



# Initial Review of King Edward VI College, Nuneaton

June 2015

## Contents

<b>About this review .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Key findings .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>QAA's judgements about King Edward VI College, Nuneaton.....</b>	<b>2</b>
Good practice .....	2
Recommendations .....	2
<b>Explanation of the findings about King Edward VI College, Nuneaton.....</b>	<b>4</b>
1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding organisation.....	5
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities.....	13
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities .....	26
<b>Glossary .....</b>	<b>28</b>

## About this review

This is a report of an Initial Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at King Edward VI College, Nuneaton. The review took place from 17 to 18 June 2015 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Brian Whitehead
- Miss Lucy Bannister (student reviewer)

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by King Edward VI College, Nuneaton 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)<sup>1</sup> setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Initial Review, 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
- 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 4.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>2</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Initial Review](#)<sup>3</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Initial Review web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Initial-Review.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Initial-Review.aspx)

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about King Edward VI College, Nuneaton

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at King Edward VI College, Nuneaton.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of its awarding organisation **is likely to meet** UK expectations
- The quality of student learning opportunities **is likely to meet** UK expectations
- The quality of the provider's information about learning opportunities **is likely to meet** UK expectations.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at King Edward VI College, Nuneaton.

- The strong relationship between staff and students which enables learners to develop their individual skills, their confidence and to progress (Expectation B3).
- The innovative and industry-relevant approach taken to presenting coursework (Expectation B6).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to King Edward VI College, Nuneaton.

By November 2015:

- formalise a curriculum planning and approval process for the development of new higher education programmes (Expectation A3.1)
- clarify the process for admissions appeals (Expectation B2)
- clarify the process by which applicants can access additional learning support (Expectation B4)
- systematically involve students in deliberative committees (Expectation B5)
- develop an academic appeals policy and ensure that it is accessible to all learners (Expectation B9).

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

## About King Edward VI College, Nuneaton

King Edward VI College (the College) is the only sixth-form college in Warwickshire and was created in 1974. It offers a range of academic and vocational courses, mostly at level 3, which are intended to broaden the range of experiences and opportunities available to students. As part of its curriculum development programme, the College introduced higher education to its portfolio of courses in 2012-13 with the launch of a Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Creative Media, validated by Pearson. The College is at a very early stage in its development of level 4 provision and as such it recognises that quality arrangements appropriate to the needs of higher education students need to be developed to fully embed higher education into whole-College systems.

The College's collective and individual aim is to be outstanding so that it is an outstanding sixth-form college.

Its core values are to deliver the highest quality in all that it does; to put the student first and at the centre of all that it does; and to promote a fair, open and respectful culture.

Its mission is to be an independent centre of excellence in advanced level education which realises potential and promotes aspiration and achievement in an environment in which students and staff are supported, challenged and encouraged to reach for the best in everything they do.

The College has seven students on one HNC programme. The main challenge identified by the College is to ensure its higher education students receive a meaningful and high quality experience within an overwhelmingly post-16 College setting. The College has addressed this challenge by appointing experienced staff who understand both the Media curriculum and higher education provision. At present, it only recruits internal 16-18 year-old students to the HNC programme. This enables the College to offer bespoke advice and guidance to students before registration onto the HNC course. An additional challenge identified by the College is to ensure that students have access to resources commensurate with advanced level study. In striving to meet this, it has endeavoured to allocate high quality physical and IT resources into this area that it cites as a key area of potential growth.

## **Explanation of the findings about King Edward VI College, Nuneaton.**

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 its awarding organisation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Findings

1.1 The College offers one HNC programme. Although it is not directly responsible for the standards of its awards, the College has taken guidance in developing the programme from Pearson and from an experienced consultant. As such, the programme and the naming of the programme are appropriately positioned within the FHEQ, and the programme learning outcomes are aligned with the qualification. This enables the expectation to be met in theory.

1.2 In testing the expectation, the review team considered the programme handbook, programme specifications and learning outcomes, comments from Pearson and the external examiner, and corroborated evidence through meetings with staff and students.

1.3 The approach taken by the College is effective, with the programme's qualification positioned at an appropriate level. The intended learning outcomes are clearly defined in the programme specifications and are aligned with relevant qualification descriptors. Students are aware of what they are expected to achieve and where they can find the information.

1.4 The approach taken by the College enables the team to conclude that the expectation is likely to be met and the risk low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**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**

1.5 The College delivers its programme within a partnership agreement and, as such, is governed by the academic regulations of Pearson. The Pearson standards verification ensures assessments are at a national standard, and the programme is managed in accordance with the Pearson quality assurance handbook.

1.6 While the College is complying fully with the academic regulations of Pearson, the policies and procedures are overseen by three teaching staff and one manager. The limited scale of the provision means that the processes are often less formal than in colleges with more complex provision. The College is aware of the need for a more formal process, particularly in view of its plans to expand its higher education provision and has plans to involve the Senior Management Team (SMT) more systematically over the next year.

1.7 The development of the higher education provision is embryonic and there are ongoing discussions with the consultant, SMT, and the College governors about the introduction of a higher education Quality Standards Board next year. In view of the approach taken by the College, the review team judged that the expectation is met in theory.

1.8 The review team evaluated the College's approach to the expectation through meeting with College staff and students and by consideration of the programme documents, which clearly define the processes. The documentation included a self-evaluation document, the policies and procedures of Pearson, and the meetings with senior and teaching staff, which demonstrate a clear understanding of these policies and procedures.

1.9 The College does not currently have a higher education Assessment Board, relying instead on Pearson. An internal monitoring system is in place which is based on a second marking process among the teaching staff, although the recording of the individual internal judgements could be more systematic.

1.10 There has been an interim visit by the external verifier from Pearson who confirmed that academic standards are high and concluded that the assessment process is effective and supports all students.

1.11 The review team considers that the process is working effectively at this stage in the development of the programme, and anticipates that the final assignments, which will be inspected by the external verifier after the review visit, should further confirm that the process works in practice.

1.12 The approach taken by the College enables the team to conclude that the expectation is likely to be met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**  
**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**

1.13 The College designs its programme using an internal 'top down/bottom up' model through which SMT discusses the curriculum options with governors and, once agreement is reached, the teaching staff design the programme based on the Pearson programme options. Although there were discussions between the teaching staff and management, the review team was not able to find evidence of any formal processes.

1.14 The details of the programme qualifications, specifications, aims and learning outcomes are made available to potential students during the four internal, pre-application meetings, and are documented in the course handbook and on the virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.15 Assessment regulations are clear and, according to the most recent external report, the College manages the recording of student achievement well, and there is clear evidence of an audit of student achievement. The review team considers that the design of programmes is likely to meet the expectation in theory.

1.16 The team explored this expectation by considering programme specifications, programme handbook, and the VLE. The team also had meetings with staff and students, and reviewed minutes of SMT's meetings.

1.17 Programme specifications and learning outcomes were prepared by the Director of Art and the lead internal verifier and distributed to the teaching staff. However, the team was not able to identify formally minuted discussions of the contents of the programme at any SMT meetings.

1.18 The curriculum of the College is regularly reviewed and the higher education programme was discussed at meetings with the Principal, Vice Principal, and Assistant Principals, but this is not a formal minuted process. The College appreciates that a more formal process will be necessary in future.

1.19 Following this scrutiny, the team concludes that the expectation is likely to be met and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**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 The College works within a detailed framework for the HNC Creative Media qualification provided by Pearson. This framework is aligned with the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). Responsibility for assuring academic standards are set at an appropriate level and involves both the College and Pearson. At the College, programme design is undertaken by the Creative Arts team using Pearson templates and specifications which cover the structure and learning outcomes of awards at both programme and module level.

1.21 The review team finds that the HNC delivered by the College meets with QCF which aligns with UK threshold standards through closely adhering to the framework provided by Pearson.

1.22 The review team analysed documents from both the College and Pearson. During the review visit, the team also met staff who are involved in the design of the HNC programme.

1.23 Internal processes for programme approval in the College are informal. The rationale for the development of the HNC and future higher education provision is predominantly to provide internal progression opportunities for its students and to further extend strong areas of its further education provision; however, the approval process, and where responsibility for final approval lays within the College management structure, is unclear. Therefore, the team **recommends** that the College formalises a curriculum planning and approval process for the development of new higher education provision.

1.24 The review team concludes that the College, with the support of Pearson, delivers an HNC programme that is set at a level that meets UK threshold standards. The team considers Expectation A3.1 is likely to be met and the associated level of risk is moderate due to the recommendation made in this area.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**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**

1.25 The College designs modules within the assessment framework provided by Pearson, which sets out expected learning outcomes and processes for the internal and external verification of students' achievement. The programme is aligned to the QCF. Assessments are approved externally and Pearson confirms grades before credit and qualifications are awarded. Further discussion of assessment processes is included under Expectation B6.

1.26 The College has processes, policies and procedures in place designed to ensure that the Pearson framework is used in the design of programmes in a way that ensures the outcomes are likely to meet the Expectation.

1.27 The review team examined College policies and guidance and met delivery staff, who are also internal verifiers, and students.

1.28 The review team finds that there is an effective system for the assessment of students that requires them to demonstrate that they have met learning outcomes, which is communicated to students via assignment briefs and the HNC programme handbook. Fairness and accuracy is ensured through a system of internal and external verification.

1.29 The team concludes that the expectation is likely to be met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**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 Responsibility for the monitoring and review of standards is shared between the College and Pearson. The process for internal and external verification ensures that programmes are delivered as approved and that Pearson's standards, aligned with the QCF, are met.

1.31 The review team judges that the design of programmes is likely to meet the Expectation in theory as the College has processes in place for programme monitoring and review that are designed to ensure that the standards are aligned with UK threshold standards through the Pearson framework.

1.32 In testing this, the review team analysed documentation provided by the College and met senior staff and delivery staff who are involved in programme assessment and monitoring and review.

1.33 The review team finds that the processes of verification and annual monitoring operate effectively. External verification and annual monitoring in the form of the departmental Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Quality Improvement Plan both result in the identification of opportunities to improve provision. The outcomes of the external examiners' reports, student feedback, and unit evaluations feed into the departmental SAR.

1.34 On the basis of the evidence provided, the review team concludes that the College, with the support of Pearson, has appropriate policies in place for ongoing monitoring and review of its higher education provision. Therefore, the expectation is likely to be met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**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 College works within the detailed framework for HNC qualifications provided by Pearson. This framework is aligned with the QCF. Responsibility for assuring that academic standards are set and maintained at an appropriate level involves both the College and Pearson. The processes for programme approval, and programme monitoring and review, are discussed in further detail in sections B1 and B8. Pearson appoints an external verifier who undertakes the role of external examiner and is a subject expert. The College works closely with the external verifier who provides moderation as well as advice and support.

1.36 The review team considers that the design is likely to meet the expectation in theory, external expertise is obtained through external verifiers, visiting professionals, live briefs and links with local colleges.

1.37 To test this, the review team analysed relevant documentation provided by the College, which included external verifiers' reports, minutes from meetings with local colleges and the Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA). The team also met senior staff, delivery staff and students.

1.38 The College has strong relationships with local colleges and the SFCA, which is used to disseminate good practice and use continuous professional development opportunities across sixth-form colleges. Within the external verifier's report on the area highlighted as good practice is the College's use of external professionals as visiting speakers in order to discuss access opportunities into industry, underpin the curriculum and provide networking opportunities for students.

1.39 The team concludes that Expectation A3.4 is likely to be met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**Level of risk: Low**

## The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding organisation: Summary of findings

1.40 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched the findings against the criteria set out in the *Guidance for Providers Undergoing Initial Review*, published by QAA in December 2014.

1.41 From its scrutiny of a wide range of evidence, and through the meetings that the review team had with staff and students, the team concludes that effective use is made of relevant subject and qualification benchmarks and external expertise in the development of programmes and their subsequent approval and monitoring. Furthermore, the review team confirms that effective use is made of input from external examiners and link tutors from the degree-awarding partners.

1.42 All expectations were met with low risk apart from Expectation 3.1, which, while being met, is regarded as a medium risk. This was reflected in the recommendation that the College formalises a curriculum planning and approval process for the development of new higher education programmes.

1.43 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the College's awarding organisation is **likely to meet** 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 programme is the College's first offering of a higher education programme and was prompted by student demand. The College's vision and strategy is to provide a distinctive student experience that will enable student learning to continue at level 4 in an environment that will facilitate and encourage personal development. The College identified a need for HNC provision to provide learner progression for students unsure or incapable of accessing higher education at that stage of their development. This programme is intended to allow students from a successful academic area of the College to sample and progress into a higher education programme.

2.2 The College staff produced a bespoke programme based on Pearson units and College resources, and, although it was discussed at all levels within the College, the review team was not able to access minutes from meetings where the details of the programme were discussed and approved.

2.3 The programme was designed to develop the existing skills of the potential learners, to support their progression and meet local employment needs. The resources available within the College were considered during the design process, and the Quality Code used to support the development. The review team therefore concludes that the expectation is likely to be met in theory.

2.4 The review team investigated this approach through meetings with senior managers and academic staff, and explored the minutes of team meetings to consider the planning and approval process.

2.5 Senior staff confirmed that the College's emphasis on the development of this programme was to meet student and employment needs and, as such, involved careful planning and external links with other providers, practitioners and businesses. Given the specific needs for this programme, the review team considers that the process works in practice.

2.6 Staff acknowledged that if the higher education provision was to continue to grow in student numbers or to include more programmes, then more formal processes are needed with documented consideration and approval meetings.

2.7 The approach taken by the College enables the team to conclude that the expectation is likely to be met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**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**

2.8 The College currently has an Admissions Policy which is primarily for further education applicants. The College predominantly recruits internally to its HNC programme. The College states that admission is subject to achieving the minimum requirement of 180 University and College Admissions Service (UCAS) points. However, upon further analysis this is not clear in the Admissions Policy. The policy does outline a formal interview process, the completion of previous levels and evidence of a minimum 85 per cent attendance. The Admissions Policy is made available for applicants via the College website but does not outline the process for admissions appeals.

2.9 The College informs applicants of course requirements, with opportunities designed to enable their development and achievement at several applicant meetings held throughout the year. Staff inform applicants of the structure of the programme, assessment, expected hours of study, term structure, student finance and progression opportunities.

2.10 The review team considers that the design is likely to meet the expectation in theory as the admission policy adheres to the principles of fair admission. It is transparent, reliable, valid and inclusive. The College has outlined plans to amend it to ensure it covers both its further education and higher education provision.

2.11 The team tested this expectation by analysing key documents in relation to the recruitment, selection and admissions. The team also met students, senior staff and delivery staff during the review visit.

2.12 The College's Admissions Policy outlines the application process; however, it does not make clear how an applicant would appeal an admissions decision. The team explored this further through additional documentation requests, which included the College's Complaints and Appeals Procedure, and tested this through clarifying questions during the review visit but remained unclear as to how a prospective student might understand how they could appeal an admissions decision. Therefore, the team **recommends** that the College clarifies policy and procedures for admissions appeals.

2.13 Overall, the College has a clear application process outlined in its Admissions Policy which is made available to students via the College website. Therefore, the team confirms that Expectation B2 is likely to be met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**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**

2.14 The College has clear principles and objectives to inform approaches to teaching and learning, and to support learners. To assure the quality of teaching and learning, the College has a staff observation and appraisal system with support for internal and external staff development programmes.

2.15 The learning environment and the students' experience of learning is closely monitored. The curriculum areas produce an annual SAR, which is based on student outcomes, an analysis of teaching and learning, leadership and management, and the student voice. These reports are then analysed and validated by senior management, the Sixth Form College consortium, and governors. This enables the expectation is likely to be met in theory.

2.16 The review team tested the Expectation through meetings with management, teaching staff and students, and consideration of evidence.

2.17 The team considers that the process of providing good teaching practices and learning opportunities, which enable students to develop as independent learners is effective.

2.18 Although the programme is new, the College considers that higher education-specific space with good resources is central to the programme, and the team found the provision to be good. The management confirmed that, if the higher education programmes are to expand, there are plans to ensure the provision of learning resources also expands.

2.19 The modules of the programme were selected to build on the experiences of the students and to support their future progress. In addition, while producing the programme, staff worked with other colleges to share experiences, to secure externality and to bolster the higher education provision.

2.20 Student support is strong. As all of the students are from the College, the staff have previous knowledge of their abilities and needs, and are able to support vulnerable students. The informal relationship with the students enables the staff to help with the identification of needs and to provide support for students, although the College acknowledges that this would need to be a more systematic process should numbers increase. Staff have access to an integrated student monitoring and support system and are able to privately and discretely disseminate and access information and concerns about individual students. Learning support, including financial and pastoral support, is made available and offered to students with identified needs.

2.21 Students commented on the relevance and values of the programme, and the benefits of easy access to the staff. They commented on the readiness and the willingness of staff to provide support outside timetabled sessions.



2.22 The review team considers the strong relationship between staff and students, which reflects the College ethos, and which enables learners to develop their individual skills, their confidence, and to progress, to be **good practice**.

2.23 The review team concludes that the Expectation is likely to be met and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**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**

2.24 The College has in place arrangements to ensure students are aware of the arrangements and resources of the programme. The students have several HNC information meetings before application where the details are explained. The course handbook provides information on policies, procedures and learner agreement, the roles of teachers and tutors; and the resources and facilities available.

2.25 Through the year, information is gathered with focus groups and student surveys, and these feed into an action plan to improve student development.

2.26 Academic, employability and personal development skills are embedded into the course unit modules to support professional and academic progress, and there is pastoral support on a personal basis with staff being readily available to students.

2.27 The College's policies, processes and services allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.28 The review team considered documentation, student guidance information, minutes of meetings, and met a range of academic and support staff, and students.

2.29 The learner agreement in the HNC handbook outlines the responsibilities and expectations of learners, the teachers, and support tutors, and students reported that they were satisfied with the information they received.

2.30 The team found evidence of discussions following student feedback, and external examiners are asked to comment on student achievement and to offer suggestions on improvements that could be made.

2.31 As all the current students had been further education students at the College, their learning needs are known by the staff, and when a student has a need for additional support, the College is able to offer the support from the start. The team considers that the information and support for any future students needs to be improved. The College is aware of the need to improve particular needs of external applicants, for example terminology and technical language, and states that it is part of future actions. However, there is no evidence for advice and support for new students who may have specific learning difficulties, or students who need to apply for Disabled Students' Allowance. From its analysis the team **recommends** that the College clarifies the process by which applicants can access additional learning support.

2.32 The review team concludes that the expectation is likely to be met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**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**

2.33 The College has a Student Experience Strategy which details a Student Voice initiative. However, at higher education level, student engagement occurs on a more informal basis between students and College staff. The College uses focus groups, unit evaluations and feedback, and student surveys to improve the student experience.

2.34 The Expectation is likely to be met in theory, as the College takes deliberate steps to engage students, both on a formal and informal basis. This includes informal feedback, unit evaluations, survey outcomes, and compiling the student submission. Feedback from students links into the departmental SAR on an ongoing basis.

2.35 The review team analysed documentary evidence such as the student submission, survey outcomes and student feedback. The team then triangulated this evidence in a meeting with students at the review visit.

2.36 Student engagement predominantly takes place on an informal basis within the College, due to the extremely small higher education cohort. However, if the College were to grow its higher education provision significantly, more formal representation structures would be necessary. The College currently has a strategic ambition to extend well performing areas of its further education provision, predominantly to ease the transition for students considering progressing to higher education but require some extra support to do so. Taking into consideration this strategic ambition, the team **recommends** that the College systematically involves students in deliberative committees.

2.37 The review team concludes that the College takes deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, and that therefore the expectation is likely to be met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**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**

2.38 The College designs assessment within a framework provided by Pearson. The Assessment policy establishes the principles for assessment practice and is accessible via the College website and student handbook. The assessment criteria for each grading is outlined on the assignment brief, all work is internally verified following initial marking, and a sample is then provided to the external verifier for marking. The HNC introductory units are designed to ensure students are familiar with a range of research methods and Harvard referencing.

2.39 The design of assessment is likely to meet the Expectation in theory as there are College and awarding organisation processes to secure equitable, valid, reliable assessments to demonstrate achievement of intended learning outcomes.

2.40 The review team scrutinised external examiners' reports and further documentation relating to assessment. The team also met delivery staff and students to confirm the clarity of assessment briefs, the processes of assessment and achievement of learning outcomes.

2.41 Feedback on written work is timely and valuable, with students and external examiners confirming the effectiveness of feedback. Mid-unit feedback and tutorials further develop students' understanding of the assessment criteria, and provide opportunities for discussion and clarification. The external verifier's report for 2012-13 commented that handwritten feedback was occasionally illegible; however, when the team explored this with students, they reported no issues.

2.42 Students submit their coursework for assessment via an online blog; in the external verifier's report this practice is commended as an excellent method of collating and storing coursework effectively for assessment. Students also have the opportunity to organise a live brief and submit the outcome as part of their assessment. Examples of this include live projects with local companies. Students reported that they found this experience valuable and it supported their studio-based work. The delivery staff also arrange a programme of visiting industry professionals, so that students can engage and interact with industry experts. The team considers the innovative and industry-relevant approach taken to presenting coursework to be **good practice**.

2.43 The College has secure procedures for equitable, valid and reliable assessment practice, which is confirmed by the external verifier. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is likely to be met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.44 The College works closely with Pearson, who appoint external verifiers to take on a role similar to that of an external examiner. The moderator highlights good practice and recommendations on assessment processes, which inform the content of the departmental SAR, which is part of the College's annual monitoring and periodic review process.

2.45 The design meets the expectation in theory. External verifier reports are disseminated to all staff, and external verifiers' details are included in the HNC Handbook, and they also meet students. External verifier feedback is delivered verbally and via electronic documents. Subject leaders respond to reports, identify actions, timescales and roles outlining responsibilities. The College makes the external verifier feedback available to students via its VLE.

2.46 The examined documentation provided by the College, which included an external examiner's report, and meetings with delivery staff and students, confirmed they had all met the external verifier.

2.47 The College provided the external verifier's report for 2012-13, which highlights visiting speakers and the use of blogging as an assessment tool as areas of good practice. The report also provides extensive comments on assessment, deadlines, feedback, and the rigorous internal verification process in place at the College. The external verifier's report for 2014-15 was not yet available at the time of the review visit.

2.48 The College makes scrupulous use of external examiners through a system of internal verification and external verification operated by Pearson. There are also appropriate processes in place for staff and student interaction with external verifiers. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B7 is likely to be met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**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**

2.49 The College has in place a secure and detailed monitoring system for its A Level programmes, and this is being continued with the HNC programme. There are SAR reviews which are based on students' achievements, student surveys and focus groups. External examiners are asked to comment on student achievement and to make suggestions for improvements. From this an action plan is developed and monitored over the following year.

2.50 Before the programme started, potential students had regular meetings with staff who offered details of the programme and possible progression opportunities. During the programme, the students are kept informed by the course handbook and detailed unit briefs with course outcomes and goals, and they are given opportunities to develop skills in preparation for employment.

2.51 The College's policies, processes and services allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.52 The review team tested the Expectation through the scrutiny of evidence and through meetings with staff and students.

2.53 The team considers that the programme monitoring and review is effective and, although in the first year of the programme, is being applied consistently through the year. There are annual departmental SARs, formal student surveys, plus informal opportunities to feed back to tutors. The course team is expected to review and comment on assessment strategies, taking into account any external reports.

2.54 Changes to assessment were discussed and considered but students reported that they were happy with the assessment process, Pearson also reported that assessment is being carried out to correct standards, so the current assessment process is to continue. However, the College was able to give examples of amendments made to assignment briefs in response to students' comments.

2.55 The review team concludes that the expectation is likely to be met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.56 The College has a comprehensive complaints procedure that clarifies how informal complaints and formal complaints are handled differently, it also outlines a staged approach and what cannot be handled using the procedure. The College has received no higher education complaints this year. The complaints policy is made available via the College website. This is also signposted from the final section of the College's HNC handbook.

2.57 The College does not currently have an academic appeals policy. Academic appeals are mentioned across several College documents. The College identified the inclusion of Pearson's appeals procedure in the HNC handbook as an area for further action.

2.58 In theory, the design predominantly meets the expectation as the College has a detailed and accessible complaints procedure. However, the information the College provides on academic appeals requires greater clarity and to be more accessible to students.

2.59 The review team examined documents which set out the College's policies and procedures for complaints and appeals and explored how these are made available to students. The team also met staff and students in order to triangulate the evidence provided by the College.

2.60 The College's complaints policy is detailed, fair and accessible. However, the procedure for appeals is unclear. In order to explore this further the team discussed academic appeals with staff and students, who stated that they had not had any cause to access such a policy; however, they would expect to access it via the College website. Academic appeals are mentioned across several College documents, which includes the Examinations Policy and Assessment Policy. It is unclear within these documents whether they apply to higher education or further education students and the Assessment Policy is not made available via the College website. Therefore, the team **recommends** that the College develops an academic appeals policy and ensures that it is accessible to all students.

2.61 Based on the evidence provided and discussions that took place on the review visit, the team finds that expectation B9 is likely to be met and the associated level of risk is moderate due to the recommendation made.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.62 The programme does not formally involve organisations outside the College in the delivery of learning opportunities. Students are encouraged and supported to extend their learning processes by practical involvements with external organisations, but these experiences are not evaluated nor included in any assessments.

2.63 The College's policies, processes and services allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.64 The review team tested the Expectation by examining agreements and evidence, and in meetings with staff and students.

2.65 The process works in practice as, although the involvement with outside bodies does not contribute to the assessment process, the students benefit from the experiences. The team was made aware of the many talks provided for the students by external professionals such as film-makers, photo-journalists, the Edinburgh festival curator, a film and photography-based company, and the curator from Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. On a more practical level, some students have organised their own exhibitions outside the College, and some students have opportunities to work with Lanemark turbines producing images and videos for its website.

2.66 The team concludes that the expectation is likely to be met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**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**

2.67 The College does not offer research degrees.

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

2.68 In reaching its positive judgement that the policies and procedures at King Edward VI College are likely to meet UK expectations in the quality of learning opportunities, the review team matched the findings against the criteria set out in the *Guidance for Providers Undergoing Initial Review*, published by QAA, December 2014.

2.69 All Expectations are considered likely to be met, with low risk apart from Expectation B9, which, while likely to be met, is regarded as a medium risk in view of the need for the College to develop an accessible academic appeals policy.

2.70 The team identified two further recommendations: to clarify the process by which applicants can access additional learning support, and to involve students systematically in deliberative committees. The team also identified two areas of good practice: the strong relationship between staff and students which reflects the College ethos and which enables students to develop their individual skills, their confidence and to progress, and the innovative and industry-relevant approach taken to presenting coursework.

2.71 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the College's awarding organisation is **likely to meet** UK expectations.

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

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

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

##### **Findings**

3.1 Applicants receive detailed information about the programme before they apply and further details once the College has received their application. This information includes entry requirements, potential equipment costs, equipment supplied by the College, information on the awarding organisation, tuition fees, qualifications and the differences in studying at level 4. In addition, students are made aware of what is expected of them, and what they can expect of the College. However, all the students were internal applicants and the information supplied was targeted at them, mainly inside the College.

3.2 The College's policies, processes and services allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

3.3 The review team tested the Expectation during meetings with staff and students, and by exploring the information made available to students.

3.4 Students are given a full programme of information, with all the necessary details, during four internal meetings. Further course details are made available to enrolled students in the Creative Media Production Handbook which contains information on learning outcomes, assessment, module details and deadlines.

3.5 Although there are no immediate plans to encourage external applicants, information is available for prospective applicants on the College website, which is to be supplemented by open evenings and access to tutorial guidance. In addition, potential students are encouraged through direct contact with local schools, though this has had limited impact.

3.6 As the target students are at this stage internal, and any expansion will focus on local students, the expectation is likely to be met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Likely to meet**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

3.7 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched the findings against the criteria set out in the *Guidance for Providers Undergoing Initial Review*, published by QAA, December 2014.

3.8 The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. This is because the review team found that the College approach to managing information to ensure that it was fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible for all stakeholders, including all students and staff, was robust.

3.9 The review team concludes that the quality of information produced about learning opportunities by the College is **likely to meet** UK expectations.

## Glossary

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

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

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

### **Academic standards**

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

### **Award**

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

### **Blended learning**

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

### **Credit(s)**

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

### **Degree-awarding body**

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

### **Distance learning**

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

See also **blended learning**.

### **Dual award or double award**

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

### **e-learning**

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

### **Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)**

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000  
Email: [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

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