



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

July 2018

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) Partial Re-review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at ICON College of Technology and Management Ltd. The review took place from 17 to 18 July 2018 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Diane Meehan
- Mr Josef Mueller.

The main purpose of the partial 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)¹ setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

This was a partial review following an original review undertaken in July 2017 which resulted in a published report. The QAA review team made judgements on one area requiring improvement: The quality of student learning opportunities.

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](#)² and explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).³ For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.

² QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk.

³ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education.

Key findings

Judgement

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

- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

About the provider

ICON College of Technology and Management Ltd (the College) is an independent college of higher education established in 2003 to meet the demand for quality education at affordable fees. The College seeks to prepare students for their choice of careers and to offer an educational experience that will aid them in taking their place as productive members of society. The College is committed to expanding access to higher education to individuals from those sections of the community under-represented in higher education. The vast majority of students are mature students, many from the European Union.

The College operates from one campus in the east end of London. It offers a range of Higher National Diplomas awarded by Pearson. At the time of the partial re-review there were 1,060 students enrolled: 520 students on the HND Business; 225 in Health and Social Care; 87 in Computing and System Development; 152 in Travel and Tourism; and 76 students in Hospitality Management.

The College's mission, strategic direction and management structure is unchanged since the previous QAA review in 2017. The College produced a detailed action plan to address the recommendations made at that time and has closely monitored progress in implementing the actions identified. Changes have been made to the operation and management of the admissions system to ensure decision making is fair and consistent across programmes; clearly documented processes have been introduced for the remarking of student work and a formal review of assessment practices within Health and Social Care has taken place; formative feedback to students has been strengthened and is now differentiated by level of study; and clear processes approval and monitoring of all work placements have been implemented. In addition, the College has strengthened its support for the development of students' academic writing skills and developed a process for the periodic review of programmes.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

1 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

1.1 The College offers BTEC Higher National Diploma (HND) courses developed by Pearson. The responsibility for designing and developing the courses and the overall curriculum lies with Pearson as the awarding body, while the College has a degree of discretion with regard to the selection of course units out of the pool of available core and specialist units defined by Pearson. In choosing these, the College considers local needs. The College then delivers approved courses following the course specifications, which are provided to students by the College through course handbooks.

1.2 The College obtained centre approval in 2004 and has course approval for six level 5 HND courses. The division of responsibilities between the College and the awarding body is laid out in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manual (QAEM). The same document contains the procedure for the approval, re-approval, modification and withdrawal of courses, although no courses have been withdrawn to date. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.3 The review team examined documentation including course and unit specifications, the course handbooks, the QAEM, and a range of minutes from course reviews, academic management and annual programme reviews, and Academic Board minutes. It met with the Principal and senior staff.

1.4 Academic Board oversees the approval process for new courses. When the College wants to introduce a new course or modify an existing course, a course review team (CRT) is convened, which reports to Academic Board. The CRT considers demand for the new course, its delivery, marketing, and the adequate provision of physical and human resources for the delivery of the course. Academic Board approves the selection of units and pathways before the College seeks approval from Pearson. Revisions of Pearson courses follow the same process, including the establishment of a course review team. Existing courses undergo re-approval every five years. Academic Board maintains the course re-approval schedule.

1.5 Pearson is responsible for the design and development of courses. It designs courses according to the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) and the Regulated Quality Framework (RQF). By September 2018, the College will switch its courses to RQF, which will allow students to choose a pathway in their second year and aligns more closely with level 6 study after completion of the HND. For this purpose, course review teams have recently been convened. The College decides which pathway options it wants to offer its students. In doing so, it takes account of students' interests, resource constraints and the market situation. It also decides on the electives to be offered per pathway. Local employers

are consulted in this process, and feedback from alumni about what content has been helpful for them in their further study or career also feeds into the choice of pathways.

1.6 Pearson adopts a range of quality assurance checks on the College to ensure it is complying with Pearson requirements, namely: Centre and Course Approval; Academic Management Review (AMR); annual external examiner visits and Annual Programme Monitoring Review (APMR).

1.7 With respect to choosing optional units and pathways, the College has in place an effective process which includes consultation with employers and student 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

1.8 In accordance with the list of responsibilities agreed with Pearson, the College is responsible for the recruitment, selection and admission of students. In doing so, the College follows an admissions policy, which outlines the processes and procedures that are followed during the admissions process. The policy is contained in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manual.

1.9 Applicants must be able to demonstrate either a level 3 qualification, a level 2 qualification and relevant work experience, or, substantial work experience related to the field of proposed study. International qualifications are accepted, and their equivalence is determined by admissions staff using the UK National Academic Recognition Information Centre's (NARIC) guidelines. Candidates must also demonstrate capability in the English language equivalent to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level B2, and a commitment to study. In cases where students cannot provide a formal language qualification, they take an in-house written English language test, while their spoken English is assessed by the admissions tutor during interview.

1.10 Applicants go through a three-stage interview process. The application is finally checked and signed off by the Head of Quality and Enhancement (HoQE). A procedure is in place to deal with students who have declared a disability on the application form. A procedure is also in place for students who want to apply for recognition of prior learning. Applicants who are not offered a place on the course which they applied for can appeal the decision through a procedure that is outlined in the QAEM. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.11 The review team tested the Expectation by reading the College documentation related to admissions, including the QAEM, minutes of admissions meetings, and documents related to the training of admissions staff. The team also viewed agent performance reviews, samples of student admissions files and offer and rejection letters sent to students, samples of assessment forms and English tests. It also held meetings with the Principal, senior, teaching and professional support staff, and students.

1.12 The 2017 QAA review report contained a recommendation to 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'. In response to this recommendation, the College sent staff involved in the admissions process on UK NARIC admissions officer training. Admissions staff reported an increased level of clarity regarding international qualifications as a result of the training. In respect of the verification of the originality of certificates, the number of NARIC checks has been increased to 25 per cent.

1.13 The College has a procedure for the selection and recruitment of agents and has recently strengthened the briefing of agents with regard to the College's requirements, including English language requirements. Applicants go through the same selection and admission procedure and three-stage interview process, no matter whether they come through the agent route or apply directly to the College. This was confirmed by students.

Students are interviewed by the agent if they come through the agent route, admissions staff check if the appropriate documents are in place, and the admissions tutor checks the student's motivation, academic suitability, and their communication skills. Admissions staff use a document checklist while the admissions tutors use a student assessment form for the interview. Most of the students met by the review team had also taken the in-house English language test. Greater clarity of communication and setting of expectations for students at the admission stage has had a positive impact on student engagement.

1.14 Another recommendation related to establishing 'effective oversight of the admissions interview process in order to ensure fair and consistent conduct across all courses'. In response to this recommendation, the College has introduced a number of meetings to increase communication between the staff members involved in the admissions process, to ensure consistency, and share good practice. Admissions staff hold regular informal meetings to discuss operational matters. Good practice meetings are called to disseminate good practice among admissions tutors. In addition to this, the College has introduced standardisation meetings, three of which have taken place since 2017, with one such meeting being held at the start of each academic year. These meetings are attended by both, admissions staff and admissions tutors, with the aim of sharing information and informing the next round of student admissions. The meetings are also used for admissions tutors to share good practice. In order to expand the pool of admission tutors, a number of teaching staff are trained in conducting interviews by initially observing admissions interviews and then conducting interviews themselves, under supervision by a senior staff member. In future, the Director of Admissions will oversee staff training for those involved in the admissions process.

1.15 The College has undertaken a review of its procedures with regard to a potential conflict of interest if the Director of Admissions (DoA) was involved in interviewing prospective students. The decision was taken that the DoA and the Principal would not be involved in making admissions decisions. Instead the relevant Head of Department (HoD) or a senior admissions tutor recommends applicants for admission, followed by sign-off by the HoQE. A letter from the DoA informs the student of the outcome. As a quality check, the Principal or DoA audit a sample of admissions files to see if the admission process has been applied consistently and effectively. The Academic Management Review 2017-18 by the awarding organisation concluded that suitable processes are in place for the integrity of student recruitment.

1.16 The College has implemented a number of measures since the last review to improve the training of, and the communication among, staff members involved in the admissions process. Staff training has been conducted and a plan for future training is in place. Sharing of good practice, standardisation meetings, observations of admissions interviews, and a revised admissions policy ensure improved standardisation and consistency in the selection and admission of applicants. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

1.17 The College's arrangements for effective learning and teaching are underpinned by its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy (TLAS), the effectiveness of which is currently being reviewed. The College's approach includes teaching observations, staff development, performance monitoring, student and staff feedback, the provision of learning resources and assessment policies. Course delivery is supported by the College's virtual learning environment (VLE). The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.18 The review team tested the Expectation by reading the QAEM, policies and procedures, materials available on the VLE and by considering student feedback and minutes of relevant committees. The review team also met the Principal, senior, teaching and professional support staff, and students.

1.19 The implementation of the TLAS 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. The current review of the TLAS is expected to be completed by August 2018. The College confirmed that the review is unlikely to result in major changes to the strategy.

1.20 Regular monitoring and evaluation of teaching occurs through tutor performance audits, carried out regularly by the Heads of Department, which feed into the staff performance review system; developmental peer observation, which takes place annually for experienced teaching staff and twice a year for new staff or those needing additional support; the sampling of classes by the Head of Quality and Enhancement; and student evaluations. Feedback from peer observations are discussed at HoD meetings and reported to Academic Board and appropriate action is taken where necessary. Peer observations and student evaluations also form part of the evidence required for the College's unit review process (discussed under Expectation B8). Feedback from students demonstrates overall satisfaction with the teaching on their courses.

1.21 All teaching staff are supported to participate in a range of developmental activities. The College also holds mandatory continuous professional development (CPD) workshops. New staff confirmed that appropriate support was in place when they joined the College, including a formal induction process and ongoing support from their HoD with whom they meet on a four-weekly basis. Recently, the College conducted a tutor questionnaire survey, to be repeated annually, the aims of which are to review professional development and training needs, to assess and improve performance reviews and feedback and to review teaching practices, benefits and attitudes. One action taken as a result of the survey is the support being provided by the College for staff to achieve fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). Nine staff have achieved HEA fellowship to date.

1.22 Staff and students confirmed that the College's VLE continues to effectively support course delivery and assessment. A wide range of materials are made available on the VLE, including lecture notes, eBooks, journals, videos, course specifications, College policies and

procedures, academic and administrative forms, and an electronic notice-board. Students also communicate among themselves and tutors through forums and emails. The VLE is also used by students to upload their assignments through the anti-plagiarism software and receive feedback on their assignments. The College is building on the good practice from the 2017 HER (AP) report which noted the 'effective integration of the virtual learning environment into Course delivery which enhances student engagement with the learning process' and is intending to evaluate the effectiveness of the integration of the VLE into course delivery at the end of the 2017-18 academic year.

1.23 The Teaching, Learning and Resources Committee (TLRC) ensures sufficiency of learning resources and makes recommendations to Academic Board on the provision of learning resources based on student feedback, feedback from the Student Affairs Committee (SAC), Staff-Student Liaison Panel meetings (SSLPs) and external examiner reports. Recent improvements to resources noted by staff and students include improvements to library stock, longer library opening hours, improved printing facilities and upgrades to IT facilities.

1.24 The College has in place effective arrangements to monitor, 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

1.25 The College's strategic approach to enabling student development and achievement is set out in its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. The College discharges this responsibility in a number of ways including through its induction process, personal tutorial system, student support systems, the provision of appropriate learning resources, the monitoring of student attendance, the use of formative feedback and by preparing students for employment. Additionally, the College has recently established a hardship fund. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.26 To test the Expectation the team read the College's QAEM, minutes of committee and board meetings, policies and procedures and feedback from student surveys. The team also met the Principal, senior, teaching and professional support staff, and students.

1.27 A mandatory two-day student induction focuses on supporting students through their initial transition to higher education. The 2017 HER (AP) report recommended the College 'strengthen support for the development of student's skills in academic writing' and in response the College has reintroduced one full day of academic writing and study skills into the induction period and has introduced academic writing skills into tutorial sessions. This additional support was viewed positively by both staff and students. Students are provided with the College's student handbook and course handbooks at induction, and induction sessions include the use of the College VLE. Feedback from the most recent induction survey shows that students are generally happy with the induction process.

1.28 Following induction, all students are allocated a personal tutor who supports the student throughout their studies. Personal tutors provide general advice, act as a first port of call for pastoral, professional or academic concerns or advice and direct students to other support offered by the College such as counselling and careers advice. The College confirmed that there is a mandatory requirement for students to see their personal tutor at least once every semester but that this requirement is not met for every student. Students confirmed that all students are assigned and meet their personal tutors at induction. While personal tutors are accessible, and students recognise the value of having personal tutors, they also expressed the view that meeting with their personal tutors was not compulsory. The College is attempting to increase the number of students who regularly engage with their personal tutors by asking personal tutors to follow up students who fail to make contact, working with student representatives to highlight student issues and paying part-time tutors to be available at times most convenient to students. Senior staff confirmed that these measures are beginning to make a positive impact.

1.29 Students can identify on their admissions application form any specific learning disability needs. A range of additional support is made available to such students following further assessment. Students also have access to professional counselling support. A dedicated Careers Adviser and the Student Career and Welfare Officer provide students with careers guidance. The College has added to the support it offers to students by setting up and operating a hardship fund. Students were aware and appreciative of the additional support available to them.

1.30 The College monitors, and has taken steps to improve, student attendance and retention rates. Poor attendance is followed up through tutors and student representatives.

Students must achieve at least 50 per cent attendance before being allowed to submit assignments. Attendance rates have improved to 75.4 per cent in the current academic year but still fall short of the College's target of 80 per cent. Retention is also monitored. The College's annual report for 2016-17 noted that the retention rate was 94 per cent overall and updated figures reported the current retention rate overall as 98.3 per cent.

1.31 Secure arrangements are in place to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

1.32 The College is responsible for developing, implementing and facilitating arrangements and processes that ensure the engagement of students. The College has in place a formal student representation system. Student engagement is mainly facilitated through the various committees that the student representatives are elected to and through feedback elicited through questionnaires and surveys. The College continues to develop its comprehensive and systematic representation system and has supplemented the internal training for student representatives with training provided by an external body. The arrangements in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.33 The review team explored the effectiveness of the approach by considering relevant documentation, including the College's QAEM, outputs from student feedback surveys and minutes of relevant boards and committees, and held meetings with senior, teaching and professional support staff and students.

1.34 Student representatives are elected by their peers at the beginning of the academic year and engage with a number of College boards and committees including Academic Board, the SAC, the Teaching, Learning and Resources Committee (TLRC), the Prevent Lead Duty team and departmental SSLPs. SSLPs bring together student representatives and staff and receive and respond to student feedback. SSLPs report to SAC which in turn escalates issues as appropriate to Academic Board. The Student Career and Welfare Officer supports student representatives in their roles and internal and external training is provided; the latter, having been introduced in 2018, will be repeated annually. Students spoke positively about the student representation system, confirmed that SSLPs provide an effective mechanism for issues to be raised and that the College responds to issues in a timely fashion. They were able to give a number of recent examples of actions taken as a result of their feedback.

1.35 A number of other mechanisms are in place for students to provide feedback, including internal student surveys, a suggestion box and an online forum on the VLE as well as external surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS). The College uses student feedback effectively to enhance provision. Student feedback is analysed externally. The College uses a 'You Said, We Did' mechanism for feeding actions back to students as well as through the SSLP meetings, boards and committees, the VLE and notice-boards. The College also uses a student exit survey and has created an alumni database to allow students to create a network after graduation. The College also makes use of alumni in course reviews and one alumnus sits on its Advisory Board.

1.36 The College has in place effective procedures and processes to enable students to provide feedback and to contribute to quality assurance processes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.37 The College's courses are delivered and assessed in line with its regulatory framework, which includes assessment regulations based on those of its awarding organisation (Pearson). The College is responsible for developing assessment tasks, marking, internal verification and for providing feedback to students. It has recently developed a new policy for the remarking of student work and revised its approach to providing formative assessment feedback. Assessment practices within the department of Health and Social Care have also been reviewed. Departmental assessment boards are held to confirm student progression and achievement and to recommend grades to Pearson. Procedures are in place for the recognition of prior learning which align with the requirements of the awarding organisation. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.38 The review team tested the Expectation by reading the QAEM, assessment policies, procedures and regulations, student handbooks, samples of assignment briefs, external examiner reports and minutes of departmental assessment boards. The team also met the Principal, senior, teaching and professional support staff, and students.

1.39 Staff confirmed that appropriate support is in place, including for new staff in relation to assessment practice. Teaching staff attend in-house workshops and standardisation meetings are also held. Good practice is shared through the College's VLE and through Assessment Boards.

1.40 The College's use of anti-plagiarism software is intended to encourage good assessment practice. Plagiarism stands at an average of five per cent across the College's courses. Students submit assignments through anti-plagiarism software via the College's VLE. Students confirmed that they are allowed to submit up to five times prior to final submission. The College accepts an overall similarity index of 30 per cent with no more than 10 per cent from a single source, although staff confirmed that discretion can be applied. Students are aware of these requirements. Students who do not meet these requirements are referred and must resubmit their assignment. A formal Academic Misconduct Committee is in place which deals with cases of student academic misconduct.

1.41 Marking is undertaken by tutors, checked through the College's internal verification process and outcomes are discussed at departmental Assessment Boards. The 2017 QAA review report recommended that the College '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'. In response, the College has developed a clear procedure, included in its QAEM, for the remarking of student work should this be deemed necessary, and the team saw evidence which demonstrated that the procedure was being operated appropriately.

1.42 The College uses both formative and summative feedback. Formative feedback is used to monitor the progress of student learning and allow students to improve their work. Students confirmed that the summative feedback provided to them electronically is helpful

and timely. Grades are provisional until they are internally verified and approved at Assessment Boards. The 2017 QAA review report recommended that the College 'take steps to ensure that the model for formative assessment adequately supports the development of independent learners, particularly at level 5'. The College has developed a revised procedure for formative assessment feedback that has moved away from the previous task-by-task approach to the provision of more holistic formative feedback. The revised approach differentiates between levels 4 and 5, and at level 5 feedback focuses on the higher contextual level, such as critical analysis and evaluation or making judgements when arriving at conclusions. The College shared this revised approach with teaching staff in a CPD workshop and ensures that students receive formative feedback appropriate to their level of study. Both staff and students confirmed their understanding of the new approach which students found helpful.

1.43 Following the recommendation within the 2017 QAA review report that the College 'undertake a formal review of assessment practices within Health and Social Care (HSC) in order to establish in what ways they have contributed to the essential actions and recommendations identified by the external examiner', the College has taken a number of actions including strengthening ways in which the department and the College consider and respond to the recommendations from external examiners' reports (see also Expectation B7) and by inviting an independent external assessor to look at the assessment practices within the department. The report from the external assessor was positive and identified no major issues in relation to the assessment practices within HSC. The most recent external examiner report for HSC confirmed that actions arising from previous external examiner reports had been actioned appropriately and raised no essential actions or recommendations.

1.44 The College carefully monitors progression and achievement rates, which along with retention and attendance data are reported in its comprehensive annual report. Recent Assessment Board minutes indicate, however, that in some subject areas the number of referrals is of concern. Teaching staff comment on student achievement within unit review reports with appropriate action taken as necessary. A number of mechanisms are in place to support students to achieve positive assessment outcomes including the formative assessment process described above and the recent introduction of an additional three weeks of support following the completion of teaching to enable students to prepare for assessment. This support was highly valued by students. In its self-evaluation, the College noted that students completing within the normal two years has risen to 65 per cent. In meetings the team heard that this is likely to rise to 70 per cent or above for the current academic year.

1.45 The College's processes for assessment, design, marking and feedback are appropriate and the College has satisfactorily addressed the recommendations raised in the 2017 QAA review report. Appropriate support is in place for students and staff in relation to assessment. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

1.46 The College's external examiners are recruited, trained and appointed by Pearson. The external examiner for each course visits regularly and reports on the College's management of academic standards, the effectiveness of its verification and assessment processes and of its response to essential actions and recommendations raised in the previous report. Certification of learners is only released when the external examiner confirms that Pearson's standards are met by the College. The College has developed external examiner action tables for each subject area that incorporate actions arising from the reports. The arrangements in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.47 The review team explored the effectiveness of the approach by considering relevant documentation including the College's QAEM, external examiner reports, action tables and minutes of relevant committees and boards. The review team also met senior and teaching staff, and students.

1.48 During their visits external examiners meet staff and students. Students confirmed they have access to external examiner reports on the VLE. External examiners ensure that all assignment briefs have been internally verified and verify a sample of assignment briefs prior to them being issued to students. They also sample student work and check that students have been assessed fairly, according to the published and contextualised assessment criteria, and grades are awarded accordingly.

1.49 The College draws up action tables in response to external examiners' reports and these, together with the reports, are discussed at departmental assessment boards. The action tables are also considered by Academic Board to ensure that all actions and recommendations have been addressed appropriately and in a timely manner. Recent external examiner reports confirm general satisfaction with the overall standards and quality of the provision and the responses made to recommendations arising from previous reports. Three recommendations were made in the 2017 report for the HND Business which have been addressed, whilst no recommendations were made in the most recent reports for Health and Social Care, Travel and Tourism Management and Hospitality Management and Computing. In addition, no essential actions were raised in any of the recent external examiner reports and all reports note areas of good practice.

1.50 The College gives serious attention to the external examining process and 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

1.51 Responsibility for periodic review is shared by the College and the awarding organisation. In addition to Pearson's quality assurance checks via AMRs, annual external examiner visits and APMRs, the College has adopted its own review mechanism, including unit reviews and annual course reviews, which feed into a College annual report. These processes are set out in the College's QAEM and are coordinated by the Vice Principal/HoQE, who reports outcomes to Academic Board.

1.52 Tutors complete a unit evaluation and achievement report after the delivery of each unit, following an agreed template. The relevant HoD complements the report with student feedback data and adds an action plan, which is signed off at the Assessment Board. Unit reviews feed into the annual course review, through which the course team reflects on course delivery over the past year. Annual course reviews are presented at the first Academic Board of each academic year. The College has recently adopted a procedure for periodic course review. The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.53 The review team tested the Expectation by reading documentation relating to the College's and Pearson's monitoring and review procedures, and the minutes of relevant committees. In addition, the team held meetings with senior, teaching and professional support staff, and students, including student representatives.

1.54 The College has continued to make progress with the affirmation from the 2017 QAA review report regarding the establishment and implementation of processes for annual unit and course reviews. The College continues to produce good quality unit review reports every semester and, in line with Pearson requirements, has produced comprehensive annual course reviews for the academic year 2016-17. They provide a suitable health check for the course and include data on student enrolment, progression and completion, as well as external examiner comments. They also provide a summary of unit reports for each term, including data on unit achievement. An appropriate action plan is appended.

1.55 The reports are received by the Heads of Department Committee, which in conjunction with the Vice Principal/HoQE prepares a comprehensive College annual report that pulls together information from the annual course reviews. This forms the basis for the College action plan, which together with the College annual report is reviewed and monitored by Academic Board. These processes enable the College to reflect effectively on the delivery of units and courses with a view to maintaining standards and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. The review team found these documents to be comprehensive and make effective use of a wide range of data.

1.56 In response to the recommendation from the 2017 QAA review report to 'establish and implement a process for the periodic review of courses', the College has introduced a procedure for periodic course review. According to the College's procedure, each course will undergo periodic review every five years. Periodic review will cover all HND courses and is to be carried out by a panel that includes external peer reviewers. The panel will make judgements about the standards, quality and currency of learning opportunities of a specific course, culminating in a subject review report, to be considered and signed off by Academic Board. This would allow reflection on the performance of each course over a longer period.

The College has drawn up a review timetable, which implies that reviews would be undertaken in the year prior to the date by which the College needs to obtain course re-approval. The first periodic review is due to take place in 2020.

1.57 The latest Pearson AMR on the College was positive. It included no essential actions or recommendations but highlighted one area of exemplary practice. Outcomes of the review were considered at Academic Board. In line with Pearson's requirements, the College's latest annual programme monitoring report reflects appropriately on academic standards and quality assurance, statistical information, published programme information, student experience, learning and teaching, resources, and employer engagement. In addition, the College also comments extensively on how essential actions and recommendations from external examiner reports have been addressed.

1.58 The College has in place effective systems for unit and annual course reviews the outcomes of which feed into a comprehensive College annual report with appropriate action planning. The College also appropriately addresses actions and recommendations arising from Pearson reviews and external examiner reports. It has made plans for the introduction of a periodic review system for its provision. The Expectation is met and 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

1.59 The College's procedures for complaints and appeals are outlined in the QAEM. Information on appeals and complaints is also available on the College website, the College VLE and within the student handbook. Students are made aware of the appeals process during induction.

1.60 The appeals procedure follows a six-stage process. A student can lodge an appeal within 10 days of the assessment result having been made available. If the HoD gives permission for the appeal to proceed, an internal verifier team will meet to consider the appeal within 10 days of the appeal having been lodged. The recommendation of the team is submitted to the relevant assessment board, which can accept or reject the recommendation. After internal procedures have been exhausted, a student who is dissatisfied with the final decision can apply to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) and the awarding organisation.

1.61 The complaints procedure aims to resolve the majority of complaints through the informal process (stage 1). Students can discuss complaints with their personal tutor, the HoD, or the Career and Welfare Officer. If complaints are more general in nature, they can be raised via student representatives at SSLPs or other committees. If a complaint cannot be resolved informally, students can submit a written complaint to the Academic Misconduct Committee (stage 2), using a complaint form. Academic Board receives a summary report of academic appeals and complaints through the College's annual reporting processes. The College also has suggestion boxes for students' comments and suggestions regarding academic and administrative matters. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.62 The review team considered evidence by reading relevant College documentation such as the appeals and complaints procedure, both of which are contained in the QAEM, a record of complaints, and a sample of student appeal forms. It also held meetings with groups of staff and students.

1.63 The College effectively implements its procedures for academic appeals and complaints. In the 2017-18 academic year the College received two appeals, one of which was upheld and one overturned. Over the same period, the College received 13 complaints. All complaints are carefully recorded in a complaints log including the actions taken and the outcome. Students confirmed that they were aware of processes and procedures for appeals and complaints and knew where to find the relevant information. Students reported that if student representatives were unable to resolve an issue, they knew how to invoke the complaints procedure.

1.64 The College has in place and follows appropriate processes and procedures for 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

1.65 The Pearson BTEC HND Health and Social Care (HSC) contains a unit that requires at least 200 hours of relevant work experience to be completed in a health and social care setting with an appropriate professional provider. The College assumes responsibility for oversight of the management of students' work experience. A work experience portfolio that shows evidence of the student's ability as a reflective practitioner must be submitted as evidence in order to pass the unit. The programme specification states that students need individual support through tutorials and meetings with work-place mentors to devise appropriate development plans. Planning, monitoring and revision of personal development plans are seen as appropriate evidence for achieving personal targets and learning outcomes.

1.66 The College revised its HSC Work Experience Policy, which has been in operation since September 2017. The policy sets out in general terms the responsibilities of the College, students, and the work placement provider (employer). It also contains a number of forms for procuring and risk-assessing placement providers and monitoring student progress during their placement. The College supports students in finding suitable placements and has recently appointed a part-time Work Experience Learner Coordinator (WELC) to help deliver the revised policy and ensure that it is implemented. The HoD HSC is responsible for monitoring and reporting the effectiveness of the work experience arrangements to the HoQE. The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.67 The review team tested the Expectation by examining the revised Work Experience Policy, associated forms and guidance for staff, students and placement providers. The team also met senior, teaching and professional support staff, and students.

1.68 The 2017 QAA review report contained a recommendation that the College should 'establish and put into effect a clearly-documented process to ensure that the arrangements for the approval and monitoring of all work placements at the required level are implemented securely and managed effectively'. There is evidence that procedures are in place to identify students who need to complete a work placement, to assist them in finding placements, and to monitor their progress. The revised Work Experience Policy tightened the College's management of the arrangements for the approval and monitoring of work placements. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the policy after the first year of its implementation has been produced for submission to Academic Board.

1.69 The College informs HSC students at the recruitment stage about the work experience requirement and of the support provided by the College. Students are given the work experience handbook at the start of the placement unit. The same information is also provided in the student handbook and the QAEM. Students are informed at what level their work has to be in order to satisfy the requirements of the placement unit. In 2017-18, out of 92 students, 21 needed to complete work experience. In February 2018, 59 students started the placement unit and 17 needed work placements. Most students on the HSC course are already working in the sector and can satisfy the placement requirement through their ongoing work. For those students that are not in employment, the College provides help with finding a placement. The College provides students with a list of the types of placements that

are acceptable, and examples of placements that are not. It has established links with five employers who provide work experience opportunities for students.

1.70 The College has also established an appropriate process for risk assessment of placements. The revised policy contains checklists that aim to verify that work experience providers have relevant policies in place to safeguard the student's well-being while on placement, and to make providers aware of their responsibilities. Students are expected to complete a health and safety student induction checklist and a work experience learning agreement within one week of starting the work placement.

1.71 Students met by the review team confirmed that they found the College very supportive with regard to finding a placement and that relevant checks had been carried out as laid out in the policy. Students who fulfilled the work placement requirement through their existing employment confirmed that the College established contact with their work supervisor, that an agreement between the employer and the College had been signed, and an audit of the responsibilities covered at work had been undertaken.

1.72 The newly introduced role of the Work Experience Learner Coordinator plays an important part in the process of delivering the revised policy. The WELC maintains a database of students who need work experience, tracks their progress, and meets students prior to as well as during placement. The WELC visits classes to increase students' level of awareness of work experience and the support that is available. The role-holder also contacts potential placement providers, communicates with existing providers about documentation that providers need to complete, and carries out random checks on providers through visits or phone calls. In addition, the WELC also completes risk-assessment forms, which assess the risk profile related to various aspects of the work experience, state what control measures are undertaken, and whether a site safety visit is needed. The WELC keeps in contact with placement supervisors, who are asked to complete a progress template for each student. The WELC works in close liaison with the HoD HSC and placement unit tutors.

1.73 The sample of student portfolios seen by the review team shows that, overall, the required elements are in place, including health and safety checklists, signed statements by the work placement providers confirming they are willing to sign the student's work experience learning agreement, and log sheets to document the number of hours completed and the nature of work undertaken. The College acknowledges that some providers are reluctant to sign work experience learning agreement or progress forms and is considering alternative ways of obtaining confirmation.

1.74 With the introduction of RQF courses, in future the HSC work experience requirement will be increased from 200 to 450 hours. This is mitigated by the fact that the work experience will no longer be attached to a specific unit but can be acquired over the duration of the course. The College is planning to expand its network of work experience providers to accommodate the new requirement.

1.75 Given the progress which the College has made over the academic year 2017-18 in relation to having policies and procedures in place, with a newly created post dedicated to implementing these policies, and evidence of a commitment to their implementation, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

1.76 The College does not offer any research degrees and therefore this Expectation does not apply.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

1.77 In determining its judgement on the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.78 All relevant Expectations in this section are met and the associated level of risk is low in all cases.

1.79 The College has taken appropriate steps to address the issues identified in the previous review, and the current policy and management framework provides a sound basis for managing the quality of student learning opportunities. The College has built on the good practice identified in the previous report. There are no recommendations or affirmations.

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

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms that may be used in this report.

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

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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