



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of ICON College of Technology and Management Ltd

July 2017

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at ICON College of Technology and Management Ltd. The review took place from 11 to 14 July 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Stuart Cannell
- Mr Mike Coulson
- Emeritus Professor Diane Meehan.

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

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

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

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#)<sup>2</sup> and explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).<sup>3</sup> For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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

<sup>2</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education).

## Key findings

### Judgements

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision.

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

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice**.

- The effective integration of the virtual learning environment into course delivery which enhances student engagement with the learning process (Expectation B3).
- The extensive pastoral support and guidance available to students from a wide range of backgrounds which enables them to develop their personal and academic potential (Expectation B4).
- The comprehensive and systematic representation structure which empowers students to contribute to the development and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations**.

By November 2017:

- ensure that all staff involved in making admissions decisions have up to date knowledge, are appropriately trained and are sufficiently experienced to carry out their roles (Expectation B2)
- establish effective oversight of the admissions interview process in order to ensure fair and consistent conduct across all courses (Expectation B2)
- ensure that the process for remarking of student work, and the circumstances under which it takes place, are clearly documented and that the first assessor is fully involved in the decision-making process (Expectation B6)
- undertake a formal review of assessment practices within Health and Social Care in order to establish in what ways they have contributed to the essential actions and recommendations identified by the external examiner (Expectation B6)
- take steps to ensure that the model for formative assessment adequately supports the development of independent learners, particularly at level 5 (Expectation B6)
- establish and put into effect a clearly-documented process to ensure that arrangements for the approval and monitoring of all work placements at the required level are implemented securely and managed effectively (Expectation B10).

By January 2018:

- strengthen support for the development of students' skills in academic writing (Expectation B4).

By July 2018:

- establish and implement a process for the periodic review of courses (Expectation B8).

### **Affirmation of action being taken**

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action already being taken to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to students:

- The steps being taken to establish and implement processes for annual unit and course reviews (Expectation B8).

## About the provider

ICON College of Technology and Management Ltd (the College) is a private college offering programmes leading to the award of Higher National qualifications from its awarding organisation, Pearson Education. Its aim is to offer higher education at affordable fees, making university education accessible via Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes, and to offer high levels of support to ensure that all students reach their full potential. The College operates from premises on the east edge of the City of London, in a neighbourhood characterised by the presence of a large South Asian community.

The College has a total of 644 students enrolled on five HND programmes, Business, Computing and System Development, Health and Social Care, Hospitality Management, and Travel and Tourism Management. Of the 41 members of academic staff, eight are full-time, including the Principal and Vice-Principal: the remainder are employed on a part-time basis.

Key challenges faced by the College include its attendance, retention and completion rates. The College acknowledges the challenge of achieving student completion within the normal programme duration of two years and has been taking steps intended to address this issue. Other challenges acknowledged by the College include ensuring a successful introduction of the National Student Survey and of the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey in 2017. Additionally, the College is reviewing its provision with a view to responding to current uncertainty concerning the status of students from elsewhere in the European Union following the UK's intended departure from the Union in 2019.

The Review for Educational Oversight of the College by QAA in 2013 resulted in positive outcomes. The report of the review draws attention to one feature of good practice as well as two advisable and eight desirable recommendations. Since 2013 the College has made good progress with addressing the advisable recommendations. While it has also addressed the desirable recommendations, its progress in this respect is relatively recent and the effectiveness of its actions is not yet clear. The outcome of the most recent monitoring visit to the College, in June 2015, was that further improvement is required with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision.

During the review, the team investigated a Concern raised through QAA's Concerns Scheme. The Concern related to aspects of the College's provision in respect of Expectation B2 and Expectation B6 of the Quality Code. As a result of investigations during the review the aspect of the Concern in relation to Expectation B2 was not upheld, while the aspect in relation to Expectation B6 was upheld. Further details can be found under Expectations B2 and B6, and in the summary section of the quality of student learning opportunities.

## Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Findings

1.1 As the sole awarding organisation for all courses offered by the College, Pearson Education (Pearson) is responsible for meeting the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). All the HND courses run by the College are at level 5 of either the Regulated Qualifications Framework or the Qualifications and Credit Framework.

1.2 Pearson sets the academic standards for its programmes and ensures the maintenance of these through regular reports from its external examiners and through its Annual Management Review (AMR). It also provides course specifications, which include unit contents, learning outcomes, modes of assessment and grading criteria for each level. Pearson is responsible for defining the learning outcomes within the programme specifications of all courses.

1.3 The College has customised Pearson's course specifications to provide appropriate

course handbooks aligned to its provision.

1.4 These arrangements, if implemented securely, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.5 The review team considered Pearson's approval documentation for all courses run by the College, and read course and quality assurance documentation produced by Pearson and by the College as well as minutes of appropriate academic committees. The team also met the Principal and members of senior management, including those of the Academic Board.

1.6 The Academic Board, which replaced the Quality Assurance Board from January 2017, takes responsibility within the College for the oversight and maintenance of academic standards. The terms of reference for the Academic Board state that it meets at least four times per year, although in practice it normally meets monthly. The College has developed a comprehensive Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manual (QAEM) and a range of course handbooks to support it. The QAEM, which is made available to all staff in hard copy and on the virtual learning environment (VLE), is aligned to the Quality Code and contains details of the terms of reference and the composition of all academic committees, as well as staff and student handbooks and other documents related to the College's quality assurance processes.

1.7 Pearson ensures that it fulfils its responsibilities. The College has put an appropriate academic structure in place to maintain effective oversight of academic standards. The Expectation is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.8 Pearson, as the sole awarding organisation for the College, is responsible for the transparency and comprehensiveness of the academic frameworks and regulations. The College is responsible for using these effectively to underpin quality assurance and manage and inform course delivery, as detailed in the QAEM.

1.9 The College revised its formal committee structure in January 2017, to enable academic committees to function more effectively. The terms of reference, composition and responsibilities of each committee are defined within the QAEM. Key changes in the structure from January 2017 are that the Board of Governors now functions in an advisory capacity as the Advisory Board, and the Quality Assurance Board has been replaced by the Academic Board.

1.10 There is an Assessment Board for each department, which is responsible to Academic Board for awards made to students, resubmissions, academic misconduct, progressions and referrals, academic appeals and consideration of external examiner reports. The College has established an internal verification procedure, described in the QAEM. The Academic Board is responsible for ensuring the effectiveness of the internal verification process. Heads of Departments, in conjunction with the Head of Quality Enhancement, are responsible for the oversight, design and setting of assessment tasks.

1.11 These arrangements, if implemented securely, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.12 The review team considered a range of quality assurance and course documentation supplied by the College, including Annual Management Review reports and external examiners' reports. The team met senior managers and held a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Advisory Board.

1.13 The Academic Board meets more frequently than the Quality Assurance Board did previously and, as the overarching academic authority within the College, takes effective overall responsibility for overseeing the management of academic standards and quality of teaching and learning for all programmes, as well as ensuring that the requirements of the College and its awarding organisations and bodies are fulfilled. Although the Academic Board has a significant number of areas of responsibility which it covers at its monthly meetings, senior managers confirmed that the academic reporting structure is functioning effectively and that there are no current plans to make any changes to this. The recently-appointed chair of the Advisory Board confirmed that he intends to take steps to ensure that the Academic Board and the College's other committees are fulfilling their responsibilities for management of the quality of provision in a satisfactory manner.

1.14 Pearson's Academic Management Review examines the College's provision with a view to confirming that the College maintains effective academic quality and standards in line with Pearson's requirements. External examiners' reports confirm that the College's assessment processes are appropriate and meet Pearson's requirements for awarding credit and qualifications.



1.15 Minutes of departmental Assessment Board meetings demonstrate appropriate formal consideration of reports from the external examiner, although in practice actions are normally reported rather than discussed and agreed.

1.16 Assignment briefs are written by module tutors and reviewed by the Head of Department at a continuing professional development (CPD) workshop standardisation meeting to ensure that academic standards are appropriately maintained. Positive comments in external examiners' reports regarding the suitability of assignment briefs demonstrate the effectiveness of this process.

1.17 The Expectation is met, as there are transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations in place to govern the awarding of academic credit and qualifications. As there is an appropriate academic structure in place to effectively address issues arising from the regular visits by Pearson, the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.18 It is the responsibility of the awarding organisation to create and provide programme specifications for each of the courses. The definitive record of each course is set out within the course handbook, which is subject to approval by Academic Board before being given to students during the induction process and being uploaded onto the VLE.

1.19 The procedure by which the College updates all information, including information contained within the Course Handbook, is included within the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manual. The Senior Management Team has oversight of this process and of the change control procedure governing amendments to documentation.

1.20 These arrangements, if implemented securely, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.21 The review team examined all appropriate evidence including all of the course handbooks and programme specifications. The team met senior staff, teaching staff and students to confirm the availability of course handbooks and that the process for making changes to these documents was being followed correctly.

1.22 The review team found that all programme specifications and course handbooks are fit for purpose. Information held within course handbooks includes: module descriptors and their respective credit; information on the awarding organisation and award title; admission requirements; objectives of the course; external reference points; learning outcomes; assessment strategies and support available. Students whom the review team met found the programme specifications and course handbooks to be accessible and contained the appropriate information needed.

1.23 Although the procedure to approve changes has been established too recently to have been used for the approval of changes to Course Handbooks, it has been used to approve changes to public facing information. The procedure in place is secure as it has appropriate senior management oversight and requires two members of senior management to sign off the proposed amendment.

1.24 The review team found that the College has in place the processes and procedures to allow them to maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they offer, in collaboration with Pearson. Therefore, this Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.25 Responsibility for the formal approval of the College's courses and for gaining recognition from the appropriate regulatory body rests with Pearson. Approval is granted for a specific period, typically five years, after which re-approval is required. Pearson's approval processes ensure that courses meet UK threshold academic standards and are fully aligned with the requirements of the Quality Code. Pearson has its own assessment framework and the College's assessment policies, procedures and regulations align with its requirements.

1.26 These arrangements, if implemented securely, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.27 The review team examined documentation including Pearson and College monitoring reports, course and unit specifications, student and course handbooks, external examiner reports, minutes of relevant meetings and the QAEM. In addition, the team held meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, students and their representatives and held a telephone conversation with the chair of the Advisory Board.

1.28 The College's responsibilities in relation to course design and approval are limited. Its internal course approval process, set out in its QAEM, is used to agree and approve the selection of appropriate units and pathways for a proposed course. A Course Review Team is established with responsibility for ensuring that the course receives approval from the awarding organisation, Pearson. Course Review teams, which included staff and student, alumni and employer representatives, were recently convened to address the move of the HND Courses in Business and Computing from the Qualifications and Credit Framework to the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). The selection of units and pathways is approved by the Academic Board (and previously Quality Assurance Board) prior to the College seeking approval from Pearson.

1.29 The College adheres to the requirements of its awarding organisation in relation to course approval, thereby ensuring that academic standards are set at an appropriate level. While the College has limited responsibility for course design and approval the review team found that its internal course approval process, which includes student, alumni and employer representation, is fit for purpose. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.30 Pearson's approval processes ensure that courses meet UK threshold academic standards and that courses and units are aligned with the requirements set out in the FHEQ. Assessment is conducted according to the awarding organisation's published expectations. The College's regulatory framework includes assessment regulations based on those of Pearson. External examiners are appointed by Pearson to verify that learning outcomes have been met and to comment on alignment with national standards.

1.31 These arrangements, if implemented securely, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.32 The review team considered a range of policies and procedures, Pearson's and the College's assessment regulations, external examiners' reports, student assignments and examples of the formative and summative feedback provided by staff to students. The review team read minutes of relevant committees and assessment boards. It also held meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, with students and their representatives and held a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Advisory Board.

1.33 Programme and unit specifications are made available to students through course handbooks. Unit specifications provided by Pearson set out the learning outcomes to be assessed and the associated assessment criteria which describe how tutors determine whether students have achieved the prescribed learning outcomes.

1.34 Assignments for all modules, except for the RQF Research Project, are written and internally verified by College staff; external examiners verify a sample of assignments. Assignments are clearly linked to learning outcomes and their associated assessment criteria; assignments also provide opportunities for students to attain higher grades of merit or distinction based on satisfying contextualised assessment criteria. Students confirmed that that they were clear about what is expected of them in relation to assessment including how to achieve a pass, merit or distinction grade.

1.35 In line with Pearson's requirements, students must satisfy all published assessment criteria under all learning outcomes to gain a pass grade for a unit. However, the review team noted that in an example of summative feedback the student had gained a merit grade for the unit although the feedback indicated that not all the assessment criteria had been satisfied at pass level. The College explained that this must have been due to a typographical error in recording assessment outcomes and had been identified and corrected through the internal verification process (see also Expectation B6).

1.36 External examiners are appointed by Pearson; each examiner makes regular visits to the College and submits an annual report. Where the external examiner considers standards are being met, certification of learners is released. Where standards are not met,

recommendations from the external examiner must be resolved before certification of learners is released. External examiners and the awarding organisation generally comment positively on the College's management of academic standards in their reports.

1.37 The review team concludes that overall the College adheres to Pearson's requirements to ensure that the award of credit and qualifications is made when achievement of learning outcomes is demonstrated through assessment. The example of assessment feedback where a merit grade had apparently been awarded despite not all assessment criteria having been satisfied at pass level is discussed further in Expectation B6. External examining arrangements ensure that UK threshold standards and the awarding organisation's standards are achieved. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.38 Pearson reviews the College's provision annually through its AMR process, and the recently implemented Academic Programme Monitoring Review (APMR). External examiners visit regularly to ensure that UK threshold standards are achieved and academic quality and standards are maintained. Pearson periodically reviews its courses and is currently moving its qualifications from the Qualifications and Credit Framework to the Regulated Qualifications Framework.

1.39 In response to the awarding organisation's requirement for the College to routinely monitor and review its courses, the College has developed semester-based unit and annual course review processes which are set out in its QAEM. The purposes of which are to enable reflection on the operation of units and courses with a view to maintaining standards and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning as well as to identifying good practice. A College Annual Report is also compiled. The College uses a range of data such as student progression, completion and achievement data to support the maintenance of standards. There is currently no College periodic review process in place.

1.40 These arrangements, if implemented securely, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.41 The review team read a range of documentation relating to the College's monitoring and review procedures including Pearson's and the College's annual monitoring reports, the minutes of relevant committees and the College's QAEM. In addition, the team held meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, with students and their representatives, and had a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Advisory Board.

1.42 Pearson reports annually on the College's provision and its management of standards through its AMR process. The AMR reports for 2016 and 2017 confirm that UK threshold academic standards are being achieved and that the required standards are being maintained. Pearson has also recently introduced the APMR process which requires the College to complete a report to a standard template reflecting on the previous teaching year; areas to be covered include academic standards where the provider is asked to comment on the most recent AMR. As the most recent AMR had not been received at the time the 2015-16 APMR was written, this section was not completed by the College. Individual provider APMR reports will feed into a summary, anonymised report expected to be published by Pearson in September 2017

1.43 The College's recently introduced internal monitoring processes are aligned with the APMR process. The Unit Review process draws on a range of evidence including tutor evaluation and achievement reports, peer observations, external examiners' reports, the periodic tutor performance audits and the College's student survey. At the time of the review visit one semester of the unit review process had been implemented and the Annual Course Review which is intended to reflect on course performance from the previous year had yet to be implemented. As previously noted, the College does not have an internal periodic review process but has expressed an intention to introduce one in the future (see also Expectation

B8).

1.44 The College pays close attention to a range of data to ensure that UK threshold standards are being achieved and that standards are being maintained. The College monitors information on student progression, completion, achievement and equality and diversity through its Annual Report which is a comprehensive document and forms the basis of the College action plan, overseen by the Academic Board. Assessment Boards monitor academic standards and consider a range of qualitative and quantitative measures including student progression, completion and achievement data, equality and diversity data and external examiners' reports. The Academic Board also monitors student progression and achievement and requires departments to take action to improve where figures are deemed unsatisfactory. For example, having acknowledged that its student non-continuation, completion and pass rates are not satisfactory, the College has taken actions which have been effective in achieving an improvement in this data (see also Enhancement).

1.45 The College fulfils Pearson's requirements in relation to monitoring and review through the consideration of and response to external examiners' reports, and effectively utilises a range of data to ensure standards are being maintained. It has also recently introduced an annual monitoring process which has yet to be fully implemented; there is no internal periodic review process in place. These gaps in monitoring and review processes are discussed further in Expectation B8. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.46 The chief external input to the process of setting and maintaining academic standards arises from Pearson which is responsible for the design and approval of modules and qualifications. The College selects the units required for each programme it offers from the list of those available from Pearson, as appropriate. Pearson ensures, through regular reports from its external examiners and its AMR process, that the College's provision is aligned with UK threshold academic standards and that the College's internal procedures and practices consistently meet its own standards. In addition, following re-organisation of its committee structure from January 2017, the College has appointed an Advisory Board, previously the Board of Governors, to provide advice on governance and academic matters.

1.47 The arrangements that are in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.48 The review team considered the QAEM and minutes of deliberative academic committees. The team also met senior staff and held a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Advisory Board.

1.49 The process works effectively in practice. In regard to the HND Business course at RQF level 5, which replaced the previous HND Business course at QCF level 5 from September 2016, staff were notified of the impending changes and a working group convened. The Course Review meeting proposed the modules to be delivered and the introduction of the new course was approved by the Quality Assurance Board and Board of Governors in October 2016.

1.50 The Board of Governors was actively involved in revising the academic committee structure. As a result of this revision, the Board was replaced by the Advisory Board which consists of seven external specialists, all of whom have recent relevant experience within higher education, and including an alumnus of the College. The Advisory Board provides effective oversight of the College's provision both through representation on Academic Board and receipt of minutes of academic meetings, and in relation to the higher education sector more generally. It monitors student progression, achievement and performance, provides appropriate advice and takes an active interest in the furtherance and achievements of the College. A member of the Advisory Board has been closely involved with formulating the QAEM and explaining it to staff at a workshop.

1.51 The College has made effective use of both an employer's representative and an alumnus within the Course Review Team considering the changes to the new HND in Computing at RQF level 5.

1.52 There are robust processes in place to ensure that external and independent expertise contributes effectively to the maintenance of academic standards. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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



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

1.53 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations for this judgement area are met with a low level of risk.

1.54 The College's arrangements with Pearson enable it to ensure that academic standards continue to be met. There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations relating to this judgement area.

1.55 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

**Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.**

### **Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval**

#### **Findings**

2.1 The College's courses are designed and developed by Pearson and delivered by the College according to the course specifications which are provided to students through Course Handbooks. Courses are typically approved for a period of five years following which the College seeks re-approval from Pearson. As noted in Expectation A3.1, while the College's role in the development and approval of courses is limited it has some flexibility over the units it chooses to deliver and has developed a course approval process to ensure that the selection of units and pathways is appropriate. The College is also responsible for ensuring that appropriate resources, both human and physical are in place and for developing learning materials and a learning and teaching strategy.

2.2 These arrangements, if implemented securely, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.3 The review team examined documentation including Pearson and College monitoring reports, course and unit specifications, course handbooks, minutes of relevant meetings and the College's QAEM. In addition, the team held meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, and with students and their representatives, and held a telephone conversation with the chair of the Advisory Board.

2.4 When a new course is being introduced a Course Review Team is established by the College with responsibility for ensuring that the course receives approval from the awarding body. Course Review Teams were recently convened to address the move of the HND Courses in Business and Computing from the Qualifications and Credit Framework to the Regulated Qualifications Framework; these teams comprised staff and student, alumni and employer representatives. Support, including time and any necessary resources, is provided for staff involved in Course Review Teams. In keeping with its mission, the College ensures that during this process units are selected to increase the possibility of enhancing the employability of students after graduation and to ensure that there is a market demand for the pathways selected. Feedback from alumni based on their experience of what content has been helpful for them in their further study or careers also feeds into the choice of units. The selection of units and pathways is approved by Academic Board (and previously Quality Assurance Board) prior to the College seeking approval from Pearson.

2.5 The College also has in place processes for modification to courses and for course withdrawal which are set out in its QAEM. The College has not yet used its course withdrawal/closure process. Apart from the process described above in relation to course approval and re-approval there are also limited opportunities for the College to modify courses; the College may seek permission from Pearson to replace an optional unit with another option but has not yet chosen to do so.

2.6 Pearson is responsible for the design and development of the College's courses. In relation to the selection of optional units and pathways the College has in place an

effective process which involves staff and student, alumni and employer representatives; there is formal sign off through the College's Academic Board. Hence the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education**

**Findings**

2.7 The College has the responsibility to recruit, select and admit students, as agreed by Pearson. The College has an Admissions Policy that outlines the processes and procedures that are followed during the admissions process which is overseen by the Director of Admissions. Applicants must have either a relevant level 3 qualification, or a level 2 qualification and relevant work experience or substantial work experience related to the field of proposed study. The original certificates that prove prior education qualifications are subject to inspection by the College before an offer is made. International qualifications are checked through UK NARIC to ensure their authenticity. An applicant's evidence of prior work experience must be provided on company-headed paper and is sometimes checked by the admissions team to ensure the authenticity of the previous employment experience.

2.8 Once an application is processed by the admissions team and the relevant paperwork has been submitted, the Head of Department conducts an interview with the applicant, lasting typically 30 minutes. If the Head of Department is unavailable, the Principal, Director of Admissions or another member of academic staff will conduct the interview. The interview is conducted by a single member of staff.

2.9 In relation to the Concern, the review team also considered documentary evidence and discussed the issues raised with staff. The first of the two aspects of the Concern alleged that students are not at an academic level sufficient for study on the programme and in particular that students' level of English language is inadequate. This aspect of the Concern is considered in this Expectation, and is also touched upon in Expectation B6.

2.10 Students who do not have a formal qualification to demonstrate capability in English are required to undertake the College's in-house written English language test before an offer is made. This test was introduced in January 2015. Almost all of the students whom the review team met had taken this test. Additionally the interviewer will make a judgement of the applicant's capability in spoken English. All applications are subject to final approval by the Principal and the Director of Admissions.

2.11 Applicants who are not successful in receiving a place on their desired course can appeal against the decision through the procedure that is outlined within the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manual. This information is not formally conveyed through the rejection letter, but is available on the College's website. There have been no appeals made against the outcome of the admissions process in the previous three years.

2.12 The majority of students that are enrolled at the College have been recruited through the use of an agent. The procedures for selecting and recruiting agents are outlined within the QAEM. The Director of Admissions is responsible for the selection, recruitment and contracting of agents involved in student recruitment.

2.13 The lack of formal training for staff involved in the interviewing of students and the absence of oversight of the interview process constitute shortcomings in the College's admissions process. Nevertheless, the College's arrangements, if implemented securely,

would be sufficient to meet the Expectation.

2.14 The review team examined evidence relating to the admission of students including evidence relating to the conduct of the in-house English language test. Further scrutiny was given to the interview process and the information that students receive. The team explored the implementation of the College's procedures and the provision of information about them in meetings with teaching staff, senior staff, professional support staff and students.

2.15 Students expressed satisfaction with the admissions process in general, and with the English language test, affirming that it is robust and it is usually taken in a group, with exam-like conditions in effect. The test was created by a member of staff with professional experience in English-language tuition and testing who is also responsible for the marking of test papers. On occasions when she is unable to carry out marking in person, she is responsible for subsequently confirming the marking carried out by another member of staff.

2.16 The review team found that the arrangements for the selection, recruitment and management of agents are secure. The Director of Admissions monitors the activity of each agent and provides feedback in regards to the calibre of students they are recruiting. If an approved agent recruits fewer than ten students within a six month period their contract may be terminated and if they wish to work with the College again they must re-apply for a new contract.

2.17 The College does not provide formal or systematic training for staff involved in the admissions process, including those who undertake interviews of applicants. Some senior members of staff have attended externally-organised workshops, conferences and seminars relating to the Prevent strategy and to student loan policy. Staff stated that informal training occurs between the academic staff member and the Head of Department to ensure compliance with the College's Admission Policy. However, the training offered to members of staff involved in the admissions process is limited and the College does not systematically ensure that all such staff are suitably trained for their roles. The review team **recommends** that the College should ensure that all staff involved in making admissions decisions have up-to-date knowledge, are appropriately trained and are sufficiently experienced to carry out their roles.

2.18 The College does not undertake systematic oversight of the interviewing of applicants. It has identified general lines of questions that interviewers are expected to pursue with applicants, but there are no pre-defined questions. Interviewers are also expected to describe the College's terms and conditions to applicants. Interviews are conducted only by a single member of staff. In considering staff development for the admissions process, the College confirmed that the review of interview arrangements takes place only informally. The College has no secure arrangement to ensure that the conduct of interviews is fair and consistent, and appeared not to be fully aware of potential issues arising from this shortcoming. The team **recommends** that the College should establish effective oversight of the admissions interview process in order to ensure fair and consistent conduct across all courses.

2.19 Based on the evidence provided and discussion with the College the review team concludes that the Concern is not upheld in relation to Expectation B2. The College has adequate arrangements for the assessment of English language prior to entry. Despite the shortcomings in the oversight of the interview process, the review team found no evidence that students had been admitted without prior qualifications or experience at a suitable level.

2.20 The College's Admissions Policy and associated procedures are broadly adequate. However, the lack of oversight of the arrangements for interviewing applicants and weaknesses in the arrangements for training staff involved in admissions decisions constitute shortcomings in the rigour with which the College's procedures are applied.

The Expectation is met and the level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.21 The College's arrangements for effective learning and teaching are underpinned by the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, which is contained within the QAEM.

2.22 The Advisory Board provides advice to the Senior Management Team on the resourcing of academic courses and provision of study support, as defined in the QAEM. The Senior Management Team is responsible for ensuring that resources are carefully managed in support of the College's academic goals, including oversight of staffing and consideration to requests for learning resources. The Teaching and Learning Resources Committee is responsible for keeping the resources required to implement the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy up to date. This includes the library, IT resources and the content and development of the VLE.

2.23 The College's Staff Development Policy provides a framework for staff to learn and develop within their current role and to prepare for their future career development. This includes performance reviews, the tutor performance audit, the peer observation process, regular CPD workshops for academic staff, as well as facilitating research and appropriate scholarly activity by academic staff.

2.24 These arrangements, if implemented securely, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.25 The review team read minutes of committee meetings and CPD workshops, policies and procedures and other documents supplied by the College and met Heads of Departments, senior managers, teachers, professional support staff and students. The team also received written evidence from Pearson's Centre Quality Manager, on behalf of the external examiner for Health and Social Care who was unavailable.

2.26 The implementation of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy is monitored by the Head of Quality and Enhancement, who reports to Academic Board. The strategy is made available to staff in hard copy and via the VLE, and is reviewed annually by the Academic Board: an updated version was approved in May 2017. The Head of Quality and Enhancement ensures its implementation by teachers through his regular visits to classes.

2.27 There is a rigorous selection process for recruiting new teaching staff, which includes a panel interview and presentation. New staff receive an induction from their Head of Department, participate in a CPD workshop before the start of the semester to ensure a grounding in college policies and processes, and are mentored by their Head of Department and the Head of Quality and Enhancement. Although a visit in January 2017 by Pearson's Centre Quality Manager recommended that the College should review its observation policy with regard to new or inexperienced staff and how support for staff is provided and recorded, there is no evidence that this was discussed or actioned by deliberative committees. The June 2017 report from the external examiner for Health and Social Care, which had not been discussed by the Assessment Board at the time of the review visit, also recommended

that the College should support new teachers when assessing units for the first time.

2.28 The Heads of Department and Programme Managers review lecture materials at the start of each semester and upload assignment briefs following approval. Tutors are responsible for ensuring that schemes of work and lecture notes conform to Pearson requirements.

2.29 Heads of Departments carry out regular monitoring and evaluation of each tutor's performance to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching style, clarity of communication, interaction and practice. This is accomplished through formal class and peer observations as well as student evaluations and effectively informs the performance review process. Formal observations by Heads of Department take place annually, while peer observations occur once per semester. Teachers confirmed that they find the observation process helpful and offered examples of issues identified and addressed in observation including the review of teaching materials to maintain currency, alongside the identification of areas of good practice as well as habits to avoid. Where areas for improvement are identified during observation, an action plan is agreed and followed up with a subsequent observation to monitor outcomes. The review team concludes that arrangements for observation of teaching staff make a positive contribution to the development of learning opportunities and teaching practices.

2.30 Teachers are given leave to attend professional development activities, which can be identified or requested during the performance review process, and are encouraged to develop links with appropriate subject and professional bodies. Full-time teachers attend scholarly conferences and three academic staff undertake roles as external examiners. The College also holds mandatory two-day CPD workshops twice a year to provide staff development opportunities, to facilitate the sharing of good practice and to provide time for standardisation meetings. A CPD workshop in September 2016 provided effective practical training and guidance for teachers on giving developmental feedback. Teachers confirm that these workshops are helpful and that they are able to suggest appropriate topics for development.

2.31 The VLE provides the central pillar for all teaching and learning at the College. Students confirmed that they access this daily to obtain lecture notes and assignment briefs as well as to participate in helpful discussion forums, which can be initiated by either teachers or students. Teachers use the VLE in most classes as an effective teaching tool, and ensure that teaching materials and notes are uploaded in a timely fashion. Students upload their assignments through Turnitin and staff access these online for marking and for providing developmental comments. The College has recently commenced compilation of a digital library on the VLE, in the form of links to texts and journals recommended by tutors for all courses. Staff and students are also able to access course and College handbooks, schemes of work, the growing digital library, useful general college information and any forms they need. In addition, there are closed forums for student representatives and for teachers to share good practice. Student representatives also have access to external examiners' reports. Students express particular appreciation for being able to access the VLE from any location. The effective integration of the VLE with course delivery which enhances student engagement with the learning process is **good practice** (see also Expectation C - Information).

2.32 The Teaching Learning and Resources Committee ensures sufficiency of learning resources through updating IT skills, improving the VLE and increasing library stock. Following feedback from students, recent steps have been taken to add recommended titles supplied by course tutors and, as a result, the provision of library resources has significantly improved. A report from the external examiner for Health and Social Care in June 2016 which highlighted a concern that the book stock available to students included level 3 texts



was considered by the Assessment Board for this subject and, as a result, seven texts were removed.

2.33 The College makes a returnable deposit charge to students who wish to borrow books from the library, detailed in the student handbook, which has deterred some students from using the facility. Following recent feedback from student representatives the College has agreed to reduce this cost, which is not made transparent to prospective students prior to registration, to £35. Some students find the short loan period deters them from borrowing course texts, although the length of this lacks clarity and is not clearly defined in the student handbook.

2.34 The College is continuing to implement its ongoing plan for upgrading the IT facilities appropriately, addressing student comments raised at the Staff-Student Liaison Panel (SSLP) regarding slow computers. Students, however, express their appreciation for the fast Wi-Fi provision.

2.35 There are robust arrangements in place to systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The Expectation 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**

2.36 The College has implemented its Teaching Learning and Assessment strategy, underpinned by the QAEM, to meet its aim of preparing students for effective and profitable roles in their choice of careers and enabling them to reach their full potential. The implementation of its approach is overseen by Academic Board and its relevant subcommittees, as described in their terms of reference.

2.37 The College assigns every student to a designated personal tutor providing structured tutorials, where students can obtain advice and raise academic, professional and pastoral concerns.

2.38 The Welfare Support Officer works closely with Heads of Department to provide additional guidance and support for students with a declared protected characteristic, particularly in relation to obtaining appropriate allowances, as well as providing guidance for all students wishing to progress to further study.

2.39 The College offers a system of task-by-task learning, with tutors providing feedback on formative tasks based on learning outcomes.

2.40 These arrangements, if implemented securely, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.41 The team read minutes of committee meetings and CPD workshops, policies and procedures, student surveys and other documentation provided by the College. They also held meetings with senior staff, teachers, students and professional support staff.

2.42 All students attend induction sessions at the start of their course following enrolment. Induction sessions contain a strong focus on supporting students through the initial transition to higher education. In response to feedback from students, the duration of the induction sessions has recently been reduced from two days to one. A student representative is given the opportunity to provide a student perspective. Students confirmed that they are given course and student handbooks during induction and that sessions covered an introduction to their course, as well as topics including their rights and responsibilities, health and safety, attendance and avoidance of plagiarism. Induction sessions also include an introduction to the VLE: students are provided with written guidance on using the VLE and Turnitin. Additional IT classes are also provided after induction on an ongoing basis for those requiring additional support.

2.43 The Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy identifies the development of good working relationships with the students as a way of promoting self-motivation. Students are able to develop their academic potential in class and through submitting regular formative assessments. Teachers use a range of formative assessment methods and provide oral and written developmental feedback to enable students to improve. The internal verification process helps to identify instances where feedback from assessors is insufficiently developmental, which are discussed at Assessment Boards.

2.44 Students are encouraged to submit their draft summative assignments on a task-by-task basis, to improve their focus on the topic and receive ongoing formative feedback throughout each unit. Teachers emphasised that a large proportion of students

attending the College are mature, having been out of education for some considerable time but having gained considerable life experience: 241 of 247 students (98 per cent) entering the College in April 2017 were aged over 21. The College also affirmed that many students come from under-represented sections of society and often have family responsibilities, alongside working part-time, making it more difficult for them to concentrate on academic study. Staff consider that the outcome-by-outcome approach to achieving the summative assessment task provides a structure to enable such students to interpret the task and apply theory in a structured manner. This approach to assessment is discussed further in Expectation B6.

2.45 The College does not offer formal supplementary classes in the use of English, nor, since the reduction in the length of student induction, in academic writing skills. Teachers use their classroom time to provide individual support and address issues with students' understanding of technical English where needed. However, examples of student work contained instances of difficulty in the use of English language. Noting the College's acknowledgement of the non-academic backgrounds of many students, together with the fact that many students are required to take an English test when applying to the College, the review team **recommends** that the College strengthen support for the development of students' skills in academic writing.

2.46 The College acknowledges the challenge of enabling students to complete the programme within the two year period of funding. The proportion of students entering in 2014 who gained a qualification within two years was 67 per cent (340 of 508). The proportion of students entering in 2015 who had discontinued their studies prior to the time of the review visit was 9 per cent (61 of 644). In order to improve student development and achievement, the College has taken effective steps to improve student attendance and ensure adherence to submission deadlines. While there has been a marked improvement in attendance in the current academic year compared to previous years, the average attendance of 73 per cent still falls short of the College's stated attendance target of 80-100 per cent. Senior staff attribute increased attendance rates, along with higher completion rates, to greater diligence by staff in following up non-attenders, as well as an increased requirement for the level of English at entry and improved levels of personal support provided to students. Achievement data for students starting in 2012-2015 and completing their course shows a significant increase in completion rates as well as a notable increase in the proportion of students achieving merit or distinction grades. Progression data shows an increase in the number of diplomates progressing to further study, rising from 37 per cent in 2014-15 to 68 per cent the following year, with a corresponding decrease in the number continuing to employment from 45 per cent to 19 per cent.

2.47 Following induction, the College assigns every student to a designated Personal Tutor, with whom students can request a tutorial to obtain advice and raise academic, professional and pastoral concerns. Tutors are also able to direct students to other forms of support both internal and external to the College. The operation of the Personal Tutor system is monitored by the Heads of Department Committee and a report included in the annual course monitoring report submitted to Academic Board. Personal tutors are assigned around 55 students each, although this does vary between individual members of staff. However, the number of students requesting a tutorial each semester is considerably lower, averaging around 30 per cent. College managers acknowledge that students in need of support do not consistently take advantage of what is available and are actively seeking to raise the number of students engaging with tutors through emails and regular reminders in class. Students who have taken part in a tutorial spoke positively of its benefits and confirmed that they are able to raise both personal and academic issues.

2.48 Students are able to declare any physical, medical or learning needs when applying. Existing students who develop such a need during their course are able to

complete a Disability Application form. The College makes additional support available for students with a declared protected characteristic and provided the team with specific examples where this has taken place appropriately. The type of support required is discussed by the course SSLP, then further discussed and monitored in Student Affairs Committee before being reported to Academic Board. Students who declare a learning need or disability are supported by the Welfare Officer, personal tutor and respective Head of Department. Students with an identified learning, physical or medical need are followed up by the Welfare Officer and provided with appropriate support to apply for Disabled Student Allowances. Tutors are informed of the level of support required for these individual students. Following instances of students suffering from mental health issues, the College has recently formed a link with a qualified psychotherapist to provide professional support to address students' specific needs. In addition, an experienced careers adviser visits the College regularly to provide students with appropriate advice and future direction. Students can also meet with either her or the Welfare Officer at other times to receive support. The review team considers that the extensive range of pastoral support and guidance available to students from a wide range of backgrounds which enables them to develop their personal and academic potential is **good practice**.

2.49 The College makes use of guest speakers and trips to further inspire and develop students and to increase their awareness of opportunities for employment or further study after completion. While students attending College in the daytime find these very helpful, students who are employed during the day and attend College in the evening and at weekends are sometimes disadvantaged, as guest speakers and trips are normally arranged for the daytime. The College has joined the London Chamber of Commerce in forming a framework to link with businesses and organisations to assist in creating small business within the community.

2.50 The College has secure arrangements to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The Expectation is met and, while there are minor oversights, 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**

2.51 The College has a formal student representation system in place in which student representatives are elected by their peers at the beginning of the academic year. This is done on a proportional basis with one representative being elected for every 50 students. Student representatives must meet the attendance requirement of 80 per cent and academic progression requirement of 100 per cent in order to be eligible to nominate themselves for the role. Within this group of elected representatives, students will nominate themselves to sit on a number of College committees, including Academic Board, Student Affairs Committee, Learning Resources Committee, faculty or department SSLPs and the Prevent Duty Lead Team. Each student representative on a formal committee has an alternate who attends a meeting if the main representative is unavailable.

2.52 The College provides formal training for student representatives. Each student representative signs an agreement with the College to indicate their commitment to the role.

2.53 The College has a number of other mechanisms in place for students to provide feedback including the internal student survey conducted on a semester basis and the outcomes of external surveys such as National Student Survey and the Pearson student survey. It is the responsibility of the Student Affairs Committee to implement and monitor mechanisms to facilitate that the student voice is heard and acted upon and to report and make recommendations to Academic Board.

2.54 The appropriate policies, procedures and processes the College has in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.55 The review team examined all appropriate evidence including minutes of various committees that student representatives sit on and explored how actions were resolved as a result of student feedback. The team met staff to investigate their approach to student engagement and confirmed with students that where possible, their voice was being heard, listened to and acted upon.

2.56 Processes for electing, training and managing student representatives are well organised and managed by the College. Students representatives confirmed that that they have appropriate opportunities to inform the College of student feedback and that the College acted on their feedback in a timely manner throughout all of the formal committees that they are involved in, including the Academic Board. All of the students that the review team met with felt that their voices were being listened to and their feedback acted on. The College also draws on the results of the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey, the National Student Survey and Pearson student surveys to better the student experience. Recent examples of actions taken as a result of student feedback includes introducing a common room for students, improving the stock of books that the Library holds and reducing the mandatory deposit to borrow books from the Library. The College also acts on student feedback that addresses routine issues, such as general maintenance and repair. Students are informed of these changes through discussions with their respective student representative or through mechanisms such as 'You said, We did' posters.

2.57 The review team found that there is sufficient support in place to enable student representatives to fulfil their duties. This is primarily done through the Staff-Student Liaison

Officer who works closely with student representatives. As additional support to student representatives attending committee meetings, the College provides payment and reimburses out-of-pocket expenses.

2.58 The College has in place a sound and effective structure in which students are enabled and empowered to provide feedback through formal mechanisms. The comprehensive and systematic representation structure which empowers students to contribute to the development and enhancement of their educational experience is **good practice**.

2.59 The College takes deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, and has in place appropriate procedures and processes to enable students to provide their feedback through formal and informal mechanisms. It is evident that the views of students are closely listened to and acted upon. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.60 The College's courses are delivered and assessed in line with its published credit and regulatory framework and Pearson's requirements; its assessment regulations are based on those of Pearson. The College's approach to assessment is set out in its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and assessment regulations are contained in student and course handbooks. Intended Learning Outcomes and associated assessment criteria are set out in Unit specifications.

2.61 A system of internal verification is in place, set out in the QAEM. The College has five assessment boards each chaired by an independent Head of Department; these boards are held to confirm student progression and achievement, and to recommend grades to Pearson. Pearson appoints external examiners who ensure that the standard of student work is appropriate to the grades awarded and that assessment meets national standards. Tutors are provided with regular opportunities to attend in-house workshops and seminars to develop their assessment skills and ongoing support is provided for new staff. Good practice in assessment is shared via the VLE and Assessment Boards.

2.62 Appropriate procedures are in place for the assessment and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL); these align with Pearson's requirements.

2.63 The policies and procedures in place for assessment would, if securely implemented, allow the Expectation to be met.

2.64 The review team tested the Expectation by considering Pearson's and the College's assessment regulations, assessment policies and procedures, student and course handbooks, samples of assignment briefs and assignments, examples of summative and formative feedback, external examiner reports and minutes of assessment boards. The team also met senior, teaching and support staff, and students and their representatives, and held a telephone conversation with the chair of the Advisory Board. The review team also received written evidence from Pearson's Centre Quality Manager, on behalf of the external examiner for Health and Social Care who was unavailable during the review visit.

2.65 In relation to the Concern the team also considered documentary evidence and discussed the issues raised with staff. The Concern alleged that (i) students are not at an academic level sufficient for study on the programme and in particular that students' level of English language is inadequate and (ii) that arrangements for internal verification of assessed work are inadequate and specifically cited an instance of failing grades awarded by the first marker being converted to passing grades by the Internal Verifier without any process of reconciliation. While (i) is mainly considered under Expectation B2 it is also touched upon in this Expectation together with the issues raised in (ii).

2.66 The College uses standardised formats for coursework assignments and students commented positively on this approach. Except for the RQF Research Project, teaching staff design all assignment briefs; if more than one tutor is involved in teaching a unit a standardisation meeting is held to agree on a single assignment. Assignment briefs and

marking of assessment are subject to the College's internal verification procedures. Internal verifiers are senior members of academic staff from each department; additionally a sample of assignment briefs is externally verified by external examiners. Recent external examiners' reports indicate satisfaction with, and improvement in, the College's internal verification processes. While external examiners' reports also contain positive comments regarding assignments and have, in some areas such as business, noted improvements, the four most recent external examiner's reports in Health and Social Care, covering the period from May 2015 to June 2017, have raised recommendations and essential actions in relation to assessment instruments, processes or methods (see paragraph 2.75 and Expectation B7).

2.67 Students submit assignments through Turnitin on the College's VLE; although the College has recently agreed a similarity index of 30 per cent with no more than 10 per cent from one single source in order to provide clear guidance to staff and students in relation to plagiarism, teaching staff acknowledged that the software can give misleading data and confirmed that they apply discretion and judgement to its outcomes. The College's policy on, and procedures for, the handling of plagiarism and other academic offences are set out in its QAEM and highlighted to students at induction and through the student handbook and assignment briefs; this was confirmed by students. Staff confirmed, as have external examiners, that the anti-plagiarism software is effective in detecting and helping to prevent plagiarism; detected instances of plagiarism currently stand at an average of five per cent across all courses. Appropriate policies and procedures are also in place relating to the late submission and resubmission of assessments; extenuating circumstances are dealt with through assessment boards.

2.68 The College uses both summative and formative approaches to assessment and feedback. In relation to formative assessment, students submit their assignments 'task by task' and receive formative feedback on how to improve their work on a learning outcome by learning outcome basis. The College monitors the efficiency of this approach at the end of each semester through unit achievement reports and has noted its positive impact on pass rates; students were very supportive of the approach. Noting that the College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy places emphasis on the development of students as independent learners and that Pearson's "Guide to Quality and Assessment" states that 'students working at higher levels should be capable of undertaking independent study', the team explored with staff how the task-by-task approach helped to achieve these aims, particularly at level 5. Staff expressed the view that the approach is an appropriate method of supporting mature learners and helps to provide structure and direction. Staff acknowledged that there is little difference in the task-by-task approach at level 5 to that at level 4. The review team formed the view that this approach does not adequately support the development of independent learning. The team also noted that, while one external examiner had raised an essential action requiring the College to 'develop more holistic approaches to assessment and move away from the outcome by outcome approach' the College's proposed response did not suggest any significant move away from the task-by-task approach. The review team **recommends** that the College take steps to ensure that the model for formative assessment adequately supports the development of independent learners particularly at level 5.

2.69 Summative feedback and provisional grades are provided to students electronically via the VLE. Feedback is usually provided within two to three weeks of the assignment submission date; grades are provisional until they are internally verified and approved at assessment boards. Students were satisfied with the helpfulness and timeliness of assessment feedback. Staff are provided with guidance in relation to the content and quality of both formative and summative feedback expected, through workshops, assessment board and standardisation meetings. In addition, during each semester comments are made by Heads of Department about the expected feedback that tutors should give based on samples sent to them by tutors. However, the review team noted the variable quality of some



feedback including feedback that was incomplete and some which contained typographical errors.

2.70 Students must satisfy all published assessment criteria under all learning outcomes to gain a 'pass' grade. As noted in Expectation A3.2 the team was provided with an example of summative feedback on an assignment in Health and Social Care for which the student appeared to have gained a merit grade for the unit despite the feedback indicating that not all of the assessment criteria had been satisfied at pass level. The College explained that this must have been due to a typographical error. A similar issue was noted in the Health and Social Care external examiner's report in June 2017 where an assessor had indicated that all assessment criteria has been achieved at merit grade but recorded the overall outcome for the unit as a pass; the external examiner also noted another example of feedback where no overall grade was recorded.

2.71 Marking of assessments is also subject to the College's internal verification processes. Internal verifiers report on marking practices and outcomes at assessment boards and may suggest grade changes which are recorded in assessment board minutes; in certain circumstances where grade changes are suggested a second verifier may be asked to review the internal verifier's sample or the assessment board may require the re-marking of a complete set of assignments. The process for re-marking is set out in the QAEM which states that 'grades for the unit should represent a set of marks which are believed to be fair and equitable across all students taking that unit. Where this is not the case, the verification process must require further grading of all assignments, or assignments within particular bands, until such a list of grades can be produced'. There is no reference to who is responsible for making the decision to re-mark.

2.72 In relation to the Concern, regarding the assessment of unit 10 in Health and Social Care in June 2016, the team review established that the first assessor had referred all students in the relevant unit except for one; this was considered anomalous by the Internal Verifier as the same group of students had successfully completed four units in the previous semester. Following receipt of the first assessor's complete set of marks on 20 June 2016 an email was sent by the Head of Department to the assessor on the same day to indicate that remarking would take place. The Health and Social Care Assessment Board on 24 June 2016 decided that all of these assignments would be remarked; the College confirmed that the second assessor completed the re-marking between 24 and 26 June to ensure samples were available to the external examiner who visited the College on 29 June; some of the assignments were also subject to further internal verification. While one of the referred students remained referred all other students were deemed to have satisfactorily completed the unit. The team heard that the external examiner had been informed of the re-marking process but did not look at samples of these assignments during his visit.

2.73 The review team also explored how the first assessor was involved in the decision-making process and whether attempts were made to reconcile the differences between the first and second assessor. The team was referred to the communication between the first marker and the Head of Department on 20 June 2016 and to the QAEM which does not explicitly set out a process for reconciliation. The single email to the first assessor confirmed that re-marking would take place; the College confirmed its view that it had communicated appropriately with the first assessor in relation to the process to be undertaken. The College also noted that the first assessor did not attend the June 2016 assessment board although invited and expected to attend. The College failed to acknowledge the desirability of a process of reconciliation of differences in marks following re-marking. Evidence showed that the College had pre-empted the decision of the assessment board by carrying out the re-marking, and the verification of the re-marking, prior to the meeting of the Assessment Board at which the decision to carry out re-marking was made. The team found no evidence of any attempt to reconcile the marks of the first

and the second assessors or to further involve the first assessor in the decision-making process, nor any reference in the College's process as to how this might be achieved. The College does not have arrangements for first and second marking which are clearly set out and applied, and does not have guidance on how agreement will be reached on the final marks to be awarded. The team **recommends** that the College should ensure that the process for remarking of student work, and the circumstances under which it takes place, are clearly documented and that the first assessor is fully involved in the decision-making process.

2.74 In considering the Concern the team also considered the College's admissions process and specifically in relation to English Language competence. While this is mainly covered in Expectation B2 the review team noted that some, but not all, examples of assignments in Health and Social Care provided to the team as evidence in relation to the Concern did reflect poor use of English and academic writing skills. Staff indicated that students' English Language and academic writing skills improve during the year.

2.75 The majority of the College's external examiners' reports for 2016 and 2017 are generally positive and highlight improvements in assessment processes at the College. However, as previously noted, the last four reports from the external examiner in Health and Social Care, from May 2015 to June 2017, have all raised one or more essential actions and recommendations, some of which address similar issues, relating to a variety of aspects of the assessment process. While the College emphasised that, with the exception of those issues raised in the most recent report (June 2017), all outstanding actions and recommendations have been addressed, it did not acknowledge the possibility that the continuing identification of essential actions and recommendations is indicative of systemic or procedural shortcomings. The team also noted issues identified at paragraphs 2.69 and 2.70, some specific to Health and Social Care and some more generic across the College, which could lead to assessment practice becoming unreliable, such as the incorrect recording of assessment decisions and variability in the quality of feedback. The team **recommends** that the College undertake a formal review of assessment practices within Health and Social Care in order to establish in what ways they have contributed to the essential actions and recommendations identified by the external examiner

2.76 Based on the evidence provided and discussion with the College the review team concludes that the Concern is upheld in relation to Expectation B6. The process for remarking assessed work and for reconciling marks between first and second assessors is neither clearly articulated nor fit for purpose. The team also noted some examples of assignments in Health and Social Care which reflected poor command of written English and poor academic writing skills.

2.77 The College's processes for the management of assessment are based on the requirements of Pearson. However there are several shortcomings in these processes and their implementation. The College's approach to formative assessment does not support students to become more independent learners as they move from level 4 to 5. This weakness indicates insufficient emphasis being given to assuring quality in the College's planning processes. The process for remarking assessed work and for reconciling marks between first and second assessors is neither clearly articulated nor fit for purpose. This weakness indicates insufficient emphasis being given to assuring standards in the College's planning processes and a lack of clarity about responsibilities. The College failed to show awareness of the possibility that outcomes of recent external examiner's reports in Health and Social Care are indicative of systemic or procedural failings in assessment in this subject. This weakness indicates shortcomings in the rigour with which the College's quality assurance procedures are being applied.

2.78 The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met. Issues raised point to

insufficient emphasis given to assuring quality and standards in planning for some areas of assessment, a lack of rigour in the way some assessment processes are carried out and a lack of clarity in relation to responsibilities. The College failed to show awareness of the significance of issues in relation to the continuing nature of concerns expressed by an external examiner, did not acknowledge issues about development of independent learning in task-by-task assessment, and failed to recognise a need for a reconciliation process in remarking student work. These shortcomings pose risks which, without action, could lead to serious problems over time. The level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.79 External examiners are recruited, trained and appointed by Pearson as the awarding organisation. An examiner visits the College for each course on a regular basis to sample a range of student work and to report on the College's management of academic standards, the effectiveness of its verification and assessment processes and the effectiveness of its response to essential actions and recommendations raised in the previous report. Certification of learners is only released when the awarding organisation's standards are met by the College. In addition, Pearson carries out an annual AMR to provide an overview of the whole College provision.

2.80 Department Assessment Boards are responsible for considering external examiners' reports and for making appropriate recommendations to the Academic Board to address actions and recommendations raised in these, as defined in their terms of reference in the QAEM.

2.81 Internal assessment is verified by the Internal Verifiers following the process specified in the QAEM. The College's internal verification teams, consisting of senior members of academic staff of each Assessment Board, internally verify the assignment briefs and distributes them on the VLE after approval from external examiners. The Internal Verifiers also conduct internal verification after first marking of the assignments. This ensures that the assessments are consistent across the courses and also accurately match student work to assessment and grading criteria.

2.82 These arrangements, if implemented securely, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.83 The review team tested the Expectation through reading external examiners' reports and minutes of academic committee meetings, and through meetings with Heads of Departments, senior academic staff, Health and Social Care Internal Verifiers, teachers and students. The team also obtained written evidence from the Pearson Centre Quality Manager, as the external examiner for Health and Social Care was unavailable.

2.84 Pearson appoints separate external examiners for each HND course. Each course receives an individual report. During their visits, external examiners meet relevant College staff and students to assess the implementation of the academic quality systems and sample student assignments to test the integrity of the internal verification process and to ensure consistency. External examiners also check assignment briefs to ensure that they are fit for purpose and that tasks are appropriately linked to learning outcomes.

2.85 The majority of external examiner reports are highly positive about the standards and processes within the College. They also identify several positive aspects of provision including the tutorial support mechanisms and the effective and robust strategic committee structure. External examiners' reports additionally identify any essential actions and recommendations necessary to maintain Pearson's academic standards, and comment on assignment briefs as well as on the thoroughness of the internal verification process. Scrutiny of meeting minutes shows that course Assessment Boards consider these appropriately and take effective action to make the necessary improvements. In the past these actions have sometimes not been addressed in a timely manner: for example the responses to the external examiner's report for Health and Social Care in February 2016 were all still being addressed after the target date of his next visit in June 2016. However,

all actions arising from the report of June 2016 had been dealt with satisfactorily by the time of his subsequent visit in June 2017. External examiners' reports are made available to staff and student representatives on the VLE, although their location is not immediately obvious.

2.86 The team noted that, in regard to the Health and Social Care course, the four most recent reports from the external examiner, dating from May 2015 to June 2017, have each raised one or more essential actions and recommendations relating to a variety of aspects of the assessment process. This matter is discussed in more detail in Expectation B6.

2.87 External examiners' reports indicate satisfaction with the robust nature of the College's internal verification processes and confirm that these meet the standards of Pearson. Potential Internal Verifiers are identified and then trained through individual mentoring. There is a CPD workshop for Internal Verifiers every semester, which covers standardisation for the assignment briefs and also carries out verification of marking.

2.88 Three members of academic staff act as external examiners or moderators to other institutions, providing the College with an additional perspective and insight into external verification processes.

2.89 The College has secure arrangements for supporting the work of external examiners. External examiners carry out their work in a thorough manner and the College addresses actions and recommendations arising from their reports effectively. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.90 Pearson monitors and reviews the College's provision through its annual Academic Management Review (AMR) and the recently implemented Annual Programme Monitoring Review (APMR). Pearson also periodically reviews its courses and may involve providers, for example through its consultation processes. Additionally, Pearson has recently reviewed and re-developed its HND courses, moving them from the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) to the Regulated Quality Framework (RQF).

2.91 Pearson requires the College to routinely monitor and review its courses and, in response, the College has developed unit and course monitoring processes; the purpose of these processes is to enable the College to reflect on the operation of units and courses with a view to maintaining standards and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning as well as to identifying good practice. These processes are set out in its QAEM. A College Annual Report is also produced. The College currently has no periodic review process in place. The Vice Principal and Head of Quality and Enhancement is responsible for overseeing the College's monitoring and review processes.

2.92 These arrangements, if implemented securely, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.93 The review team read a range of documentation relating to the College's monitoring and review procedures including Pearson and College reports, the minutes of relevant committees and the College's QAEM. In addition, the team held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, professional support staff, students and student representatives, and held a telephone conversation with the chair of the Advisory Board.

2.94 Pearson makes an annual centre quality visit to the College, the Academic Management Review, to check on its quality assurance systems. The report arising out of the visit covers a number of areas including organisational structures, processes for student recruitment, registration and certification, the management of assessment and verification, staff and physical resources, recording of assessment outcomes and policies and procedures. Reports also note essential actions, recommendations and areas of exemplary practice. The College's 2016-17 AMR report raised just two recommendations, and no essential actions or areas of exemplary practice. The outcomes of the AMR are considered at the Academic Board, which also oversees any required actions and recommendations.

2.95 Pearson has recently implemented the APMR process which requires providers to reflect on the previous teaching year and to identify any concerns in the operation of courses and enhancements to be made. In completing its first APMR report in December 2016, the College drew on a range of data as well as feedback from external examiners and students. The report includes an action plan. The College expects Pearson to publish the outcomes of the process by the end of September 2017.

2.96 The College's new internal annual monitoring processes, introduced for 2016-17, involve unit reviews held after the delivery and assessment of each unit and an annual course report for each department. Unit reviews draw on a range of evidence including tutor evaluation and achievement reports, peer observations, external examiners' reports periodic

tutor performance audit and the College's student survey. Unit review reports are submitted to and discussed by the relevant assessment board. At the time of the review, unit reviews had been completed for the first semester of 2016-17. The annual Course Review process is aimed at enabling reflection on course performance from the previous year; maintaining standards, enhancing the quality of teaching and learning and identifying good practice; at the time of the review the course review process had yet to be implemented.

The College's processes for internal annual monitoring appear to be sound but are not yet well embedded in practice. The review team affirms the steps being taken to establish and implement processes for annual unit and course reviews

2.97 The College's Annual Report, which forms the basis of the College's action plan is reviewed and monitored by Academic Board which signs off actions when complete. The report for 2015-16 is a comprehensive document drawing on a range of data which covers similar areas to, and amplifies information within, the APMR.

2.98 The College makes effective use of a range of data and feedback in the annual monitoring of its provision, as discussed in Expectation A3.3. While this has led to improvements in the quality of provision, the College has no formal periodic review process which brings the information together in a systematic way and which would allow reflection on the performance of each course over a longer time frame. In discussion with the team the College noted that it may consider developing such a process once its annual monitoring processes are fully operational and embedded. The review team **recommends** that the College establish and implement a process for the periodic review of courses.

2.99 Pearson ensures that effective, regular and systematic processes are in place in relation to the monitoring and review of the College's provision. The College complies with Pearson's requirements by responding to actions and recommendations arising out of the AMR process and in completing the APMR. It has recently developed internal annual unit and course monitoring processes which at the time of the review had yet to be fully implemented and embedded. The College makes effective use of a range of data to monitor its courses but has yet to formalise its approach by developing a periodic review process. Overall the team concludes that the Expectation is met. Weaknesses relate to the completion of activity already under way and to amendments which will not require major procedural change, therefore the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.100 The College's Complaints and Academic Appeals policies are held within the QAEM and are available to students on the College website and within the Student Handbook. The Academic Board receives reports on academic appeals and complaints through the College's Annual Reporting mechanisms.

2.101 The academic appeals process, overseen by the Assessment Board, is aligned to the procedures outlined within Pearson BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment and follows a six-stage process. A student wishing to make an academic appeal must do so within 10 days of the availability of the relevant results and follow the College's procedure in finding a resolution. If a resolution is not found to the students' satisfaction, an appeal against the outcome can be lodged to the Office of Independent Adjudicator. This information is sent to the student by the Examination Office and can be found within the Academic Appeals Policy.

2.102 The College aims to resolve complaints informally when possible and states that complaints are usually resolved between the student and their Head of Department. When a complaint is unable to be resolved informally, the student may lodge a formal complaint that will be dealt with by the Chair of the Academic Misconduct Committee. All formal complaints are recorded centrally.

2.103 These arrangements, if implemented securely, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.104 The review team considered evidence including the Academic Appeals Policy and Complaints Policy, the record of complaints, a sample of an academic appeal and the breakdown of all academic appeals and formal complaints lodged. The team confirmed their understanding of the availability and application of policies in meetings with staff and students.

2.105 There had been a total of 24 academic appeals, seven of which were upheld and 17 of which were rejected, over the three years prior to the review visit, and 16 registered complaints over the previous two years.

2.106 Students the review team met confirmed their understanding of the procedures for raising an academic appeal or a formal complaint. Students that were not fully aware of the procedures were confident that if they needed to find out more information they could do so easily. Staff the review team met had a clear understanding of the College's procedures that existed and outlined each step of the process.

2.107 The College has in place and follows appropriate policies, procedures and processes in respect of academic appeals and complaints. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

2.108 As the awarding organisation, Pearson is responsible for the requirements of the BTEC in Health and Social Care taught by the College. While the College is responsible for delivering the classroom-based teaching and assessment throughout the course, Unit 4 'Personal and Professional Development in Health and Social Care' (PPD), requires at least 200 hours of relevant work experience to be completed with an appropriate professional provider. This is the only programme which includes such work experience.

2.109 The student's work experience is recorded in a portfolio of evidence, which is witnessed by their placement supervisor and marked by the course tutor.

2.110 The College has no formalised processes for ensuring the appropriateness of all work placements, that all placements have adequate risk assessments in place prior to approval, or that placements are made aware of their responsibilities.

2.111 As arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with other organisations are not securely defined, the College's arrangements are not sufficient to meet the Expectation.

2.112 The review team examined a sample of student portfolios, a recent placement agreement, course handbooks, a sample placement risk assessment pro forma and a provisional work placement policy relating to Health and Social Care work placements and met with the Head of Department for this subject, Internal Verifiers, teachers, students and a placement representative.

2.113 The work experience element of Unit 4 is evidenced through a portfolio that reflects the student's ability as a reflective practitioner. Planning, monitoring and revision of personal development plans are regarded as being appropriate evidence for achieving personal targets and learning outcomes, alongside evidence of reflective practice with the placement. The unit specification requires evidence from workplace settings which is required to be validated and authenticated by appropriately qualified expert witnesses. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding the status and qualifications for such witnesses, and no formal process for checking these for all placements. Students are required to submit a timesheet, verified by their placement supervisor, to demonstrate achievement of the required number of hours. The College has not offered Unit 4 to new students since June 2016, although existing students have been undertaking their placements since that date.

2.114 The College believes that many Health and Social Care students are already in relevant employment within the health and social care sector when they enrol for their course, and that they accordingly have ample opportunity to satisfy the requirements for workplace experience. Although the College has formed a definition of the types and levels of employment which are acceptable, this was established only shortly before the review visit and has not yet been implemented, as described at paragraph 2.117. The College maintains records of each student's current role, whether they require the College to suggest a suitable placement, and their current status in regard to completion of the required 200 hours, although records do not consistently detail the name and location of the placement or of their current employer. For students who do not have appropriate employment opportunities

available to them, the College has recently formed an agreement with a suitable placement provider, which is managed by a part-time teacher of Unit 4, to provide the required work experience. This placement relies on either the student or the College to obtain an enhanced check from the Disclosure and Barring Service. The College does not believe that any conflict of interest will arise in this instance, as the teacher is sufficiently removed from the supervision and line management of the placement student. The review team heard that the College is currently exploring potential links with other suitable placement providers to address the external examiner's recommendation to provide a range of opportunities.

2.115 At the start of their course, students may propose a work placement which may be their place of current employment; the College subsequently informs them as to whether or not it is suitable. The College has satisfactorily addressed a concern previously raised by the external examiner for Health and Social Care in regard to the suitability of some work placements. With the exception of the single placement provider arranged by the College, it does not establish signed agreements with placement providers detailing the rights and obligations of both parties and it provides no written guidance to providers in relation to the needs and expectations of students and of the College itself.

2.116 Under its current arrangements the College takes no steps to assure itself at the start of a placement that professional placement providers have appropriate arrangements for the health and safety of students, and instead relies on students to ensure that this is the case during their placement and to identify any risks. Students confirmed that they are responsible for checking the suitability of the workplace. There is no consistent oversight or monitoring by staff of the College of arrangements for placements, although the Head of Department assumes responsibility for liaising with providers on an occasional basis and makes random checks by telephone to ensure that students are still engaging with their placement. However, no records of these calls are kept. The review team failed to find evidence that the College exercises due diligence in ensuring that providers maintain appropriate professional standards while students are on placement with them.

2.117 The College has recently formulated a Work Placement Policy, which was approved by Academic Board in July 2017 and will be implemented from September 2017. If securely implemented, it is likely to address some of the shortcomings in the College's current arrangements for ensuring the appropriate nature and safety of placements and for formalising their approval. The policy contains a Work Experience Learning Agreement and Risk Assessment form, which are to be completed before a placement is approved (whether or not a student is already employed there). It also specifies the appointment of a member of staff as Work-based Learning Coordinator, although this post has not yet been approved by the College's senior management team.

2.118 Prior to the establishment of the Work Placement Policy in July 2017, the College has offered no guidance on the nature of work placements which would, or would not, be suitable for Unit 4. In his reports of February and June 2016, the external examiner for Health and Social Care commented that work placements, particularly when giving employment as a care worker at NQF levels 2 and 3, should offer students the opportunity of gaining experience and understanding appropriate to levels 4 and 5. The College's Work Placement Policy lists some examples of the types of placement that may be suitable but does not currently specify the nature of roles within such providers that are likely to be acceptable to fulfil course requirements at the correct level. Although a memo to Unit 4 tutors from the Head of Department, dated 7 July 2017, outlines examples of roles that are and are not appropriate, and emphasises the requirement that students' work experience should address all level 4 learning outcomes and assessment criteria for personal and professional development in Unit 4, this statement of policy took place too recently for the review team to see evidence of its effectiveness.

2.119 While recognising that the College has recently approved a policy which may address shortcomings in its processes for accepting and monitoring work placements, this policy is not yet embedded. Current arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with placement providers are inadequate for the purpose of ensuring the quality of learning opportunities for all Health and Social Care students in regard to work placements. The review team **recommends** that the College establish and put into effect a clearly-documented process to ensure that the arrangements for the approval of all work placements at the required level are implemented securely and managed effectively.

2.120 The lack of an embedded policy governing work placements indicates a weakness in the College's governance structure. Although the College has plans for addressing this weakness, these plans are not fully embedded in the College's operational planning. The lack of secure arrangements for ensuring the appropriate nature and safety of placements and for formalising their approval indicates insufficient emphasis being given to assuring standards and quality in the College's planning processes and could without action lead to serious problems over time. The Expectation is not met and the level of risk is moderate.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.121 The College does not offer research degrees.

**Expectation: Not applicable**

**Level of risk: Not applicable**

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

2.122 Of the 10 applicable Expectations for this judgement area, seven are met with a low level of risk, while one is met with a moderate level of risk and two are not met with a moderate level of risk. There are a total of eight recommendations, one affirmation and three features of good practice.

2.123 Expectation B2 is met with a moderate level of risk. It contains two recommendations, relating to the need for training of staff involved in admissions decisions and to the need for oversight of the process for admissions interviews. These recommendations arise from shortcomings in the rigour with which the College's procedures are applied. The College appeared not to be fully aware of potential issues arising from these shortcomings.

2.124 Expectation B3 is met with a low level of risk. It contains a single feature of good practice relating to the effectiveness of the virtual learning environment in enhancing student learning.

2.125 Expectation B4 is met with a low level of risk. It contains a single recommendation, relating to support for the development of students' skills in academic writing. This recommendation arises from a minor omission in the College's provision. It also contains a single feature of good practice relating to extensive pastoral support and guidance available to students.

2.126 Expectation B5 is met with a low level of risk. It contains a single feature of good practice relating to the comprehensive and systematic structure for student representation.

2.127 Expectation B6 is not met with a moderate level of risk. It contains three recommendations. The first recommendation arises from a weakness in the College's approach to formative assessment. This weakness indicates insufficient emphasis being given to assuring quality in the College's planning processes. The second recommendation relates to a weakness in the College's process for remarking assessed work. This weakness indicates insufficient emphasis being given to assuring standards in the College's planning processes and a lack of clarity about responsibilities. The third recommendation arises from the College's failure to acknowledge the possibility that outcomes of recent external examiner's reports in Health and Social Care are indicative of systemic or procedural failings in the assessment of this subject. This weakness indicates shortcomings in the rigour with which the College's quality assurance procedures are being applied.

2.128 Expectation B8 is met with a low level of risk. It contains a single recommendation relating to the need to establish and implement a process for the periodic review of courses and a single affirmation relating to processes for annual unit and course reviews. These relate to activity already under way which will allow the College to meet the Expectation more fully.

2.129 Expectation B10 is not met with a moderate level of risk. It contains a single recommendation arising from the need for a process regarding the approval and monitoring of all work placements. This recommendation relates to insufficient priority being given to assuring standards and quality in the College's planning processes.

2.130 While the risks in Expectation B6 and B10 are moderate, the failure to develop an understanding of why there are repeatedly essential actions in external examiners' reports, the lack of a secure process for remarking assessed work and the failure to exercise due diligence in approving and monitoring placement providers are weaknesses which could

without action lead to serious problems over time.

2.131 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Most of the applicable Expectations in this judgement area have been met, and none of them present serious risks. Some moderate risks, in Expectations B6 and B10, could without action lead to serious problems over time. Six recommendations relate either to insufficient emphasis being given to assuring standards or quality in the College's planning processes or to shortcomings in the rigour with which the College's quality assurance procedures are being applied. Although the College has plans for addressing the weakness in Expectation B10, these plans are not fully embedded in the College's operational planning. The College failed to show awareness of the significance of issues arising in Expectation B2 and Expectation B6.

2.132 In relation to the Concern, the review team found that the aspect of the Concern in relation to Expectation B2 is not upheld. The College has adequate arrangements for the assessment of English language prior to entry. Despite the shortcomings in the oversight of the interview process, the review team found no evidence that students had been admitted without prior qualifications or experience at a suitable level. However, the aspect of the Concern in relation to Expectation B6 is upheld. The process for remarking assessed work and for reconciling marks between first and second assessors is neither clearly articulated nor fit for purpose.

2.133 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the provider **requires improvement** to meet UK expectations.

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

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

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

##### **Findings**

3.1 Pearson is responsible for providing information about the courses offered by the College and provides programme specifications which are available on Pearson's website together with guidance documents on its expectations for recruitment, delivery, assessment and quality assurance of its awards.

3.2 Information about the College and its courses is the responsibility of the College and is conveyed to intended audiences through a variety of mechanisms. The College publishes information on its website and prospectus for all audiences that includes, but not limited to, entry requirements, course information, module titles, fees, mode of study and who the awarding organisation is.

3.3 More detailed information about each course is captured within each course handbook. Course handbooks make reference to: modules included and their respective credit; semester plan; information about the awarding organisation and award title; admission requirements; objectives of the course; external reference points; learning outcomes; assessment strategies and student support available. It is the responsibility of the Head of Department, in coordination with the Examination Office, to compile each of the course handbooks. The Vice-Principal monitors this process and reports to the Academic Board for final approval. It is the responsibility of the Senior Management Team to provide the ongoing monitoring on this information and to provide the definitive sign-off.

3.4 The College has created the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manual as a definitive document of College processes and procedures. This includes information on areas such as governance and management, publicity and marketing, admissions, course monitoring, assessment, appeals and complaints and learning resources. This document is monitored annually by the Senior Management Team.

3.5 The College has both Student and Staff handbooks. The Student Handbook, which is made available to students during the induction process and subsequently on the VLE, provides a large amount of information about the College and its rules, regulations and expectations. Further information is also provided in relation to assessment procedures and procedures for making an academic appeal or a formal complaint. The Staff Handbook is a source for all internal policies and additionally outlines the performance review procedures.

3.6 The College's VLE serves as a repository for information and to support the delivery of courses. Its content is reviewed by each of the Heads of Department during each semester, with oversight from the Vice-Principal, supported by the report on the operation and content of the VLE created by the Head of Departments each semester.

3.7 The Senior Management Team is responsible for the definitive sign-off for all College published information. This includes: descriptions of academic courses; course handbooks; staff handbooks; reference to fees; admission procedures; marketing information; the website and the VLE. The procedure for amending any information is also the responsibility of the Senior Management Team and requires the signatures of two senior

managers to confirm that each change can take place.

3.8 Students receive a conditional transcript detailing the individual units that have been passed after the final Assessment Board and external examiners' approval. Students have to fill in a completed certification form to receive their formal certification for completion of their programme. This is checked by the College and sent to the awarding organisation for processing.

3.9 These arrangements, if implemented securely, would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.10 The review team examined evidence relating to the use and production of information including evidence relating to the use of the VLE by students and staff, course handbooks, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manual and the Student and Staff Handbook. The team met staff responsible for checking and updating information and met students to establish whether they were satisfied with the information they received prior to and during their studies.

3.11 Students confirmed that the information they were given prior to arrival was accurate and fit for purpose, and was aligned with their experience after arriving at the College. This is further confirmed by a recent College internal student survey which found that 72 per cent of students who responded rated the adequacy and accuracy of public information as very good.

3.12 The College has recently introduced thematic audits of its information conducted at the end of each semester, which enable it to confirm that public information is appropriate and consistent across all outlets. This is conducted by an external consultant, overseen by the Senior Management Team. Despite this, the review team found that some of the information held on the website was not completely accurate, in that it contains a reference to students obtaining a degree awarded by selected UK universities after studying for three years. As the College does not have any formal partnership with an institution to create such an arrangement this information is currently incorrect. Teaching staff spoke in positive terms about their use of the VLE and the impact that it has on their practice and pedagogy. Staff are adequately trained in using the VLE and receive continuous training through the CPD workshops. The VLE supports the creation and use of forums, for both staff and students, which relate to specific topics including enabling better communication among student representatives, sharing of good practice among staff and enabling online classroom discussions. Course-based forums are informally monitored by the Head of Department with overall oversight provided by the Vice-Principal. The effective oversight and use of the content of the VLE supports the feature of good practice in Expectation B3 in relation to the integration of the VLE into course delivery.

3.13 The College has in place secure procedures to ensure that the information created for its intended audiences is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

3.14 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The single Expectation for this judgement area is met with a low level of risk.

3.15 There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations relating to this judgement area.

3.16 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College's self-evaluation document stated that the College and its Senior Management Team are committed to providing high quality learning opportunities for students and driving the enhancement strategy and that staff, both academic and support are committed to continually considering ways they can improve the student experience.

4.2 The College has adopted the definition of enhancement as indicated in the Quality Code, namely that it takes 'deliberate steps' at College level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The Vice-Principal and Head of Quality and Enhancement has a key role in ensuring that quality assurance and enhancement processes are implemented effectively and one of the stated aims of Academic Board is to drive the College's enhancement strategy as set out in its QAEM.

4.3 The College's vision, mission, values and strategic priorities are set out in its strategic plan and underpin its approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The College is committed to expanding access to higher education to individuals from those sections of the community historically underrepresented in the sector; this commitment to widening participation is reflected in the demography of its student body.

4.4 The above framework would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.5 The review team considered evidence relating to the College's approach to enhancement and its QAEM. The team also held meetings with senior, teaching and professional support staff, with students and their representatives, and held a telephone conversation with the chair of the Advisory Board.

4.6 The College places considerable emphasis on student engagement and has systemised its approach to gathering and acting on student feedback to enhance the quality of the student experience. More formal mechanisms have been introduced for gathering feedback from students including through the system of student representation on key College committees, Staff Student Liaison Panels and internal and external student surveys (see also Expectation B5). Students spoke positively about this approach and confirmed that they are listened to; both staff and students were able to give examples of how student feedback had been used to enhance student experience; examples include the development of the personal tutoring system, improvements to Wi-Fi access, provision of a dedicated common room, amendments to the teaching timetable, additional extra-curricular activities, improvements to library resources and development of the VLE.

4.7 The College's Mission notes its role in preparing students for their future careers. Recent developments to support this priority have included the engagement of a specialist careers adviser who visits the College once a week on different days, the increased use of guest speakers and visits to exhibitions. Other related priorities set out in the strategic plan include the possibility of the College offering apprenticeships, Foundation degrees and top-up programmes although these priorities have yet to be implemented.

4.8 As previously noted in Expectations A3.3 and B8 the College makes effective use of data in the monitoring of its provision which in turn leads to improvements in the quality of students' learning opportunities. For example, acknowledging that its student non-

continuation, completion and pass rates are not satisfactory , the College has taken a number of actions which have been effective in supporting improvement in this data which include the introduction of level B2 English Language requirements; the introduction of a personal tutoring system; weekly monitoring by Heads of Department of formative (task-by-task) feedback; monitoring student attendance through fingerprinting and sending text messages followed up by letter and phone calls on a weekly basis; close monitoring of student progression by Heads of Department; free classes for students to attend who have low progression; support for students that have not been able to complete their course within two years and the introduction of the unit review process. The recently re-developed student survey questionnaire is also intended to seek students' views on what might help further improve student attendance and allow the College to achieve its stated benchmark of 80 per cent.

4.9 Tutors disseminate good practice on the College's VLE and also share good practice through Assessment Board meetings and CPD workshops. Academic staff were able to give examples of good practice being disseminated by one tutor and later adopted by another. The College's newly developed annual monitoring processes are also intended to support the identification and dissemination of good practice and staff confirmed the effectiveness of the recently implemented unit review process in achieving this aim.

4.10 The College supports teaching staff to obtain a recognised teaching qualification and actively encourages all staff to engage with continued professional development both internally through its CPD workshops and externally, or to attend conferences; staff spoke positively about these opportunities. The College is a member of the Higher Education Academy and supports and encourages staff to apply for Fellowship of the Academy at the appropriate level.

4.11 The College celebrates its students' academic success through the End of Year Best Achievers awards; each department recognises those individuals who have met the College's targets for progression and attendance on their course. The College has also recently agreed to hold a formal graduation ceremony in response to student feedback.

4.12 Overall the team concludes that the College takes deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. This approach is underpinned by its Strategic Plan, its Mission and its commitment to student engagement. Effective use is made of data by the College in the monitoring of its provision which again leads to enhancement. Hence the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

4.13 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The single Expectation for this judgement area is met with a low level of risk.

4.14 There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations relating to this judgement area.

4.15 The College has effective arrangements to improve the quality of learning opportunities. The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

## 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 21-24 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Awarding organisation

An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications.

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

**Programme specifications**

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

**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.

**Self-evaluation document**

A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

**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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