

Higher Education Review of Kingston College

March 2014

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| About this review | 1 |
| Key findings..... | 2 |
| QAA's judgements about Kingston College | 2 |
| Good practice | 2 |
| Recommendations | 2 |
| Affirmation of action being taken | 2 |
| Theme: Student Employability..... | 3 |
| About Kingston College | 4 |
| Explanation of the findings about Kingston College | 7 |
| 1 Judgement: The maintenance of threshold academic standards..... | 8 |
| 2 Judgement: Quality of learning opportunities | 18 |
| 3 Judgement: Quality of the information about higher education provision..... | 37 |
| 4 Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities | 40 |
| 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability..... | 43 |
| Glossary..... | 44 |

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Kingston College. The review took place from 4 to 7 March 2014 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Hastings McKenzie
- Professor Anne Peat
- Ms Daphne Rowlands
- Professor Gary Wood
- Miss Sarah Crook (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Kingston 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 8.

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

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,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.

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

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Kingston College

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

- The maintenance of threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets UK expectations**.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets UK expectations**.
- Information about learning opportunities produced about its provision **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 Kingston College.

- The close working relationships with degree-awarding bodies at programme level, for example the role of the link tutors (Expectations A1, A4, B3 and B4).

Recommendations

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

By the start of the academic year 2014-15:

- encourage the relevant awarding body to formally approve validated delivery by the College (Expectation B1)
- clarify with the relevant degree-awarding body the formalised responsibilities for the admission of students to its awards (Expectation B2)
- seek to update the partnership agreements to reflect the change in delivery from franchised to validated provision (Expectation B2)
- amend its processes to ensure that students are consulted on changes that result in a material change to the status of their programmes (Expectation B5)
- confirm assessment arrangements with the relevant degree-awarding body (Expectation B6)
- ensure that all marketing information is approved by and clearly identifies the relevant degree-awarding body (Expectation C).

By the spring term 2015:

- include student representation on appropriate committees and ensure that they are prepared for the role (Expectation B5).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that Kingston College is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The approval and implementation of a local assessment policy for its higher education provision by September 2014 (Expectation B6).

- The establishment of the Higher Education Academic Board within its overarching higher education structure (Expectation B8).

Theme: Student Employability

The College maintains that employability is a central tenet of its higher education strategy with the higher education programmes offered being vocational in nature. By embedding employment skills into the curriculum, the College aims to ensure that all higher education leavers have the skill and qualities that will allow them to progress into employment.

In addition to curriculum-based initiatives, the College proposes to establish its own opportunities for work experience and a portfolio of internships. The newly developed Employability Working Group aims to spread good practice in the College to all areas, although currently there is no employer representation in the group. However, employers are very supportive of the College and expressed the view that students were ready for work on finishing their programmes.

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

About Kingston College

Kingston College is situated in Kingston town centre, in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. Its mission is to 'provide ever improving learning, teaching, support and progress to everyone from our community, working in close partnership within and beyond our Federation'.

The College has five sites, all within two miles of each other, four of which offer programmes to further adult and higher education students. The College is structured into 11 schools. Eight of the 11 schools provide higher education courses.

The College had over 6,000 students at the start of the academic year 2013-14, 1,128 of whom were on higher education programmes. Of these, 499 were on directly funded programmes and 629 on franchised programmes. The Kingston Hall Road site has a dedicated higher education centre, which is available to all higher education students regardless of the site at which they study.

The College offers programmes through five awarding bodies: Kingston University; University of West London; London South Bank University; University of Greenwich; Middlesex University; and one awarding organisation: Pearson. The largest source of higher education work has been provided through the partnership with Kingston University, which is also its oldest partnership in terms of the higher education provision, dating back to 1992. The running of higher national programmes with Pearson dates back to 1984.

In December 2011, the College entered into a Federation with Carshalton College. A Principal's Group and Senior Management Team lead the Federation. A Kingston and Sutton Educational Partnership Board (KSEP) has been formed to oversee Corporate Services and Quality and Learner Services. Kingston College still retains its own governing body. Each College maintains its own identity and they all exist as separate Colleges, although the overall mission is shared.

The Federation has been established to allow both Kingston and Carshalton Colleges to provide a number of their services in a more cost-effective way and to invest jointly in facilities and services to support their students. There was already substantial collaboration between the two Colleges through the Power Assessment and Training Centre, and this development builds on the partnership to the benefit of students.

The challenges faced by the College are a reflection of the changing higher education landscape and policy around the Student Number Count. One consequence is that there has been a major change in the provision offered, particularly by Kingston University, the awarding body partner with the largest provision, leading to the validation of a number of previously franchised programmes.

At the time of the review the following programmes were offered:

Kingston University

BA (Hons) Business Management - second year only

BA (Hons) Business

HND Business and Finance

FdA Business

FdA Business and Law Administration - second year only

FdA Early Years Leadership and Management in Early Years

FdA Early Years

FdA Children's Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Practice

HND Computing - second year only
HND Engineering - second year only
Foundation Year Science (Extended Degree Year Zero)
Foundation Year Technology (Extended Degree Year Zero)
Foundation Year Computing and Maths (Extended Degree Year Zero)
BSc (Hons) Sports Science
FdA Art and Design
BA (Hons) Art and Design (Top-Up)
FdA Media Skills

University of Greenwich

PGCE/DTLLS

London South Bank University

FdSc Sports Coaching and Analysis

University of West London

BA (Hons) Digital Arts
BA (Hons) Acting for Stage and Media
FdA Fashion and Textiles

Pearson

BTEC HND Aeronautical Engineering
BTEC HNC Electrical and Electronic Engineering
BTEC HND Electrical and Electronic Engineering (Conversion)
BTEC HND Mechanical Engineering (Conversion)
BTEC HNC Mechanical Engineering
BTEC HNC Diploma in Performing Arts
BTEC HNC Music (Production)
BTEC HND Computing and Systems Development
BTEC HNC Travel and Tourism Management

Middlesex University

BA (Hons) Integrative-Relational Counselling

The College underwent Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2009, which determined that confidence could be placed in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership or centre recognition and approval agreements, for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding bodies and for the quality of learning opportunities it offers. It also found that reliance could be placed on the accuracy and completeness of public information.

At the time, the College produced an action plan in response to the four features of good practice, three advisable and two desirable recommendations.

The College has taken steps to respond to the recommendations of the IQER, and has flagged up areas in which this continues to be a work in progress. The College has sought to build on the good practice points by further developing relationships with its awarding bodies through its associations with the link and liaison tutors. The review team has again identified the strength of these relationships to be a feature of good practice.

Progress on the recommendations has been more mixed as institutional restructuring ahead of the establishment of the Federation resulted in inconsistent central collection of higher education student feedback. The College has also acknowledged that more needs to be done to provide a clear higher education focus and environment for staff and students.

The College has acknowledged that its development of higher education has been in part organic, and that it is now intent on building a more systematic approach to the enhancement of its higher education provision to create a higher education ethos.

The College has established a system to review all external examiner reports and this is reflected in Expectation B7 on page 30. Programme specifications that clearly detail learning outcomes are now produced for all programmes and made readily available through different media.

Explanation of the findings about Kingston 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 threshold academic standards

Expectation (A1): Each qualification (including those awarded through arrangements with other delivery organisations or support providers) is allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*.

Quality Code, Chapter A1: The national level

Findings

1.1 The College currently offers 32 higher education awards approved by five degree-awarding bodies and one awarding organisation: Kingston University, University of West London, London South Bank University, University of Greenwich, Middlesex University and Pearson.

1.2 The College makes it clear that the ultimate responsibility for the standards of awards lies with the awarding bodies. This is articulated in the respective memoranda of agreement and approval documents.

1.3 Recently the College has changed from indirect to direct student funding for much of its higher education provision. In doing so, the College agreed with the relevant degree-awarding bodies to shift these directly funded programmes from franchised to validated delivery.

1.4 It is the responsibility of the College's awarding bodies to allocate the qualifications they award to the appropriate level of the FHEQ and to ensure there is sufficient volume of study to demonstrate that learning outcomes can be achieved.

1.5 The FHEQ is used as a reference point in the development of higher education programmes and its use is monitored at internal and external reviews. It is embedded in the Institutional Quality Handbooks and Programme Specifications.

1.6 The College makes use of a toolkit, produced by Kingston University, that offers guidance on a number of design areas including writing learning outcomes at levels 4, 5 and 6.

1.7 The programme team normally writes learning outcomes. The level of involvement of the partner institution link or liaison tutor in this process is dependent on the maturity of the partnership. Staff confirmed the strength of relationship with the University link and liaison tutors. The review team considers the close working relationships with degree-awarding bodies at programme level, for example the role of the link tutors, to be **good practice**.

1.8 For Pearson programmes, and in the case of a relatively new programme, the learning outcomes are developed in collaboration. The review team saw evidence of appropriate scrutiny of programmes, and where learning outcomes had not been written at the appropriate level, this was addressed and appropriate changes made.

1.9 Although there are slight variations in the process of approvals and reviews, the programmes are all monitored annually and action plans formulated. The College has recently established a new governance arrangement and clear lines of communication are identified for all higher education programmes.

1.10 The College consider external examiners to be central to upholding academic standards. The review team saw evidence that external examiners comment on the suitability of learning outcomes. The external examiner report template asks external examiners to report on the programme, subject design, content and standards. Reports reviewed confirm appropriate standards are met. The College is able, through its consistent use of the FHEQ, to indicate achievements and attributes of students; this is communicated to prospective students and employers through programme specifications.

1.11 Overall, the review team concludes that the College effectively discharges its responsibilities, within the context of its agreements with its awarding bodies, for allocating qualifications to the appropriate level of the FHEQ and therefore meets Expectation A1 of the Quality Code. The associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2): All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

Quality Code, Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level

Findings

1.12 The College makes it clear that the ultimate responsibility for academic standards and alignment with appropriate reference points, including subject benchmark statements, lies with the awarding bodies.

1.13 It is clear from the Quality Handbooks of partner institutions that programmes are aligned with subject benchmark statements and College staff confirm the effective use of benchmark statements in programme development and monitoring. Programmes are reviewed regularly, providing assurance on academic consistency across the subject area. Evidence of annual review of programmes through Higher Education Self-Assessment Reports (HE SAR), validated by a College panel, is evident. HE SARs are mapped to the Quality Code. In future, HE SARs will go to the newly formed Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB), which will give the College an overview of its higher education provision. Annual reviews also go to the respective partner institutions in which compliance with benchmark statements is evident.

1.14 The College is confident through external scrutiny of programmes by external examiners that programme content is aligned to subject benchmark statements and the review team saw evidence through external examiner reports that standards are met.

1.15 Overall, the review team concludes that the College discharges its responsibilities effectively to ensure that programme design takes account of relevant subject and qualification benchmarks. There is robust use of external examiners in assessing subject benchmark statements. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A2 of the Quality Code is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3): Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study.

Quality Code, Chapter A3: The programme level

Findings

1.16 The College makes information about the programmes available through programme specifications to prospective students, current students, employers and the general public. The programme specifications provide clear information on the aims, learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for the programme of study and meet Expectation A3 of the Quality Code.

1.17 Programme specifications are provided by the relevant awarding body, or by Pearson in conjunction with the College for its Higher National programmes. External reference points are taken into account where relevant; for example, the counselling programme makes reference to its professional guiding body, the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), and their guidelines are followed.

1.18 The College has different degrees of input into writing the learning outcomes and programme specifications depending on the maturity of the partnership. Partner universities are involved in leading the writing of programme specifications and College teams are involved in setting assessment to ensure the assessment methods meet the needs of a broad range of abilities. In the case of its BTEC Higher National programmes, Pearson and the College have worked together to develop learning outcomes.

1.19 There is some variability in how information and programme specifications are made available to students. Some students report seeing a description of every module at the time of application, while others are given a programme specification when they commence the programme of study. Students can also access information through the websites of the College and its partners. Employers reported seeing information about the programmes which they found very helpful.

1.20 Kingston University recently revised its academic framework and looked at the structure and quality of all degrees delivered by the University and its partners; this review included programme specifications.

1.21 It is clear in the guidance from partner institutions that external examiners or external advisers are expected to be involved in the development of programmes and validations and the approval of changes to the curriculum.

1.22 The review team concludes that Expectation A3 of the Quality Code has been met, and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A4): Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter A4: Approval and review

Findings

1.23 The College works with a number of partners, the majority of its provision being with Kingston University. Partnership agreements outline procedures for monitoring programmes. Guidelines for collaborative partnerships inform the way in which the College works with its partner institutions and agreements are overseen by the Head of Higher Education. The University of West London, Kingston University and Middlesex University provide guidelines for link/liaison tutors on how to manage collaborative arrangements. Awarding body Quality Handbooks prescribe the procedures for monitoring programmes. Pearson programmes are monitored by external verifiers. The process and procedures meet Expectation A4 of the Quality Code.

1.24 The current method of reviewing and monitoring higher education programmes internally is through the use of Self-Assessment Reports which are compiled three times a year by each School. Reviews are written by the course team and informed by course data, external examiner reports, student feedback, and a review of previous actions. The course document is amalgamated into a School document, which has a Quality Improvement Report attached to it outlining actions to be taken to address weaknesses. The action plan, which has timely outcomes and named responsibilities, is currently monitored locally by the Head of Section, with the Head of School responsible for ensuring that outstanding actions have been completed.

1.25 Meetings take place at a number of levels between the College and its partners. Integral to the review process is the role of link tutors who provide liaison between the College at course level and the relevant awarding body. Link tutors have an overview of staff development needs and are cognisant of student feedback. This close relationship contributes to the feature of good practice under Expectation A1. Annual reviews as well as Institutional Subject Reviews and Periodic Programme Reviews take place to ensure the currency and relevance of programmes. Kingston University has recently undergone a review of its programmes, resulting in new validations of courses offered by the College. A series of development activities took place for staff during the revalidation of programmes. Employers have some input into the content of courses as they are invited to review the relevance of modules.

1.26 New programmes are developed in conjunction with the awarding body; for example, a top-up degree to Foundation Art and Design. Approval was given to deliver the programme and the course was developed and supported by the link tutor, and went through the process of validation. At validation, staff qualifications are checked to ensure they are appropriately qualified to teach at the relevant level with staff development offered if necessary. The College is now implementing a more formal method of internally approving programmes through its planning process, which clearly articulates the rationale for programmes and associated resources needed to run them.

1.27 The College is implementing a more structured and rigorous approach to reviewing its programmes through the introduction of the HEAB, which is due to meet during this academic year. The Board will meet six times a year and provide a formal mechanism for monitoring the College's higher education provision and enhancing its quality assurance procedures. The HEAB will ensure adherence to external processes and provide a

centralised overview of higher education within the College through its monitoring of a composite HE SAR.

1.28 The review team considers that, overall, the College's mechanisms for maintaining and monitoring standards meet Expectation A4 of the Quality Code and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A5): Higher education providers ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards.

Quality Code, Chapter A5: Externality

Findings

1.29 The College makes use of external expertise in quality assurance processes in a number of ways. All higher education programmes have external examiners appointed by the relevant awarding institution. Procedures are set out in partnership handbooks. Arrangements for externally verifying higher national programmes are described in Pearson's Quality Assurance Handbook. External verifiers are appointed for each higher national programme and make annual visits.

1.30 Programme specifications indicate appropriate levels, subject benchmarks and credit values. Programme specifications are included in course files, on the virtual learning environment (VLE) and in handbooks. The counselling programme is informed by its external professional body and is clearly identified in the course management handbook. Employers, with students at the College, are involved in ensuring the relevancy of the programme's content and expressed satisfaction that programmes are fit for purpose.

1.31 The College has a clear procedure for managing external examiner and verifier visits and subsequent reports. All external examiner reports are received by the Quality Unit. Comments are noted and reported on a spreadsheet which are rated red, amber or green according to importance. Red and amber are followed up immediately; for example, in a meeting with senior staff they gave an example of an issue rated red for a business course run in partnership with Kingston University. Further investigation found it was not a College issue but it demonstrated the College's mechanism for following up points raised. The College acknowledges receipt of external examiner reports and the official response is made by the awarding body. Link tutors play an integral part in this process by discussing external examiner reports with the College.

1.32 The review team looked at external examiner reports which confirm that standards are appropriate and assessment is fair, and that students understand what is required of them. Reports also confirm that the College is following correct procedures and that all information is made available to external examiners. Higher National courses use internal verification procedures appropriately prior to external verification.

1.33 External examiner reports are used to inform the Quality Self-Assessment Reports (QSARs), which are produced termly and used to compile a School Self-Assessment Report. The College is implementing a more formalised structure to receive and monitor these reports at higher education level.

1.34 External examiner reports are not currently shared with students as a matter of routine. Students were aware of the role of external examiners and the existence of reports but many had not seen a report and were unsure how to access them. One programme does pass on reports and responses to the student representative who in turn cascades the information.

1.35 The review team considers that there is use of external expertise in quality assurance processes and therefore the College meets Expectation A5 of the Quality Code. The review team considers that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A6): Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Quality Code, Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes

Findings

1.36 The College adheres to assessment policies and regulations provided by the relevant awarding body, which are specified in the respective partnership agreements. The College's input into Kingston University's review of the academic framework process enabled staff to look at the suitability of assessment. The College is responsible for initial assessment, and assessment guidelines are outlined in the College's draft assessment policy for Higher Education in Further Education which is further discussed under Expectation B6.

1.37 Staff qualifications are scrutinised during validation processes to ensure currency and appropriateness. The review team looked at qualifications and found that staff are adequately qualified for their teaching level.

1.38 Module assessments and programme assessment boards are held in conjunction with the relevant awarding body to discuss assessment decisions and form part of the College's quality cycle. The College provides draft guidelines for higher national assessment boards and meeting notes seen by the review team demonstrate that assessment decisions are discussed. The review team looked at external examiner reports, which confirm that assessments are appropriate and in line with comparable programmes. Issues arising from reports are actioned and a composite sheet of actions arising from external examiner reports is compiled in a database and monitored by the Quality department.

1.39 Assessment informs the internal termly reviews that are compiled for each course. A template for the Self-Assessment Review shows that assessment in terms of achievement is recorded and discussed. These provide the basis for the School's amalgamated Self-Assessment Review, which currently feeds into the whole College review process. The College is in the process of forming a HEAB, which will receive and monitor reports from schools and enable the College to have an overarching view of its higher education provision.

1.40 Each programme maintains a management file in which details of assessment are kept. Intended learning outcomes are clearly shown on assignment briefs together with marking criteria. Students confirm that they understand what is expected of them and that intended learning outcomes are explained to them along with assessment methodologies. The review team looked at returned work and concluded that feedback is appropriate and developmental and recorded against learning outcomes. The College has a stated turnaround time of two weeks. Actual turnaround time varies across schools and students with whom the review team met gave a mixed response regarding assessment feedback being received promptly. Students confirm that feedback in a variety of formats is helpful and that in general they are satisfied with assessment.

1.41 The review team heard that the College has a policy for the accreditation of prior learning, of which some students are aware. Staff confirm that what can be approved is up to the discretion of the awarding body. Higher National programmes follow Pearson Recognition of Prior Learning which can be used to waive entry qualifications; for example, in Sport a coaching qualification may take precedence over an A Level qualification.

1.42 The review team concludes that the College's assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning meets Expectation A6 of the Quality Code and that the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of threshold academic standards: Summary of findings

1.43 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. All of the Expectations for this judgement area have been met with a low level of risk. There is evidence that although the College's awarding bodies and awarding organisation have ultimate responsibility for setting academic standards, the College is aware of its responsibilities for maintaining standards.

1.44 Although the College's awarding bodies and awarding organisation have ultimate responsibility for setting academic standards as stated in the partnership agreements, the responsibility for maintaining these standards lies with the Principal of the College, who is accountable to governors. Responsibilities are delegated through the Principal to the Head of College, Head of Higher Education and ultimately course teams with clearly defined roles for course tutors, section heads and heads of School. The reporting process is outlined in the College's higher education reporting structure chart.

1.45 The College is taking appropriate action in areas where it recognises that further work would enhance practice and contribute positively to the student experience; for example, the approval and implementation of an assessment policy currently in draft, which is affirmed in the section on Expectation B6, and the establishment of the HEAB within its overarching higher education structure, which is affirmed in the section on Expectation B8.

1.46 The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of threshold academic standards of awards offered by the College on behalf of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation meets UK expectations.

2 Judgement: Quality of learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme design and approval

2.1 The responsibility for the design and approval of programmes is shared with partner awarding bodies. The College works closely with its partners to develop the programmes it offers. The extent of input varies depending on the maturity of the partner relationship. Staff are closely involved in the development and approval of awards and this has enabled the successful transition from franchised to validated provision. This transition was accelerated due to the receipt of directly funded student numbers.

2.2 The review team heard that some students were moved from indirectly funded programmes to directly funded programmes and became College students. Students joined the College expecting two years on a franchised award followed by a University-operated top-up to find they were on a programme validated by the University, but delivered entirely by the College, and as a result, access to University resources had ceased. The review team also heard from students that there were unexpected changes made to the name of their award.

2.3 The review team tested the College's understanding of the difference between franchised and validated provision. The College's understanding is that there is little difference between a franchised and validated programme other than resource implications depending on the direct or indirect nature of the funding.

2.4 The idea that a franchised award, because it was previously successfully delivered by the College, could transition to a validated award without a prior approval process was accepted by the College and its awarding bodies. As such, no prior approval to recognise the College's ownership and ability to wholly teach and resource the awards in question was attempted before the change in funding model.

2.5 Kingston University sanctioned the College to deliver the BA (Hons) Business Management and the FdA Business awards using a directly funded model in September 2012, and retrospectively approved the awards for validated delivery during the academic year 2012-13 in time for the September 2013 intake, after one year of directly funded operation.

2.6 However, at the time of the review visit the team found that the University of West London switched its franchised provision to validated provision directly funded and delivered as if owned by the College without seeking retrospective approval. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2014-15 the College encourage the relevant awarding body to formally approve validated delivery by the College.

2.7 There was also no evidence that the College sought to formally involve its students in the approval of its validated business awards. Because the University of West London awards moved from franchised to validated delivery mode without an approval event, students were consequently not able to be involved in the design, development and approval of the programmes. This factor contributes to the recommendation made under Expectation B5 that the College amend its processes to ensure that students are consulted on changes that result in a material change to the status of their programmes.

2.8 In coming to its conclusion that the College meets the Expectation that higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes

with a moderate level of risk, the review team carefully weighed up institutional responsibilities and judged that the College had acted in good faith and in accordance with direct advice from its respective degree-awarding bodies.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B2: Admissions

2.9 In accordance with the existing partnership agreements, the College has responsibility for admissions to all programmes with the exception of those originally franchised from Kingston University. The review team heard that the College took responsibility for the admission of students onto all of its higher education awards, a position that had been reinforced by becoming a member of UCAS. At the time of the review visit the movement to validated arrangements from franchised provision in 2012 for the delivery of Kingston University business awards had also not been reflected in the overarching Kingston University partnership agreement, as only franchised admissions arrangements were stipulated. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2014-15 the College clarify with Kingston University the formalised responsibilities for the admission of students to its awards. The review team also **recommends** that the College seek to update the partnership agreements to reflect the change in delivery from franchised to validated provision.

2.10 The College became a member of UCAS in June 2012. In doing so, it established a student loan system for its directly funded learners and redeveloped its admissions policy. Applications for the 2013-14 academic year were processed by the College through UCAS for the first time. This move enhanced the monitoring of admissions within the College. It is now a member of the newly established 'community of best practice for HE in FE admissions' run in conjunction with Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) and the Association of Colleges (AoC).

2.11 During the review, the team met with students. Those applying for foundation degree or bachelor degree awards described how they had all expected to undertake University awards, but through a range of different circumstances had ended up as College students.

2.12 The review team was shown evidence of communications with potential Kingston University students that outlined the changes they should expect consequent to the late decision in 2011-12 to change over to directly funded provision for 2012-13. Despite this, there was confusion and some students remained unclear as to the changes that had taken place. It was only subsequent to enrolment at the College that those affected began to fully appreciate the differences between College-based study on a validated award and study at the College as a franchised student of a partner University.

2.13 The College has recently appointed a new Head of Higher Education with the aim of stabilising and growing their higher education provision. In addition, a Higher Education Admissions Team has been formed and a new higher education website has been launched. The new website offers clear information to all applicants regarding admissions requirements and all University awards have programme specifications available online.

2.14 In advertising its awards, the College will often differentiate itself from its partners in terms of the expected tariff or associated qualifications, acknowledging that its widening participation agenda draws from a differing student base to that of its University partners. However, the College was not always as clear as its partners in describing the full requirements for admission. As such, the University of Greenwich entry requirements for the PGCE in its partnership agreement with the College differed from those published on the website award page as, in particular, it did not state that a CRB check is required, a stipulation made in the partnership agreement.

2.15 No admission appeals have been made to the College. A system is in place to consider any appeal that staff were readily able to identify and describe in meetings with the review team.

2.16 Despite the historic issues noted above, the review team concludes that Expectation B2 has been met and that the associated level of risk is low. This is because the review team saw evidence that the College had put in place measures to improve the admissions process through its engagement with UCAS, SPA and AoC, the enhanced monitoring of the admissions process and the launch of a new higher education website offering clear information regarding admissions requirements.

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

2.17 The College works with staff, students, employers and awarding bodies to provide learning opportunities and teaching practices that enable students to achieve their chosen awards. The College articulates its policy to stakeholders for the review and enhancement of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The Higher Education Learning and Teaching Strategy sets out the principles and objectives for the delivery of teaching and learning. These are promoted and shared among staff, students and other stakeholders. Students understand programme specifications and the expectations of their awards.

2.18 The College demonstrates evidence of articulating and implementing a strategic approach to learning and teaching. This can be seen in the Quality Improvement Handbook, the College mission, the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and through effective teaching and assessment monitored through lesson observations and quality assurance mechanisms.

2.19 The College has a clear approach to staff professional development designed to enhance learning opportunities and teaching practices. The College has recently engaged with the Higher Education Academy in becoming a full member, providing staff development events and supporting staff to become fellows and engage with the UK Professional Framework for Higher Education. Partner awarding bodies approve staff teaching on their awards and provide professional development events and support for College staff. This contributes to the feature of good practice noted under Expectation A1.

2.20 Lesson observations, which feed into performance review, are carried out systematically and used to enhance professional development and practice through the sharing of good practice. Staff are also encouraged to share good practice of teaching and learning through peer observations of teaching sessions, cross-college improvement days, weekly staff development sessions and events such as the recently held sharing good practice event whereby staff bring their practices and ideas and share in a marketplace concept. Staff considered exceptional are identified as learning coaches and are regularly involved in staff development sessions.

2.21 Staff are appropriately qualified and up to date with their professional practice. Teaching staff are based in subject schools and teach across further and higher education programmes. All teaching staff are approved by the awarding body responsible for the award. Staff development is managed within the schools and an allocation of 13 days for scholarly activity is afforded to all teaching staff. Staff have the opportunity to attend development activities such as training events and review exercises at partner institutions. Staff are able to undertake a master's degree at Kingston University, funded by the University.

2.22 The College collects and analyses data, including recruitment, progression and achievement data, to ensure the effectiveness and enhancement of learning and teaching. Additionally, the student voice provides feedback that allows teaching staff to reflect on their practice. Close monitoring and evaluation of modules and programmes support the enhancement of learning opportunities and teaching practices.

2.23 The planning and design of learning, teaching and assessment activities are effective in providing opportunities for the achievement of learning outcomes for each programme of study.

2.24 There are effective mechanisms for the identification and support of students with disabilities and specific learning needs, which afford equality of opportunity for all learners. Students with specific learning needs are identified through the application process and support is made available for them through the College Additional Learning Support team.

2.25 The different arrangements and the changes to agreements with partner awarding bodies have led to students having different access rights to services at the partner awarding bodies. This has led to some discontent among students. An example of this is access to VLEs, as some students have access to both the College and the partner institution VLEs while some only have access to the College VLE.

2.26 The quality of learning opportunities and teaching practices is systematically reviewed, drawing on a variety of sources of information including the observation of teaching and learning, external examiner reports, student feedback and the review of data on student retention, progression and achievement. Each programme collates a quality file and compiles a quarterly review of programme performance, which identifies strengths and areas for improvement.

2.27 Students are able to monitor their progress and academic development through constructive feedback on assessment, tutorials and regular contact with teaching staff. Students speak highly of the quality of teaching and the support provided by the College. Students respect their teachers and are appreciative of the access they have to them out of timetabled contact hours. The timeliness of feedback on assessment varies from programme to programme depending on the awarding body regulations.

2.28 The team concludes, therefore, that Expectation B3 has been met and that 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

2.29 The College has clear structures in place to enable students to develop and achieve their relevant awards. The roles and responsibilities of individuals and different services within the College are clear and fulfil the needs of students. Students are appreciative of these services and speak highly of the support they receive from the College.

2.30 Heads of sections and programme leaders are clearly aware of their responsibilities in terms of programme-level quality assurance and awarding body requirements. They have close working relationships with partner awarding bodies and regular meetings are held between programme leaders and link tutors. Communication channels are effective and understood by staff. Each course has a designated programme manager with responsibility for the compilation and maintenance of a programme quality management file, which comprises key documents and information including programme specifications, student feedback and achievement data.

2.31 There is a strategy for the development of resources and facilities for higher education provision at the College with an objective to have an extended 'physical higher education presence' and allocation of monetary resources to higher education. The College has a range of resources and arrangements in place specifically for higher education students such as the designated Higher Education Resource Centre, although due to its location not all higher education students benefit fully from these facilities.

2.32 Students develop well and data shows good progression and achievement. External examiners' reports confirm the standards achieved by students and the appropriateness of levels. Employers also confirm the validity of programme content for employability and also comment on improving cooperation with the College and greater involvement with programme development.

2.33 Services available to students include careers guidance, tutorial, pastoral and academic support. Support and guidance for students are seen as strengths by the College and students. However, as the delivery of tutorial support varies from programme to programme, there is inconsistency in the provision of tutorials. Overall, however, tutorial support is valued by staff and students.

2.34 The College has in place policies and procedures that promote equality of opportunity for students and clearly state where responsibilities lie.

2.35 Students are kept informed of opportunities designed to support their learning and the achievement of their learning aims at all stages of their engagement with the College. Students are supported in their transition into higher education and an increasing number of students who study further education programmes at the College progress to higher education programmes. These students receive effective support. Student retention, progression and achievement are good.

2.36 There is disparity in access rights to services and support mechanisms depending on the students' registration status. As a result, some students studying for the same award from the same awarding body have access to different VLE systems and library borrowing rights. The notion of dual identity for students is understood by the College and managed

within their powers, but none the less creates concerns and dissatisfaction for the students affected.

2.37 Despite the disparity in access rights to services and support mechanisms, the review team concludes that, based on its investigations around resource allocations for higher education provision and the level of pastoral care and student support, the College meets Expectation B4 and the risk in this area 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

2.38 The College provides and promotes opportunities for student engagement across a range of formal and informal activities. The College has in place a formal representative structure and a Student Voice programme. Student representatives are elected to each programme and receive clear guidance. Students receive training once appointed as a representative. Generic training for all the College's University Students' Union members with the involvement of key Kingston University staff and higher education student representatives is provided by the University, although the appropriateness of this arrangement was challenged in meetings with the review team by certain students not affiliated to that University.

2.39 There is a clear structure in place for formal student engagement through the Student Council and student representation College committees such as the Higher Education Student Forum, Staff-Student Consultative Committee (SSCC), Boards of Study, Higher Education Focus Groups and the College governing body. Students' contributions are sought and valued through these formal structures. The review team saw evidence that student attendance at SSCCs and Boards of Study is good and that part-time students are also represented and attend meetings. Student also engage informally through open and easy access to both teaching and support staff.

2.40 As noted under Expectation B1 on page 18, the review team found no evidence that the College formally involves its students in programme design, development, approval and review or the validation of awards. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2014-15 the College amend its processes to ensure that students are consulted on changes that result in a material change to the status of their programmes.

2.41 Recent changes to higher education committee structures at the College have the potential to enhance student engagement. The College's commitment to student engagement should be sustained and consideration be given to the inclusion of students in the newly established HEAB, and to facilitating their involvement in programme review and validation events with partner awarding bodies. These recent changes have the potential to enhance the College's deliberative processes. Students would benefit from receiving training in preparation for attendance at such committees. The review team **recommends** that by the spring term 2015 the College include student representation on appropriate committees and ensure that they are prepared for the role.

2.42 The Student Council, College Senior Management Team and Quality Directorate and Schools consider student survey results so that the feedback can also be incorporated into in-year action planning for improvement. The student submission comments favourably on recent changes to the College's approach to student engagement through the introduction of the 'feedb@ck' structure. The Student Voice policy and 'feedb@ck' integrate both further and higher education students, and communication back to students across the College is via a 'you said, we are working on' notification system through channels such as the College's VLE. These are effective in closing the feedback loop. In addition, students have the opportunity to put questions to the Principal directly at termly 'in the hot seat' Principal's question time.

2.43 Teaching and learning activities are well planned and students are clear about their expectations and the requirements to meet learning outcomes and opportunities to fulfil their potential. The review team heard of examples at programme level of students' comments being acted upon which led to changes to programme delivery and module assessment.

2.44 The review team concludes that Expectation B5 has been met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.

Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning

Findings

2.45 The College states that it adheres to the assessment policies and regulations of each degree-awarding body who in turn are ultimately responsible for the standards of their awards. All partner regulations for module and programme assessment boards are also followed.

2.46 This assertion by the College is affirmed by all the partnership agreements with the exception of the arrangement with Middlesex University. This partnership agreement states that the assessment of students on FdA/BA (Hons) Integrative-Relational Counselling shall be the responsibility of the College's Assessment Board and subject to the College's assessment regulations, except for appeals against Assessment Board decisions. During a meeting with College staff, this arrangement was queried and it became evident that the College had discussed the variation between the stipulated and actual operating arrangements at the programme's latest reapproval event.

2.47 At the time of the review visit, the partnership agreement had yet to be updated and local assessment regulations had yet to be approved. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2014-15 the College confirm assessment arrangements with the relevant degree-awarding body.

2.48 All students are provided with programme handbooks. It is an explicit requirement of both the College's assessment policy and those of its partners that there is clear guidance to students on assessment. Programme handbooks and schemes of work include assessment strategies, assessment schedules, submission dates and the consequences of late submission of work. The College aims to ensure that programme handbooks are customised for College students, although evidence provided to the review team demonstrated that this was not always the case. This was despite assurances during meetings with Kingston University and College staff that all such handbooks were subject to local customisation.

2.49 Regarding the timeliness of assessment feedback, when questioned staff members gave varied answers regarding expectations. While this in part accords with the fact that the various university partners stipulate differing timescales for feedback, it was evident that there was no certainty among staff as to which particular timeframe operated for which award. When questioned, some students confirmed the variation in timing of when they received feedback and in some cases feedback was not received to inform subsequent course work.

2.50 The College adheres to the accreditation of prior learning (APL) procedures of its partner universities. An example was given where the College was able to accept APL credit but accreditation of experiential learning remained the responsibility of the partner university.

2.51 For the operation of its Pearson awards, the College operates an APL policy that was made available in course files. However, no local higher education assessment policy that could influence the delivery of higher national awards is currently in force. The review team **affirms** the approval and implementation of a local assessment policy for its higher education provision by September 2014.

2.52 The College has two awards accredited by a single professional, statutory and regulatory body, the BACP, namely the FdA and BA (Hons) in Integrative-Relational Counselling. These were successfully reaccredited for a period of five years in 2009 and were subject to only one recommendation to achieve new compliance arrangements by 2014.

2.53 The review team concludes that although conduct of assessment was not wholly in accordance with one of the partnership agreements, and there existed a disparity of view between staff and students as to the timeliness of feedback, overall the College meets Expectation B6. 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

2.54 In accordance with the partnership agreements, all higher education programmes have external examiners appointed by the awarding bodies, although the College has the opportunity to make recommendations. Programme leaders and external examiners attend programme assessment boards alongside University representatives, although this is not currently the case, or a requirement, for Pearson programme assessment boards.

2.55 In response to a recommendation from the previous IQER, the College established an external examiner report review system whereby Quality, Learning and Academic Standards receives and rates all reports and follows up on red and amber ratings.

2.56 Programme leaders may draft responses to external examiner reports but it is programme-level link tutors or equivalent who coordinate report responses on behalf of each awarding body, and help produce action plans that form part of the HE SAR.

2.57 Each of the University of West London's programmes run by the College receives one or more separate external examiner's reports, ensuring all the comments are programme specific. However, despite the recent change to validated status, this has not been established practice for the Kingston University awards. In its previous franchised status, the College was part of a network of Colleges that as a whole received the external examiner reports. As such, the College was not necessarily specified within reports. The 2012-13 Business School HE SAR clearly identified that College staff tease out College-relevant external examiner issues from the reports, or in the case of the foundation degree, from attending feedback meetings with the external examiners. As from 2014-15 for its validated Kingston University business awards, the College will receive and respond to reports specific to those validated programmes.

2.58 For Pearson awards, the external verifier reports are received through the Quality Nominee and Pearson's online database, for which School responses and action plans are also required.

2.59 HE SAR reports are currently considered at an annual College validation event, although the review team learned that with the formation of the College's planned HEAB, this system of reporting would change. Currently, the validation event is the culmination of the year's programme and School-level quality reporting activity. Under the new system, the School and College HE SARs will be considered regularly at HEAB to monitor progress against action plans. HEAB will also monitor and consider responses to other data and management information in addition to external examiner report responses including admissions, student feedback and student progression.

2.60 Some staff are themselves external examiners and are given time to undertake these activities.

2.61 There were opportunities for students to meet external examiners, and the review team learned that FdA Early Years and Leadership and Management students attend a meeting with the external examiners each year.

2.62 Access to external examiners' reports is available to students upon request. However, none of the students met had seen a report, although they knew of their existence. The reports could be emailed to student representatives for dissemination, or alternatively

they were considered during programme-level meetings. For example, external examiner reports and responses were given to the student representatives of the Foundation Degree in Art & Design at their autumn Board of Study meetings.

2.63 The team concludes that the College meets Expectation B7 and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review

Findings

2.64 The College monitors its higher education provision annually through the production of HE SARs and a College self-evaluation document. Other monitoring and review processes are conducted by the awarding bodies in accordance with their established quality policies and procedures. The shift from franchise to validation and the corresponding impact on the review processes of the College's higher education programmes has been discussed elsewhere in this report.

2.65 The HE SARs evaluate the quality of both the College's further education and higher education curriculum. For the College's directly funded provision, and where the awarding body is in agreement, programmes use the HE SAR which is updated annually to cover topical themes and then in turn populates the relevant School Higher Education Self-Assessment Report. In addition to College-originated SARs, each awarding body asks the College to contribute to or write a programme annual monitoring report, depending on the College's responsibility for the particular programme. Overall, the review team regard the procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes as consistent with the guidance in the Quality Code.

2.66 The College has responded to a shift from franchised to validated provision by revising its internal deliberative structure for higher education. The previous system, which evolved from the further education-based reporting system, saw the work that programme teams conducted during the year to ensure the quality of their programmes considered at an annual validation event. In effect, this system cascaded issues upwards. With the formation and operation of a new HEAB, the intention is to more proactively cascade issues down. It is intended that the HEAB meet six times per year, twice per term, to ensure adherence to awarding body processes and monitor progress against School and programme-level action plans. The meetings will also monitor and consider responses to other data and management information including partner annual monitoring, admissions, student employability, student feedback and student progression, and will receive direct reports from the Higher National Committee.

2.67 The review team considers that the shift to this new structure will enable more direct and targeted oversight of the College's higher education awards with the ability to close action plans more proactively than the current system.

2.68 That the College now operates a coherent set of validated higher education awards and is seeking to grow student numbers on these awards makes the approval of this new deliberative structure timely. The review team **affirms** the establishment of the HEAB within the College's overarching higher education structure.

2.69 The review team therefore concludes that the College meets Expectation B8 and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals.

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals

Findings

2.70 The College has a two-stage internal complaints process. The first stage focuses on local resolution of issues and is dealt with by the Head of the appropriate School or Service area who takes the lead. Second-stage complaints are referred to the Curriculum Director - Students.

2.71 In the first instance, students are encouraged to submit their complaint online, in person, through email or by letter. The online facility was developed in response to student feedback, demonstrating the College's willingness to respond to the student voice.

2.72 Although the College has not yet had need to do so, complaints at both stages will be monitored locally by the Curriculum Director - Students. The College has a clearly articulated timeframe of 20 days for stages 1 and 2, during which the student may expect to receive a full response.

2.73 Complaints and appeals procedures for partner institutions are articulated in the partner handbooks and partnership agreements and vary for each partner. The regulations for each partner are followed and the College is clear what each is responsible for. The College publishes an annual report of the number and categories of complaints and the number upheld.

2.74 The procedures meet Expectation B9 and reflect the Indicators of sound practice therein. The review team tested the operation of the complaints and appeals procedures through the examination of the documentation in relation to a prior student complaint and found that it had been dealt with in a way that was fit for purpose and effective. The College considers complaints to be a valuable way of enhancing its effectiveness. After the second stage, internal complaints can be reviewed impartially by an external agency if not satisfactorily resolved.

2.75 The students with whom the review team met were aware of the existence of the complaints procedure but were not familiar with the details. However, they felt that they would know where to go to look for this information. The College seeks to make students aware of the complaints procedure at induction and through handbooks. However, students reflected that the quantity of information communicated at induction meant that sometimes the details were hard to retain.

2.76 Information contained in handbooks regarding academic appeals points students to the College Appeals Procedure, which can be accessed online. A clear link in the handbook to the procedure would assist students who are seeking to make a complaint.

2.77 The review team regards the lack of familiarity demonstrated by students regarding the complaints and appeals procedure and the limited prominence of the policy in student documents to pose a low risk to the effective application of these procedures, as the students believed that they would be able to find the policies if they needed them. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B9 is met and that 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

2.78 The College is seeking to embed strong relationships with the community and employers. The College encourages students to seek and secure their own work placements on their courses. Support for this is currently provided at course level and through the College's employment advice team. The College is looking to develop mechanisms through which to further facilitate placement support. The College is seeking to further enhance its relationship with employers. It has established an Employability Working Group to support this, although at the moment no employers are engaged with this. The College is developing a mentoring relationship with employers, who reflected on this positively.

2.79 Employers engaging with the College are given information about their responsibilities and are aware of programme specifications. They are engaged in discussions around course content and their feedback is used to progress module content. This demonstrates the College's willingness to respond to external feedback. The employers have a clear understanding of course and award requirements and they meet periodically at mentor update sessions. The College maintains a good level of communication and a strong relationship with these external bodies.

2.80 The review team concludes that Expectation B10 has been met and that 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

2.81 The College offers no postgraduate provision, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

Quality of learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.82 In reaching its positive judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified and noted that all Expectations have been met.

2.83 Factors contributing to the positive judgement include: the College has taken steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities by enhancing the admissions process; the quality of learning opportunities and teaching practices is systematically reviewed; students speak highly of the quality of teaching and the support provided by the College; students are supported in their transition to higher education, develop well and data shows good progression and achievement; and the College provides and promotes opportunities for student engagement across a range of formal and informal activities.

2.84 Although the review team made six recommendations in this area, it is of the opinion that four of the recommendations are designed to enhance the quality of learning opportunities by further strengthening the relationship between the degree-awarding bodies and the College beyond programme level.

2.85 The close working relationship with degree-awarding bodies at programme level is good practice. The remaining two recommendations relate to the involvement of students as committee representatives and student involvement in programme review.

2.86 In concluding that the College meets UK expectations in relation to the quality of learning opportunities, the review team is of the view that the one Expectation that poses a moderate level of risk does not present any serious risk to the management of this area.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information about higher education provision

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about higher education provision

Findings

3.1 The College has recently launched a new higher education website which is tailored to the needs of higher education students. This is considered to be a positive step by students. The College publishes information for its intended audiences including its mission, values and strategic objectives on its website. The College has recently conducted an audit of public information.

3.2 The review team heard that students relied largely on the website to find out about the College. This contains a wide range of information about fees, student support, the undergraduate student and admissions. To help inform choice, programme information including programme specifications, Key Information Sets and Wider Information Sets is available through the website. Students followed the application routes advised for their courses either through UCAS or directly with the College.

3.3 The review team heard that student experiences of information provided by the College prior to enrolment were varied. Some were confused by the relationship between the College and the partner universities, and were subsequently perplexed about the location of their study upon enrolment to the College.

3.4 College marketing literature is produced in a standard format agreed with the College Marketing Department. It is documented in the partner agreements that the individual university partners maintain ultimate responsibility for the information provided regarding the programmes, and permission has to be gained to use the name and logo. In addition, all marketing material is to be signed off by the relevant degree-awarding body. However, the review team saw evidence that the College does not consistently follow the agreements as articulated with regards to marketing information. The review team had sight of marketing information produced by the College that does not clearly or consistently articulate that the College itself does not have degree-awarding powers and its partner institutions are not mentioned in leaflets detailing available courses. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2014-15, the College ensure that all marketing information is approved by and clearly identifies the relevant degree-awarding body.

3.5 Students reflected positively upon the process of College induction and the information given at this stage. The induction process includes an introduction to the College's use of the VLE. The VLE has an area dedicated to higher education for the use of the staff. The VLE has recently moved providers, a shift students are still adjusting to. The College is seeking to develop student access to the VLE and has appointed a member of staff to oversee this.

3.6 Students are also given handbooks and module guides at induction. These contain information about tutor support, assessment, grading, deadlines and resources. Students reflected that these were useful and provided accurate information about the course that was fit for purpose. Handbooks are quality assured by the College and/or the

awarding body and organisation as detailed in the respective partnership agreements. Students felt that they knew where to find information regarding disciplinary procedures, complaints and appeals, and had signed a student code of conduct upon their enrolment at the College. Employers were aware of programme specifications and felt that they communicated the course content accurately.

3.7 Information about policies and procedures is available on the College website, some of which is for internal use. Details of the College's quality assurance procedures are available to staff in the College's quality assurance handbook.

3.8 The College tracks information regarding enrolment, progression and achievement. Data features at SAR and HE SAR level and the College is seeking to embed the use of higher education data in its quality enhancement processes. However, the review team heard that the College is aware that its mechanisms for capturing internal data have been weak and it is taking steps to address this through piloting software.

3.9 The review team therefore concludes that the College meets Expectation C, and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Quality of information produced about its higher education provision: Summary of findings

3.10 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. Although the review team recommended that the College ensure that all marketing information is approved by and clearly identifies the relevant degree-awarding body, the risks associated with this recommendation are low. The review team saw a number of examples of planned developments where the College has recognised that further work would enhance practice and contribute effectively to the student experience, including continuing development of the quality and consistency of information on the VLE and the enhanced use of data.

3.11 Therefore, the review team concludes that the information about learning opportunities produced by the College meets UK expectations.

4 Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

- 4.1 The College sets out its intentions for enhancement in strategic documents. These documents are readily available to staff, students and other stakeholders.
- 4.2 There are examples of strategically driven enhancements, including the establishment within the College of a dedicated higher education centre on the 11th floor, changes to the structure of the College academic team to enhance the planning and delivery of higher education provision, and the construction of a new Creative Industries Centre due to be completed in 2015.
- 4.3 The College has set up an Employability Working Group to investigate opportunities for placements and other work-based initiatives to enhance student learning opportunities, although membership does not currently include employers.
- 4.4 The College has been responsive to the changing higher education landscape by becoming a member of UCAS, offering UCAS one-to-one drop-in support through its Careers, Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) team, establishing the new student loan system for its directly funded students, and developing its admissions policy. In addition, the College has recently become a full member of the Higher Education Academy.
- 4.5 Staff engage in sharing good practice at regularly held events which they identified as being highly effective. Tutors, through lesson observations, are expected to share techniques and ideas with colleagues and act as learning mentors. Students speak highly of the quality of teaching and learning opportunities.
- 4.6 The importance of improving the quality of student learning opportunities is understood by staff and there is an ethos of continuous improvement demonstrated through the monitoring and analysis of performance data and lesson observations. However, discussions with staff highlighted varying degrees of understanding of enhancement as opposed to enrichment activities or the characteristics of good programme design and delivery.
- 4.7 Until recently, the 'HE Strategy Group' was the mechanism to drive key changes and establish a higher education identity at the College. It linked into the 'HE Committee' which had responsibility for actioning enhancements and providing a forum to disseminate good practice. These committees have been superseded by the recent introduction of the HEAB structure and a Higher Education Operations Forum. The new HEAB membership does not include students, although student presence would benefit the functioning of the Board and the identification of enhancement opportunities.
- 4.8 The College has effective quality assurance mechanisms that are used to identify opportunities for enhancement. At programme level, Module Review and Development Plans and Quality Self-Assessment Reports monitor performance and set out action plans for enhancements.
- 4.9 An employers' forum is used to inform the contemporary validity of the curriculum content and employers express satisfaction with the employability skills possessed by graduating students.

4.10 There is a sound mechanism for collecting feedback from students and a process for communicating action through a 'you said, we're working on it, you said, we've done' notification.

4.11 Enhancement comes from team level as well as from centrally coordinated and planned activities. A team of student enrichment advisers based in the student support centre promote extracurricular activities ranging from sports clubs to volunteering opportunities designed to enhance personal and social development. Teams build enhancement into programme delivery using guest speakers, field-trips and employer involvement. Programme teams cited examples of enhancement including student live projects working with employers such as the Arcadia Group and Mowden Hall.

4.12 The College expresses the intention to create a higher education ethos and is taking steps to achieve this through the allocation of both physical and human resources, staff development and support, and internal infrastructures.

4.13 Although the College has acknowledged that its development of higher education has been in part organic, it is now intent on building a more systematic approach to the enhancement of its higher education provision. This is demonstrated by the introduction of the HEAB and other initiatives such as the Employability Working Group. The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement Expectation has been met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.14 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. Although the College's approach to the systematic monitoring and review of enhancement activity is not yet firmly established, the review team considered the Expectation to have been met based on the level to which the College has introduced an integrated set of initiatives to enhance higher education learning opportunities, including the development of a dedicated higher education centre and the introduction of the HEAB, which will have oversight of the provision.

4.15 Therefore, the review team concludes that the enhancement of learning opportunities at the College meets UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 Employability is a central tenet of the College's higher education strategy. The College's Higher Education Committee has set up an Employability Working Group with a specific remit to look at how the College is progressing against the Expectations and Indicators of the Quality Code, with regards to work-based learning, employers and part-time learning. However, the review team learned that there was currently no employer representation in the group.

5.2 The College identified that the higher education programmes offered were vocational in nature and sought to embed employment skills into the curriculum. For example, a new core module was introduced into business programmes that included aspects such as preparing for interviews. Business students expressed particular satisfaction with careers information given as part of their studies, and opportunities are sought to enable students to enhance their skills through teamwork.

5.3 The College's CIAG service provides impartial, one-to-one careers guidance. The service offers information and support around higher education employability and career planning, which is tailored to the needs of the students. This ranges from building a CV to job/volunteer listings and interview skills advice, although the review team heard mixed messages from students as to the level of take-up of this service. Students the review team met reported that the CIAG drop-in service operating from the 11th floor Higher Education Learning Resources Centre was not well attended.

5.4 On a practical level, the College hosts an annual Higher Education Fair in October and in 2013 there were representatives from over 60 universities from around the UK along with employers such as the Army, Police Force and the RAF. The School of Performing Arts has also worked with external performing arts organisations to enhance the skills of staff and students, in the main with opportunities to regularly watch performances and research practitioners who are relevant to the College's curriculum.

5.5 Work placement opportunities were not commented upon favourably by students met by the review team. While those students who are in work are supported very well by both the College and their employers, those students who are studying full or part-time with the hope of obtaining work placements had difficulty doing so. Where help was available, the review team heard it was usually by providing students with potential contacts and that it was students who were then expected to follow up the available leads. The review team also heard from students how the broad vocational curriculum of certain programmes meant that students had difficulty focusing on a particular career strand, and as such they perceived that this had an impact on their ability to successfully gain a work placement.

5.6 The review team met employers who were very supportive of the College. The employers, including regionally and internationally recognised companies, expressed the view that the programmes were very useful for their employees and improved their work-based skills. Mentoring courses are also run at the College, and full course information is provided for employers so that they can fully understand the study in which their employees are engaged. There was also evidence of the involvement of employers in the development of modules, in particular for the FD Early Years programme which the local council relies upon very extensively to offer appropriate education and training.

Glossary

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

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

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

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* (FQHEIS).

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

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.

QAA759 - R3722 - May 14

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2014
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000
Email: enquiries@qaa.ac.uk
Website: www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC03778