Higher Education Review of Kidderminster College

October 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Kidderminster College. The review took place from 13 to 15 October 2014 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Mike Wing
- Miss Alison Davies (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

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

The themes for the academic year 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Kidderminster College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The effective academic support provided by tutors and academic support staff (Expectation B4).
- The effective and coherent approach within the curriculum to developing students' employability (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

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

By March 2015:

- make explicit the role and membership of the committee responsible for higher education in overseeing the quality and standards of the College's higher education provision (Expectation B8).

By September 2015:

- develop an effective, regular and systematic process for the review of Pearson programmes (Expectation B8)
- develop a process to allow a coherent overview of higher education provision (Expectation B8)
- formalise opportunities for staff and students to contribute to the process of quality enhancement (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

There are no affirmations.

Theme: Student Employability

Overall, employability is embedded across Kidderminster College's (the College's) academic curriculum and through additional activities improving the professional development of students. It is an aspiration of the College's mission to develop employable students and the College provides opportunities for students to undertake work experience through various forms supported by professional development portfolios. The College ensures that teaching staff are practitioners within the relevant industry, which ensures constant employer links and a curriculum which meets the needs of current employers and enhances student employability.

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

About Kidderminster College

The College is a small general further education college situated in north-east Worcestershire offering provision across a range of further education, higher education and work-based learning programmes. At the time of the review, the College had 91 students studying on higher education programmes across eight HND programmes offered in Dance, Urban and Electronic Music Production, Music Performance, Creative Music Technology and Public Service through Pearson and the University of Worcester.

Since the last review by QAA in 2010, a new Principal was appointed in 2010 and a management restructure was completed for the beginning of the 2011-12 academic year. On 1 August 2014 the College merged with NCG (Newcastle College Group). The College's rights, properties and liabilities were transferred to the Corporation of NCG and it was confirmed that in time the College would adopt NCG policies and strategies. The College's Principal became a member of the Executive Board of NCG reporting to the CEO of NCG. The name of the College remains unchanged by the merger. NCG's mission is 'to develop people through learning and achievement, for the benefit of themselves, society and the economy'.

A key challenge facing the College is to achieve student recruitment targets with the removal of the student number control. The opportunity to further develop its provision was one of the drivers to merge with NCG. Although recruitment has been steady, the College stopped delivering HND Film Making in 2010. In 2014-15 an HND in Music Performance and HND in Public Services were introduced for the first time. The College acknowledges that a further challenge involving monitoring arises with the introduction of an HND in Public Services which sits outside the Creative Industries department where traditionally all higher education provision within the College is managed.

The QAA review in 2010 identified three areas of good practice and desirable recommendations. The College continues to maintain facilities specifically for higher education students and the majority of higher education staff are housed in one area to create consistency and the sharing of good practice. The College has introduced an HE Academic Liaison Librarian to improve academic support which has had a positive impact on learners and the newly introduced NCG virtual learning environment (NCG Online) was well received by both staff and students.

The HE Forum was replaced by the Creative Industries team meetings which meet more frequently, although the remit of the group was not explicitly defined. The College now has a quality manual in place for its higher education provision and the quality and consistency of

feedback to students have improved. A definition of the role and responsibilities of the University of Worcester Link Tutor was established.

Higher education is offered by the Creative Industries department with the exception of the HND Public Services. Programmes offered by the College on behalf of the University of Worcester and Pearson are:

Pearson
HND Music Performance
HND Creative Music Technology
HND Public Services

University of Worcester
HND Dance
HND Urban and Electronic Music Production

Explanation of the findings about Kidderminster College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and 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* are met by:

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College offers awards on behalf of one awarding body and one awarding organisation, who approve, monitor and review the College's higher education programmes. The awarding body and awarding organisation set the standards of the College's programmes through the application of their academic frameworks and regulations which ensure that qualifications are positioned at the appropriate level.

1.2 The awarding body and awarding organisation assume full responsibility for the design of the programme curriculum framework, and ensure that the standards of awards are correctly positioned within the FHEQ, aligned with relevant qualification descriptors, and correctly named, with properly defined learning outcomes, correctly credited, and taking account of Subject Benchmark Statements. The role of the College in the design process is to select a legitimate set of modules that fit within this framework by following the award rules of combination defined by Pearson. The College has recently introduced a requirement that new programme proposals should be approved by the College before being submitted to the relevant awarding body or organisation.

1.3 The College works in partnership with the awarding body to design a programme which is then approved through the University's validation process, confirming that the

programme meets the FHEQ and related requirements. College staff take full part in the awarding body validation event. The College has some scope to change the programme throughout the life of the programme. Any changes proposed by the College are submitted to the University for approval.

1.4   The requirements of the awarding body and organisation are clearly laid out in the relevant awarding body/organisation procedures and regulations and in the agreements between the College and the awarding body and organisation.

1.5   The team formed the view that in theory the above processes enable it to meet Expectation A1 of the Quality Code.

1.6   The review team confirmed these arrangements are applied through a scrutiny of the relevant awarding body's and organisation's procedures and regulations, the relevant approval documents and the programme specifications. Through meeting with members of the College academic staff and academic managers responsible for the programmes, and an examination of the programme specifications and related programme documentation, it is clear that the requirements of the FHEQ have been actively considered and that College staff are sufficiently aware of the requirements of the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements, and sound pedagogical principles allow the College to develop programmes which meet the requirements of the FHEQ.

1.7   The awarding body and organisation have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the relevant external reference points are adhered to through their own regulatory frameworks. The review team found that the College effectively manages its own responsibilities for doing this in accordance with its partnership agreements. Policies and procedures adequately reference levels in the FHEQ and staff are aware of those external reference points. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation A1 is met both in design and operation, and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8   The awarding body and awarding organisation have well established procedures and regulations relating to the award of credit and qualifications, and articulate these respective responsibilities in the agreements between them and the College. The procedures and regulations are designed to ensure awards delivered by partners meet the qualification framework requirements established by the awarding body and awarding organisation.

1.9   The awarding body's procedures include a clear description of the validation process that approves the programme curriculum and structure, and describe arrangements for the ongoing maintenance of standards through external examiner oversight, annual evaluation monitoring, periodic review of programmes undertaken quinquennially and partnership review. The University appoints a link tutor for each programme whose role is to support, monitor and report on programmed standards. The College addresses standards issues through the annual monitoring process, involvement in validation and quinquennial programme review, periodic partner review, participation in assessment boards, and responding to the external examiners. These responsibilities are clearly laid out in the awarding body's regulations.

1.10   The team formed the judgement that in theory the articulation of the College and awarding body processes would allow the College to meet the requirements of Expectation A2.1.

1.11   With regards to the Pearson awards, the College programmes follow the curriculum framework validated by the awarding organisation. The framework allows for some tailoring of awards to local needs through the selection of optional modules. College staff are responsible for the assessment of modules and are required to verify assignments and assessment decisions. The awarding organisation subject advisers provide guidance with respect to standards issues including programme planning. The awarding organisation oversees the ongoing maintenance of standards though the appointment of Standards Verifiers whose role is to ensure reliability of assessment and verification and that the correct academic standards, processes and procedures have been applied. In addition, the College undertakes an annual monitoring process which reports annually on quality and standards. There is no explicit process in place for periodic programme review.

1.12   The team formed the judgement that in theory the procedures and regulations meet the requirements of Expectation A2.1 but noted that there is no explicit arrangement in place for the process of periodic review of the Pearson programmes.

1.13   The team reviewed the procedures of both Pearson and the University of Worcester, talked to the academic staff concerned with the delivery of the programmes, reviewed external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports and the recently successful University of Worcester Partnership and Periodic Review, accessed the relevant regulations and procedures, and reviewed the programme handbooks and formed the judgement that the relevant academic frameworks, regulations and procedures are systematically and

consistently applied to secure academic standards. The team therefore concludes that Expectation A2 is met, both in design and operation, and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

Findings

1.14   It is a requirement of both the awarding body and the awarding organisation that all awards have a current and complete record of each programme and qualification in the form of a programme specification. The programme specifications describe the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected achievements of graduates of the programmes.

1.15   The College is responsible for producing, updating and disseminating programme specifications. The programme specifications are updated by the programme team to reflect policy updates and amendments to modules, as well as changes to human and physical resources. In the case of the University of Worcester, details are confirmed by the University annually and also as part of periodic and partnership review. The awarding body's programme specifications are available on its website.

1.16   The awarding organisation's awards programme specifications are reviewed annually by the subject verifier and a generic specification is available on the awarding organisation's website, supplemented by programme-specific information on the College website. Programme specifications are also available on the College's VLE and embedded within programme handbooks, enabling students to see any updated information.

1.17   The programme specifications clearly articulate the aims, learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for each programme of study, and link these to specific modules. The programme handbooks include elements of the programme specifications within them, including the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievement.

1.18   The review team reviewed programme specifications, programme handbooks, the websites of the College, the awarding body and the awarding organisation, minutes of partner review, and results of student surveys, and confirmed their understanding of the process for recording and disseminating programme information through meetings with senior staff, academic staff and students.

1.19   The review team concluded that the programme information provided is accurate and comprehensive and readily available to students, staff and other stakeholders, and considers that the College processes for preparing, disseminating, monitoring and updating programme information are sound and fully aligned with Expectation A2.2. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation A2.2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.20   Programme approval at the College takes place within the frameworks and regulations of the College's awarding body and awarding organisation. The College has implemented its own policies within the frameworks in order for UK threshold standards for awards to be maintained. Validation is managed by the awarding body, whose programmes are also validated internally within the College. There is no internal validation process for the awarding organisation's programmes. The College's Higher Education Team meeting monitors the validation and re-validation of all higher education programmes.

1.21   All awarding body course changes and small modifications are initiated by course team leaders and submitted for approval to the University. The College follows an approval process in order for it to deliver the awarding organisation's courses. However, the College cannot alter these courses.

1.22   The review team evaluated the College's effectiveness in the design and approval of programmes by scrutinising documentation including the awarding body's regulations, the College's internal processes, and minutes of the Creative Industries department and through meeting staff. All staff are highly experienced in their industries and have current knowledge of the requirements in the designated field which informs the development of the curriculum.

1.23   The review team concludes that the College is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities for programme approval within the context of the agreements with the awarding body and awarding organisation. The College engages with the awarding body to ensure that procedures are followed and the appropriate qualifications are aligned to the FHEQ. Therefore the team concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.24   The responsibility for ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes rests with the College's awarding body and awarding organisation. The College has some responsibility for the design of some assessments on programmes and has aligned its procedures with the awarding body's assessment policy which states that the College course teams should ensure assessments are aligned with the intended learning outcomes.

1.25   The awarding organisation designs all assessment for its awards and changes to the programme are not permitted.

1.26   All awards have published programme specifications on the awarding body or organisation templates which are available on the College website and VLE. The programme specifications show clear programme aims, learning outcomes, and learning and teaching assessment strategies and assess student achievement against the UK threshold standards. Published programme handbooks have clear information regarding the programme aims, learning outcomes, teaching and assessment methods and programme requirements, and module guides also contain assessment information as well as links to the awarding body's assessment policy. Students are also made aware of assessment procedures through their induction.

1.27   The review team tested the College's approach to Expectation A3.2 by examining assessment policies and procedures, and reviewing programme specifications, handbooks and external examiners' reports. The review team also spoke with senior staff, academic staff, course lecturers and students.

1.28   External examiners confirmed that assessments are set to permit students to achieve the desired learning outcomes appropriate to their award and commented favourably on the processes set in place by the College. They also confirmed that all assessments satisfy threshold academic standards and commented favourably on the range of assessments provided.

1.29   The College complies with its awarding body's and awarding organisation's processes for managing assessment and the assessment is appropriate, robust and varied. Therefore Expectation A3.2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.30   The responsibility for monitoring and reviewing programmes lies with the awarding body and the awarding organisation. Within the terms of the partnership agreements, the College engages with the policies and procedures of its awarding body and organisation for monitoring and review. These processes are clearly defined and guidance is provided in the awarding body's assessment policy and Assessment Verification Policy.

1.31   Annual Evaluation Reports (AERs) are completed by course leaders and the process is monitored by the Institute of Humanities and Creative Arts Quality Committee at the awarding body and by the Head of the Creative Industries and the external examiner for the awarding organisation. The College also adheres to the awarding body's periodic review of programmes.

1.32   The awarding organisation's programmes undergo an annual monitoring process which is submitted online through a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) process which encompasses external examiner reports. SARs are considered at the Curriculum and Quality Forum.

1.33   The review team tested the College's approach to Expectation A3.2 by the examination of policies, AERs and external examiner reports and through talking to course team leaders and other academic staff. College staff are aware of the processes for monitoring review and the steps needed to complete the AERs and SARs for the awarding body and organisation.

1.34   In summary, all relevant staff are involved with the process, but only a very small cohort of students. The process is managed effectively but informally through regular Creative Industries team meetings. Monitoring procedures delegated by the awarding body and organisation are effectively followed and therefore the team concludes that Expectation A3.3 is met and the associated 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

1.35   The responsibility for ensuring that standards are appropriate for the awards rests with the awarding organisation and awarding body. Assurance with regards to externality of the awards is ensured with an external panel member appointed at validation and external examiners, appointed by the awarding body and awarding organisation, to monitor and review the standards of the delivery of the awards.

1.36   External examiners' reports are received at Creative Industries team meetings and curriculum and quality meetings and are then fed into the annual action planning process in the form of AERs and SARs. The AERs are discussed at the Higher Education Team meetings and the SARs at the curriculum and standards meetings.

1.37   The team reviewed the processes for annual and periodic monitoring and programme design, examined validation documents and external examiners' reports and spoke with senior and academic staff.

1.38   The College confirmed that students are prepared for employability through the use of specific industry-related modules. External visiting lecturers and links with employers are used to enhance the delivery of programmes but there is no formal mechanism for external input into the development of programmes. Teaching staff have relevant and current industry experience and knowledge to inform the development of programme modules.

1.39   The College is effectively managing its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards through the use of externality. The College uses external examiners' reports to monitor the quality of its programmes, has good local employer links and an effective use of visiting lecturer networks, and relies on the current industry experience of teaching staff for the relevance of its modules. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.40   In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.41   Of the seven Expectations, all seven are met and the associated level of risk with each is low. There are no features of good practice or affirmations. There are no recommendations. The team is satisfied that the College discharges and manages its responsibilities of maintaining academic standards appropriately and effectively by reviewing documented evidence and speaking with staff. The team was assured that College staff were aware of their responsibilities in following awarding bodies' regulations with regards to the maintenance of academic standards. Through the effective working relationships with the awarding bodies, staff were responsive to any changes made to those regulations.

1.42   The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards on behalf of its degree-awarding body and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College follows the awarding body's and awarding organisation's regulations for the design and approval of the respective programmes.

2.2 The team reviewed the effectiveness of programme design and approval processes. This was achieved by reviewing the minutes of the Higher Education Team meeting and Creative Industries meeting and through discussions with academic staff. The team ascertained that both the awarding organisation and the awarding body have clear guidelines and procedures in place which are disseminated and understood by all course leaders.

2.3 The College has its own internal verification process where staff members who have industry-related experience contribute to the design of module specifications by writing programmes which feed into the main design and approval of all programmes. The curriculum offered by the College is therefore current and relevant in each area due to the industry-related knowledge and experience. Through discussions with senior and academic staff the review team were able to establish that staff involved in writing modules are aware of the FHEQ and have a general awareness of Subject Benchmark Statements. Modules for second-year students are enhanced further with the introduction of academic and professional skills incorporated into each course to promote employability which students comment favourably on.

2.4 The College has an informative Module Evaluation Policy whereby students are involved in the programme design, development and approval process through the submission of feedback at the end of each module. This information is considered by course leaders in the Creative Industries team meetings and fed into the AER; action plans for the modification of modules are then developed by course teams and approved by the senior management team before being forwarded to the relevant awarding body. Through discussions with course team leaders it became apparent that the College environment was conducive to active cross-programme idea-sharing on an informal basis which would feed into the formal enhancement of modules, where relevant, through course committees.

2.5 Overall, the review team concludes that the College adheres to both the awarding body's and awarding organisation's procedures for programme design and approval and that it has effective internal procedures which feed into the design of programmes where possible. Therefore, Expectation B1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission*

Findings

2.6   The College follows the awarding body's policy for admissions and has implemented its own policy for Pearson awards. In the case of the University of Worcester programmes, the College's process for the recruitment, selection and admission of students is based on the University's requirements which are defined in the University's admissions policy. This clearly defines the process for admissions and the relative responsibilities of the College and the University. In this case academic staff select and interview prospective students, and make admissions recommendations and offers, with the University being responsible for administering the whole process. In the case of the Pearson programmes, the College's admission policy applies. Recruitment data is retained by the College and recruitment statistics are reviewed at programme level. This occurs as part of the annual monitoring process.

2.7   Admissions process information is provided on the College website and in course-specific guides. Entry requirements for programmes are determined at validation and are specified in the programme specifications and on the College website in the information related to the programmes.

2.8   Students accepted on programmes receive enrolment information prior to joining the programme, and once admitted students undergo an induction process which introduces them to the programme and the College.

2.9   The team concludes that the processes are appropriate for Expectation B2 to be met in principle.

2.10   The team tested the implementation of the admissions policies and procedures through discussions with students and admissions and academic staff, and by reviewing the guidance given to staff and information given to students.

2.11   The team found that staff understand and apply the relevant policies, and that recruitment statistics are regularly monitored and considered. Information provided to students was comprehensive, clear and accurate. Students also noted that the induction process was a useful introduction to the College, academic study and their programme.

2.12   The team concludes that the admissions process followed by the College, and the manner in which it is applied, enables appropriate students to be recruited in an equitable manner, and that the processes are well integrated within the structure of the College. The team therefore concludes that Expectation B2 is met with a low level of risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.13   The College indicated that given the recent merger with NCG it will now adopt the teaching and learning strategy of NCG.

2.14   All staff teaching at higher education level are expected to have qualifications at an appropriate level. For those staff who do not meet these requirements, the College supports staff in achieving the relevant qualification. Staff teaching on the awarding body's programmes are also registered as awarding body associate staff. As part of the College's commitment to promoting employability, all academic staff are practising professionals. The College also employs a number of visiting lecturers who are industry experts and whose expertise contributes to the work-related dimension of the programmes.

2.15   The College operates a higher education peer observation scheme for all staff. Under this scheme, higher education staff observe other members of the HE Team during lectures and teaching sessions and provide feedback. There is also an annual Kidderminster College observation process in which a teaching session is observed and graded and formal feedback is given to the lecturer. The outcome of the graded observation is an improvement action plan.

2.16   Staff also receive feedback via module evaluations which are completed by all students registered on a module, allowing them to comment on the teaching, learning and assessment of each individual module. These module evaluations are collated and discussed in various venues including Academic Team meetings, the HE Team meeting and in course committee meetings in which student representatives also participate, providing additional student feedback. In addition to student feedback, staff also evaluate the effectiveness of learning through review of student progression and achievement.

2.17   Staff undergo an annual appraisal which draws on the feedback from various sources including teaching observation and students, and which serves to identify staff development needs.

2.18   Staff are encouraged to take part in and benefit from a range of strategic development opportunities. With the merger with NCG, staff can now also access the personal and professional development opportunities offered by NCG.

2.19   In considering whether this Expectation has been met in practice, the team spoke to senior staff, academic staff, academic-related staff and students, and reviewed relevant policies, procedures, validation reports and approval documentation.

2.20   The review team finds that there is a clear understanding of sound teaching, learning and assessment practice at higher education level. The team finds that staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. Staff commented favourably on the efficacy of the appraisal and observation processes, and noted that they are encouraged to undertake staff development opportunities. There is evidence of staff reviewing student feedback and

progression and achievement and students are positive about the teaching and learning experience, and the effective academic support provided by academic staff.

2.21   There are appropriate systems and processes in place to support the development of staff in their learning and teaching, and students are positive in their views concerning their teaching and learning experience. Therefore the team concludes that the College meets Expectation B3, and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*

Findings

2.22   The College has a commitment to enabling students to 'innovate and support excellence in learning and employability', promoting this ambition through the development of the academic, personal and professional potential of students. This is achieved through a variety of means including providing supportive and effective individual academic and pastoral guidance and support, the provision of appropriate resources to support learning, and through offering a curriculum that supports the development of student employability.

2.23   All new students participate in a comprehensive induction programme which includes an introduction to academic and pastoral support, and to the resources provided by the College and by the University in the case of the awarding body's programmes.

2.24   The programme handbooks provide a comprehensive guide to the academic and pastoral support that is available to students. In addition, the College provides a guide to specific support services, and to the resources available to students, such as library resources. The College also provides similar guidance on the College website, including a description of the academic and pastoral support provided to students and who to contact to access support.

2.25   Academic support is provided by academic staff who address subject-related academic matters. In addition, the College has appointed an Academic Liaison Librarian who provides tutorials and workshops for higher education students on specific topics such as academic writing and referencing, and assessment-specific support to individual students.

2.26   Extensive pastoral support is also available to students. All students are assigned an academic member of staff who acts as a personal tutor and who may be consulted during timetabled sessions or as needed. The tutor acts as a point of first contact for students with concerns or issues. The College also has a number of staff whose role is to provide pastoral support and advice on such matters as careers, accommodation, finance, and health and disability issues (the latter of which is also addressed in the College's equal opportunities policy). The College provides a number of specialist staff such as those supporting careers advice or offering counselling support.

2.27   The College provides a number of specialist higher education teaching spaces including practice studios, recording studios and dance studios, some of which are only available to higher education students. The students also have access to a higher education student common room. The College provides specific library resources for the higher education programmes it offers and students on the University of Worcester programmes have access to University of Worcester library services.

2.28   Learning resources are approved as part of the validation and approval processes of the awarding bodies. The College has recently introduced a process for the internal approval of new higher education provision which involves the submission of a proposal form describing the teaching and learning resources that will be required to support the proposed new provision. This form is considered by the Director of Curriculum and Performance, the Director of Learning and the Heads of Department before new provision can be prepared for validation.

2.29   The adequacy of support and learning resources is monitored as part of the module evaluations. These reports inform the annual monitoring reports that are produced as part of the awarding body's requirements and are considered at the HE Team meetings in the case of the awarding body, and the Curriculum and Quality Forum in the case of the awarding organisation programmes. The College intends to consider both the annual monitoring reports of all higher education provision at the HE Team meetings in the future. The College also conducts an institution-wide survey that solicits student opinion on student support and resources, and this is currently considered at the Curriculum and Quality Forum. Programme teams discuss student feedback and any need to update the resources provided in course meetings. The Academic Liaison Librarian is responsible for ensuring that the library provides the resources requested by programme teams, and regularly reviews and updates module reading lists with course leaders and module leaders. For the University of Worcester courses the Academic Liaison Librarian also attends meetings for partner library staff to ensure best practice is followed within the College.

2.30   The curriculum of the programmes is specifically designed to promote employability of students. Programmes include content that is designed to develop employability skills and an understanding of the industry related to the programme. Where appropriate, programmes include work placements to further develop skills. Student employment prospects are further enhanced by a stringent Personal Development Plan process supported by staff.
Staff teaching on programmes are practitioners in the field and bring their experience to the classroom. Visiting lecturers who are employed in the relevant industry are also invited to contribute to programmes to strengthen the students' understanding and employability prospects. Based on the coherent approach to promoting employability within the curriculum, and the success of the College in placing its graduates in employment or further study, the effective and coherent approach within the curriculum to developing students' employability is **good practice**.

2.31   The review team met senior, academic and support staff as well as students, and reviewed policies, module feedback reports, programme handbooks and related documentation, and student guidance to establish whether this Expectation has been met in practice.

2.32   The team found that students are well informed concerning the support that is available, and commented on the high level of support provided to them. Students confirmed that academic support is a particular strength of the College and that staff involved are approachable and supportive. The team found that through reviewing evaluative documentation and talking to staff and students there was evidence to endorse the effective academic support provided by tutors and support staff as **good practice**.

2.33   Overall, the College provides high-quality and comprehensive opportunities to support the academic and professional development of its students. Support is readily available and publicised and formal mechanisms of effective academic support are complemented by the informal accessibility of teaching staff. Sufficient learning resources are available and are monitored and informed by student feedback. The curriculum has been developed with students' employability and professional needs in mind. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B4 is met, and that the associated 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

2.34   Student engagement at the College is established in a number of ways across all higher education programmes. There are two course representatives per cohort for every higher education course who are elected at the start of each academic year. Students are represented on College committees and there is a student governor within the higher education provision who attends various meetings including the Corporation Meeting where all governors convene throughout the academic year. It was confirmed that the implementation of training and guidance for student representatives on courses awarded by the awarding body is through its e-STAR policy where the training takes place at the location of the awarding body.

2.35   The student voice is also captured through feedback mechanisms such as end-of-module evaluations which are completed by all students. The feedback is collated and discussed at course committee meetings and further actions are fed into the AER.

2.36   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's approach to student engagement by talking to academic and professional staff and students and examining meeting minutes, evaluations and actions plans.

2.37   The evidence analysed by the review team showed that there is limited formal student engagement in the College's deliberative structures. Students do actively contribute to the AER through module feedback and course tutor meetings. However, through meeting students it was clear that representatives had received little or no representative training at the College or the University. The College advised the review team through discussions at meetings that there were plans to incorporate new student representative training within the forthcoming weeks. The review team found through further discussions with students and staff that there was a very informal approach to training student representatives at the College, with the higher education cohort being very small.

2.38   Several examples of monitoring and responding to the student voice were given to the review team which students acknowledged led to a positive impact on their learning experience. Students felt that their concerns and issues were listened to and were satisfied with both the formal and informal systems of identifying and responding to student issues.

2.39   The College provides a small purpose-built environment for all higher education students with a range of facilities appropriate to each course. Students felt that the environment was conducive to an informal approach to student engagement and due to the small size of the cohorts and ease of accessibility to teaching staff, their concerns were heard and responded to effectively and they were positive about the more formal methods of feedback through module evaluations.

2.40   The review team concludes that student representation is present at the College in an informal way, which works for both students and the staff due to the small cohort of higher education learners. Procedures that the College have in place work effectively and students are positive about their personal learning experiences at the College. The team therefore concludes that Expectation B5 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

2.41   The College conducts assessments in accordance with the policies set by the awarding body and awarding organisation. Programme specifications and module unit guides are written, compiled and produced at the College and module leaders have a significant input to this process**.** The majority of learning outcomes are designed and internally verified within the College due to course leaders having significant industry-related experience whereby assessments are tailored to meet industry requirements. Handbooks issued to students at the start of each academic year contain all relevant information and this can also be accessed on the College's VLE.

2.42   Assessments are designed and conducted in accordance with procedures from the awarding body and awarding organisation and are appropriate to the desired module of industry-related study. The assessment process is clearly marked in the student handbook in the 'assessment strategy' section and is mapped in accordance with the learning outcomes.

2.43   The College has its own Assessment and Verification policy detailing the processes for internal verification and the roles and responsibilities of the verifiers. A sample of students' work is externally verified by external examiners appointed by the awarding body and awarding organisation. The policy also includes details on how staff would deal with issues arising from plagiarism. Assessments are internally verified and the College uses a system of double marking and a sample of work is reviewed by the external examiner. Feedback is issued to students in accordance with guidelines stated in the module handbooks and students commented favourably on how they received their feedback. Students also confirmed tutors would accommodate requests for personal tutorials as and when required. External examiners had commented favourably on the quality of the feedback.

2.44   The College follows guidelines issued by the University and Pearson for the Exam Board and Assessment Panels. This was clarified during the review visit through meetings with academic staff and reviewing the assessment policy.

2.45   The review team tested the effectiveness of the management of assessments by speaking with staff and students, and reviewing policies, handbooks, programme specifications and external examiners' reports.

2.46   Staff are aware of the assessment policies in place, directed by or aligned to the awarding body and awarding organisation. The policies and procedures are clear for assessment and students confirmed that they knew where to obtain information about assessments and were happy with the quality and the timeliness of the feedback.

2.47   Assessment literacy is developed at the College with the introduction of the HE Academic Liaison Librarian, and all higher education students have the opportunity to attend rolling workshops to enhance academic skills within the first four to six weeks of a course. Tailored personal support to students is identified by course tutors and additional academic support is available if required.

2.48   The College has an effective approach to assessment, working within the regulatory frameworks of the awarding body and awarding organisation. The College has developed internal assessment development and verification methods to ensure the quality of assessments is maintained. Students have appropriate opportunities to show that they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit. Expectations with regards to assessments are clearly articulated and communicated effectively to students using a variety of methods and students and external examiners comment favourably on the quality of feedback received. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B6 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

2.49   The College uses the awarding body's policies and processes for nominating and appointing external examiners for HND Dance and HND UEM. Guidance on the selection of external examiners and panel members, regulations for external examiners and an External Examiners' Handbook are clear and comprehensive, outlining roles and responsibilities, mandatory induction and requirements.

2.50   External examiners attend the College at the end of each semester for exam boards and review and comment upon a sample of work seen.

2.51   Courses delivered on behalf of the awarding organisation are provided with an external examiner who attends the College annually to review the work of students, the assessment process and to confirm that the College is working in line with the guidelines and procedures issued by the awarding organisation. Feedback from the external examiner is used by the course team and evaluations are then actioned in the AER.

2.52   The review team viewed external examiner reports from the awarding body and the awarding organisation. All comment favourably on the standards of provision delivered by the College and say that learning outcomes are clearly mapped to assessments and are easily identifiable by students. Meetings with academic staff clarified that there is an annual monitoring report which collates all the external examiner reports within the annual action plan.

2.53   Overall the team was satisfied that the College is following the procedures regarding external examiners outlined by the awarding body and the awarding organisation and there were processes in place to make scrupulous use of external examiners. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation B7 is met and the associated 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

2.54   The College follows two separate processes for annual monitoring.

2.55   For the awarding organisation awards, programmes follow the University's annual enhancement review process, producing annual reports. These reports consider matters related to teaching and learning, and draw together module feedback, external examiner reports and relevant programme data such as achievement and progression, and recruitment profiles on a programme basis. The annual reports are considered at course committees which include staff and student representation. The HE Team meeting also considers the annual monitoring reports for the awarding body's programmes with the intention of identifying action that needs to be taken to enhance quality. There is no explicit process that requires consideration of the awarding body's programmes as a whole, and higher education provision-wide consideration is not evident in the minutes of this committee. The team also notes that the HE Team meeting does not have terms of reference to indicate its role in quality assurance, and in the annual monitoring process.

2.56   In the case of the awarding organisation's programmes, course and departmental reports feed into an institutional SAR. SARs are considered at the Curriculum and Quality Forum. The College has announced its intention that the HE Team meeting will consider all higher education programmes in future.

2.57   The team heard that the annual monitoring reports, and other quality indicators such as external examiners' reports, are also considered by the senior management team to inform the College's development plan and accompanying action plan, the College's operating statement. The development plan and operating statement are presented to the senior management and Governors for consideration and approval.

2.58   The awarding body's programmes are subject to the relevant University quality procedures for the review of programmes. The College is also subject to the awarding body's periodic partner review, which draws together generic themes across all University of Worcester programmes delivered by a collaborative partner. The awarding organisation's quality procedures do not provide for the periodic review of programmes and the College does not currently describe within its procedures how it would undertake periodic review of these programmes.

2.59   The team considered that the College has in place arrangements that to a large extent would allow it to meet Expectation B8 in principle, although there are some weaknesses in relation to the description of the purpose of the key College higher education quality committee, processes that allow cross-provision monitoring, and the arrangements for the periodic review of the Pearson programmes.

2.60   The review team considered a number of documents, including the development plan and operating statement, annual monitoring reports, the minutes of key committees including the HE Team meetings, the Curriculum and Quality Forum, and the course committees and meetings with senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students.

2.61   There is evidence to show that annual monitoring at a programme level is an effective process, and that academic quality issues are identified and addressed. However, a clear process for reporting across all programmes to identify generic issues associated with the College's higher education provision is not evident, and the team therefore **recommends** that the College develops a process to allow a coherent overview of higher education. The team also notes that there is no explicit definition of the terms of reference or membership of the key College committee responsible for the academic quality oversight of the College's higher education provision and the team therefore **recommends** that the College makes explicit the role and membership of the committee responsible for higher education in overseeing the quality and standards of the College's higher education provision. The team also notes that for the Pearson awards, neither the awarding body nor the College has explicit requirements and procedures for periodic review and the team therefore **recommends** that the College develop an effective, regular and systematic process for the review of Pearson programmes.

2.62   The review team concludes that although the College's approach to operating effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and reviewing programmes could be further improved, the current arrangements do not pose a serious risk to the quality of student learning opportunities. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation B8 has not been met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student appeals/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

2.63   The College has a complaints policy which clearly describes each stage of the complaints process and what is expected at each level. The awarding body has its own Students' Complaints Procedure and Academic Appeals Procedure which can be accessed via the website and also through a link provided to the students in the course handbook. For HND Dance it can be found in section 15 Assessment Strategy in the course handbook. Through meeting with students it was noted that most students were aware of the complaints policy and that they also approached tutors first if there was an issue.

2.64   The review team looked at the Kidderminster College Complaints Policy, University of Worcester Admission Policy and the University of Worcester Assessment Policies and spoke with students and staff during the review visit. The staff confirmed that due to the size and nature of the higher education provision, the College rarely receives formal complaints as issues are usually resolved before they reach the formal stage. This is due to the close working relationship between staff members, course leaders and students.
Students generally adopt an informal approach to what they perceive to be a complaint and an example of how a complaint was dealt with and resolved to the student's satisfaction was described. Students were not aware of any instances of academic appeals.

2.65   Students confirmed that they are aware of the complaints procedures and stated that all the information for this is in their course handbooks and on the VLE.

2.66   The review team concludes that there are adequate and effective procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints and that Expectation B9 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

2.67   Currently, the only placements offered are for the HND Dance programme delivered by the College and validated by the awarding body. This programme follows the awarding body process for placements. A mentor handbook is provided by the awarding body to the staff linked with the placement partner, and a handbook is also given to the student. This handbook clearly indicates the relative responsibilities of the College, the placement organisation and the student.

2.68   Students are responsible for establishing their own placements and these are approved by the programme team at the College. The employer provides a written feedback document for the student. Students report back on their experience at the end of the placement although placements do not contribute to students' assessed grade. The College programme leader also completes an annual work-based learning audit document for the University.

2.69   The team reviewed the documentation provided for placements, including the various placement handbooks, saw examples of student reports on placements and spoke to staff who had oversight of and students who had participated in placements. The guidance is thorough, helpful and consistently applied, and students find the placements to be a valuable part of their award. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B10 is met both in design and operation and the associated 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

2.70   The College does not offer research degrees.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.71   In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.72   Of the 10 applicable Expectations, nine are met. Expectation B8 is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate as the College is not explicit enough in its oversight of monitoring its higher education provision. Of the nine met Expectations, the associated level of risk is low.

2.73   There are two features of good practice in this area: the effective academic support provided by tutors and academic support staff (Expectation B4); and the effective and coherent approach within the curriculum to developing students' employability (Expectation B4). There are no affirmations in this area.

2.74   There are three recommendations, all relating to Expectation B8 and the quality of student learning opportunities.

2.75   There is a lack of explicit detail regarding the oversight and centralisation of higher education provision within the College. Various groups such as the Higher Education Team, the Creative Industries department and the Curriculum and Quality Forum discuss higher education operational and quality assurance issues at various levels but there did not appear to be one group that had strategic oversight. The lack of remits and terms of reference for each group made this particularly difficult to pin down. In addition, there appears to be no central group to discuss external examiner reports and share good practice although it was evident that these discussions did occur in different places. In general, the monitoring of the awarding body programmes was adequate but there was no internal periodic review of the awarding organisation provision.

2.76   While there are three recommendations relating to Expectation B8, the team felt that the College needed further clarity on where higher education was monitored and discussed rather than there being an absence of effective monitoring arrangements. For that reason the associated risk was considered to be moderate. The other nine Expectations were considered to have adequate systems and processes in place to assure the quality of learning opportunities, and therefore the team concludes that the quality of student opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

3.1 The College has recently merged with the NCG group, and has adopted the mission, values and strategy of the Group which are easily accessed via the NCG website. The College has stated its intention to develop its College-specific strategic approach in the context of the wider NCG strategy and this is in the process of being updated and therefore is not currently published.

3.2 The College provides information to its student body, including instructions on the application and admission process, on the website and students have access to the College admissions policy. In the case of the awarding body programmes, this is supplemented by advice on the awarding body website as students apply via its procedures.

3.3 Marketing materials for programmes are placed on the website and included in the prospectus and in course-specific guides. The website also contains information about the student application process. Content is prepared by the programme teams and submitted to the College marketing department. The College is responsible for its own website and full-time prospectus. For the awarding body programmes, in addition, programme information also appears on the University website and in the prospectus and course-specific details are provided to the University by the College.

3.4 Programme information for students is provided in the form of programme handbooks which are used by students at the commencement of their programmes. Programme handbooks include all module outlines, guides and programme specification details. Programme and module handbooks lay out programme learning outcomes and their relationship to module learning outcomes and module syllabi. The programme handbooks refer to the pastoral support on offer to students, and the learning resources available to students. This information is supplemented by extensive information available on the College website. Programme specifications and handbooks are updated annually by the course leader and the programme team.

3.5 Award certificates and diploma supplements are provided by the awarding body which also provides information on the quality assurance of the qualifications that it awards. The College provides a general guide to its quality processes but this does not currently describe the College's deliberative structure as it applies to the College's Higher Education provision.

3.6 The team reviewed materials provided to students including programme specifications, programme handbooks, module handbooks and web-based information resources. The team also met students and staff. In general, the materials provided were informative, comprehensive and accurate. Students reported that the information provided to them as prospective students, and while on programmes, was accurate and helpful. This view is corroborated by external examiners who have commented favourably on programme handbooks.

3.7   Overall, the information the College produces concerning its higher education provision is comprehensive and accurate. The College has processes to approve and monitor information including that provided to the awarding body and organisation. The team therefore considers that Expectation C is met in design and operation 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

3.8   In reaching its judgement about the quality of information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.9   The Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no examples of good practice and no affirmations in this area. The management of the information relating to the provision is deemed to be effective, accessible and up to date across all areas of its publication and distribution. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College's strategic intention to enhance student learning opportunities is clear in its higher education strategic aims as articulated in its Higher Education Strategic Plan for the period 2009-12 which notes that the College aims to: 'continuously improve standards and enhance the quality of the learners' higher education experience' and to 'improve the higher education learning experience available to students at the College through enhancing physical, symbolic aspects and learning resources'. Although this plan has now been superseded by that of the NCG, these ambitions are still relevant to the College and are commensurate with the commitment in the NCG strategic plan to 'innovate and support excellence in learning and employability'.

4.2 The College has a variety of methods to enhance quality, with its approach built on the quality processes of the College, the awarding body and the awarding organisation, including student feedback, external examining, annual monitoring processes, programme review and periodic partner review.

4.3 At programme level, the course committees are the major deliberative forum for the consideration of module student feedback, external examiner reports, programme annual monitoring reports, additional student feedback from student representatives on the committees and sharing of good practice. Course team meetings consider operational and curriculum development matters related to programmes.

4.4 At an institutional level, the HE Team meeting plays a key role in the quality enhancement of provision related to higher education provision. Enhancement initiatives were previously considered at the Creative Industries meetings. The HE Team meeting considers student module feedback, student feedback, external examiner reports, and programme annual monitoring reports (which consider matters related to teaching and learning), and draws together module feedback, external examiner reports and relevant programme data such as achievement and progression and recruitment profiles on a programme basis with the intention of identifying actions that need to be taken with respect to the enhancement of quality. There is currently no composite report on all University of Worcester programmes although the programmes are the subject of the University of Worcester periodic partner review which draws together generic themes across all University of Worcester programmes delivered by the partner. The HE Team meeting is currently mainly concerned with University of Worcester programmes, but the College has announced its intention that the HE Team meeting will also consider all higher education programmes in future.

4.5 In the case of the Pearson programmes, course and departmental reports feed into an institutional SAR that considers both further education and higher education provision. SARs are considered at the Curriculum and Quality Forum. This group also considers the outcomes of the cross-College student survey.

4.6 In support of strategic enhancement of quality, the College produces a development plan which outlines the strategic enhancement plan of the College. This is accompanied by an operating statement which is an action plan developed in the context of the College's development plan and which includes, as one of its elements, actions concerned with

enhancement of the student experience at higher education level. The operating statement addresses both further education and higher education provision and is informed by consideration of relevant quality assurance information including annual monitoring reports. The plan is developed at the senior management level and is presented to the senior management team and Governors for consideration and approval. A 2014-15 development plan has not been developed due to the merger with NCG and the intention to operate within the framework of the NCG strategic plan.

4.7   The review team considered that the College has arrangements in place to support institutional quality enhancement in principle.

4.8   The review team considered a number of documents, including the development plans and operating statements, self-evaluation documents, the minutes of key committees such as the HE Team meetings and the Curriculum and Quality Forum, and met senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students.

4.9   There was evidence to show that student issues at a local level are identified and addressed, resulting in enhancement of the student learning experience. At higher levels, there was also evidence that institutional issues were identified and institutional solutions implemented to address these. Such actions are made explicit in the operational plan of the College. A good example of an institutional initiative to enhance quality was the introduction of the position of HE Academic Liaison Librarian as a key support for higher education students. However, the team concluded that while institutional enhancement occurs, and there are processes in place to support this, the processes could be further developed and made more explicit to include a wider range of faculty and student representation in the institutional enhancement process. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College formalises opportunities for staff and students to contribute to the process of quality enhancement.

4.10   The review team concludes that although the strategic approach to enhancement could be further developed and embedded, the College is taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities, and that the Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.12 There is one Expectation in this area and it was met with a low level of associated risk.

4.13 There are no examples of good practice and no affirmations in this area. There is one recommendation. The team identified a strategic approach to enhancement which included a variety of quality assurance processes in place for the continuous improvement of the quality of learning opportunities. However, the team felt that staff and students should be more involved in those processes and therefore the single recommendation was made to further embed a more inclusive process.

4.14 The team is therefore able to conclude that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 As part of the NCG group, the College makes clear its strategic intention to 'innovate and support excellence in learning and employability' and to 'foster strong relationships with employers, partners and communities'. The College has a variety of ways in which it promotes employability and the professional development of students.

5.2 A key component of its approach towards student employability is the promotion of employability within the programme curriculum including the study of the profession related to the award, such as an examination of the music industry. The curriculum also focuses on developing the student's employability skills and knowledge, and providing support related to this, such as organising CV writing workshops. Programmes offer work placements where this is possible and where, due to the nature of the related industry, work placement is difficult to arrange, the programmes offer students the opportunity to obtain experience through work simulations.

5.3 The College also requires students to create long-term plans that focus on educational, personal and career goals. In support of this, the development of professional development portfolios (PDPs) is promoted by integrating the development of PDPs into the curriculum as part of lectures, tutorials and other teaching sessions and providing students with course team support to develop their PDPs. In addition, some programmes support a student mentoring scheme whereby second-year students mentor and support first-year students in their learning.

5.4 To underpin the focus on employability, and the professional context of the programmes, all College higher education teaching staff are practitioners and are professionally active within their respective fields. The College encourages academic staff to develop their professional skills on a continuous basis and to incorporate this within teaching activities. In addition, active and experienced practitioners are invited to contribute to the teaching elements of programmes as visiting lecturers, giving talks, running question and answer sessions and workshops, and providing professional advice and guidance to students.

5.5 The College also has a careers advisory service with available support clearly described in careers guides and on the College website.

5.6 Students were positive concerning the development of employability and the work-related dimension of their programmes, and felt that they were being fully prepared for the world of work. Discussions with staff confirmed that their professional expertise was an important element of this work, and that being active within their profession was a necessary condition of effective teaching. Staff also commented favourably on the College support they receive for professional development. The success of the College in promoting employability can be seen in the destination data of students entering employment or proceeding to further study: in 2012-13, 100 per cent of HND Dance students and 90 per cent of HND Urban and Electronic Music Production students moved into employment or onto further study.

5.7 The review team therefore commends the effective and coherent approach within the curriculum to developing students' employability. The embedding of employability into the curriculum has already been highlighted as good practice (see Expectation B4).

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27 to 29 of the Higher Education Review handbook.

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

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement
The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of

provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

Expectations
Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.
Flexible and distributed learning
A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.
See also **distance learning**.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Public information
Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code
Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Subject Benchmark Statement
A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard
The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)
An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation
Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.