extensive use made of management information in the College's performance monitoring which is made accessible to all users.

2.67   For a number of Expectations the review team concludes that while the College effectively follows the policies and procedures of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation in managing the quality of its provision, the College lacked strategic oversight in a number areas. If strategic oversight was in place, the College would be more able to take an effective overview of the management of its provision with the ability to take deliberate steps to enhance the quality of its provision. While the College works within its current arrangements with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation for a relatively small number of programmes, this was considered low risk in relation to the effectiveness of managing the quality of student learning opportunities. This lack of strategic oversight is reflected in the recommendation in the area of academic standards and the enhancement in learning opportunities and relates to the respective roles and responsibilities of the College's deliberative and executive structures. The other area of strategic oversight relates to appropriate annual monitoring and action planning processes relating to the current higher education programmes and in support of planned future provision.

2.68   The review team made two specific recommendations in this area which are designed to address minor omissions under admissions and student engagement.

2.69   Overall, the team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities provided by the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about higher education provision

Findings

3.1 The College has a wide variety of mechanisms for distributing information to the public and prospective students, and also to students already engaged in their higher education provision. These include: online course prospectus; the College website; UCAS programme information; College policies and procedures; programme handbooks that include programme specifications; programme learning materials, including assessments; full and part-time course guides; the HE Virtual Common Room; the College's VLE; Learning Resource Centre links to the VLE; Career Advice Service, including HE Convention and Open Days; financial support information via the College website; and student support and services, including support for students with specific learning support.

3.2 The College website and prospectus are seen as the key tools for prospective applicants. The Vice Principal is ultimately responsible for the accuracy and quality of content produced by the College, and is supported in this role by the Director of Marketing, who has a major role to play in the creation and dissemination of information to the public and other stakeholders. In day-to-day practical terms, ensuring accuracy is the responsibility of the College Marketing Team, who liaise extensively with senior management, and heads of curriculum areas from the College's higher education provision. Current students receive information through course and College handbooks and the VLE is used as a key tool for providing access to definitive programme information.

3.3 The HE Common Room is also where external examiners' reports are made available to students. Programme specifications and unit specifications meet expectations and are informative documents. The students the review team met stated that they had good information about all aspects of the courses and were positive about the new HE Common Room Hub which made all the higher education-relevant content and information available in one place.

3.4 The review team looked at documents supplied to it about the management of information, the relevant sections of the self-evaluation document and the student submission, and asked questions of both staff and students. It also reviewed samples of the documentation available to potential and current students such as the website, the prospectus, course handbooks, the HE Common Room Hub and course materials available on the VLE.

3.5 Programme handbooks contain all the necessary information for students but are not in a standardised format. The review team noted the newly introduced HE VLE Threshold Standard paper sets out a minimum content for programme handbooks. The College is also in the process of establishing a corporate identity for handbooks but, as yet, it is not completed.

3.6 The College does not have a documented framework for the management of academic standards, quality assurance and enhancement which could be used to promote the effective management of standards and quality to staff, students and other stakeholders.

College staff refer to the assessment strategy as the quality handbook. The review team heard how a decision had been taken recently to extend the assessment strategy to include further documents, such as plagiarism and higher education, as part of one larger manual for assessment. In the absence of a wider documented framework, it was unclear to the team how staff with responsibilities for academic standards and quality are fully informed about what is expected of them. The team found, for example, staff lacked knowledge of concepts of levelness, volume of study, enhancement of student learning opportunities, and awareness of reference points such as the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements. While the College reported that it had mapped its assessment strategy to the Quality Code, wider account of the College's policies and procedures against the chapters of the Quality Code had yet to be undertaken. The team therefore **recommends** that by December 2014 the College ensure that the internal processes and procedures for managing academic standards and assuring quality are clearly articulated and available to staff, students and external stakeholders.

3.7   The review team concludes that information available to current students is accurate and easily accessible, and covers all areas that could be reasonably expected. Information on the College's policy, procedures and guidance on quality assurance and enhancement are lacking. Overall, the team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Quality of the information produced about its provision: Summary of findings

3.8   In reaching its judgement on the quality of the information produced about its provision, the review team matched into findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation in this area is met and the risk is considered low.

3.9   The team found that information for students is accurate and accessible, and that there are effective mechanisms in place for ensuring its accuracy. Students were positive about all aspects of the information they receive in the course of their studies. The team found some differences in detail but not content between some programme information. The College is working towards corporate branding of its higher education provision which will address this.

3.10   The team found that the College does not have a documented framework for the management of academic standards, quality assurance and enhancement. The team therefore recommends that the College clearly articulate and make available its quality management framework to staff, students and external stakeholders.

3.11   Overall, the team concludes that the quality of information provided by the College about its provision **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: 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 is committed to improving the student learning experience and responding to the student voice at programme level. Good practice is identified at programme level and disseminated through the College's Learning and Teaching Conferences and Learning and Teaching Coaches.

4.2 The College does not, however, take a strategic approach to enhancement or integrate enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner across its higher education provision, nor does it have the quality assurance policies, structures and processes in place to identify opportunities for enhancement. There is no college-wide strategy, policy or framework to systematically enhance student learning opportunities. Enhancement is not the responsibility of any of the College's three management groups - the HE Strategy Group, HE Curriculum Group or J2O group - and staff at all levels are unaware of the QAA definition of enhancement. The College does not meet the Expectation that 'deliberative steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of the students' learning opportunities'.

4.3 The review team tested the College's understanding of enhancement and its engagement with the enhancement of learning opportunities as defined by QAA through review of the College's self-evaluation document (SED) and in its meetings with academic staff, support staff and students. No evidence was provided by the College on its approach to enhancement or examples thereof. The SED listed what the College perceived as enhancement initiatives; however, the review team considers these to be day-to-day actions arising out of annual SARs and not deliberative actions to improve the quality of learning opportunities. Other examples cited as enhancement activities by the College are investment in the estate, student focus groups and IT developments, none of which the review team considers to be enhancement initiatives as defined by QAA.

4.4 The College's Strategic Intentions 2012-2015 makes reference to developing e-learning to enhance the learning experience but contains no other reference to the systematic enhancement of the quality of student learning opportunities.

4.5 The review team found no evidence of policies, procedures or structures and processes to systematically improve the quality of learning opportunities at an institutional level and heard no evidence of this in meetings with students, academic and support staff. In their meeting with academic staff, the review team was given examples of initiatives to improve the student learning experience, but these were not initiatives implemented in a systematic and planned manner; rather, they were ad hoc initiatives originated at programme level in response to student feedback. Senior, academic and support staff could not provide the review team with a definition of enhancement. The review team **recommends** that by July 2015 the College develops a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities that ensures the identification, integration and dissemination of enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner across all of the College's higher education provision.

4.6 None of the groups/committees within the College that have responsibility for quality assurance - the SMT, J2O, HE Strategy Group and HE Curriculum Group - have strategic oversight of, or responsibility for, quality enhancement, this being evidenced through their

terms of reference and confirmed by senior and academic staff in their meetings with the review team. The review team noted that the HE Curriculum Group, which has responsibility for sharing good practice and creating a positive higher education ethos across the College, has not met since its formation, resulting in a lack of a forum within the College for this area of work. Consequently, the review team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College clarifies the respective roles and responsibilities of its deliberative and executive structures in the strategic oversight of its processes and outcomes in the management and quality enhancement of its higher education provision.

4.7   The team concludes, therefore, that the Expectation is not met and the risk is serious. The lack of understanding throughout the College about what constitutes enhancement, no strategic approach and the lack of quality assurance procedures to identify opportunities for enhancement represent significant gaps in the College's structures, policies and procedures relating to the College's quality assurance and enhancement.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.8   In reaching its judgement on the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team considered its findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team concludes that the Expectation relating to the enhancement of student learning opportunities is not met and the risk is considered to be serious.

4.9   The not met judgement reflects that the College does not take a strategic approach to enhancement or integrate enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner across its higher education provision. It does not have the quality assurance policies, structures and processes in place to identify opportunities for enhancement, or a college-wide strategy, policy or framework to systematically enhance student learning opportunities. The lack of understanding throughout the College about what constitutes enhancement, no strategic approach and the lack of quality assurance procedures to identify opportunities for enhancement represent significant gaps in the College's structures, policies and procedures relating to the College's quality assurance and enhancement. Therefore, the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **does not meet** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 From a strategic perspective, the College approaches the issue of employability from two directions; at a provider level through activities external to individual courses, and through the content and structure of each individual programme.

5.2 At a provider level, the College has multiple initiatives to advise and support students in regard to their employability needs. This includes the provision of a dedicated Information and Guidance Service with two full-time and two part-time staff who can help students with services such as CV writing and interview skills. The College also provides an annual Jobs and Skills fair, which the students were positive about, explaining that it is an important event and that they viewed it as being of value. The College also provides details of local and regional vacancies to students through their Business Development office.

5.3 At an individual programme level, many of the programmes have a strong element of employability development already embedded within the course structure. For example, the HNC Electrical/Electronic Engineering and the HNC in Mechanical Engineering are part-time day-release courses delivered over two years with two semesters per year to support the needs of students who are already in employment in the sector.

5.4 The HND Performing Arts course employs guest speakers from the industry to advise students, and good links between tutors and external theatres allow for students to gain experience of the industry.

5.5 The HND Creative Media Production (Games Development) has links with companies in the field who offer placements to students, although it is not clear to the review team how many are available and how these are allocated.

5.6 On the Foundation Degree in Early Years and Childhood Studies, all students have to be in paid employment or a voluntary placement in an early years setting for a minimum of 16 hours a week throughout the foundation degree. Students are assessed in the workplace by the practice trainer each semester, to ensure links are made between theory and practice. Similarly, on the HNC Health and Social Care programme, all students are in paid employment or a voluntary placement in a health and social care setting for a minimum of 16 hours a week throughout the programme. All learners across both areas are supported by a workplace mentor throughout the course to ensure competencies are met. This demonstrates a clear link between course activities and the ability for students to develop professional experience which enhances their employability for when their studies reach a conclusion.

5.7 Students were very positive about the provisions that were made for them in terms of work experience placements, and found that the College was both supportive and responsive to their needs in the event of issues that they experienced while out on placement. They also felt that their direct experience from work experience would in future be of benefit should they decide to look for alternative employment, as they believed that the work experience in combination with their paid work demonstrated commitment to their chosen sphere. Many students were already employed in the industry sectors which they were studying within, and many were considering further education such as topping up their foundation degrees to bachelor's degrees with honours when they finished at the College. Staff were aware of this, and said that often their role in helping students to progress following their time at the College involved exploring routes into more advanced education, often with the validating partner institutions, as opposed to employment advice.

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/assuringstandardsandquality.

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

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.