Higher Education Review of Leicester College

January 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Leicester College. The review took place from 19 to 21 January 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Paul Brunt
- Mr Peter Hymans
- Miss Sarah Crook (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Leicester 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 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 5.

In reviewing Leicester 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 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.
[2] Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages:
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Leicester College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body and other awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The College's approach to embedding scholarship into the cultural and working practices of academic staff, which enhances the learning opportunities for students (Expectation B3).

Recommendations

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

By July 2016:

- ensure that staff making admissions decisions based on interviews are trained appropriately (Expectation B2).

By September 2016:

- revise annual course review documentation to ensure the consideration of academic standards is clearly recorded (Expectations A3.3 and B8)
- fully articulate the strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to improve the management and oversight of work placement processes (Expectation B10).
- The steps being taken to ensure consistency of format and content of the virtual learning environment (Expectations C and B4).

Theme: Student Employability

All of Leicester College's programmes are vocational and require students to engage with work-related activities in a variety of different ways. Aspects of employability are embedded in curriculum design and assessment, including skills development modules. Strong links

with local employers ensure that they have input into programmes and that their needs are actively considered when developing new programmes. There is provision for work-based learning opportunities, which includes work placements, work applied learning and work experience.

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

About Leicester College

Leicester College (the College) is a large further education college based in the city of Leicester within three campuses. The higher education portfolio consists of 23 core programmes, some of which are delivered in full-time and/or part-time mode. For the academic year 2014-15 there were 655 higher education students. Higher education at the College is organised into seven curriculum areas: Creative and Performing Arts, Business and Computing, Sport and Service Enterprises, Teacher Education, Caring Professions, Engineering and Construction.

The College mission is 'to equip people with the skills they need to be successful in education, in work and business and in their personal lives'. This is underpinned by four values: ambition, inclusion, collaboration and excellence. The Higher Education Strategy 2015-18 sets out three broad aims for higher education at the College: to deliver a portfolio of change-orientated technical and professional programmes that meet student progression outcomes; to attract and engage a wide range of learners into college higher education; and to generate new forms of knowledge and practice in collaboration with key stakeholders. Going forward, the College identifies the following key challenges: enhancing the quality of learning and teaching through scholarship; increasing the number of higher education students following the removal of the HEFCE Student Number Controls; improving the sense of student identify; and attaining cost effective delivery while maintaining student satisfaction rates from key performance indicators.

Since the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2011, the College has ended its partnerships with Coventry University and the University of Bedford and now has one main awarding partner, De Montfort University. The transfer of programmes was completed in September 2015. The College also offers Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals.

The College received a positive outcome in its 2011 IQER, with seven features of good practice, two advisable recommendations and five desirable recommendations. The review team considers that the College has responded effectively to the requirements of the recommendations, and features of good practice still mainly feature as extant practice.

Explanation of the findings about Leicester 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.

Explanation of the findings about Leicester College

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College is responsible for delivering the programmes offered through its partnerships with De Montfort University (DMU) and Pearson. The awarding partners, through their approval and review procedures, are responsible for ensuring that key reference points are adhered to. Design, development and validation are carried out by the awarding partners and the College contributes fully to the validation processes, as well as participating in or undertaking periodic reviews. Prior to the formal validation processes of the awarding partners, the College conducts its own internal approval process. The awarding partners supply the College with comprehensive information about reference points, which is made available to staff and students via a number of routes, including programme specifications, course handbooks, websites, virtual learning environments (VLEs), and other relevant documentation.

1.2 The design of the College's processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.3 The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining relevant information packs, handbooks, annual monitoring reports, external examiners' reports, partnership agreements, and validation and review reports and by talking to senior staff, employers, teaching staff and students.

1.4   The evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective in practice. External examiners' reports show that the College, in the context of the intended learning outcomes, is aware of, and adheres to, the relevant reference points in its teaching, learning and assessment practices at both module and programme level. The College continuously monitors the appropriateness of levels through marking, standardisation, second marking, and the monitoring and feedback of individual modules. This information is recorded in the Programme Area Manager Programme Lead Higher Education Course Reviews, which feed into the Higher Education Self-Evaluation and Business Improvement Plan. The team saw evidence of the College's engagement at validation events and the range of discussions regarding the consideration of external reference points. Staff, students and employers whom the team met confirmed that the information they receive is clear.

1.5   While the awarding partners have ultimate responsibility through their own regulatory frameworks for ensuring that the relevant external reference points are adhered to, there is significant evidence that the College manages effectively its own responsibilities for doing this within its partnership agreements. This is confirmed through a variety of mechanisms including reviews by the awarding partners and the conclusions from external examiners' reports.

1.6   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.7   The regulatory frameworks of each awarding partner determine the academic standards for each programme. The College works within the established academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding partners as outlined in the partnership agreements. The College demonstrates its awareness of, and engagement with, these frameworks and regulations through a variety of mechanisms including validation and revalidation processes, programme monitoring, and external examiners' reports. Internally, the College has a higher education-specific quality calendar, and key policies and committees responsible for securing academic standards and quality. A growing number of policies, procedures and regulations specific to higher education reflect the commitment of the College to its provision in this area.

1.8   The College's processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.9   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining partnership agreements, handbooks, annual programme monitoring and review reports, external examiners' reports, College policies and procedures, minutes of meetings, and validation and revalidation documents. The team also met senior staff and academic staff.

1.10   The evidence reviewed shows the practices and procedures to be effective in practice. Evidence from annual review and external examiners' reports, and active participation at validation events, shows the College's awareness of, and adherence to, the frameworks and regulations of its awarding partners. The College has good links with its awarding partners and there are coherent and complementary quality assurance procedures in place. Staff whom the team met were clear about the respective allocations of responsibility between the College and the Universities.

1.11   The team saw evidence that, internally, the structure of quality assurance committees and their reporting lines are clear and effective in ensuring oversight of higher education provision and in ensuring adherence to the regulatory frameworks of the College's awarding partners. The Higher Education Quality, Standards and Enhancement Committee is the primary College committee and this reports the College's Curriculum, Strategy and Quality Improvement Committee, with Governor membership. The meetings of the Higher Education Quality, Standards and Enhancement Committee are supplemented by Curriculum Management Board meetings, attended by senior managers, academic staff, and some support staff, with any major matters being taken forward to the Higher Education Quality, Standards and Enhancement Committee. Students are represented at both of these meetings. It is clear that staff have a good understanding of the committee structure and of how design and delivery of teaching impact on the maintenance and enhancement of standards.

1.12   The team saw numerous examples of how regulatory information is clearly set out in staff and course handbooks, for example, in the latter, regarding how assessment, marking and credit arrangements work. In addition, the College has an intranet site to

provide staff with information and updates about higher education matters, including regulations, standards, skills, and academic practice requirements.

1.13   The awarding partners have ultimate responsibility for academic frameworks and regulations. Annual review and external examiners' reports clearly indicate that the College operates effectively to uphold the frameworks and regulations. The College's committee structure and internal quality assurance processes operate effectively in this respect. Additionally, there are well defined lines of responsibility between the College and its awarding partners.

1.14   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.15   The College shares responsibility with DMU for the production of definitive programme information. For courses validated by Pearson, the College is responsible for providing definitive programme information, including a tailored programme specification. The Higher Education Office holds all College Higher Education Programme Specifications and the final approval for their publication is made by the Curriculum Management Board.

1.16   Information about courses and modules is made available online and in the College prospectus. Learning outcomes are detailed in course handbooks. There is a Higher Education Quality Student Handbook Checklist that ensures that it is consistently included. The College examines programme records and documentation as a part of its quality assurance processes in its relationship with its awarding partners, including during validation and module modification processes.

1.17   The College's approach to meeting this expectation, and its arrangements for providing, using and maintaining programme specifications, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.18   The team examined this area in meetings with senior staff, students, employers and teaching staff, and analysed documentation, including programme specifications and course handbooks.

1.19   The team heard from staff that DMU and the College use programme specifications with different degrees of detail. College programme specifications contain additional information, such as that relating to employability, which supplements the awarding body specification. The review team found that the information complements the University's specification and is therefore fit for purpose.

1.20   Course information is made available to students and prospective students through the College's website and further information about assessment is available through the VLE. Information about individual module assessment aims and learning outcomes is made available through unit and assessment briefs in handbooks. Information in programme specifications is thorough and up to date, and they include information about the awarding body, the date of validation, the curriculum area, employability and transferable skills, and mode of assessment.

1.21   The external examiners' reports ensure that programme information is maintained as a reference point for delivery and assessment of the programmes. Oversight processes, included at validation and review stages and enforced by the College's awarding partners, ensure that programme specifications are up to date.

1.22   In meetings with senior staff and students the review team heard that the College learning outcomes are reliably communicated in module and course handbooks. Students whom the team met had made use of the specification during their studies and were aware of course outcomes. The review team examined assessment briefs and found that these

contained accurate and appropriate information about expected outcomes and the assessment criteria.

1.23   The review team found that definitive programme information is accessible and appropriately managed, and used in the delivery of programmes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.24   The responsibility for the oversight of academic standards rests with the awarding body for validated programmes and with the awarding organisation for other programmes.

1.25   New programmes are discussed at Higher Education Curriculum Management Boards (HE CMB). Programme proposals that are agreed are then submitted for discussion and approval to proceed to validation at Higher Education Quality and Standards Enhancement Committee (HEQSEC). Approval at HEQSEC is followed by implementation of the College procedure for curriculum planning, which generates internal course codes and course database profiles for marketing purposes.

1.26   Where programme proposals relate to validated awards, the Higher Education Office submits an application form to the awarding body. This application is subsequently tabled for consideration at the University's Development and Review Committee and the College notified of the outcome.

1.27   Curriculum teams are responsible for ensuring that validated qualifications are positioned in relation to the appropriate level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and that reference to the *Foundation Degree Benchmark Statement* is made where appropriate. In relation to curriculum design there is a specific requirement to map modules and learning outcomes to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.28   The College introduced an internal approval process for Pearson Higher National programmes in 2012 and three programmes were subject to this new process in that year.
1.29   The team tested the expectation by means of scrutiny of documents supplied by the College, and meetings with staff of the College and the awarding body.

1.30   The College has created internal processes that complement the requirements of the awarding body and the awarding organisation. Even though the ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of the programmes remains with those awarding partners, the College systems ensure that programme teams design programmes of study that are secured by the FHEQ, the *Foundation Degree Qualification Statement* and Subject Benchmark Statements as appropriate.

1.31   In practice, processes are highly effective in ensuring that academic standards are set at a level that meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own and the awarding body's academic frameworks and regulations.

1.32   The review team found that the College's procedures for programme approval, combined with the oversight by the awarding body and the awarding organisation, ensure that threshold academic standards are met on all programmes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.33   The Learning and Assessment Policy, the College Higher Education Academic Regulations and the Plagiarism, Copying and Collusion Policy underpin the College's assessment of students. The College Higher Education Academic Regulations and the College's Learning and Assessment Policy provide guidance and set minimum expectations for ensuring that assessment practice is inclusive and accessible to all students.

1.34   Each higher education programme has an assessment strategy, contained in the programme specification, which informs assessment practice, contained in the course handbook.

1.35   College and awarding body regulations specify how qualifications at different levels are achieved, and minimum expectations regarding academic standards. Both the setting of summative assessment and summative assessment decisions are subject to a College-devised process of higher education internal verification.

1.36   Summative assessment decisions are ratified by assessment boards, managed either by the College for non-validated awards, or by the awarding body, prior to outcome decisions being finalised.

1.37   The team tested the Expectation through meetings with staff, consideration of policies and procedures, and examination of marked and verified student work.

1.38   External examiners confirm that standards set are being maintained and are comparable to programmes run at a similar level by other providers. External examiners have oversight of the assessment process, from assessment setting to final grading, and their findings are reported both at Assessment Boards and through programme review and monitoring.

1.39   The College's Learning and Assessment policy and its Higher Education Academic Regulations, together with the awarding organisation's procedures and the awarding body's processes, combine to provide a secure framework ensuring that the achievement of relevant learning outcomes, module learning outcomes and programme outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment. Internal verification and external examiner processes are working well to ensure that standards are met.

1.40   The review team found that, in practice, the College's systems work effectively, and all external examiner and awarding partner reports confirm this. The College and awarding body/organisation processes ensure that threshold academic standards have been met by students through assessment. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.41   All higher education programmes compile annual higher education course self-evaluations, facilitated by termly meetings between the Programme Area Managers (PAM) and respective Higher Education Programme Leads (PL). The PAM PL HE Course Review records and responds to external examiner feedback, including that on academic standards, if any issues are raised.

1.42   The College Higher Education Office receives all external examiner reports and transfers these to relevant curriculum managers and PLs. The College Principal, who is also the chair of the Higher Education Quality and Standards Enhancement Committee, also receives external examiner reports. Curriculum teams devise actions in response to external reports and record these through the PAM PL HE Course Review document.

1.43   Higher education course self-evaluation documents are approved by Directors of Curriculum and validated at the autumn round of higher education Curriculum Management Boards. The Manager for Higher Education subsequently reports on any thematic areas for development at HEQSEC through the presentation of the Higher Education Enhancement Plan. The Higher Education Office is also responsible for the development of a College Higher Education Self-Evaluation for consideration by HEQSEC, but this did not happen for the 2014-2015 session as the Self-Evaluation developed for this review was used instead.

1.44   All higher education course self-evaluations relating to validated provision are forwarded to the awarding body for incorporation into the University's Programme Enhancement Plans and other quality assurance processes.

1.45   The team tested the Expectation by the scrutiny of documents including the course level self-evaluations and minutes of committee meetings, and by meetings with senior and teaching staff.

1.46   In June 2015 the College underwent a Collaborative Review by DMU. The process required the College to respond to strategic issues, the status of validated programmes, commitment to the collaborative contract, quality assurance and the academic management of provision. The Collaborative Review concluded that DMU is confident in the College's maintenance of standards. An action plan addressing issues raised by the review has been created, but there were no issues relating to academic standards.

1.47   The College has recently introduced a cycle of periodic review for its non-validated programmes. Higher Nationals in Construction, Engineering and Travel and Tourism have been called to review in July 2016. A preliminary framework sent to Directors of Curriculum outline the requirement for courses to demonstrate the meeting of external reference points in relation to academic standards. The review team recognised that the process has the potential to strengthen the security of academic standards and quality of learning opportunities.

1.48   The review team noted that the section within the PAM PL HE Course Review document headed Academic Standards contains information related to student progression and achievement statistics and that the consideration of academic standards through the programme-level self-evaluation process is not made explicit. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College revises annual course review documentation to ensure that the consideration of academic standards is clearly recorded.

1.49   The review team found that the College and awarding organisation processes ensure that academic standards are considered within the review processes, although reference to academic standards within course-level self-evaluations could be made more explicit. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.50 The awarding partners validate the programmes delivered by the College and therefore have ultimate responsibility for making use of external and independent expertise to set and maintain academic standards. External examiners' reports comment on whether academic standards have successfully been achieved and maintained by the College. External examiners are appointed and trained by De Montfort University and Pearson. The College has good links with local employers and employer-related organisations who inform curriculum design, and some contribute to the College's internal approval stage. Externality is further enhanced by the experience of academic staff, many of whom have current or recent experience from the sectors in which they teach. In some cases one awarding partner provides external specialist advisers, who assist to maintain curriculum currency and student opportunities.

1.51 These approaches allow the College's processes to meet Expectation A3.4.

1.52 The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining relevant strategies and external examiners' reports, and through meetings with students, employers and academic staff.

1.53 The review team found these processes to work effectively in practice. External examiners' reports suggest satisfaction with the maintenance of academic standards. The team found evidence that the College maintains strong links with local employers and employer-related agencies. Links with relevant employers ensure that local needs are actively considered when developing new programmes, as well as providing input to the College's programmes.

1.54 The evidence from documentation and meetings clearly shows that the College is managing effectively its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards through the use of external expertise. This is confirmed by external examiners' reports. The review team saw evidence of good relationships with local employers and related agencies, and the industry-relevant experience of academic staff.

1.55 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.56   In reaching its judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.57   All Expectations in this area are met, with low risk. The College works effectively with its partner university and Pearson in the maintenance of academic standards. The University and Pearson quality assurance frameworks are used and adhered to. The College has mechanisms to ensure that standards are maintained and appropriate use is made of external expertise where appropriate. The review team made one recommendation in this judgement area, reflecting the need to amend annual monitoring documentation to ensure that the consideration of academic standards is clearly recorded.

1.58   The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body and other awarding organisation at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1   Proposals for new higher education programmes are examined through either an internal College process for non-validated programmes or an awarding body validation process.

2.2   Curriculum Area teams table new course proposals at termly Higher Education Curriculum Management Boards under a standing agenda item. The rationale for all new higher education proposals is discussed at the Higher Education Quality and Standards Enhancement Committee, chaired by the Principal. In support of the Annual Growth Plan process, greater contextual discussion takes place at HEQSEC to ensure that developments are feasible and fall broadly in line with the College strategic mission.

2.3   Following internal confirmation to proceed, programme proposals requiring awarding body approval are submitted to the Educational Partnerships office of the University for consideration. The College-managed process for non-validated higher education programme approval describes the validation process and criteria through the Guidance for Edexcel Higher Education Validation or Review.

2.4   In addition to measuring proposals against recognised national reference points, as discussed in Expectation A3.1, both validation processes verify market demand, programme structure, quality assurance, externality, resources, learning opportunity and student engagement.

2.5   The College's policies and procedures, combined with the awarding organisation's processes, meet the Expectation. The review team tested the Expectation by scrutiny of validation documents and College policies and procedures, and at meetings with staff.

2.6   When developing programmes, programme teams secure external input from other providers in the sector and employer representatives. Validation panels also consist of external panel members; more recently, they include a student representative.

2.7   The awarding partners' processes and internal validation ensure that this expectation is met, and the College is able to design and develop its own programmes with full externality under the framework.

2.8   The College has introduced its own rigorous scrutiny of new programmes, which, combined with those of the awarding body and organisation, ensures the effective design, development and approval of new courses. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.9   The College manages admissions to its programmes, and has an admissions policy supported by a Higher Education Admissions Policy. This policy lays out the ways in which applications, all made through UCAS, are dealt with. Information about the applications procedure is available on the College's website and also through the UCAS website. External candidates are then invited for an interview with a member of academic staff before they are notified of the application decision. Internal candidates are not interviewed but external candidates are. Offers are made through the College, DMU and UCAS.

2.10   The College agrees UCAS tariff points at programme design stage by researching comparable programmes. They are then agreed at programme validation events with partner universities.

2.11   The College has a presence at its own higher education fair and attends UCAS fairs. Course information is available through UCAS and in print.

2.12   Higher Education Programme Leaders act as 'admissions tutors' with the support of the admissions and Higher Education Office. The College undertakes an equality and diversity assessment as part of the University validation process and this includes a consideration of the information provided both prior to and at admission. The importance of equality in the admissions procedures is laid out in the College's Higher Education Academic Regulations. Appropriate information about Additional Learning Support (ALS) is given in the ALS policy and included in the Higher Education Induction Checklist.

2.13   The College has an Admissions Appeals Procedure should an applicant decide to appeal against a decision to refuse them a place on a course. Should the applicant decide to appeal they may write to the Vice Principal within 10 days. The Head of Student Services then convenes an appeal panel to which the applicant is invited, and the panel decides on a final outcome which is confirmed to the applicant within five working days. The team examined the Appeal Hearing Pro Forma and confirmed that it was fit for purpose.

2.14   Improving the admissions process was identified as part of the Proposal to Support Higher Education paper by the Senior Leadership Team. This resulted in a new job specification being produced for the Higher Education Coordinator.

2.15   The review team examined this expectation in meetings with senior staff, students, employers, teaching staff and professional support staff. It also examined the documentation, including that which details applications procedures, and communication with students.

2.16   Students whom the review team met reported that they had found support offered by the College appropriate. The team heard from students that some students were interviewed prior to admission and others were not. The team heard from staff that not all students were interviewed due to the different demands of the various courses: some programmes required portfolio and interview, while others did not. Students progressing from

internal study were not interviewed. Information about why some courses require an interview and others do not is detailed for staff in the College's Students Applications Procedures document, which is the responsibility of the Deputy Principal for Finance and Corporate Services and which is subject to renewal every three years.

2.17   Higher Education Programme Leads are the admissions tutors for their programmes, acting with the support of central admissions and the Higher Education Office. Staff are not given formal training in interviewing. In order to ensure that applicants are interviewed fairly and without the potential for discrimination, the review team **recommends** that, by July 2016, the College ensures that staff making admissions decisions based on interviews are trained appropriately.

2.18   The team reviewed an example of an internal conditional offer and found that this contained adequately robust information. Information about admissions and enrolment is discussed at Higher Education Curriculum Management Board. The College maintains progression data. Recruitment, retention and success data is discussed at Higher Education Curriculum Management Board level.

2.19   Changes to admissions procedures are discussed at HEQSEC. The team examined minutes of course committee meetings in which admissions data and processes were discussed and found this to be robust.

2.20   Students are given the opportunity to highlight any additional learning needs upon enrolment and at application, and initial assessments are carried out at induction. The College then contacts the students in order to encourage them to access the support available before their course begins. Student learning needs are also identified throughout the student journey and the College supports this. Students whom the review team met were aware of the sources of support available.

2.21   International students are given an International Student Welcome Pack, which includes information about life in the UK as well as College expectations. Students are offered support with ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) upon enrolment.

2.22   The College's recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admissions. The College supports students by offering a sound experience at initial application and admission stage, and by offering appropriate support to those students who need it. Information for prospective students is available and was found by students whom the review team met to be fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

2.23   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.24   The College sets out clear aims to inform learning and teaching in its Higher Education Strategy and Learning and Assessment Policy. The strategy is underpinned by curriculum design and teaching initiatives to develop students' capacities to be engaged and to learn, as well as a commitment to staff development and an additional Learning and Teaching Observation Policy to maintain and improve practice. The teaching and learning strategy for each course is set out in its programme specification and course handbook. The College has systems to monitor and report on the quality of teaching and learning through the annual Programme Area Manager Programme Lead Higher Education Course Review process, evaluating progression and achievement data, information arising from the observations of teaching, and student feedback.

2.25   These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.26   The review team met staff and students and looked at strategic documents as well as programme reviews and minutes of meetings where learning opportunities and teaching practices were discussed.

2.27   There is a well developed graded system of teaching observation expressed in the Quality Calendar. Management-led graded and peer observations for higher education staff are undertaken and are noted in a cross-College training plan and in curriculum area planning.

2.28   The management and delivery of staff development to support learning and teaching involves a combination of College, awarding body and staff-directed activities. The College requires that each member of staff involved with higher education teaching undertakes 30 hours of professional development each year. A programme of events is publicised, and the awarding university provides other opportunities. The College also supports staff to undertake higher degrees. Staff provided examples of development activities that have had a direct impact on their teaching, including studying for higher degrees. The qualifications and experience of staff are scrutinised as part of the validation process with the awarding body and awarding organisation.

2.29   The College has taken a distinctive approach to scholarly activity, by working with other colleges to form a Peer Review and Research Development Group in 2012. Work in this area has included conferences and other activities aimed at embedding scholarship and research, to enhance College higher education learning and teaching. Several College staff have secured Higher Education Academy Fellow status as a spin-off from these activities. The College has recently secured funding to develop a flexible scholarship framework, relevant to College higher education, to improve students' learning experiences. Leicester College leads a consortium of colleges in this work and the funding has enabled the appointment of a dedicated manager to lead the project, while staff have contributed research proposals. The review team considers the College's approach to embedding scholarship in the cultural and working practices of academic staff, which enhances the learning opportunities for students, to be **good practice**.

2.30   The College has worked with staff and students to identify effective teaching and learning approaches. The review team heard evidence of this in connection with the effective mentoring of new staff by established staff. Students who met the review team commented positively on the enthusiasm and approachability of staff and their ability to make learning interesting, intellectually stimulating and current.

2.31   The College has a comprehensive approach to learning and teaching focused on student engagement, continuous improvement and employment readiness. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.32   The College's senior leadership team is responsible for the strategic allocation of resources to enable students to develop their potential. Resources for higher education programmes are reviewed and determined through the annual business planning process linked to the College strategies. The allocation and monitoring of resources are also considered at regular managers' meetings and at programme validation and re-validation events. The College has resource centres providing hard copy and e-books, periodicals and online journals. Students have borrowing rights with the libraries of the University. Programmes are structured to support and engage students and arrangements are in place to facilitate work-related learning. All students have personal tutors and access to the range of student support provided to all students at the College. The College is developing the estate to improve facilities for teaching and study spaces.

2.33   These approaches would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.34   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's approach to the provision and monitoring of resources in discussion with students, teaching and support staff, and by scrutinising documents and looking at the use of the VLE.

2.35   Student guidance arrangements, including pre-entry guidance and induction, are effective. Applicants who are not internal progression students are interviewed, and all receive an induction to their programme. Students confirmed that they found the pre-entry guidance helpful and comprehensive. Support for students while studying addresses a range of needs. Students praised the tutorial system and the accessibility and supportiveness of teaching staff. There is effective liaison between the teaching teams and the learning resource centres to select and maintain resources within budgetary constraints. The College established a Good Academic Practice Working Group, which aimed to identify staff development activities to better understand student needs. The outcomes have informed induction and other activities now provided by Learning Resources staff.

2.36   The College's VLE provides a range of materials to support students' learning. Students have varying views of the VLE. The College has acknowledged variation in practice across the higher education provision, and has a badge scheme to encourage the raising of standards. This finding contributes to the affirmation made under Expectation C.

2.37   Students benefit from a variety of specialist facilities, which are required by the vocational nature of programmes, and they are able to contribute their opinions on resources in a number of ways, including representation at Course Management Board meetings, and feedback to staff through module evaluations and surveys. Subject staff remain current via engagement with industry and many continue to practise in the industries related to their subjects. Students reported very positively on the enthusiasm and relevant experience of their tutors.

2.38   The College has a systematic and comprehensive approach to ensuring that students have access to the resources they require to develop their potential. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.39   The College has a variety of mechanisms for engaging with students and gathering the student voice. The College has a course representative system. These representatives are elected at the start of the autumn term and feed up student views to the Higher Education Student Ambassadors, who report to the termly Higher Education Curriculum Management Boards, or the Higher Education Quality, Standards and Enhancement Committee, which meets three times a year. There are also meetings of the Higher Education Student Forum for all student reps. A Student Ambassador is a member of HESQEC and the student voice is considered at validation meetings.

2.40   Information about the College's approach to student voice and the role of Student Representatives and Student Ambassadors is made available to students through student handbooks. It is also shared at the student induction and features on the induction checklist to ensure this.

2.41   These policies and procedures would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.42   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's approach to engaging students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience in meetings with senior staff, students, teaching staff and professional support staff. The team also reviewed relevant policies and procedures and minutes of meetings attended by students, such as Higher Education Curriculum Management Boards.

2.43   Students whom the team met feel that their views are valued and that they are given adequate opportunities to articulate their needs at course committee level and beyond. They were able to give specific examples of times that the College had responded to their needs. Feedback from the Higher Education Student Forum is discussed at the Higher Education Curriculum Management Board.

2.44   The wider higher education student body is able to contribute opinions through multiple surveys. This was reflected in meetings with teaching and senior staff, who complete the 'feedback loop' to the student body through the Higher Education Student Ambassadors. The Higher Education Student Forum minutes were examined by the review team and the forum was found to be well attended by both staff and students.

2.45   The College takes part in the national Student Survey (NSS), the results of which reflect widespread satisfaction with the College's teaching, learning resources and academic support. The student submission suggests that there have been some difficulties in recruiting student reps from higher education, but the recently developed Higher Education Student Ambassador scheme is a means of addressing this and ensuring that the higher education student voice is considered. Curriculum Management Boards minutes reflect discussion about and action taken in response to student voice.

2.46   Students are not systematically trained but students with whom the team met were prepared and briefed by staff about what to expect and how best to participate in committee meetings. In conjunction with the minutes of committees attended by student representatives it was felt that students were adequately prepared for their role.

2.47   The review team concludes that the Student Ambassador scheme has supported the capacity of the student body to contribute to the management of the College. Student Ambassadors attend HEQSEC and have opportunities to feed back to the College at Higher Education Ambassador Meetings. The team examined the minutes of the Higher Education Ambassador meetings and concluded that the scheme serves a useful function in allowing students to communicate their needs.

2.48   The review team found that the College has effective arrangements to gather and respond to students' views. The Higher Education Student Ambassador system, although fairly recent, works well and student feedback is discussed at committee level. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.49   The College Learning and Assessment Policy provides the framework within which all higher education programmes run. The policy provides general principles for assessment, including the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and adjustment to assessments being made for learners with additional support needs.

2.50   The Leicester College Higher Education Academic Regulations provide comprehensive and detailed further guidance on assessment at higher education levels including RPL, adjustment, grading and feedback, verification and Assessment Boards. The regulations also contain the procedures to be followed in the case of suspected malpractice. The College has a comprehensive guidance document for staff to follow in the case of candidate malpractice. Validated programmes are governed by the University regulations.

2.51   The development of assessment literacy is well covered within the section on assessment in individual programme handbooks. Module handbooks are used to introduce assessment early in the course and to ensure that students are informed about the requirements for assessment of the module. Students confirmed that they are well informed regarding assessment requirements. The College uses plagiarism-detection software to ensure the originality of submitted work.

2.52   The College Internal Verification Policy applies to all programmes. The policy makes reference to the Quality Code *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*. The duties of the programme lead and the internal verifiers are clearly defined. The management of internal verification within the Curriculum Areas is the responsibility of the Directors of Curriculum. They are responsible for ensuring that Internal Verifiers are appointed to each relevant course, that lead Internal Verifiers are appointed for each Principal Subject Area for Edexcel programmes, and that Programme Area Managers, Programme Leads, Lead Internal Verifiers and Internal Verifiers carry out the responsibilities set out in the policy.

2.53   Rigorous policies and structures to ensure fair assessment of students would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.54   The review team tested the Expectation by scrutiny of documents including marked and verified student work, external examiner reports and committee minutes. The team also held meetings with staff and students.

2.55   External examiner reports confirm the effectiveness and rigour of the College's internal verification policy and practices.

2.56   All courses have a course Assessment Board for determination of final results and to oversee the assessment processes. For validated programmes these are overseen by the awarding body, and for non-validated programmes the College convenes course boards. Minutes of all course boards show that these are rigorous and provide reliable and fair oversight of the assessment process.

2.57   Oversight of assessment is achieved through the College quality processes and the Higher Education Quality and Standards Enhancement Committee. The higher education office plays a key role in monitoring the assessment and verification of programmes.

2.58   Overall, the review team found that the College has in place rigorous policies and structures to ensure fair assessment of students. In practice, the processes are highly effective, which is confirmed by external examiners.

2.59   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low, as the responsibility for assessment is shared between the College and its awarding partners, who all have rigorous and secure policies and processes for assessment of students' achievement.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.60   The policies and strategies relating to external examiners and their appointment and training, and the collation of information from their reports, is the responsibility of the awarding partners. The external examiners use the templates required by the awarding body for their reports. The College considers comments from external examiners' reports at Course Management Boards and Higher Education Quality, Standards and Enhancement Committee. In the case of De Montfort University, a formal response to an examiner's report is made by the University, with actions to address comments where appropriate. The College responds to issues raised in external examiners' reports via the annual review processes, and both the report and a summary of actions are published on the College VLE so that students can have access to it. Higher Education Student Ambassadors are informed of progress against actions within the deliberative committees that they attend.

2.61   These arrangements and responsibilities would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

2.62   The review team considered a range of documentary evidence in external examiners' reports and responses to them, action plans, partnership agreements, and minutes of the HEQSEC, and held meetings with students, senior staff, and academic staff.

2.63   Overall, the review team found these processes to work effectively in practice. External examiners' reports and action plans indicate that there are no major concerns regarding the higher education programmes and that the College actively addresses any matters relating to its provision. The College considers the examiner comments and responses to them and oversees actions via annual review processes through the Higher Education Quality, Standards and Enhancement Committee, to ensure that appropriate responses are made.

2.64   Not all students whom the team met were fully aware of the role of external examiners, or the location of their reports, which was also stated in the student submission for this review. Student Ambassadors, however, indicated their awareness of the role of external examiners and their reports, and commented that actions are discussed at Course Management Boards in their presence.

2.65   External examiners' reports suggest that the higher education programmes at the College are being managed effectively and that academic standards are being upheld. The role of external examiners is well embedded in the quality assurance systems and the College makes effective use of reports. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.66   All higher education programmes compile annual higher education course self-evaluation, facilitated by termly meetings between the Programme Area Managers (PAM) and respective Higher Education Programme Leads (PL) using the Programme Area Managers/ Programme Lead Higher Education (PAM PL HE) Review template for guidance. The PAM PL HE Course Review document records and responds to external examiner feedback. Higher education course self-evaluation documents are approved by Directors of Curriculum and validated at the autumn round of higher education Curriculum Management Boards. The Manager for Higher Education subsequently reports on any thematic areas for development at HEQSEC through the presentation of the Higher Education Enhancement Plan. The Higher Education Office is also responsible for the development of a College Higher Education Self-Evaluation for consideration by HEQSEC.

2.67   All higher education course self-evaluations relating to validated provision are forwarded to the awarding body for incorporation in the University's Programme Enhancement Plans and other quality assurance processes.

2.68   Strategic oversight of programme monitoring is by the Vice Principal for 14-19, Adult and Higher Education, supported by the Directors of Curriculum and the Higher Education Manager. The PAM PL HE Course Review template is reviewed and agreed by the Higher Education Manager and Head of Quality Development annually.

2.69   The design of the College's programme monitoring and review processes would allow the expectation to be met.

2.70   The team tested the Expectation through scrutiny of documents including the College management structure and completed review documentation. They also scrutinised the College policies and procedures in relation to quality assurance and met with staff.

2.71   The PAM PL HE Course Review template recognises the broad range of academic quality processes that inform programme review, including scrutiny of key data sets, student voice, internal verification and external moderation. A complete cycle of review and action is implicit as the template opens with the development plan for the present academic year and concludes with the formation of a new development plan for the following academic year. Also included in PAM PL HE Course Reviews are staff development, scholarly activity, student recruitment profile, progression data, destinations, and teaching and learning. The review team noted, however, that the section headed Academic Standards contains information related to student progression and achievement statistics, and that the consideration of academic standards through the programme-level self-evaluation process is not made explicit. This finding contributes to the team's recommendation under Expectation A3.3.

2.72   The reviews are finalised end of year, approved by the Directors of Curriculum at Curriculum Management Board meetings, and then sent to the Higher Education Office, which normally produces the College Higher Education Self-Evaluation for consideration by HEQSEC. This year the College has introduced the Higher Education Enhancement plan, containing themes derived from the programme reviews, for consideration by HEQSEC.

2.73   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.74   The College has a complaints procedure overseen by the Director of Quality Improvement. This is renewed every three years by the Quality Improvement Unit. The procedure is for students to first take up a complaint with the member of staff/person responsible at an informal level, or their personal tutor/trainer assessor/Programme Manager. Should the students feel uncomfortable doing this, they are given the option to talk to a member of the Learner Engagement and Enrichment Team. Should the complaint not be resolved at this level, students are able to make a formal complaint through TalkBack, a process for recording complaints or praise, or by writing to the College's Complaints Administrator. This step will be acknowledged in two working days, then investigated, and a written response is sent to the manager within 10 days. Should this not be considered satisfactory, complaints may be escalated to the College Principal.

2.75   The College maintains a record of the complaints received through both TalkBack forms and those that are sent to the Quality Improvement Unit, which administers the procedure and ensures that investigations are completed within the appropriate timescales.

2.76   The College's Plagiarism, Copying and Collusions (Candidate Malpractice) guidelines are the responsibility of the Deputy Principal for Curriculum and Quality. They are produced with the Quality Unit and are renewed every three years. The document points staff towards the awarding organisation's guidance as well as the Leicester College Disciplinary Procedure and that of the Joint Council for Qualifications. Information about malpractice is also contained in the Higher Education Academic Regulations.

2.77   The availability and design of these processes would enable the College to meet the Expectation. The review team examined this expectation in meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, professional support staff and students, and against the documentary evidence, including the College's academic complaints and appeals procedures, student handbooks and complaints reports.

2.78   The review team examined the documentation relating to the management of academic complaints and found that they were given suitable consideration. These complaints were found to have been dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner. The team reviewed documentation relating to a specific student complaint and found that it was addressed.

2.79   Cases of academic malpractice are reported to the Higher Education Office and an investigation is then undertaken. Cases are reported through the HE CMB procedure. University procedures are then invoked, and HEQSEC is notified. The team reviewed minutes of relevant committees at which academic bad practice was discussed.

2.80   Sector-wide changes governing complaints and appeals have been discussed by the College at the meeting of the East Midlands Collaborative Working Group, of which the College is a leading member. The team reviewed these minutes and found that this provided a robust mechanism through which best practice can be shared.

2.81   Information about complaints and appeals procedures is made available to students through a variety of mechanisms. It is included in the induction checklist, as is information about academic malpractice and the Learner Voice system. Information about complaints and appeals is available in course handbooks.

2.82   The review team found that the College has effective mechanisms to capture information about complaints at both an informal and a formal level. Students are aware of complaints and appeals procedures, and the information is consistently available and accessible. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.83   The College has a range of responsibilities for the provision of learning opportunities delegated by its awarding partners. This includes the provision of work-based learning opportunities, which include work placements, work applied learning and work experience. Both the College's Higher Education Strategy and Employability Strategy outline the importance the College places on associations with employers. This is delivered through the provision of information to employers and work-based providers and through ongoing contact by staff with the organisations providing settings for student learning.

2.84   The College's stated approach would meet the Expectation.

2.85   The review team tested the College's arrangements for implementing and managing work-based learning opportunities through the scrutiny of programme information and guidance given to work-based providers, the Higher Education Strategy and Employability Strategy, and through meetings with College staff, students, and employer representatives.

2.86   The team found that the processes for managing higher education provision with others are generally working effectively. Students whom the team met reported a high degree of satisfaction with processes associated with work-based learning and confirmed that these occurred in an appropriate setting. Where the College has longstanding relationships with work-based providers, the procedures to investigate and judge the risks of each arrangement are robust, and appropriate due diligence procedures are in place. Moreover, employers whom the review team met reported a high degree of satisfaction with the connections they had with the College in respect of the various types of work-based learning undertaken. The College explained that standardisation of practice across the higher education provision was yet to be fully achieved, particularly in curriculum areas characterised by freelance practitioners. The College has recently moved to centralise the coordination of work placement coordinators to better oversee the organisation of work placements. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to improve the management and oversight of work placement processes.

2.87   The review team found that the College has generally effective procedures in place to manage the work-based learning provision in collaboration with employers. Students commented positively on the support they receive from the College. The review concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.88   The College offers no postgraduate research provision; therefore, this Expectation is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.90   All of the applicable Expectations in this area have been met and the risks are considered to be low in all cases. The review team makes two recommendations that relate to this area. The recommendations relate to the need to address minor omissions in the oversight and management of procedures and practices. The team also makes two affirmations in this area where the need for action is already being taken forward by the College.

2.91   One feature of good practice was identified by the review team for this judgement area: the College's approach to embedding scholarship. Other positive factors contributing to the judgement area include the College's own processes for designing, developing and approving new programmes; the system of teaching observation; staff enthusiasm and approachability towards students and their learning; the arrangements for gathering and responding to student views; and the policies and processes for assessment of student achievement.

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

3   Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1   The College has a variety of mechanisms through which it ensures that information to external stakeholders, students, and staff is fit for purpose. The College has a Higher Education Marketing Plan that allocates responsibility for producing and distributing information, created annually by the Higher Education Office. The Marketing Steering group works with the Higher Education Office.

3.2   The external website contains information for prospective learners, and more full information is available through UCAS. The Director of Marketing and Communications is responsible for the public information and reports to the Deputy Principal for Finance and Corporate Service. The chain of responsibility and oversight is completed by the Senior Leadership Team, which monitors the Marketing Strategy.

3.3   Prospective students receive information through open days and the College prospectus; the prospectus is populated by curriculum teams through the Course Database system and hard copy proofs are circulated for sign-off. Final validation is given by the Director of Marketing and Communications. Course information is provided to students through a course handbook, which is made available on the VLE and which is given to students at induction.

3.4   The design of these processes would allow the College to meet this Expectation.

3.5   The review team tested this expectation in meetings with senior staff, students, professional support staff, employers and teaching staff. They also examined the relevant documentation, including course handbooks and the marketing plan. The review team also analysed the policies and procedures made available through the staff intranet and to students through the VLE via a demonstration of both.

3.6   The review team examined course handbooks and found that these provide full information about course objectives, assessment aims, submission deadlines, grading criteria and academic offences.

3.7   Policy documentation is made readily accessible to staff through the staff intranet. Responsibility for ensuring that documentation on the staff site is up to date lies with the Higher Education Manager and the Higher Education Coordinator. Guidance for staff on issues such as academic malpractice and the conditions governing assessment are available here. Teaching staff whom the team met were aware of where relevant policy information was kept and how to access it.

3.8   Information for external audiences is created and tracked through internal systems: the course is set up by the Programme Area Manager and a course ID is created; directors provide curriculum planning data, which is then uploaded to the course database; and an online profile is created. The Higher Education Programme Leaders then create draft course details on the course database, which is then approved by Directors or Programme Area Managers. The course database profile is then used by marketing for prospectus purposes

and a hard copy of this is distributed for approval before it is published on the website. Key dates are detailed in the College's Marketing Course Guide Planning Calendar. The Higher Education Office is responsible for ensuring that course database profiles are consistent with UCAS information.

3.9   Information is made available to students through the VLE. The team heard from students that this was variable across courses. Information provided to current students through the VLE is monitored and tracked by the College on a monthly basis. The College has an e-strategy, reviewed termly by the E-Strategy Committee, which reports to the Senior Leadership Team. The review team saw some evidence that external examiners' reports were made available to students through the VLE and heard from staff that key points drawn from external examiners' reports were summarised and also made available to students through the VLE. The team found some significant variations in the quality and quantity of course and module-level information on the VLE and heard from students that there are some inconsistencies. The College is taking steps to encourage the use of the VLE by staff, and to increase student access to materials and use of additional functionality. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to ensure consistency of format and content of the virtual learning environment.

3.10   The evidence from documentation and meetings attended by the team indicates that the College ensures that information about its higher education provision is fit for purpose and accessible to external and internal stakeholders. Students are positive about the information provided by the College and are aware of the knowledge and information available to them. The College has processes in place to update information given to prospective students, external audiences, and staff and students. While the content and use of learning resources on the VLE is variable, the College is taking steps to address this.

3.11   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.13   The review team found that information produced by the College for its intended audiences about the higher education that it offers is fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible. The College has effective systems and policies in place for the production, monitoring and oversight of information about learning opportunities.

3.14   In assessing the effectiveness of the College in this area, the review team noted some variability in the learning resources available to students on the College VLE at a programme level and affirms the steps being taken by the College to improve this.

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

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College Higher Education Strategy provides a robust framework for the enhancement of higher education. It recognises the effect of improved staff scholarship on the quality of the student learning experience but does not specifically state how enhancement is a strategic priority within the College. Senior staff stated their intention to review the Higher Education Strategy within its normal review cycle.

4.2 The main focus for enhancement activity is the Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Committee (HEQSEC), which is chaired by the Principal. Its terms of reference include its role to inform, advise and make recommendations to the Senior Leadership Team and the Curriculum Strategy and Quality Improvement Committee, on which governors are present, on the standards, planning and enhancement of higher education.

4.3 Opportunities for the sharing of good practice are identified by the College's committee structure and the Higher Education Office. The Learning and Assessment policy offers guidance on best practice in relation to assessment and the Learning and Teaching Observation policy provides for the sharing of good practice between teaching staff.

4.4 The design of the College processes for enhancement of its higher education provision would allow the Expectation to be met although clearer priorities at a strategic level would enable the College to focus on developing a more strategic approach.

4.5 The team tested the evidence through analysis of College policies and procedures, committee meeting minutes and meetings with staff and students.

4.6 While the College has not produced an overall higher education self-evaluation for the 2014-15 academic year, it has produced an enhancement plan for 2015–2016, derived from the individual programme self-evaluations. The plan is a list of some of the actions from the programme self-evaluations but the target dates and allocation of responsibilities are not included.

4.7 Teaching staff are aware of the importance of enhancement, and that it comprises the deliberate steps taken by the College at all levels to improve the quality of learning opportunities. However, the team found a lack of consistency in the narrative around enhancement at different levels. The College states that greater emphasis is being placed on establishing a clearer definition of enhancement and that it must continue to signpost its processes and procedures more clearly to the theme of enhancement. In view of the need for greater consistency around staff understanding of the approach to enhancement, and clearer priorities in terms of the College's intentions, the review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College fully articulates its strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

4.8 The team found evidence of enhancement activity taking place and the sharing of good practice. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated

level of risk is low, as the College is aware of its responsibilities in relation to the enhancement of learning opportunities.

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

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.10   The Expectation about enhancement is met and the level of associated risk is considered low. The review team found that there are appropriate quality assurance arrangements in place to identify opportunities for enhancement, and that deliberate steps are being taken at College level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The College's annual programme self-evaluation process and enhancement plans are key components of the system.

4.11   The review team makes one recommendation in this area concerning the need for the College to strengthen further its strategic approach.

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

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The College is aware of its role and location within the local community, its contribution to economic prosperity, and the benefits that higher education can bring to individuals. The strong focus on student employability manifests itself at the programme design stage, where attention is paid to employer need and students' opportunities on programme completion. The College maintains strong links with local employers and employer-related agencies. Links with relevant employers ensure that local needs are actively considered when developing new programmes, as well as providing input to the programmes. The College's Higher Education Strategy has an explicit focus on employability as an area of focus and development.

5.2   All of the College's higher education programmes are vocational. The range of foundation degrees reflect the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* with regard to the integration of work-related and academic learning, and the development of vocational skills. Many academic staff have current or recent experience from the sectors in which they teach.

5.3   Programmes require students to engage with work-related activities in a variety of different ways and aspects of employability are embedded in curriculum design and assessment, including skills development modules. Examples across different programmes include workplace visits, volunteering, guest speakers, and live briefs. Foundation degree courses in the creative industries and Higher National engineering courses develop the link between theory and practice, thus enabling the employer to engage with the process. These students are engaged with employers throughout their course, as practice forms an integral part of their studies.

5.4   Students whom the team met reported a high degree of satisfaction with processes associated with work-based learning and confirmed that these occur in an appropriate setting.

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 30 to 33 of the Higher Education Review handbook.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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