



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of London College of Business Ltd

February 2016

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education (QAA) at London College of Business Ltd. The review took place from 9 to 11 February 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Ross Fergusson
- Professor Donald Pennington.

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

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- 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 check is also made on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) with the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure.

In reviewing London College of Business Ltd 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,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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.

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859).

<sup>3</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight-.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight-.aspx).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about London College of Business Ltd

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at London College of Business Ltd.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body and other awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **does not meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **does not meet** UK expectations.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at London College of Business Ltd.

- The access to information provided to prospective students through the virtual learning environment, which informs programme choice (Expectation C).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to London College of Business Ltd.

By September 2016:

- ensure that it holds definitive records for all programmes it is approved to deliver (Expectation A2.2)
- establish and implement formal procedures for the design, development and approval of new programmes (Expectation B1)
- implement, monitor and evaluate effective arrangements for enabling students to develop their personal and professional potential and complete their intended qualification (Expectation B4)
- develop and implement formal systems to promote the engagement of students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience across all programmes and modes of delivery (Expectation B5)
- make more developmental use of external examiner reports with staff and students (Expectation B7)
- establish and implement formal policies and procedures for the monitoring and review of programmes (Expectation B8)
- establish an appropriate, deliberative structure for the management of quality and enhancement, and ensure that outcomes are recorded and acted upon (Expectations B8 and Enhancement)
- strengthen the procedure for checking the currency and accessibility of information on the website (Expectation C)
- take deliberate steps at provider level to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

By January 2017:

- develop, and systematically monitor and evaluate, a strategic approach to learning and teaching that enhances the provision of learning opportunities across all modes of delivery (Expectations B3 and B8)
- review quality assurance procedures with respect to evaluating learning opportunities and teaching practices (Expectation B3).

### **Theme: Digital Literacy**

London College of Business Ltd encourages students to engage with computer technology during their studies: for example, this is achieved through Word-processed assignments and digital presentations.

The College states that it has developed a distinctive approach to the online delivery of the University of Wales MBA programme, which has been extended to the Pearson BTEC Extended Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership. Online delivery involves a blend of online learning through the College's virtual learning environment (VLE) and the broadcast of live lectures at the College. Online students interact entirely using digital technology by accessing video and written content, communicating with staff and other students, and producing and submitting assignments. To support teaching staff with the live broadcasting of lectures, support from a technician is provided to guide tutors through the technical process and help with presentation skills via this medium. All students have access to online learning support. Videoconferencing and a digital library supports student learning for the online Pearson and University of Wales programmes.

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

## About London College of Business Ltd

The mission of London College of Business Ltd (the College) is to provide affordable, excellent academic and professional education, underpinned by creative work, scholarship and ethical values.

The College was founded in 2005 and began its operations with the delivery of short professional programmes. In 2007 the College started to deliver Pearson BTEC Higher National Certificate and Higher National Diploma programmes. Also in 2007, the College began a partnership with the University of Wales, through which the University validated the College's BA Business Administration and MBA programmes. An online version of the MBA was subsequently validated in 2011.

The College's current higher education programmes are a Pearson BTEC level 7 Strategic Management and Leadership Diploma, and the MBA validated by University of Wales. The College currently has around 73 higher education students: 70 on the Pearson programme and three on the MBA. The College's partnership with the University of Wales was terminated in 2012 and the MBA programme validated by the University is currently running out.

Prior to the Review for Educational Oversight (REO) by QAA in 2012 the number of students enrolled on the College's programmes had been declining. This decline has continued, and total student numbers have dropped from over 400 in 2008 to 73 in the current academic year. The College's recruitment has been affected by a number of external factors, including changes in the regulations pertaining to recruitment of international students. There have been some significant organisational changes since the REO, including reductions in staffing, and streamlining of the management structure. The College also reviewed its committee structure. In response to declining student numbers the College made a strategic decision to focus on online delivery and has developed an online platform to support this. This form of delivery has been developed over the past three years, and the majority of the College's students are now studying online.

The REO carried out in 2012 made four advisable recommendations and six desirable recommendations. The College submitted a self-evaluation document as part of this review, which indicated that the College has taken action to address some of these recommendations. The review team noted, however, that there is a lack of evidence of regular, focused monitoring of the areas identified in the REO, and that some of the recommendations had not yet been fully engaged with.

## Explanation of the findings about London College of Business Ltd

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

## **1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/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 Academic standards in respect of the MBA programme are established and maintained by the University of Wales. The curriculum designed by the College was validated by the University in 2009. An online version of the MBA programme based on the same curriculum was validated by the University in 2012. Alignment with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales, is reflected in MBA qualification and module specifications, as required in the University's Taught Degree Handbook.

1.2 Academic standards in respect of the Pearson BTEC level 7 Strategic Management and Leadership programmes are established by the prescribed Pearson specifications, which are aligned with the Qualifications and Credit Framework.

1.3 The oversight of academic standards by the University of Wales and Pearson would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.4 To test this Expectation the review team examined a range of documents and discussed this aspect of academic standards with senior staff and other teaching staff.

1.5 The College's Academic Committee is now merged with its Senior Management Team. The merged Senior Management Team and Academic Committee (SMT/AC)

maintains the College's compliance with its awarding body and awarding organisation's academic policies and procedures to maintain academic standards. Maintenance of standards is further secured through the processes of external examination (see Expectation B7), and annual monitoring and review (see Expectation B8).

1.6 The review team found evidence of full documentation, including detail at module level in both programmes, that shows how standards are maintained. The review team concludes that the College's compliance with the processes of its awarding body and awarding organisation mean 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 academic frameworks and regulations of the University of Wales and Pearson govern the College's higher education programmes. The operation of the programmes within the regulatory frameworks of the University and Pearson would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.8 The review team tested this Expectation through scrutiny of documentation, and meetings with senior staff and teaching staff.

1.9 The University publishes academic regulations for the MBA programme that establish clear frameworks for the governance and award of academic credit and qualifications. The documentation produced for the University's validation process demonstrates that the validation panel assessed the appropriateness of credit allocations, learning outcomes and assessment strategies against the requirements in its own frameworks and those of the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and qualification statements. Adherence to the University's regulations is checked through examination boards, chaired by senior staff of the University, the proceedings of which are detailed in board minutes. Comparable evidence for Pearson programmes is provided by Standards Verifier reports, and Academic Management Review and Monitoring Reports. Minutes of examination boards show that the College adheres to the academic regulations of the University, and similarly reports indicate alignment with Pearson's requirements.

1.10 The review team concludes that the College adheres to appropriate academic frameworks and regulations that the University and Pearson, as awarding body and awarding organisation, have in place for their respective awards. 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**

1.11 The University of Wales and Pearson are responsible for maintaining the definitive records of the programmes. For the Pearson programme taught by the College, the Pearson qualification specification provides detail on the qualification, and is available and readily accessible to all College staff and students on the College's website and VLE. Its detailed coverage of learning outcomes and assessment requirements at module and qualification level make it a valuable reference point for the design of the College's programme. The College has developed its own programme specification for the Pearson programme and the MBA, the latter being subject to approval by the University at validation.

1.12 The operation of these procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.13 The review team tested this Expectation through scrutiny of a range of documents, and meetings with senior staff and other teaching staff.

1.14 The review team received programme specifications for the MBA developed by the College for the validation process, for both face-to-face and online delivery. In both cases the University required some minor changes as a condition of approval arising from the validation process; detailed scrutiny of the specifications provided evidence of progress towards production of a definitive record. However, the College was unable to provide the final definitive versions of the documentation. The College informed the review team that it did not hold a definitive record and that there was no record of the version submitted to the University for approval being updated or amended. The level of detail regarding, for example, learning outcomes and assessment at module and qualification level in the submission documents means that they are useful and accessible reference points for staff and students. However, they do not formally constitute definitive records of the agreed programme.

1.15 The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College ensure that it holds definitive records for all programmes it is approved to deliver.

1.16 The review team found that the lack of definitive documentation for the MBA programme means that there is a moderate level of risk to the very small number of students remaining on the programme, and to alumni who may seek ready access to a detailed record of the curriculum and learning outcomes of their award.

1.17 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate because the recommendation relates to a relatively small part of the College's provision.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

1.18 Pearson designs the BTEC programmes delivered by the College. The programmes validated by the University of Wales are designed by the College and approved through the University's approval processes.

1.19 As the responsibility for the design of qualifications and the setting of standards at threshold levels rests with the awarding partners, these arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.20 The review team considered a range of documentation, including awarding body approval letters and programme specifications, and held meetings with the Principal and staff.

1.21 Pearson and the University of Wales are responsible for ensuring that academic standards are set at a level that meets the UK threshold standard for the qualifications. The College complies with Pearson and University processes that enable it to meet these responsibilities. As required by Pearson, the College produced its own programme specification for the BTEC Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership, based on the generic template provided by Pearson, and taking account of Pearson's rules for the combining of units. The College successfully participated in the University of Wales' validation process for the MBA programme, which ensured that the qualification is in accordance with UK threshold standards, and the University's academic framework and regulations for the award.

1.22 The College does not have its own internal programme approval policy and procedure, however, a degree of oversight for new programme development is provided by the combined SMT/AC.

1.23 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met, because the College participates in the programme approval processes of its awarding body and follows the rules of combination in the design of Pearson programmes, and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.24 The College's awarding partners are responsible for ensuring that they award credit and qualifications for programmes studied at the College, when students have met the learning outcomes, and threshold and institutional academic standards have been met. Pearson uses its Academic Management Review process and Standards Verifier visits to assure the award of credit. The University of Wales operates an Annual Monitoring Report process, moderation of coursework process and an external examiner system. For the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership the College has responsibility for setting assignment briefs and marking student coursework. For the MBA the College first-marks assignments and the dissertation, which are then subject to the University's moderation and external examiner processes.

1.25 The systems and processes put in place by both Pearson and the University of Wales would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.26 The review team examined the application of the awarding partners' assessment procedures by scrutinising Pearson Academic Management Review and Standards Verifier reports, and University of Wales' moderation and external examiner reports. The team also held discussions with the College Principal and staff.

1.27 The review team found that Pearson Academic Management Review and Standards Verifier reports provide assurance that the College is operating assessment procedures that award credit and qualifications where learning outcomes are met, and which meet UK and institutional threshold standards. The University of Wales' Annual Monitoring Reports, internal moderation and external examiner reports provide assurance that the assessment procedures ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded where learning outcomes are met.

1.28 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low because the College adheres to the procedures of its awarding body and awarding organisation.

**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**

1.29 The College's awarding partners maintain responsibility for the formal review of programmes. Pearson expects that any changes it makes as a result of reviewing its programmes are implemented by its approved centres, according to stated timescales. As the University of Wales has terminated its partnership with the College, and is running out the MBA (with a final small group of students completing their dissertations), there will be no further review of this programme.

1.30 Programme annual monitoring is conducted in accordance with the requirements and procedures of the awarding partners through the Pearson Academic Management Review process, and the Annual Monitoring Report for the University of Wales. The College does not operate its own internal programme review or annual monitoring system or process.

1.31 The College's adherence to its awarding partners' procedures for monitoring and review of programmes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.32 The review team tested the Expectation by examining Pearson Academic Management Review and Standards Verifier reports, and the University of Wales' Annual Monitoring Report and external examiner reports, and by meeting staff. The College complies fully with these annual monitoring arrangements.

1.33 The Pearson Academic Management Review and Standards Verifier reports demonstrate that the College conforms to the awarding partners' processes for monitoring and review, which address whether threshold academic standards are achieved. The University of Wales' Annual Monitoring Review and external examiner reports demonstrate that the College adheres to its processes for monitoring and review, and that threshold academic standards are achieved.

1.34 The QAA annual monitoring report for 2015 stated that the College committed to reintroducing its own internal annual monitoring reporting process, the Annual College and Course Review, in 2015. The College has not met this commitment and relies on the monitoring and review processes of the University of Wales and Pearson.

1.35 The review team concludes that the College's adherence to the requirements of its awarding body and awarding organisation for monitoring and review of programmes means 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**

1.36 The responsibility for engaging external and independent expertise in the setting and maintenance of academic standards lies primarily with the awarding partners. The University of Wales appoints external examiners to provide oversight of the setting and maintenance of academic standards. Pearson uses Standards Verifiers, who usually make an annual visit to the College followed by a report, to ensure that academic standards are being maintained. It is the responsibility of the College to complete the University's template for the Annual Monitoring Review process, on which the University then provides feedback to the College.

1.37 The operation of these processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.38 The review team tested the Expectation by examining Pearson Standards Verifier reports, and University of Wales' Annual Monitoring Reports and external examiner reports. The review team also met the Principal and staff.

1.39 The review team found that the College conforms to the requirements of its awarding partners in the assurance of standards, both of which use independent expertise to ensure that threshold and institutional academic standards are appropriately set and maintained. The use of standards verification for the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership is extensive and thorough, confirming that academic standards are appropriately maintained through the College's assessment process.

1.40 The review team concludes that the College's adherence to its awarding partners' processes for the use of external and independent expertise mean 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

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

1.42 The College's main responsibilities for maintaining academic standards are in adhering to the policies and processes of its degree-awarding body and awarding organisation, which it generally does satisfactorily. All Expectations in this judgement area have been met and the associated level of risk is low in six out of seven cases. The exception is Expectation A2.2, where the review team found the associated level of risk to be moderate.

1.43 There are no features of good practice in this area and no affirmations. There is one recommendation in this area, linked to Expectation A2.2, relating to definitive records for programmes. The College was not able to provide final definitive documentation for its MBA programmes. The review team concludes that the lack of availability of such records for the programmes presents a moderate risk, as while the lack of a definitive programme record for the MBA is significant, the issue relates to a relatively small part of the College's provision

1.44 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the 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 The College states that the operation of processes for the design, development and approval of programmes is the responsibility of the combined SMT/AC. Pearson is responsible for the design and development of its programmes (see Section 1 of this report). The College was responsible for the design and development of the MBA programme validated by the University of Wales.

2.2 The review team found that the minutes of meetings of the SMT/AC are very brief and only record decisions taken. The College states that the Quality Assurance Manual describes the processes for programme design and approval, however, the Manual does not evaluate processes, it only confirms that the Academic Committee is responsible for approving programmes. The approval processes are therefore not explained in sufficient detail to demonstrate a systematic and planned approach; strategic oversight; or evaluation of the processes for programme design, development and approval.

2.3 The review team tested the Expectation by considering a range of documentation, including minutes of SMT/AC meetings, and through discussions with the Principal and staff.

2.4 Evidence from the minutes of the meetings of the combined SMT/AC, and discussions with staff, does not demonstrate that the College maintains strategic oversight of processes and outcomes of programme design, development and approval.

2.5 The development of a progression agreement with Cardiff Metropolitan University, which informs the design of the College's Pearson programme, is briefly recorded in a standard meeting record form. However, the combined SMT/AC has not considered this development in any systematic, planned or detailed manner, and it is not clear whether or not students were involved in the processes that led to this decision. The recent decision to consider working in partnership with another awarding organisation was taken at the November 2015 meeting of SMT/AC, but there was no detail of the discussion that took place or evidence that the decision was informed by a strategic, systematic and planned process. This meeting did not have representation from students, and although the review team was told that the College had consulted with alumni, no evidence of consultation was available.

2.6 The lack of student representation on a frequent and regular basis at meetings of the combined SMT/AC means that students are not routinely and formally involved in College considerations of the design, development and approval of programmes. There is also no evidence that students were engaged in these processes through the informal consultation processes that the review team was informed of.

2.7 When the review team asked for documents relating to the most recent higher education programme approved the College provided documentation relating to the approval process with the University of Wales, which did not demonstrate approval of the programme through the College's internal process involving the Academic Committee. The College was



unable to demonstrate that it used external reference points in its design, development and internal approval of the MBA programme. Reference was made to the use of an external consultant by the College at the design and development stage, however, the only evidence for this presented to the review team was a photocopy of a visiting card. Membership of the combined SMT/AC consists of staff of the College; as this is the only formal committee currently being operated by the College there are limited opportunities for external input.

2.8 The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College establish and implement formal procedures for the design, development and approval of new programmes.

2.9 The review team concludes that the College does not have a formal, systematic process for the development and approval of programmes. The expectation is not met and the level of risk is serious because it indicates that there are significant gaps in the College's policies and procedures relating to quality assurance.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Serious**

**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**

2.10 Responsibility for all matters concerning learning opportunities and teaching practices is held by the merged SMT/AC. Management responsibility rests with a small team comprising the Principal, the Registrar and Programme Directors. The College's recruitment and selection process is set out in its Admissions Policy. The Policy outlines the entry requirements and application process, and is available on the website. The Admissions Policy is reviewed annually by the Registrar and other colleagues. The College states that it provides training to improve admission processes.

2.11 The operation of the College's procedures for recruitment and admissions would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.12 The review team discussed recruitment, selection and admission with senior staff, students, other academic staff and administrative staff. It also made requests for supplementary evidence such as data on applications. The team also evaluated evidence including policy documents, handbooks, committee minutes and sources on the College website.

2.13 Applicants are interviewed when further examination of the applicant's evidence is required, although this is not normally undertaken for applicants for online programmes, where email and telephone calls are used instead. The review team saw copies of two versions of completed forms recording interviews. The College has a procedure for handling appeals and complaints about admissions. Students confirmed the effectiveness of the admissions procedure.

2.14 Progression and completion data for the MBA indicates that the College is successfully recruiting students who are able to complete their programme. The data indicates significantly lower rates of completion on Pearson programmes (see Expectation B4) but the review team identified no evidence to confirm whether this can be attributed to recruitment or selection processes.

2.15 The review team concludes that the College's use of entry criteria and interviews, in addition to the advice and guidance given to applicants, enables it to meet this expectation and that the level of risk associated 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**

2.16 Responsibility for all matters concerning learning opportunities and teaching practices is held by the merged SMT/AC. Management responsibility rests with this small team comprising the Principal, the Registrar and Programme Directors. Coverage of this Expectation in the College's self-evaluation document, submitted for this review, was organised as a series of brief statements associated with the Indicators of sound practice, supported by reference to a small number of documents.

2.17 The College has a Learning and Teaching Policy that sets out in detail its commitments in relation to tutorials, assessment, quality, levels of study and achievement, as well as feedback from students, and their engagement and responsibilities. It sets out the College's aim to develop independent learners who take responsibility for their own learning.

2.18 The transition from exclusively face-to-face to almost exclusively online provision over the last three years makes particular demands and offers new opportunities for the College and its students. Teaching and learning at the College is now set up for study exclusively online. Following advice from external sources the College has upgraded its VLE platform. Interactive sessions for those learning at a distance allow for presentations by students and discussion of them in forums. Records of student participation in these sessions are maintained. Teaching provision takes the form of contact time via live and recorded lectures. Some 'live' interaction is possible via interactive links with synchronous participants. Subsequent interaction with tutors may be by email, forums or one-to-one tutorials, which may be through online videos.

2.19 The College undertakes regular reviews as required by its awarding partners. In addition, it uses peer review to develop the professional skills of academic staff and uses student feedback to identify enhancements. These arrangements, if operated effectively, would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.20 The review team discussed the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices with senior staff, students, other academic staff, and administrative and technical staff. The team viewed evidence, including policy documents, handbooks, the College Strategic Plan, committee minutes, a range of sources on the College website and some online VLE resources.

2.21 The College stated that details of each module set out the learning opportunities offered to students. This claim was not supported by inspection of the programme and module specifications made available to students, as they focus on learning outcomes but offer no substantive focus on the range and form of learning opportunities deployed, or on the learning resources that support them.

2.22 The College does not have a published or clearly articulated learning and teaching strategy. In discussions with staff the review team identified that there was limited awareness of the distinctions between a learning and teaching policy that codifies present practices and expectations, and a learning and teaching strategy that sets out priorities for

development to assure and enhance learning opportunities and the student experience. In the evidence provided, the concepts of policy and strategy are used interchangeably. The College's Strategic Plan does not refer to strategy in relation to developing learning or teaching, and consideration of developing and extending learning opportunities is limited to a short list of prospective links with outside organisations.

2.23 Monitoring and review processes focus on meeting academic standards; the award of credit; adjustments to curricular content; and specific requirements for changes in relation to these considerations, along with some of the learning resources that support them. These processes do not support a systematic or strategic approach to the development of learning opportunities and teaching practices. Monitoring and review processes do not result in a strategic direction for the enhancement of learning and teaching provision, or develop enhancement plans. There are similar omissions in the minutes of the SMT/AC, in which there is no substantive evidence that the opportunity offered by regular reviews for development and enhancement is identified or acted upon.

2.24 The College states that it updates its learning and teaching practices with regular peer reviews and training. A standard template is used in one-on-one peer observation and there have been frequent observations over the last three years. Almost all observations took place between a small group of full-time senior staff, covering both face-to-face and online sessions. Student numbers in the sessions observed were invariably very small. Almost without exception observers gave the highest ratings to the lectures observed. Staff reported high levels of learning from one another's practices resulting from peer observation. It is not evident how this learning was made explicit, consolidated or made available beyond the two staff involved in each observation.

2.25 Peer observation is presented by the College as its principal approach to the development and enhancement of teaching practices. As described more fully in paragraph 2.24, these practices now occur in significantly altered circumstances as a result of the recent rapid transition from face-to-face to online teaching.

2.26 The College states that its Learning and Teaching Policy invites feedback from students within meetings and after completion of each module or unit of study. Most recently, it has gathered feedback by online surveys. Feedback focuses on the support and guidance offered by individual tutors, and the findings of the student surveys are positive or very positive. Survey response rates for face-to-face teaching are more than sufficient to identify some learning points. Survey response rates for online teaching were too small to constitute reliable data and no learning points were identified. Supplementary data for surveys of online students for 2015 also evidences consistently very positive responses. Sample sizes are generally small and responses between students show very little variation. The data is considered by the same small group of senior staff as for peer observation. The College acknowledges that the outcomes of student feedback are not shared among students except for the few occasions when students attend committees.

2.27 Discussion with students confirmed a lack of evidence of follow-through of student feedback. Recent minutes of the SMT/AC frequently refer very briefly to student feedback, but references are confined to action points and the minutes do not record substantive discussion of, or reflection on, feedback. This does not verify the College's claim that it analyses student feedback at the Academic Committee.

2.28 On the basis of the evidence presented, the review team cannot establish that the focus of student feedback, the methodology for gathering it, or the review processes in place for analysis of, and reflection on, its findings are capable of enhancing students' learning opportunities and the teaching practices through which they are realised.

2.29 Discussions with staff about the rapid transition to online teaching and learning did not clarify how students are enabled to interact with each other, as well as with the tutor (see also Expectation B4). The review team was unable to identify how the College had undertaken a focused consideration of the pedagogic implications of the transition from face-to-face to online teaching and learning. The team noted the particular importance of this change for the induction of less experienced and less well-informed staff.

2.30 The review team heard that a significant part of the management of the transition to online teaching at the practical and technical levels was supported by three dedicated staff: a technician, who maintains the infrastructure, and two colleagues appointed to facilitate blended learning. These two colleagues (who no longer work at the College) had assisted tutors in producing suitable content, and intervened during live teaching sessions to help students to participate. Staff acknowledged that plans to guide the development of online delivery have been interrupted and significant development work regarding online teaching and learning remains to be pursued. There is evidence that key senior staff have undertaken related and appropriate professional development, including in one case in respect of online learning.

2.31 The review team **recommends** that the College develop, and systematically monitor and evaluate, a strategic approach to learning and teaching that enhances the provision of learning opportunities across all modes of delivery. The review team also **recommends** that, by January 2017, the College review quality assurance procedures with respect to evaluating learning opportunities and teaching practices.

2.32 The absence of a learning and teaching strategy, and the lack of focus on learning and teaching in the Strategic Plan and annual monitoring, means there is little evidence of the College planning enhancement to learning and teaching. The review team found that the College does not have a systematic approach to reviewing the quality of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The governance structure and management practices do not require or assure such an approach. No written plans for the development of provision were made available.

2.33 The approaches of both the governance and management of the College are not effective in enabling it to take deliberate steps to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in a strategic or systematic manner. The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is serious, due to significant gaps in policy and procedures relating to the College's quality assurance.

**Expectation: Not met**  
**Level of risk: Serious**

**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**

2.34 The SMT/AC holds responsibility for the arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their potential. This management team comprises the Principal, the Registrar and Programme Directors.

2.35 The College's Student Welfare Policy sets out the guidelines for providing support and welfare for its student body. It advises that the Student Welfare Officer is available to all students at all times, and is to be invited to all meetings related to students or student policy. Student support is reported to be reviewed on an annual basis and reported to the SMT/AC. The Student Welfare Policy does not describe the support available for students with additional learning needs.

2.36 The College has a personal tutor support system, although the Student Welfare Policy refers to an academic support tutor rather than a personal tutor. The review team heard that students are introduced to the personal tutor system through an induction process, which was confirmed by students. Personal development plans provide further evidence that this arrangement is active. The College has a library, and students are encouraged to attend local libraries and use electronic resources.

2.37 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.38 The review team discussed arrangements and resources for the development of student potential with students, senior staff, other academic staff, administrative and technical staff, and the Student Welfare Officer. The team viewed a range of evidence, including the student submission, data on student progression and completion, policy documents, the Student Handbook, committee minutes, a range of sources on the College website and individual student records.

2.39 The College describes its support for students with additional learning needs through an example of support given to a student with dyslexia, although further discussion with staff did not establish successful outcomes and progress to date with this student. The College was unable to provide further examples.

2.40 A survey of alumni found positive evidence of the benefits of study at the College to students' careers. The College provides careers advice and workshops, for example on writing CVs.

2.41 The College states that a well-resourced library is available to students and that updates on the library are given at the main student forum, the Student-Staff Liaison Committee. However, the review team noted that the Student-Staff Liaison Committee has been in abeyance, and now operates as an online forum. The College has resources available for online students studying at a distance in the UK and overseas. Access to hard-copy and e-books is therefore an important and changing element of provision of learning resources at the College given its adoption of online delivery.

2.42 Students reported a range of methods of obtaining library access, including use of the College library, the British Library and local libraries. Integrating a learning management system software into the VLE had provided a suitable business library but this facility has been removed due to falling student numbers. For those studying outside London, online

library provision, which requires a token for which students must pay a monthly fee, is available.

2.43 The College expects tutors to use an online book, and an additional book for each unit of the programme. Key online resources for students on the MBA programme have been provided by student access to the University of Wales' library. Withdrawal of access to the University library is imminent as the last of the MBA students complete their studies. Plans to replace this provision for the College's remaining students have not yet been implemented or timetabled. During the interim period to follow, BTEC students will need to open their own accounts to gain access to online books via an online library.

2.44 These arrangements add to the costs incurred by students and may also make overseas study difficult, as some major book suppliers cannot deliver overseas from the UK. The College has on occasion acted as intermediary in forwarding books, but this is not a workable or reliable basis for prompt access to core learning resources. The student submission refers to an urgent need for the College to provide e-books online for students. The review team did not find evidence that the College has in place a system for monitoring or evaluating the availability, accessibility and suitability of the full range of learning resources provided for students. Student feedback on the effects of current arrangements is not available, as student surveys are confined to questions about the quality of teaching provided by individual staff (see Expectation B3).

2.45 The review team identified some risks with the extent to which all registered students can gain access to required teaching resources, irrespective of where they study and of their ability to meet additional costs to sustain their studies. It is not clear to the team how Pearson students have accessed the necessary book resources since the learning management system software was withdrawn from the VLE, or how the College ensures the adequacy of current arrangements. The risks are greater owing to the impending withdrawal of access to the University's online library and hiatus ahead of the provision of new learning resources. The nature of this provision had not been settled at the time of the review visit. The absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation of the adequacy of the provision of learning resources in consultation with students further increases the risk to students' abilities to realise their potential.

2.46 The review team sought evidence that pastoral care optimised potential for completion and progression among online students studying at a distance. Arrangements for liaison between personal tutors and the Student Welfare Officer were not clarified by discussions, but assurances were provided of twice-yearly contact between students and their personal tutors, although staff reported that online students do not use the welfare support offered. Inspection of SMT/AC minutes for 2014 and 2015 finds only one brief reference to student welfare, and is not indicative of a substantive review process that might pick up and respond to student welfare issues. Subsequent discussions reported that general emails are sent to online students to encourage contact. These emails have a standard content, although they are personally addressed.

2.47 Staff acknowledged that students 'disappearing' from the College's view is a problem. It was also acknowledged that there was no formal procedure for maintaining active contact with them, and that College-initiated contact with students is variable and has not been maintained for online Pearson students. Discussions found some uncertainty among staff about the maximum registration period on Pearson programmes against which student progress can be monitored, and about monitoring of responses to reminders sent to students who appear to be inactive. It is clear to the review team that the onus for communication largely falls upon students to respond to occasional general email prompts. The review team found that the arrangements in place are not conducive to encouraging and

supporting continuing study and progression, or to optimising online students' abilities to realise their potential.

2.48 Analysis of student data confirmed that some current online students are making very slow progress, are failing to progress or have become inactive. In the closing phases of teaching the MBA programme, the University contacted the College with the names of 141 registered students who had neither completed their studies nor formally withdrawn. The College contacted those students with a generalised email asking them to indicate whether or not they were intending to complete their studies, giving a specified deadline for reply. Students were informed that after the deadline the absence of a reply would be taken to mean that they had withdrawn. Two of the 141 students contacted were deemed to be continuing following this communication, and others had received sub-degree exit awards. No arrangements for personalised contact with the remaining 139 students were made, regardless of their date of registration or their progress to date.

2.49 Among the 19 Pearson students enrolled in 2013, two had completed their level 7 diploma (which can be completed in one year) at the time of the review visit. Detailed inspection of the records of a number of students made available during the review visit found several who had made minimal or no progress since their enrolment, despite multiple resubmissions of assignments in several cases. The minutes of the SMT/AC for 2014 and 2015 contain two very brief references to students and their progress, but do not refer to online students or action to provide support to those inactive or failing to make progress with their studies.

2.50 These findings indicate an absence of systematic monitoring, identification and follow-up of students whose progress towards completion of their programme of study is at significant risk. These findings are inconsistent with the College's claim that it regularly reviews students' progress to enable them to achieve their potential. The review team found that there are significant doubts about the extent to which the College's arrangements and practices adopt a sufficiently active stance towards enabling students to reach their potential, and towards facilitating the achievement of those who are able to complete their studies.

2.51 The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College implement, monitor and evaluate effective arrangements for enabling students to develop their potential and complete their intended qualification.

2.52 The review team concluded that the risks identified, in terms of limited access for online students to essential learning resources, limited regular personalised contact with students and the high proportions who are not making sound progress towards completion, mean that this Expectation is not met. Since these risks result from significant gaps in procedures relating to the College's quality assurance arrangements, the level of risk is assessed to be serious.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Serious**



**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**

2.53 The College describes its arrangements for student engagement with reference to its tutorial provision, draws attention to the student forum, and identifies minutes of one well-attended student meeting. It refers to the Student-Staff Liaison Committee as the principal platform for the student voice, which includes elected student representatives. These arrangements would not allow the Expectation to be met.

2.54 The review team discussed student engagement with students, senior staff and other academic staff. It requested supplementary evidence to that indicated in the College's self-evaluation document. The team viewed evidence including the student submission, policy documents, handbooks and committee minutes.

2.55 The student submission, produced by the sole student representative, consisted of a verbatim report of the responses of seven students to a brief questionnaire, which was distributed to 70 students.

2.56 In 2014 students elected two student representatives; the current incumbent is the sole representative. In 2014-15 representatives have attended two SMT/AC meetings. At one meeting the representatives were required to leave after the first item. The reasons for very low levels of student attendance are not clear. However, the review team notes that meetings of the SMT/AC are irregular, can be called at short notice, and occur according to need. With only two exceptions, the minutes of the SMT/AC are not circulated to student members. The review team notes that these circumstances are not conducive to regular student attendance and engagement.

2.57 Senior staff acknowledge that the College has not been successful in engaging online students in discussions about their learning experience. They describe the student forum as marginally successful. When student numbers were larger, with more face-to-face students, they too did not engage often. The student forum takes place online and takes the form of postings online, which students treat mainly as tools for resolving issues or complaints.

2.58 Most engagement with students is informal. Staff explained that for most of the College's students it would not be the norm to be involved in detailed feedback and discussion about the way the teaching programme and the College are run. The College also suggested that cultural differences, and the tendency of online students to value their privacy and isolation, posed barriers to engagement. Staff acknowledge that more active promotion of the benefits of engagement is needed and that this is an area the College needs to develop.

2.59 Students informed the review team that there was always a student representative for each academic year, but this was not consistent with the fact that there was only one student representative at the time of the review. Students do not meet to discuss their experience of the College and the learning opportunities it offers. The students present were unable to provide examples of how the College involved them in discussions about learning opportunities and learning resources. Some students reported being invited to join a meeting about a prospective new level 8 programme, just before the Higher Education Review. Others described an invite to meet twice in the last 18 months, and confirmed that in one

instance they had feedback from a previous student representative reporting on what he had heard in College staff discussions.

2.60 Students had not been invited to contribute to the updating of the Student Handbook. Senior staff acknowledged that they had no information as to whether students were satisfied with the Handbook, although they noted that they had not received any representations to the contrary. The College had, however, discussed the Student Handbook with its student representative shortly before the Higher Education Review. Students do not have access to external examiner or Standards Verifier reports, or to the processes or outcomes of annual monitoring or review.

2.61 The College recognises that it is not succeeding in engaging students as partners in the development of significant aspects of their studies. Apart from the limited forms of student feedback on modules, and some ad hoc surveys (see Expectation B4), there are limited mechanisms through which individual students can routinely express their views about their learning experience at the College. The arrangements for student representation do not allow students to be constituted as a group for the purposes of partnership in the development of their learning opportunities. Information for students on the College's quality assurance arrangements does not align with the Quality Assurance Manual, and quality assurance reports, such as external examiner reports, are not shared with students, meaning that the lack of transparent information about the operation of the College's quality assurance arrangements further limits the possibilities for partnership. The review team's comments in Section 3 of this report in relation to the Quality Code, Part C observe that information about such arrangements is not consistently up to date on the College website, which is a further obstacle to effective partnership. There is no substantive evidence that students have been able to contribute individually or collectively as partners in the assurance or enhancement of their educational experience.

2.62 The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College develop and implement formal systems to promote the engagement of students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience across all programmes and modes of delivery.

2.63 The review team concludes that this Expectation is not met because the College has not demonstrated that it engages students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. Significant gaps in structures and the absence of codified procedures and regular points of consultation and review involving students mean that the associated level of risk is serious.

**Expectation: Not met**  
**Level of risk: Serious**

**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**

2.64 The College is required to comply with the assessment regulations and procedures set by the University of Wales and Pearson. The College has an Assessment and Examinations Policy, which is set within the context of the Expectations and some Indicators of the Quality Code. This is a useful document, as it provides an overview of aspects of the assessment process operating at the College. The College's Quality Assurance Manual provides some high level information about the assessment process. The information provided is not specific to the requirements of each of the awarding partners. It covers such matters as mitigating circumstances for late submission, provision for students with additional learning support requirements, the process for handing in assignments and unfair academic practice. Students and staff are provided with information about the assessment process and requirements for the two awarding bodies.

2.65 Pearson operate an internal verification and Standards Verifier system, shown in an IV/EV flowchart, for ensuring that assessed work is both set and marked according to its requirements, which take account of whether assessment is equitable, valid and reliable. Information about the University of Wales's procedures and policies for assessment and examinations are provided on the College's website. The University is involved in the assessment process at both the setting and academic standard of marking stages, and in ensuring that assessment is appropriate to enable students to demonstrate the achievement of intended learning outcomes.

2.66 The College has a recognition of prior learning policy and procedure, which is available on its website.

2.67 The policies and procedures concerned with the assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.68 The review team scrutinised the implementation of policies and procedures, internal verification and moderation procedures, and external examiner reports; and considered evidence from staff and students.

2.69 The Pearson Standards Verifier visits the College once a year to inspect the standard of marking, operation of the internal verification process, student record keeping, and feedback provided to students on their assessed work. The reports for 2015 show compliance with Pearson requirements for the assessment process, with no essential recommendations being made. The College operates an internal verification process that conforms to Pearson requirements, and demonstrates the process of the setting and marking of assignments. Appropriate feedback is given to students on their assessed work.

2.70 The College submits proposed assignments briefs to the University of Wales for approval before giving them to students. In the case of the final MBA dissertation, proposals for dissertations developed by students, with guidance from staff at the College, are submitted to the University for approval before students are allowed to progress with the dissertation. Assessed work is first-marked by College staff, then sent to the University for

moderation, before being sent to the external examiners. This is in line with the requirements in the University's Taught Degree Handbook and ensures a level of objectivity in the assessment process.

2.71 The College's Quality Assurance Manual explains the policy and procedure for dealing with unfair academic practice. The College makes use of an Unfair Practice Committee for dealing with suspected cases of plagiarism. The review team requested the terms of reference and membership requirements for this Committee but this information was not provided. The College states that it uses plagiarism-detection software and manual observation by staff to help with the detection of plagiarism. However, at a meeting with staff it became clear that the use of this software is inconsistent across the College and there is a reliance on staff identifying plagiarism from reading student work.

2.72 The College's recognition of prior learning policy and procedure, as applied to the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership, will give a student advanced standing only where the same units of study have been taken and successfully passed at another higher education provider. Examples of the application of this policy, which is effective, were provided.

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.74 External examiners for the MBA are appointed by the University of Wales. For the BTEC Strategic Management and Leadership Diploma programme, Pearson allocates a Standards Verifier to the College. The University moderators also second-mark a substantial sample of scripts. College staff attend examination boards chaired by academic staff of the University.

2.75 External examiners provide feedback on draft assessments and formal reports following examination boards. For the BTEC Strategic Management and Leadership Diploma the Standards Verifier visits the College. The operation of the awarding partners' procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.76 The review team discussed the College's use of external examiners and Standards Verifiers with senior staff and other academic staff. It requested further evidence to supplement that indicated in the College's self-evaluation document. The team viewed policy documents, handbooks, external examiner reports, external moderator reports, Standards Verifier reports, annual monitoring and other regular review reports, and examination board minutes.

2.77 A substantial sample of MBA examination scripts are second-marked by the University, and the resulting moderators' reports are included in the Annual Monitoring Reports and provided to external examiners. A standard University template includes a brief summary of internal and external examiner reports. External examiner feedback on draft assessments is also sought via a standard University template.

2.78 External examiner reports indicate satisfactory processes of examining and recording responsive improvements in practices resulting from previous reports and discussions. Detailed minutes of University examination boards for the MBA also show consideration of reports from external moderators and external examiners, and affirm the satisfactory conduct of assessment.

2.79 The Standards Verifier reports demonstrate that the College is meeting Pearson academic standards and providing appropriate feedback to students. A range of Academic Management Review and Academic Monitoring Review reports also attest to the satisfactory conduct of assessment processes and outcomes.

2.80 The Principal and Programme Directors review external examiner reports and respond to the examiner by email. Consideration of external examiner reports is not listed in the responsibilities of Academic Committee, although there is evidence that it has received, considered and responded to reports. The Quality Assurance Manual states that external examiner/Standards Verifier reports are received at examination boards, but examination board meetings have not been held recently, as the taught element of the MBA has been completed and they are not required by Pearson.

2.81 External examiner and Standards Verifier reports are not made available to students. Staff explained that the content of reports had in the past been shared at student forums when these were held face-to-face. Since the forum became conflated with the Student-Staff Liaison Committee and moved exclusively online it was not thought appropriate to post the reports, as they referred to students by name. The possibility of redacting student names was recognised. Staff recognise that this means that the present

situation does not fully address the Expectation, and that significant opportunities are being lost for students across the full range of experience and performance to gain a clearer understanding of what examiners/Standards Verifiers expect, and of ways in which the College is expected to make required and recommended changes in response to their reports. These insights also need to be made available to all relevant academic staff, whether or not they are members of the committee(s) that have sight of the reports. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College make more developmental use of external examiner reports with staff and students

2.82 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**

2.83 The College states that it reviews all programmes on a regular basis at senior management level and through the review processes of the awarding partners. The College has engaged appropriately with the Pearson Academic Management Review process and the University of Wales' Annual Monitoring Review.

2.84 However, the College's internal programme monitoring and review process, as described in the Quality Assurance Manual, is not taking place. In their meetings with the review team staff acknowledged that there needs to be a stronger review of programmes, that reliance had been placed on the awarding partners' review processes, and that there are weaknesses with this approach.

2.85 The lack of an effective, regular and systematic approach within the College for the monitoring and review of its programmes would not allow the Expectation to be met.

2.86 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising a range of documentary evidence, and through discussions with staff.

2.87 Following the College's last QAA review in 2012 it has not developed and used the internal programme monitoring and review process, which was identified as good practice. Instead, it has relied on the awarding partners' annual monitoring processes. This approach has a number of shortcomings; for example, it does not allow the College to have oversight of the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership differentially and combined for its face-to-face and online students. The Quality Assurance Manual states that the College regularly monitors its conduct of seminars, double-marking of student work, and clarity of feedback provided to students. The review team could not find evidence that this was taking place systematically from minutes of the combined SMT/AC.

2.88 The College's Quality Assurance Manual states that senior management is engaged with programme monitoring and review. The main formal committee operating at the College with senior management as members is the combined SMT/AC. Meetings have fixed agendas, but the minutes are very brief and record only actions; there is no evidence of any discussion that takes place and little evidence of any documents or reports that are considered, although the College asserts that this is where it discusses Annual Monitoring Reports. Consequently, there is little evidence that these meetings reflect the operation of effective, regular and systematic processes for the monitoring and review of programmes.

2.89 Reports provided by Pearson on the Academic Management Review process, and feedback from the University of Wales following the College's submission of the Annual Monitoring Return, using the University's template, are considered at the combined SMT/AC meetings. The College does not produce an overall summative report and the minutes of meetings only note decisions. Minutes of the combined SMT/AC do not record how the College uses these reports and how they feed into quality enhancement and sustaining good practice.

2.90 The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College establish an appropriate, deliberative structure for the management of quality and enhancement, and

ensure that outcomes are recorded and acted upon. The review team also **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College establish and implement formal policies and procedures for the monitoring and review of programmes. The recommendation under Expectation B3 also relates to this Expectation.

2.91 The College is meeting the requirements of its awarding partners with respect to programme monitoring and review. However, the College has not continued with its own annual course review process. The failure to implement effective, regular and systematic processes for the monitoring and review of programmes leads the review team to determine that the Expectation is not met, and the associated level of risk is serious as this represents a significant gap in procedures relating to quality assurance.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Serious**



**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**

2.92 The College's Complaints and Academic Appeals Policy is set in the context of the Quality Code, Chapter B9. This is made available to students via the Student Handbook, the College's websites and the VLE, where the policy and procedures are provided in full.

2.93 The Complaints and Academic Appeals Policy and procedure would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.94 The Expectation was tested by examining the Complaints and Academic Appeals Policy and procedure, and academic appeals and complaints made by students. The review team also met staff and students to evaluate the practical application of the policy and procedures.

2.95 The Complaints and Academic Appeals Policy clearly defines what constitutes a complaint and an academic appeal (against an assessment decision). This separation of complaints and academic appeals is appropriate and follows the guidelines of the Quality Code. The Complaints and Academic Appeals Policy also provides students with links to Pearson and University of Wales policies and procedures online, should a student not be satisfied with the outcome of a complaint or academic appeal as dealt with by the College.

2.96 The College attempts to resolve complaints on an informal basis in the first instance. Students report that College staff address issues that arise effectively and in a timely manner, with the consequence that the use of the College's formal complaints procedure has not been invoked to date. The College has not had to deal with any academic appeals for its Pearson programme. Some students on University of Wales' programmes have made complaints directly to the University, following the procedure in the University's Taught Degrees Handbook. Where a complaint is made by a student directly to the University of Wales, the University refers this to the College for a response, which is communicated to the student by the University. Records of informal interventions are only kept by the College if the complaint moves to the formal stage. At present, evidence is provided through email trails, which does not constitute a proper system for recording informal complaints and appeals.

2.97 The College explains its Complaints and Academic Appeals Policy and procedure to students at induction. The Student Welfare Officer is available to provide advice to students concerning the Policy and procedure for making a complaint or appeal. The College states that its Complaints and Academic Appeals Policy and procedure is reviewed and updated on an annual basis, and that this is approved at a combined SMT/AC meeting. However, the minutes of these meetings are not sufficiently detailed to provide clear evidence that review and updating takes place. Staff new to the College are provided with an induction in which student policies and procedures are communicated and reference made to the Student Handbook.

2.98 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**

2.99 The College has no other organisations to whom it has delegated responsibilities, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

**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**

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

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

2.101 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.102 Of the nine applicable Expectations in this judgement area four are met and judged to be of low risk. The other five Expectations are not met and judged to be of serious risk.

2.103 There are no items of good practice or affirmations identified in this judgement area. There are nine recommendations in this area, relating to Expectations B1, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7 and B8.

2.104 The review team found that the serious risks identified indicate shortcomings in a number of areas, which significantly impact on the quality of learning opportunities. This includes, but is not limited to: procedures for programme development, design and approval; provision of resources; student engagement; programme monitoring and review; and the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices.

2.105 The review team concludes that there are significant gaps in policy, structures and procedures relating to the College's quality assurance and therefore that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **does not meet** UK expectations.

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

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

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

##### **Findings**

3.1 The College publishes a range of online information about its provision, including policy documents, programme information and general information about the College. Detailed programme information and handbooks are available on the College's open access website for the public, prospective applicants, current students, alumni and employers. The College's mission and values are also published on its websites, and detailed information is provided about application and admissions processes. Upon successful completion students are provided with a certificate and a transcript or diploma supplement. This approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.2 The review team discussed the provision of information with senior staff, students, other academic staff and administrative staff. The team viewed both College websites and the information they contained, and some online VLE resources.

3.3 The College maintains two websites, one focused towards UK users and one to international uses, although the content is identical. Key policies are uploaded as separate documents to make them easily found by search engines. Detailed information for applicants is also available. Printed copies of handbooks are made available to students.

3.4 The VLE is used to provide information and support to current students and includes an extensive range of information about module content and associated provision and expectations. Minutes of meetings and additional policy documents are also available on the College's intranet.

3.5 On satisfactory completion of their programme students are provided with detailed transcripts of the curriculum they have studied. Student feedback is not made available on the intranet.

3.6 The review team found the information provided on both websites and the VLE to be clear and useful, and to meet the criteria of accessibility, trustworthiness and fitness for purpose.

3.7 The College states that policies and other information on the website are reviewed and updated annually. Staff described the processes of maintaining the currency of documents on the internet. There is a regular annual review schedule. Staff share responsibility for reviewing documents and consult informally on their findings and on any need for changes. Major changes are discussed by the Senior Management Team. Previous arrangements for proofreading and formal sign-off were abandoned as too cumbersome. Final 'master' versions of documents are currently approved by the Principal, and logged and stored by the Registrar.

3.8 Detailed inspection of the website during the review visit found some obsolete information, which the review team discussed with staff. This included outdated timetable information, and information about the governance structure that did not take account of significant recent changes. The review team also noted that some key policy documents and

handbooks were difficult to find. Material that is only of relevance to staff is mixed with student-facing information in ways that are confusing and impede easy navigation and access for students.

3.9 Students generally reported that information provided for them is helpful. Two students reported informal one-to-one conversations with staff, who asked about how useful they find the information the College provides.

3.10 No evidence is available of systematic evaluation of the information provided on the part of the College, as distinct from the annual updating review and occasional consultations with students.

3.11 The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College strengthen the procedure for checking the currency and accessibility of information on the website.

3.12 In its consideration of the College's arrangements for maintaining definitive programme records (see Expectation A2.2) the review team identified an issue with the availability of final definitive documents for the MBA programme. The review team found that this has the potential to disadvantage students and alumni, which lead to the recommendation under Expectation A2.2.

3.13 Applicants are given access to the College's intranet and VLE for two weeks before they commit themselves to registering. This provides valuable safeguards and additional information for prospective students at a critical juncture in their decision to enrol. The review team considers the access to information provided to prospective students through the virtual learning environment, which informs programme choice, to be **good practice**.

3.14 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. The absence of defined and established systems for checking all information before publication and for evaluating and updating the website means that the associated level of risk is moderate, as the College's procedures are broadly adequate but have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

3.15 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.16 The Expectation in Part C is met and the associated level of risk is moderate. There is one area of good practice in this judgement area associated with the provision of access to the VLE prior to enrolment. There is one recommendation associated with this judgement area concerning the procedures for checking the currency and availability of information on the website. The recommendation in Expectation A2.2, concerning definitive records for the MBA programme, also relates to Part C. There are no affirmations associated with this judgement area.

3.17 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 states that it has formalised many of its practices and policies to ensure consistency and clarity of expectations, and has in place a regular review cycle of a number of key College functions (for each of which a committee exists to review practice and make improvements). This would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.2 The review team tested the College's approach to enhancement through scrutiny of documentation, including the College's self-evaluation document, Quality Assurance Handbook, minutes of the combined SMT/AC meetings, and other relevant documents. The review team also met staff and students.

4.3 The review team found that key strategy documents (including the Strategic Plan, Learning and Teaching Policy, and Quality Assurance Manual) are not drawn together to demonstrate that deliberate steps are being taken at College level to inform and guide quality enhancement, and that enhancement does not feature in key documents such as student or staff handbooks. The team found that the College's approach to enhancement is piecemeal and uncoordinated, and that it does not take place at a strategic level. Staff were not able to articulate how the College takes deliberate steps at College level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.4 The main example that the College put forward to demonstrate enhancement of learning opportunities was its online learning delivery of the Pearson and University of Wales' programmes, which is also identified in the College's Strategic Plan 2015-18. However, the College does not distinguish between mode of delivery of its higher education programmes or identify specific enhancements made to online learning. There is no College-level approach to enhancing the learning opportunities of students studying online. Face-to-face teaching remains an important aspect of the College's approach to supporting student learning. Examples of enhancements given by the College, such as external visits to the London Cross-Rail project and the Bank of England, provide students with a valuable applied experience but there has not been an equivalent initiative for online students. The College has not followed up with students the benefits gained from these visits and how they enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities. This demonstrates the piecemeal approach to quality enhancement by the College and the relative neglect of quality enhancements for the online students.

4.5 The College gathers data on career progression for students who successfully complete their programme of studies, and has worked to enhance the career prospects of its students. For example, the progression agreement with Cardiff Metropolitan University will allow students to progress to a top-up bachelor's degree.

4.6 The steps taken to enhance employability and career-relevant skills are noted, although there is considerable room for improvement, particularly with regard to careers advice, since just 56 per cent of those surveyed expressed satisfaction with this aspect. The social programme and work-related visits provide enrichment to the student experience, although the tangible benefits are unclear; the College states that reduced student numbers have made it more difficult to maintain this enrichment.

4.7 Minutes of the combined SMT/AC meetings are inadequate, as commented on in relation to Expectation B8, and fail to demonstrate that the College takes deliberate steps and a strategic approach to quality enhancement.

4.8 The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College take deliberate steps at provider level to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities.

4.9 The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met because the College does not strategically articulate or operate a planned or effective approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities to enable it to demonstrate that it takes deliberate steps to enhance the quality of learning opportunities. The level of associated risk is serious because the absence of a strategic and effective approach represents a significant gap in the College's policies and structures relating directly to the quality assurance of its provision.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Serious**

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

4.10 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.11 The Expectation in this judgement area is not met and is considered to present serious risk. There are no areas of good practice or affirmations in this judgement area. There is one recommendation that the College should take deliberate steps at provider level to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities. The recommendation under Expectation B8, which relates to establishing a deliberative structure for the management of quality and enhancement, is also applicable to this Expectation.

4.12 The review team found that key strategy documents are not drawn together to inform the process of quality enhancement; that minutes of senior committees fail to demonstrate a strategic approach or deliberate steps in the enhancement of learning opportunities; and that enhancement does not feature in key documents. The College was unable to provide examples that illustrated a strategic provider-level approach to enhancement, and the team found that there was a lack of strategic consideration of the particular challenges of enhancing learning opportunities for students studying online (an increasingly important part of the College's provision). The team found that enhancement does not take place at a strategic level and that the College's approach to enhancement is not coordinated. The deficiencies identified present a serious risk, as there are significant gaps in policy, structures or procedures relating to the College's quality assurance.

4.13 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **does not meet** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy

5.1 The College addresses the theme of digital literacy by linking it to remaining employable in the modern world. The College points out areas of the curriculum in its programmes that address the role of information technology in organisations. The College encourages students to engage with computer technology during their studies, through, for example, Word-processed assignments and digital presentations.

5.2 The College states that it has developed a distinctive approach to the online delivery of the MBA programme, which has been extended to the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership. Delivery involves a blend of online learning through the VLE and the broadcast of live lectures at the College. Online students interact entirely using digital technology by, for example, accessing video and written content, communicating with staff and other students, and producing and submitting assignments. Teaching staff are supported with the live broadcasting of lectures by a technician, who guides tutors through the technical process and helps with presentation skills via this medium. All students have access to online learning support. Videoconferencing and a digital library supports student learning for the online programmes.

5.3 The College's Learning and Teaching Policy does not mention the role of information technology and digital literacy in supporting the student learning experience, or the further development of the College's VLE. The Staff Handbook does not make reference to digital literacy, nor does the Student Handbook refer to information technology or digital literacy in any detail. In addition, the Quality Assurance Manual does not refer to the Learning and Teaching Policy nor the role of digital literacy in supporting the student learning experience. Given that the College states it is a pioneer among alternative providers for online learning, the review team found there to be little evidence that digital literacy informs its key handbooks, strategies or general approach to enhancement of the student learning experience.

5.4 The College conducted a digital literacy survey of students with the aim of better understanding student views of the value of digital technology in learning. Of the 32 students who responded, one fifth said that they made minimal use of digital technology in their studies at the College. The majority of respondents acknowledged that the College supported them with using digital technology. While the survey was a useful exercise, there is little evidence of where the results have been considered, or of the development of an action plan to enhance the College's support for students with digital literacy.

5.5 Overall, the College makes use of digital technology in student learning and provides some support to students and staff in this respect. There is scant mention of information technology and learning in the Strategic Plan. Digital literacy is not embedded across the Learning and Teaching Policy or other key documents, such as the Student Handbook, Staff Handbook and Quality Assurance Manual. There is little evidence that the College is distinctive, forward looking or strategic in its approach to digital literacy.

## 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](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality).

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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