



# Higher Education Review of Huntingdonshire Regional College

March 2014

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Huntingdonshire Regional College. The review took place from 10 to 12 March 2014 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Sarah Shobrook
- Mr Craig Best (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Huntingdonshire Regional 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](#) (Quality Code)<sup>1</sup> setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 4. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 8.

In reviewing Huntingdonshire Regional 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,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx).

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

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review).

## Amended judgement December 2016

### Introduction

In September 2014, Huntingdonshire Regional College underwent a Higher Education Review, which resulted in judgements of 'meets UK expectations' for academic standards, quality of learning opportunities and provision of information; and a judgement of 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' for enhancement.

Negative judgements are subject to a formal follow-up by QAA, which involves the monitoring of an action plan produced by the College in response to the report findings. The follow-up visit took place in July 2015 with two reviewers and the recommendation was to maintain the original judgement for the enhancement of learning opportunities. This recommendation was approved by the QAA Board in October 2015. When negative judgements are not amended after the follow-up process, providers are subject to the application of HEFCE's Unsatisfactory Quality Policy.

The College published an action plan in January 2016 describing how it intended to address the recommendations, affirmations and good practice identified in the review, and has been working over the past several months to demonstrate how it has implemented that plan.

The UQP process included an initial visit with HEFCE and three progress updates, and culminated in the review team's scrutiny of the College's progress reports and the supporting documentary evidence, along with a one-day visit in September 2016 with two reviewers. During the visit, the team met senior staff, support staff and students to discuss progress and triangulate the evidence base received over the preceding months.

The visit confirmed that the recommendations relating to enhancement had been successfully addressed.

### HEFCE and QAA Board decision and amended judgement(s)

The review team concludes that the College had made sufficient progress to recommend that the judgement 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 academic standards of awards **meets** UK expectations
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

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

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

Recommendation - Enhancement, B7

In respect of the recommendation to systematically consider external examiner reports, increased oversight has been established through the HE Operational Group, HE Management Committee, and annually through the HE Assessment Board. Greater discussion and evaluation has only recently become evident, however, consideration of opportunities to embed practice and share good practice is apparent. Of particular note is the development in vocational contextualisation of assignment briefs. Additionally, the introduction of the revised External Quality Assurance/Moderator processes has provided a robust and accountable approach to preparing for external oversight and an opportunity to identify and reflect on practice. External examiner reports are more effectively used: external examiners' comments are summarised in the Oversight and Evaluation Report which is considered at the Higher Education Forum and by the Academic Leadership Team to identify enhancement opportunities.

Recommendation - Enhancement, B8

To address the recommendation that processes for programme monitoring and review are implemented effectively, the College has established a systematic process that focuses upon the maintenance of academic standards and reviews the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. There are now clear lines of accountability for the management and monitoring of the provision at programme, Senior Management Team (SMT) and Corporation levels. The emergent HE Self-assessment Report informs the Quality Improvement Plan and there is more effective use of quantitative and qualitative data to support the enhancement of higher education provision.

Recommendation - Enhancement

With regard to establishing effective oversight of higher education programmes to enable deliberate steps to be taken to enhance student learning opportunities, the Self-Evaluation Monitoring process and Quality Improvement Plan provide an appropriate overarching framework. The revised committee structure affords opportunities to discuss the student experience and address enhancement issues. The College has introduced effective mechanisms for following up actions and disseminating the outcomes into the other deliberative structures. Staff have a clear understanding of the concept of enhancement and, although the revised processes have only been established within the last year, it is evident that they are now being operated consistently and are well supported by the College's SMT. Significant efforts have been made to obtain more systematic feedback from students: SPOCs are used to gather verbal feedback and identify priorities for improvement, resulting in a more systematic consideration of the student voice in the College's approach to enhancement.

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Huntingdonshire Regional College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Huntingdonshire Regional College.

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body 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 **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

### Good practice

The QAA review team did not identify any features of **good practice**.

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Huntingdonshire Regional College.

Prior to the approval of any new programmes, and by July 2015:

- establish a more rigorous process for programme approval, to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to the range and availability of optional units, including for those programmes intended to replace existing higher education provision (Expectations B1 and A4).

By July 2014:

- establish and clearly document assessment board regulations for its higher national provision (Expectations B6 and A6)
- put in place effective processes for the systematic consideration of external examiner reports at programme and College level (Expectation B7, Enhancement)
- formalise the process for the approval and review of programme information to ensure the quality and consistency of handbooks (Expectations C and A3).

By July 2015:

- ensure effective mechanisms are in place for identifying and responding to the collective higher education student voice (Expectation B5, Enhancement)
- ensure processes for programme monitoring and review are implemented effectively, and that those processes give more focused consideration to the needs of higher education students (Expectation B8, Enhancement)
- establish effective oversight of all higher education programmes to enable deliberate steps to be taken at provider level to enhance the learning opportunities for higher education students (Enhancement).

## **Theme: Student Employability**

Huntingdonshire Regional College, through the vocational nature of its higher education offering, has developed partnerships with local employers to support student employability. Most of its students are already engaged in some form of employment prior to enrolling at the College, and therefore the College's focus for higher education students is to support them in contextualising their learning in the workplace.

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

## About Huntingdonshire Regional College

Huntingdonshire Regional College (the College) is a medium-sized further education college located in the town of Huntingdon. It serves the needs of a widely dispersed population, drawing students from small market towns and rural settlements. The College's mission statement is to 'Learn, Succeed and be Outstanding Together'.

At the time of the review the College had 36 higher education students, all of whom were part-time. The higher education offer at the College is focused on particular skills sectors and progression routes for its further education students. The College has students enrolled across three foundation degrees, validated by Anglia Ruskin University (the University). The College is no longer recruiting students to these programmes and all existing students are expected to complete by September 2014. The College also offers, and has students enrolled on, three higher national programmes validated by Pearson. Two of these programmes are in the areas of engineering and photography, and are intended to act as a replacement for the foundation degrees it previously offered in these subject areas.

Since its last QAA review, the 2009 Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review, the College has undergone a number of significant changes. In January 2011 there was a change of principal. In July 2012, the University formally notified the College of its decision to terminate the franchise partnership. The University cited the reason for its decision as the lack of availability of additional student numbers resulting in the partnership not being able to grow. The College is currently in the process of phasing out the University's foundation degrees, with existing students being supported to complete their programme. In September 2013, the College began to offer higher national programmes and intends to further expand this provision. A number of staff were made redundant in 2013, resulting in a reorganisation of the College's management structure.

The College's last QAA review identified seven recommendations and four features of good practice. The present review team found that the College had developed an appropriate action plan in response to the recommendations made in the previous review report. However, there is limited evidence of the College fully implementing, monitoring progress against and evaluating the outcomes of the actions taken in response to recommendations made by the previous review team. Ongoing changes to the College's management and committee structure, including the disbandment of the Academic Board, have resulted in a lack of thorough oversight of the College's action plan (see findings under Enhancement).

## Explanation of the findings about Huntingdonshire Regional College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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



## 1 Judgement: 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's degree-awarding body (Anglia Ruskin University) and awarding organisation (Pearson) are ultimately responsible for setting threshold academic standards and ensuring that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level in the FHEQ.

1.2 Programmes validated by the University operate under a franchise agreement and are the same as those delivered at the University. The processes for the design, approval and review of qualifications, including ensuring appropriate consideration is given to external reference points, is the responsibility of the University and governed by its Academic Regulations. The University provides the College with Pathway Specification Forms for each of the qualifications it is approved to deliver. The College is expected to use these to ensure the delivery of the award is at the appropriate level.

1.3 Pearson develops programme specifications for higher national programmes and ensures learning outcomes reflect the appropriate level of the qualification. Staff use these specifications and the awarding organisation's quality manual as a reference point in the learning, teaching and assessment of programmes.

1.4 The team reviewed the information provided in Pathway Specification Forms and programme handbooks and explored the external examiner reports. The review team also met with teaching staff to test their use and understanding of the FHEQ as a reference point in the maintenance of academic standards.

1.5 Staff use Pathway Specification Forms, and for higher national programmes the awarding organisation's programme specifications, as explicit reference points to inform teaching practices. Staff also maintain close working relationships with University staff involved in the delivery of the same programme to ensure common practices in teaching and assessment. For foundation degrees, external examiner reports confirm that standards for the programme and modules are at the appropriate level.

1.6 Staff use programme specifications to ensure learning outcomes are covered in sufficient depth. The team also heard of one example where staff are working closely with a local university to ensure delivery of the higher national programme is aligned to the corresponding level of study for a bachelor's-level programme in the same subject area.

1.7 Overall, the review team concludes that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level in the FHEQ and the College is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities to its degree-awarding body and awarding organisation. Expectation A1 is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

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

**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**

1.8 The processes for ensuring programmes delivered by the College take relevant account of subject and qualification benchmark statements are the same as those described in paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3.

1.9 The review team tested the Expectation through a review of the documentation used by staff in the delivery of the programme including Pathway Specification Forms, programme handbooks and higher national programme specifications. The team also held meetings with senior staff and teaching staff.

1.10 University-devised Pathway Specification Forms make direct reference to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Teaching staff are aware of subject benchmark statements but rely on the University's and awarding organisation's documentation to ensure their teaching practices are sufficiently informed by relevant external reference points. Both senior staff and teaching staff have a sound understanding of the processes used by the University for mapping qualifications to relevant statements.

1.11 Overall, the review team concludes that the College effectively fulfils its responsibilities to uphold standards on behalf of its degree-awarding body and awarding organisation. The team concludes therefore that Expectation A2 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

**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 For all programmes, information on aims and learning outcomes is provided through programme handbooks and module guides. The University also provides the College with pre-approved Pathway Specification Forms for each foundation degree. Staff contextualise information in University-devised programme handbooks and module guides before disseminating these to students. For higher national programmes, teaching staff use Pearson BTEC programme specifications to develop contextualised handbooks and guides to reflect the local delivery of the programme.

1.13 The team reviewed a range of programme handbooks and module guides. The team also met with staff and students to understand how information on programmes is made available.

1.14 The team found that for foundation degrees, handbooks contain appropriate and detailed information about the programme. For higher national programmes, staff are provided with a standard College template which they are expected to populate with relevant information. The team found that, although variable in style and content, handbooks generally contain the required information on aims, outcomes and expected achievements (see findings under Expectation C).

1.15 Students the team met with had an appropriate understanding of their programme and were clear about what was expected of them. Students are aware of handbooks and guides, although some commented on the delay in receiving the latest versions of module guides from the University. In particular, students acknowledged the usefulness of the verbal guidance they receive from staff during teaching sessions.

1.16 Notwithstanding the inconsistencies in programme handbooks, the team are satisfied that definitive information on programmes is made available to students. The team concludes therefore that Expectation A3 is met and the risk is low.

**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 College follows the policies for the approval and periodic review of programmes of its degree-awarding body and awarding organisation. For foundation degrees, the College participates in University (re)validation events to obtain approval for the delivery of its programmes. For higher national programmes, the College applies to the awarding organisation to first become an approved centre. Following a centre approval visit, the College then submits a form to gain permission to deliver a particular award.

1.18 Prior to obtaining external approval to deliver a qualification, the College undertakes an internal academic planning process. There is a Qualification Approval Policy, and a Qualification Approval Form is completed as part of the planning process. All programmes are also required to go through a Course Marketing Approval Process with sign-off from the Head of Marketing. For higher education programmes, this process is overseen by the Vice Principal for Learning and Standards with final approval obtained from the Principal.

1.19 The team tested this Expectation through a review of external approval documentation, completed Qualification Approval Forms and through discussions with staff.

1.20 The team found that the College adheres to the University's and Pearson's processes for obtaining approval to deliver their awards. Following the University's most recent revalidation in 2012, the College developed an action plan to ensure recommendations arising from the event were dealt with appropriately. The team only saw one example of the College following its internal programme approval process; this was for the Higher National programme in Sport. The form is relatively brief and although some consideration is given to staffing and resources, it was not clear to the team where and how these discussions take place (see findings under Expectation B1).

1.21 Although the team found inconsistencies in the way the College applies its own internal approval processes, the team is satisfied that the College is maintaining academic standards by fulfilling the requirements of its degree-awarding body and awarding organisation for approval and periodic review. The team considers the College's internal programme approval process to be of more relevance to assuring the quality of student learning opportunities (see recommendation under Expectation B1). Therefore, Expectation A4 is met and presents a low level of risk to academic standards.

**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**

1.22 For both foundation degrees and higher national programmes, the degree-awarding body and awarding organisation are responsible for ensuring appropriate external engagement in the design, approval and review of programmes. For foundation degrees, these processes are laid out in the University's Academic Regulations. The College's degree-awarding body and awarding organisation are also responsible for appointing external examiners. For University programmes, Pathway Leaders from the College attend assessment boards where external examiners are also present. The College's main responsibility for this Expectation is to respond to the actions raised in external examiner reports (see findings under Expectation B7).

1.23 The team reviewed the Institutional Report arising from the University's most recent revalidation of the College's provision, external examiner reports and processes for University boards. The team also met with senior staff and teaching staff.

1.24 The one external examiner report available at the time of the review, for a higher national programme, confirms that the College is effectively maintaining academic standards on behalf of Pearson. As the programmes are the same as those delivered at the University, the College's delivery of foundation degrees is subject to cross-campus assessment by external examiners. Where the College is required to take action, this is communicated through the University Link Tutor for the pathway or reflected in updated programme documentation provided to College staff.

1.25 The College has itself taken steps to engage directly with employers to ensure programmes and modules reflect local employment trends. Some staff also work with neighbouring colleges offering the same programmes to check that provision is in line with what others are delivering. However, these processes are relatively informal and it was not clear to the team to what extent they are applied across all higher education provision at the College.

1.26 The team concludes that the College is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities to the University and Pearson. Therefore, Expectation A5 is met and the team consider the risk to be 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**

1.27 For foundation degrees, the College uses the assessment tasks designed and approved by the University. The College also follows the University's assessment policies and these are documented in the University's Academic Regulations and the Academic Agreement. The outcomes of assessment are reported to Departmental Assessment Panels and Awards Boards.

1.28 For higher national provision, staff are required to devise appropriate assessment tasks based on the intended learning outcomes in Pearson programme specifications. Higher national programmes align to the College's further education processes for assessment as documented in the Assessment and Internal Quality Assurance Centre Handbook.

1.29 The College is responsible for marking and internally moderating student work for all its higher education programmes. Standardisation meetings are in operation for all higher education provision to ensure consistency in the application of assessment methods within programmes.

1.30 The team tested this Expectation through a review of Pathway Specification Forms, module guides, assessment plans and strategies, and the processes governing assessment. The team also met with staff and students.

1.31 The team found that sound processes are in place to ensure that the assessment of awards is robust, valid and reliable. Clear assessment plans exist for all higher education programmes. All assessment tasks for foundation degrees are pre-approved by the University to ensure they are fit for purpose. Assignment briefs for higher national programmes are checked by an internal verifier before use. The College has also made use of the awarding organisation's assignment-checking service to ensure tasks are appropriate and meet Pearson requirements.

1.32 External examiner reports confirm that the College effectively maintains academic standards through the appropriate assessment of achievement of learning outcomes. Staff attend moderation meetings both internally (for higher national programmes) and at the University (for foundation degrees). Staff also attend Awards Boards and take full part in University processes as they relate to College students. The College is not required to hold its first assessment board for higher national programmes until the end of the 2013-14 academic year. However, the College is yet to produce documented processes governing the operation of its assessment boards (see findings under Expectation B6).

1.33 Overall, the team concludes that effective processes are in place for ensuring assessment is robust, valid and reliable. Expectation A6 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

1.34 In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. All Expectations for the maintenance of threshold academic standards have been met with the associated level of risk low in all instances. The College's main responsibilities for maintaining threshold academic standards are for adhering to the policies and processes set by the University and Pearson.

1.35 There are no recommendations or features of good practice in this area. In summary, the team found that the College is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities to the University and Pearson. The review team concludes, therefore, that the maintenance of threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body and awarding 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 processes for programme approval, including the College's internal qualification approval process, are described in paragraphs 1.17 and 1.18. Under the Academic Agreement, the University retains full responsibility for the design of foundation degrees, although College staff may informally provide feedback to the University to inform any future revisions of the programme. Pearson is responsible for the design of higher national programmes and the College's involvement is limited to the selection of optional units and developing assessment tasks against predefined learning outcomes and grading criteria.

2.2 The team tested the application of the College's approval and design processes through a review of programme approval documentation and through discussions with staff and students.

2.3 The College's Qualification Approval Form, although relatively brief, gives consideration to staffing requirements, existing utilisation and resources as part of the approval process. The form is signed off by several members of senior staff, including the Principal, but there are no records of meetings where local discussions around planning take place.

2.4 In meetings with teaching staff and senior staff it became clear that the approval process is not consistently applied to all new higher education programmes. All higher national programmes follow the Course Marketing Approval Process; however, the higher national Certificate/Diploma in Sport was the only programme for which a Qualification Approval Form was completed. For the Higher National programmes in Engineering and Professional Photography, the College considered these as natural replacements for its foundation degrees in the same subject areas and therefore did not require them to follow its formal approval process.

2.5 Higher national students the team met with commented on the lack of availability of a number of optional units. Students are aware that not all optional units will be available but some were concerned that the College may dictate the optional units to be studied. Teaching staff informed the team that the availability of optional units depends on the staff expertise available at the time. Although the team acknowledge that not all optional units can be made available, the programme approval process does not at present give sufficient consideration to the range of optional units that can be offered. Through documentation and during the visit, the College made clear its intentions to further expand its higher national provision. Bearing this in mind, the team **recommends** that, prior to the approval of any new programmes, and by July 2015, the College establish a more rigorous process for programme approval, to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to the range and availability of optional units, including for those programmes intended to replace existing higher education provision.

2.6 Overall, the team concludes that the College's processes, including those it follows through its degree-awarding body and awarding organisation, meet Expectation B1. However, there is a moderate risk associated with the need to establish a more rigorous



process for programme approval and ensure its consistent application across all new higher education programmes.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B2: Admissions**

**Findings**

2.7 The College has in place a College-wide Admissions Strategy which describes its approach to and the process for admitting students. For higher national programmes, the recruitment process is the same as for further education. Prior to acceptance onto a programme, applicants are required to attend an interview with a member of the programme staff to ensure entry criteria are met. Information about programmes, including entry requirements, is made available to prospective students through the College website and a higher education prospectus. The College is no longer recruiting students to University programmes.

2.8 The team tested the evidence around the admissions process through a review of the information available to prospective applicants and through discussions with teaching staff, support staff and students.

2.9 Information available about the higher education provision at the College is clear and accurate, enabling prospective applicants to make an informed decision. Discussions with staff and students confirmed that the admissions process is applied fairly and consistently. Students the team met with were positive about their admissions experience and found the interview process helpful and informative. Support staff involved in the admissions process are clear about their responsibilities and ensure entry criteria are applied objectively.

2.10 Sound processes are in place to ensure applicants who identify a learning difficulty or disability are provided with appropriate support. Applications where a disability has been declared are forwarded on to the Additional Learning Support team who contact the applicant to discuss the physical and pastoral support available at the College.

2.11 The team concludes that the College's processes for admitting students to higher education programmes are clear, explicit and consistently applied. Expectation B2 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.12 There is a College-wide Learning and Assessment Strategy which articulates the College's approach to reviewing and enhancing learning opportunities for students. Academic staff involved in the delivery of foundation degrees are approved by the University. The external examiner for Pearson reviews staff curricula vitae during annual visits. Initiatives to support the monitoring of learning and teaching practices include a peer observation process and a formal performance-related observation process. The College has a Staff Development Policy and individuals can apply to attend appropriate professional development activities.

2.13 The review team looked at teaching observation forms, programme self-assessment reports (SARs) and completed student surveys. The team also met with a range of staff and students.

2.14 Teaching staff involved in the delivery of higher education are appropriately qualified and supported in their roles. Students the team met with were positive about the quality of teaching and dedication of academic staff in supporting them in developing as learners. Teaching mostly takes place in small groups and this supports a high level of interaction between staff and students. Most academic staff are part-time and draw on their professional work experience to contextualise learning in the classroom.

2.15 The Staff Development Policy is directed towards further education staff although higher education staff are also entitled to relevant opportunities. The College provides support for staff development through paid time off work and a contribution to the costs of undertaking a relevant qualification. There is evidence of staff taking up appropriate development activities such as attendance at meetings and events organised by the University and engagement with local employers. Some staff members are also involved in scholarly activity with local universities and use this to inform their teaching practices.

2.16 The teaching observation process has been further developed since the last QAA review and is now more tailored to higher education. The teaching observation feedback includes comments from students on their experiences of teaching and learning; this is then used to develop the teaching practices of individual teachers through the appraisal process. Staff the team met with commented on the usefulness of peer observations as a critical self-assessment tool, although not all teaching staff had fully engaged with this observation process.

2.17 The College applies its further education Course Review process to all its higher education programmes. Although the Course Review documentation is comprehensive in nature, it considers a collection of programmes by pathway and it is therefore unclear how learning opportunities for higher education are reviewed through this mechanism (see findings under Expectation B8).

2.18 Informal mechanisms are in place to obtain feedback on teaching quality from individual students. The Vice Principal for Learning and Standards makes ad-hoc visits

(Learning Walks) to classrooms to obtain student views on the quality of their learning experiences. The team heard of one example where, through informal discussions with students, the College was made aware of poor teaching practices and this eventually resulted in an alternative teacher being used for that particular module. Given the relatively small number of higher education students on each programme, informal communication between staff and students is an important way in which the College responds to student feedback to improve teaching practices.

2.19 Overall, the team concludes that the College's processes for managing learning and teaching practices, although informal in some instances, are appropriate to the current size of the provision. Expectation B3 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement**

**Findings**

2.20 Students are prepared for their study at the College through an induction process, which usually takes the form of a separate higher education Enrolment Event. Personal tutorials with teaching staff are made available across all pathways and are intended to provide academic support. Pastoral support including counselling services is provided through the Student Services department. The College's Additional Learning Support Strategy outlines the support available to students with disabilities. Careers information, advice and guidance are provided informally through teaching staff and Pathway Leaders. Resources are planned for and purchased through an annual College-wide budgeting process.

2.21 To test the evidence for this Expectation, the team reviewed induction documentation, browsed the virtual learning environment (VLE) and also watched a demonstration of the College's online system for tracking student achievement. The team met with a range of teaching staff, support staff and students to understand how the processes for enabling student development and achievement work in practice.

2.22 The team were informed that due to the termination of the University partnership, the higher education Enrolment Event did not take place for the academic year 2013-14. As all new students were part-time, the induction process was incorporated into the first teaching session. Students were provided with a booklet and were also required to complete an induction checklist. Students the team met with, including those who joined in September 2013, felt that they had received appropriate support to prepare them for study at the College and for their transition into higher education. The team are satisfied that the processes for induction are appropriate to the current size and nature of the provision.

2.23 Tutorials are used as an effective tool to encourage student achievement and development. Actions arising from tutorials are documented and some staff use an online system to monitor student progress. The College has a named Student Advisor who works with students and liaises with the University, on their behalf, to resolve any administrative issues. Students with disabilities are identified as early as possible and are then provided with a bespoke support package to ensure they are able to access the same learning opportunities as other students. The team heard of several examples of adjustments made to support students with learning difficulties, including a longer loan time for books borrowed from the library.

2.24 Most students are already in part-time employment prior to their enrolment at the College, and the informal support provided through Pathway Leaders is useful in this context. Students on higher national programmes are guided to find suitable work placements that will support them in consolidating their theoretical knowledge. Students studying on the photography programmes are exposed to employment opportunities through engagement with working professionals involved in the delivery of the programme. The College is also working with nearby universities to provide possible progression routes for students completing higher national programmes.

2.25 College resources include a separate space for higher education students, a library and a College VLE. Foundation degree students have access to the University's VLE. Students the team met with were generally satisfied with the resources available

although some felt they would benefit from a more distinct space which is not impinged upon by further education students and a greater number of books in the library. Students find the VLE helpful and informative, using it to access notes from previous teaching sessions, handbooks and information on upcoming assignments.

2.26 Overall, the team concludes that the College has in place appropriate arrangements for enabling student achievement and development, and these are proportionate to the scale of provision. The team concludes, therefore, that Expectation B4 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.27 Informal feedback is the main mechanism for engaging higher education students in quality assurance at the College. Other opportunities for student engagement include attendance at committee meetings and completion of cross-College feedback surveys including the Learner Voice Survey and Learning Resource Centre Survey. The College also has a Learner Representative system where a student representative is chosen from each programme at the start of the academic year.

2.28 To test this Expectation the team considered minutes of committee meetings, reports from student feedback surveys and Course Review documentation. The team also met with a range of staff and students.

2.29 The team found that informal feedback works well for responding to individual students. Part-time students find it convenient to talk directly to teaching staff and resolve issues informally. The Vice Principal for Learning and Standards uses ad-hoc Learning Walks to obtain verbal feedback during teaching sessions (see paragraph 2.18). This is a direct mechanism by which students are able to provide feedback to a senior member of staff.

2.30 However, there is limited evidence of how the College takes deliberate steps to engage with students collectively in quality assurance and enhancement. Formal feedback from students is obtained through a number of different surveys administered at various points throughout the academic year. Most of these surveys are College-wide and although the team regard the survey questions to be appropriate in content, there is a lack of evidence to demonstrate how the minority higher education student voice is given separate consideration through the analysis of survey results. The College hosts most of its surveys through an external company and the team were informed that for some higher education programmes, where the group size is less than six, the results of the survey are not returned to the College. Given that higher education accounts for a small part of the College's provision, it is unclear to the team how results from College-wide student surveys impact on the enhancement of the higher education learning experience. Students the team met with had experience of completing such surveys but were unaware of how this feedback was responded to by the College. The external examiner report for a higher national programme also makes reference to students not being aware of the outcomes of survey results.

2.31 Student Perception of Course surveys are programme-specific and involve a senior member of staff visiting a teaching session to speak to students and obtain their views. The survey is completed by the visiting member of staff based on discussions with students. However, these surveys are unplanned and vary considerably in nature and format; some conform to a standard pro-forma while others consist of freehand written notes. Despite seeking clarifications during meetings, it was unclear to the team how feedback from different programmes is considered collectively to inform College-level enhancement activities.

2.32 Although College policy states that all programmes have a student representative selected at the start of the academic year, there were no higher education student representatives at the time of the review visit. The College holds a Curriculum Management

Committee, as a requirement of the University, to oversee the management of foundation degrees. There has been student representation at this Committee in the past, but the team did not meet with any students who were currently attending either this or any other College meeting. The College's Higher Education Committee has oversight of all higher education programmes at the College, although since the start of the 2013-14 academic year this has been combined with the Curriculum Management Committee. To compensate for the lack of student attendance, the College informally invite students to provide written comments to their tutor for consideration at the Higher Education Committee. However, Committee minutes provided to the team do not make any reference to the receipt or consideration of student feedback through this mechanism.

2.33 During the most recent University revalidation event, one of the conditions for re-approval related to the need to 'adopt a more consistent approach towards the recruitment of student representatives'. Although the partnership with the University is now coming to an end, the team found limited evidence of how the College has addressed this issue across its higher education provision. Students the team met with acknowledged that the part-time nature of their study makes it difficult for them to participate as representatives and felt that the College could consider more flexible ways in which it engages with higher education students. The team therefore **recommends** that by July 2015, the College ensure effective mechanisms are in place for identifying and responding to the collective higher education student voice.

2.34 The team concludes that the informal mechanisms in place work well for responding to feedback or concerns from individual students, but do not effectively capture the collective student voice. Staff the team met with are aware of the challenges of engaging with part-time students but deem current mechanisms to be appropriate for the size of provision. In reaching its conclusion, the team also gave appropriate consideration to the size and nature of the higher education provision at the College. The team acknowledges that formal processes may not suit a small cohort of part-time students but there is still a need for the College to consider other more flexible ways in which it can use feedback from the higher education student body to inform improvements at College level. The team concludes, therefore, that Expectation B5 is not met and the need to represent the collective higher education student voice more effectively at College level presents a moderate risk.

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



**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**

2.35 The College's responsibilities, and the processes it follows for ensuring assessment is robust, valid and reliable, are described in paragraphs 1.27 and 1.28. Students are provided with information about learning outcomes, the nature of assessment tasks and assessment criteria through module guides and assignment briefs. For foundation degrees, the College adheres to University processes for the setting, conduct and marking of assessment; these requirements are stipulated in the University's Academic Regulations. For higher national awards, there is a College-wide Assessment and Internal Quality Assurance Centre Handbook which includes clear information on the processes for dealing with late submissions, extenuating circumstances and the accreditation of prior learning.

2.36 Pearson requires its approved centres to hold assessment boards for higher national programmes to record and confirm assessment decisions. Although the College is not required to hold its first board until the end of the 2013-14 academic year, formal processes for assessment boards were not in place at the time of the review visit. The team therefore **recommends** that by July 2014, the College establish and clearly document assessment board regulations for its higher national provision.

2.37 The team reviewed assessment regulations, a sample of assignment briefs and external examiner reports. The team also met with teaching staff and students to understand their experiences of assessment.

2.38 Assessment information provided to students is clear, accurate and detailed. Students the team met with confirmed that assessment processes are well communicated through written and verbal information provided by staff. In particular, students commented on the helpfulness of teaching staff in explaining assessment and grading criteria. Students are provided with detailed written feedback on their work which allows them to identify areas for improvement including how to achieve a higher grade in the summative assessment. Teaching staff also provide students with the opportunity to discuss feedback on assessment tasks through a one-to-one tutorial. Students the team met with confirmed that in general marked work is returned promptly.

2.39 External examiner reports for foundation degrees do not give separate consideration to the College's delivery of the programmes, but reports confirm that assessment processes are appropriate. The one external examiner report available for a higher national programme at the time of the review visit confirmed that assessment tasks provide students with sufficient opportunities for demonstrating achievement of intended learning outcomes.

2.40 The College uses an electronic system for recording marks, uploading feedback and tracking student achievement throughout the programme. The system provides a robust means for recording and storing student grades and is also used by teaching staff to log the assessment criteria covered by each assessment task. However, the team noted that the extent to which the use of the system is fully embedded across all higher education programmes is variable.

2.41 Overall, the team concludes that the College has in place sound processes for the assessment of students and Expectation B6 is met. The recommendation in this area relates to the need to establish processes for assessment boards before they convene for the first time and the College is already aware of this action. The team therefore consider the risk to be 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**

2.42 For foundation degrees, the University has overall responsibility for defining the role of the external examiner, and for nominating and appointing external examiners, as set out in its Academic Agreement. Actions arising from external examiner reports are responded to by the University with the College informed of any action required on its part. Pearson appoints external examiners for higher national awards who are responsible for moderating grades and submitting an annual report following on from a visit to the College. Pathway Leaders are expected to review external examiner reports for the higher national programmes and are responsible for taking appropriate action in response to any recommendations. The College is not required to make a formal response to the awarding organisation but progress with outstanding actions is monitored at the next visit.

2.43 The review team tested the application of the processes relating to external examining by scrutinising a sample of external examiner reports, minutes of meetings and Course Review documentation. The team also met with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

2.44 For foundation degrees, external examiners provide a holistic review of programmes and are not expected to distinguish delivery at franchise partners from that of the University. A review of the external examiner reports available confirmed that the standards and quality of provision of foundation degrees, including that of the College, are appropriate. Staff the team met with confirmed that the College has not been required to take any action in response to external examiner reports. However, action taken by the University which affects delivery at the College is communicated through the Link Tutor. External examiner reports are considered by the College's Curriculum Management Committee, which in the past has also included student representatives. Staff also attend University Departmental Assessment Panels which provide a useful opportunity to meet external examiners.

2.45 At the time of the review there was only one external examiner report available for a higher national programme. The report commented on the effective and helpful communication with College staff in enabling the external examiner to fulfil their role during the visit. There were no essential actions or recommendations arising from this report. The Pathway Leader at the time of the external examiner visit has now left the College and other teaching staff were not aware of the report being discussed by the programme team. The Higher Education Coordinator, through the Higher Education Committee, has oversight of all higher education programmes and assured the review team that had any actions been required these would have been addressed through one-to-one discussions with the Pathway Leader. Although there are no explicit recommendations in the report, the accompanying commentary does make reference to a number of areas for further consideration or improvement, such as adopting University practices for quality assurance. During the visit the College acknowledged that this is an area for improvement and that current processes for responding to external examiner reports are relatively informal (see findings under Enhancement). The team **recommends** that by July 2014, the College put in place effective processes for the systematic consideration of external examiner reports at programme and College level.

2.46 Although most students the team met with had not seen external examiner reports, they had a sound understanding of the role of the external examiner in verifying grades

and, for higher national awards, students had been briefed about upcoming visits to the College. Some students were also aware of their work being selected as part of the sample reviewed by an external examiner.

2.47 The team concludes that Expectation B7 is met. However, the College now has increased responsibility for responding to external examiner reports for higher national programmes compared to that for University provision. The recommendation for this Expectation relates to the need to put in place a more effective system for making scrupulous use of external examiner reports, and therefore the team consider the level of risk to be 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**

2.48 The College follows the University's quality assurance processes for foundation degrees and this requires the College to submit a standard Annual Monitoring Report at the end of each academic year. The report considers all pathways collectively, although the College is expected to separate out comments for each pathway within the report. The College's Curriculum Management Committee is responsible for ensuring reports are completed and given appropriate consideration by the College before being forwarded to the University. For higher national programmes, the College uses the same Course Review process as for its further education provision. Pathway Leaders are expected to complete a Learner-Centred Self-Assessment Report (LCSAR) for each pathway which is updated at various points throughout the academic year with a definitive report produced at the end of the year. The Higher Education Coordinator then prepares a Higher Education SAR which summarises the actions across all higher education programmes. This is then used to inform the Higher Education Improvement Plan which addresses the identified areas of weakness. A similar process occurs at College level with the production of a College-wide SAR which informs the Strategic Improvement Plan.

2.49 The team tested this Expectation through a review of Annual Monitoring Reports, LCSARs, Higher Education SARs, College SARs and quality improvement plans. The team met with senior staff, teaching staff and a range of students.

2.50 The College effectively fulfils its responsibilities to the University for adhering to its quality assurance processes for annual monitoring. However, the College's own processes for monitoring and reviewing its higher education programmes are less clear. There is a Course Review cycle which is completed at programme level but this serves as a checklist of actions that need to be completed by staff rather than as an evaluation of the learning and teaching. LCSARs are more evaluative in nature but the team found that these are completed per pathway rather than per programme. Therefore, some higher education programmes are reviewed with other further education programmes under the same pathway without any distinction made in the report between the two types of provision. Given that the number of students studying on each higher education programme is relatively small in comparison to those on further education programmes, the review process does not fully demonstrate how issues affecting higher education in particular are identified and responded to.

2.51 The College was unable to complete the Higher Education SAR for the academic year 2012-13 due to changes in staffing. The team were assured that the Vice Principal for Learning and Standards took responsibility for incorporating any areas requiring attention directly into the College's quality improvement plans. The team found that the Higher Education Plan does identify areas for improvement which are relevant to the College's provision; however, several actions have only recently been identified and the team were unable to establish the progress made since the last academic year (see findings under Enhancement).

2.52 Staff the team met with consider the informal processes for review to be effective in monitoring the academic health of programmes. The Higher Education Coordinator works closely with Pathway Leaders to ensure any issues are discussed with the Vice Principal for Learning and Standards. These one-to-one discussions are seen by the College as the most effective way in which to promptly address issues affecting a higher

education programme. Students the team met with were generally satisfied that where concerns had been raised at programme level, appropriate action had been taken by the College.

2.53 However, the team found limited evidence of how the College uses programme review processes to inform enhancement at College level. The College-wide SAR makes little reference to higher education and focuses almost exclusively on the evaluation of further education programmes. This was also commented on by the previous review team in the last QAA review. The Higher Education Committee is intended to have oversight of all higher education programmes and is the formal channel through which programmes are monitored. Although previous minutes of this Committee refer to the University Annual Monitoring Report, the team were unable to find any reference to the consideration of internal SARs in recent minutes. The team therefore **recommends** that, by July 2015, the College ensure processes for programme monitoring and review are implemented effectively, and that those processes give more focused consideration to the needs of higher education students.

2.54 Overall, the team concludes that the current processes in place for programme monitoring are not fully effective and therefore Expectation B8 is not met. The team consider the lack of separate consideration of higher education as part of the review and monitoring processes to pose a moderate risk to this area.

**Expectation: Not 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: Complaints and student appeals**

**Findings**

2.55 The College follows the University's processes for academic complaints and appeals for foundation degrees as stipulated in the Academic Regulations. Student complaints are also subject to the College's internal Complaints and Compliments Handling and Recording Procedure. This procedure is clear, refers to both informal and formal procedures, and includes specified timeframes for receiving a response at each stage of the process. The procedure also makes explicit reference to the student's right to complain to the degree-awarding body if they are dissatisfied with the College's response. The College also has in place a clear appeals procedure for students studying on higher national programmes; this is documented in the College's Assessment and Internal Quality Assurance Centre Handbook.

2.56 The team tested the evidence for this Expectation through a review of the complaints and appeals processes, programme handbooks and minutes of relevant meetings. The team also met with a range of staff and students to understand how the processes work in practice.

2.57 The College provides clear, comprehensive and easily accessible information on complaints and appeals to all its higher education students. During induction all students are required to complete a checklist which includes information on how to complain or make an appeal. The process is re-affirmed in programme handbooks and students are provided with a web link to the relevant procedure, including University regulations for foundation degree students.

2.58 Students the team met with were aware of the College's complaints procedures; however, most preferred to express any dissatisfaction informally through their tutors. Higher education students only attend the College part-time and find the informal route an effective and responsive way of dealing with individual complaints or problems. Staff also remind students of the processes for appeal during teaching sessions by signposting them to the relevant documentation.

2.59 Information regarding complaints and compliments is reviewed monthly by the Senior Management Team and Governors. This is used as a mechanism to measure and evaluate the College's effectiveness in responding to complaints within the timeframes stipulated in its procedure. Data on complaints is also categorised according to the area of provision it relates to (for example, resources, facilities or staff); this is then used to analyse and respond to trends from one year to the next. However, the team noted that there is no separate analysis of the number and type of complaints made by higher education students.

2.60 Overall, the team concludes that the College has in place fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals. Expectation B9 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others**

## **Findings**

2.61 The College does not have degree awarding powers. The degree-awarding body and awarding organisation are ultimately responsible for the academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities of the awards the College delivers on their behalf. However, the College does have responsibilities for managing arrangements with employers for the delivery of work-based learning, where this contributes to the achievement of intended learning outcomes. Some elements of foundation degrees and higher national programmes require students to undertake work placements. Students are provided with a Work-Based Learning Handbook which sets clear expectations for the placement and explains the link to the programme. Each placement is governed by a written agreement between the placement provider and the College and both students and employers are provided with a set of standard pro-forma to complete during the placement.

2.62 The review team looked in detail at the Work-Based Learning Handbook and met with teaching staff, support staff and students to understand how work placements are managed in practice.

2.63 Clear information is provided to both students and employers on their roles and responsibilities for work-based learning. Most higher education students are already working prior to joining the College and are therefore able to use their employment to fulfil the work-based learning elements of the programme. Students the team met with who had completed placements were positive about their experiences and their usefulness in consolidating knowledge gained in the classroom. Students are encouraged to set individual action plans prior to embarking on a placement and to complete reflective logs to chart their progress during the placement.

2.64 Teaching staff set contextualised assessment tasks which require students to apply their learning to the workplace. Employers support students in their placements and are asked to provide developmental feedback for the students' personal benefit, but teaching staff retain responsibility for marking any assessments for work-based learning modules. These assessments are subject to the same marking and moderation processes as other tasks.

2.65 Overall, the team concludes that the College has in place effective processes for managing and monitoring work-based learning opportunities provided through arrangements with local employers. Expectation B10 is therefore met and the level of risk 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**

2.66 The College does not offer research degrees and Expectation B11 is therefore not applicable.

## Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.67 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. In summary, all but two of the ten applicable expectations in this area have been met, with the associated level of risk low in most cases.

2.68 The team identified five recommendations in the areas of programme approval, student engagement, assessment, external examining and programme review. For both of the Expectations that are not met (B5 and B8), the College has in place processes but these are not fully effective in meeting the Expectations. The team have made a separate recommendation under each of the two Expectations, both of which pose a moderate risk due to the need to strengthen the current quality assurance processes.

2.69 Two other recommendations also pose a moderate risk but in these instances the Expectations (B1 and B7) are met as the College is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities to its degree-awarding body and awarding organisation. The recommendations for these Expectations relate to formalising and improving College processes for meeting the Expectations more fully. The fifth recommendation presents a low risk to Expectation B6 and relates to the need to establish written documentation for assessment boards, of which the College is already aware.

2.70 In reaching its judgement, the team gave consideration to the nature of the recommendations in this area and concludes that they do not, individually or collectively, pose any serious risk to the quality of student learning opportunities. Although the team have identified a number of areas for improvement, they are satisfied that overall the College's management of this area reflects the criteria for a 'meets UK expectations' outcome. The review team concludes, therefore, that the quality of student learning opportunities **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 website is the main source of information for the College's external audience, including prospective students. The College's Head of Marketing is responsible for ensuring information on the website is kept up to date and accessible. Higher education students studying at the College are provided a programme handbook, module guides, assignment briefs and access to the College's policies and procedures through the VLE. For foundation degrees, all handbooks and guides are approved by the University before the information is disseminated to students, as set out in the Academic Agreement. For higher national awards, Pathway Leaders are expected to produce a handbook using a standard College-wide template. Module guides and assignment briefs are prepared by teaching staff. The College also has a range of policies, procedures and handbooks which it provides to its staff for use as internal reference points. The College makes use of an electronic document control system to ensure policies are reviewed annually with changes tracked through version numbers.

3.2 The team reviewed the College's website, and analysed a range of handbooks, policies and procedures. The team also browsed the College's VLE and met with a range of staff and students.

3.3 Information on the website is clear and accessible, enabling students to make an informed choice. There is a designated higher education section with a separate webpage for each programme which provides a brief overview, including information on attendance patterns. The College also makes available a printed prospectus which provides information for part-time students considering studying at the College. Students the team met with were satisfied with the quality of the information they received prior to their enrolment and found the website useful and easy to navigate.

3.4 Students the team met with confirmed that they receive a programme handbook at the start of the academic year and an individual module guide before commencing a new module. Students find assignment briefs particularly helpful in guiding them in their assessment, and this is supplemented with verbal information provided by teaching staff. These students are also able to access relevant programme information, including handbooks, session notes, College policies and procedures, through the VLE.

3.5 The team found that despite the College issuing a standard template, there are some inconsistencies in the style, content and level of detail in programme handbooks. The Director who has oversight for a particular pathway is responsible for liaising with programme staff to ensure programme-level documentation is fit for purpose and accurate. However, there is no formal process for checking the consistency of information across different pathways. This is the first academic year in which the higher national programmes are being delivered and the College recognises the need for greater consistency in programme documentation. The team **recommends** therefore that by July 2014, the College formalise the process for the approval and review of programme information to ensure the quality and consistency of handbooks.

3.6 Overall, the team concludes that information produced by the College is fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible; Expectation C is therefore met. Students are provided with appropriate written information about their programme and the inconsistencies in handbooks pose a low risk to this Expectation.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

3.7 In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information the College produces about its provision, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. The team identified one recommendation in this area and this relates to the need to amend documentation to achieve greater consistency across the College's higher education provision. Therefore, the team consider the recommendation to pose a low risk to the effective management of this area. The review team concludes, therefore, that the quality of information produced 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 has a Higher Education Strategy which describes its approach to developing its higher education provision and for improving the quality assurance of programmes. There is also a Strategic Plan which sets out a number of aims and objectives linked to key performance indicators. However, the Plan predominantly focuses on the enhancement of further education and there is little reference to higher education. The College also has a number of improvement plans at pathway and College level; these identify actions in response to specific areas of provision requiring improvement. The College's Higher Education Committee, whose membership includes representatives from each programme, is responsible for oversight of higher education within the College and provides an opportunity to identify and disseminate good practice across programmes.

4.2 The team tested this Expectation through a review of College-level strategies, SARs and associated quality improvement plans. The team also met with a range of staff and students.

4.3 The team found that although the College has in place processes that could enable enhancement, these are not fully effective due to a weakness in the College's oversight of higher education. Since the last review, there have been a number of significant changes to the College's deliberative structure for managing higher education. The Academic Board is now defunct and it has been replaced by the Learning Management Team and Staff Voice. However, the minutes of both these meetings do not reflect the roles and responsibilities previously undertaken by the Academic Board.

4.4 The Higher Education Committee provides the only opportunity for higher education staff to meet collectively, but since the termination of the University partnership the Committee has not been able to fulfil its roles and responsibilities. The Committee is not well attended by academic staff and minutes of meetings do not reflect discussions around the identification or sharing of good practice. Most teaching staff the team met with had not attended recent Committee meetings due to clashes with teaching commitments. During the visit, the College acknowledged that the Higher Education Committee is not functioning effectively and that greater priority needs to be given to the management of higher education within the College. However, concrete plans for implementing a revised structure for managing higher education were not in existence at the time of the review visit. The team therefore **recommends** that, by July 2015, the College establish effective oversight of all higher education programmes to enable deliberate steps to be taken at provider level to enhance the learning opportunities for higher education students.

4.5 The Higher Education Strategy identifies areas for improvement at College level but there is limited evidence of how the Strategy is implemented, monitored and evaluated. During discussions with staff it became apparent that the College considers its Higher Education Improvement Plan to be the main instrument for driving College-level enhancements. The Plan is not seen as a static document but one that is continually reviewed and updated. Actions are assigned to individuals and progress monitored through regular one-to-one meetings with the responsible individual's line manager. The version of the Plan available to the team during the visit identified a number of new actions which had not been included in the version submitted prior to the visit. The team was therefore unable

to confirm the progress made with implementing actions within the Plan. Also, there currently does not appear to be a process for the holistic consideration or evaluation of the Plan through a committee or group meeting. It was therefore unclear to the team how the College has collective oversight of the Plan at a strategic level or how the Plan contributes to enhancement.

4.6 External examiner reports are responded to by individual members of academic staff through discussions with the Higher Education Coordinator. Although the College has not been required to act on any essential recommendations arising from the one external examiner visit that has taken place, there is limited evidence of the College giving full consideration to the comments in external examiner reports. At College level, there is currently no mechanism for identifying the general issues and themes arising from external examiner reports, which could inform enhancement activities (see findings under Expectation B7).

4.7 The College obtains student feedback through informal channels and there is evidence of actions being taken to respond to the student voice. For example, the College has attempted to establish a separate learning space for higher education students. However, improvements in the College are generally driven by concerns raised by individual students rather than the collective higher education student voice. The College acknowledged that higher education is currently a minority voice due to the lack of participation in engagement structures by part-time students. Developing more effective mechanisms for engaging with higher education students collectively could allow them to inform enhancement initiatives (see findings under Expectation B5).

4.8 The College uses programme review and monitoring processes to identify areas for improvement at programme level. However, SARs consider further and higher education programmes collectively within the same pathway and it is unclear how actions arising from these reports enable the enhancement of higher education (see findings under Expectation B8). Due to the small number of higher education students at the College, informal discussions initiated by Pathway Leaders lead to local improvements to programmes. Although improvements of this kind benefit students studying on a particular programme, effective mechanisms are not in place to support the dissemination of such practice across higher education programmes.

4.9 In summary, while the team recognise that higher education is only a small part of the College's provision, there is still a need to give sufficient priority to enhancing the quality of learning opportunities for these students. The team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the need to establish effective oversight of higher education poses a moderate risk to this area.

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

## Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.10 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. The College has recently undergone a significant number of changes to both its management structure and higher education provision and this has impacted on the College's ability to give adequate emphasis to the enhancement of higher education.

4.11 The one recommendation in this area is concerned with a weakness in the College's operation of its governance structure as it relates to quality enhancement. The team consider this to pose a moderate risk which without action could lead to serious problems over time with the management of this area. Three recommendations made under the area of quality of student learning opportunities in regards to student engagement, external examining and programme review (Expectations B5, B7 and B8) are also of relevance to the judgement on enhancement and contribute to the College's shortcomings in meeting this Expectation.

4.12 Although during the visit the College acknowledged the lack of sufficient emphasis on higher education at College level, there were no concrete plans in place to address this weakness. Therefore, the team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.



## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The College is strategically focused on serving the needs of the local community and generating a greater range of vocational pathways in higher education. There is a clear Community and Employer Partnerships Vision and Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Strategy which outline the College's commitment to supporting its students in gaining employment or progressing with existing employment. However, the strategies are College-wide and it was unclear to the team how higher education-specific opportunities are distinguished.

5.2 The Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Strategy is focused on activities and projects, and contexts where learners work together to define a problem, identify a solution and take creative, effective action. One example of an initiative arising from the Strategy is the opportunity for photography students to produce a website to display and sell their work. However, it was unclear to the review team how these activities are consistently embedded across all higher education programmes at the College, and most initiatives appear to be directed towards further education students.

5.3 The majority of part-time higher education students at the College are in paid employment and find that their programme enables them to embed their learning in the workplace. Most teaching staff are engaged in professional work related to their area of teaching and this allows them to bring real-life examples into the classroom. Students the team met value the knowledge and experience of their tutors and their ability to support them in developing graduate attributes.

5.4 At programme level, teaching staff also work with employers to ensure the knowledge and skills transferred to students are relevant and up to date. For example, in one programme staff have adopted the same software package as that used by most local employers. In another programme the range of optional units was informed by local employment trends.

5.5 The College does not have a dedicated careers service but advice is provided informally through teaching staff. Most students gain employment and progression opportunities through their own initiative but find programme staff a useful source of information.

5.6 In summary, the College has taken steps to support student employability and collaborates with local employers to expose students to appropriate employment opportunities. However, the initiatives are not always consistently embedded across all higher education programmes.

## 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](http://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/aboutus/glossary](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/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.

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