



Higher Education Review of Macclesfield College

April 2015

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Macclesfield College. The review took place from 28 to 30 April 2015 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Stuart Cannell (student reviewer)
- Mr Matthew J Kitching (student reviewer)
- Professor Chris Maguire
- Mr Millard Parkinson
- Mrs Polly Skinner.

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

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

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

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

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code.

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Macclesfield College

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

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

Good practice

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

- The considered approach to engaging students and employers in the programme design, development and approval process that aligns provision to local employment needs (Expectation B1).
- The proactive and responsive approach taken in seeking and responding to student feedback that enhances the quality of student learning opportunities (Expectation B5).
- The comprehensive and integrated monitoring and review process which effectively captures and responds to emerging issues (Expectation B8).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendation** to Macclesfield College.

By January 2017:

- further develop the formal student representation system and training mechanisms to allow for the full and effective engagement of students in quality assurance processes (Expectation B5).

Theme: Student Employability

The College's Mission and supporting strategies explicitly address the employability of its students.

In the provision of learning opportunities for students the College has developed, and is further developing, its regional profile through links with local stakeholders including businesses, service providers and community groups.

In addition, many tutors employed by the College have recent and relevant workplace experience which benefits the relevance of teaching and learning and student employability.

All of the College's higher education programmes are vocational and it is engaged in a strategic change to more firmly focus its higher education provision on programmes that support student employability in its region and provide work experience and placements.

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

About Macclesfield College

Macclesfield College (the College) is a medium-sized general further education college which serves East Cheshire. It delivers a range of provision across two sites. The College was a founder member of the Higher Education Cheshire consortium (HEC) in 2008. Colleges within the HEC work together to support each other. In December 2014, the College had 2,592 students including 131 higher education students, of whom 108 were on full-time programmes.

In 2010-11, when the last QAA review took place, all programmes were foundation degrees validated by Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) with one BSc Top-Up Degree, also with MMU. Since then the College decided to transfer its higher education provision from foundation degrees to Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Higher National Certificates (HNCs), with Pearson. The first Higher Nationals were delivered in September 2013 and all existing MMU foundation degrees are discontinuing. The College considers Higher Nationals are more likely to meet the needs of its students and local employers.

The College's previous review in April 2011 made the following recommendations:

It would be advisable for the College to:

- address the management of higher education programmes to provide a more explicit and coherent overview of academic standards and quality assurance
- ensure that inconsistencies in the website and proofing errors in printed materials are identified and corrected before publication.

It would be desirable for the College to:

- continue to look at ways of achieving greater parity in the timing of feedback
- develop more formal processes to undertake a generic review of external examiner reports across higher education programmes
- continue and extend staff development activities to create a more distinctive community of higher education practitioners
- expand and consolidate the development of peer observation of teaching
- discuss with the University ways in which student access to electronic journals can be improved
- use the virtual learning environment (VLE) more effectively to address student perceptions of resource shortages.

The following areas of good practice for dissemination were identified:

- the Academic Infrastructure has been used effectively to inform the development of a top-up degree within the College
- there is a well-organised model of student support from pre-course guidance, through on-course support to advice on progression
- a helpful handbook on academic writing for higher education is used in an integrated way across programmes.

The College has engaged a process to more fully develop higher education as an integral part of its provision. Higher education has been added to the agenda as an item for the Curriculum and Quality Group meetings and Curriculum Management and Leadership Group meetings. In addition, all College staff development days contain specific higher education training.

Since the last review, the College has appointed a new Principal. It has also implemented a revised structure with higher education programmes located in the relevant curriculum area and responsibility with the relevant Programme Leader and Curriculum Manager. The development and quality of higher education provision across the College is the responsibility of the College Senior Management Team including the Vice Principal Quality and Curriculum and the Head of Academic and Higher Studies.

In addition, the review team found that the College has established a more coherent and explicit overview of academic standards and quality assurance, including the review of external examiners' reports and reviewed information on its website. Most recommendations have been addressed successfully or progressed.

Explanation of the findings about Macclesfield College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College delivers foundation degrees under agreement with Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and HND and HNC awards under agreement with Pearson. The College has been an associate college of MMU since 2008 but, following a decline in demand for places on its foundation degree programmes and, jointly with MMU, it made a strategic decision from 2013 to move its higher education provision away from foundation programmes to BTEC HNCs and HNDs.

1.2 The College is, therefore, not directly responsible for the standards of its awards, but they are overseen by its awarding body and organisation through their programme validation, approval and monitoring processes, including oversight of standards by BTEC external verifiers for HND and HNC provision, and for foundation degree provision, through scrutiny by MMU link tutors, programme leaders and external examiners.

1.3 The College's partnership agreements, quality manuals and definitive programme documents prescribe the regulatory framework to be followed including external reference points such as the FHEQ. The College publishes programme handbooks that provide clear and appropriate information for students including links to specific information provided by its awarding partners, programme specifications and assessment policies.

1.4 Examination boards for the foundation degree provision are held at MMU. College staff attend and may also contribute through their MMU link tutor. The College has set up subject assessment boards for its BTEC HND and HNC provision.

1.5 The team considered that the oversight of standards by the College's awarding body and organisation, through the mechanisms planned to safeguard standards such as the validation processes, the appointment of link tutors, external examiners and standards' verifiers, together with the College's own regulatory framework to assure itself that standards are being maintained, would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.6 The team reviewed documentation relating to the maintenance and protection of standards provided by the College and the College's use of documentation provided by MMU and Pearson. This included reports of external examiners and verifiers. It also reviewed the College's approach to maintaining standards in meetings with senior staff of the College and the MMU and BTEC link tutors.

1.7 The 2011 IQER report recommended that the College establish a more coherent and explicit overview of academic standards and quality assurance, including the review of external examiners' reports. In response, the College has reviewed and revised its higher education management structure and strengthened its own internal processes to maintain standards and to demonstrate compliance with its awarding bodies' policies and procedures. This has resulted in closer scrutiny, improved central oversight, and more formal and transparent reporting processes. These include the annual programme Self-Assessment Documents, with analysis of the external examiners' reports and student feedback and action planning. These are then summarised in a College higher education self-evaluation document. In addition, cyclical reviews, sparked chronologically or by a quality issue, take place every three years. These reports are reviewed at appropriate levels within the committee structure and executive including the Higher Education Management Group, Teaching and Learning Standards Committee and the Governing Body.

1.8 External examiner and external verifier reports confirm in general that standards are being maintained and are in line with the sector. Where issues have been raised, the College and the awarding body have taken steps to ensure standards are protected. The College ensure tutors understand the level at which programmes must be delivered and assessed through the recruitment process and through staff development.

1.9 The revised management structure, together with the establishment of key academic quality posts and closer central oversight by the College's senior management team, governing body, and the College's awarding partners, ensure that any issues with the delivery of standards are identified and addressed.

1.10 Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that risk in this area 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

1.11 The College delivers its programmes within partnership agreements and defers to the academic regulations of its awarding partners. For the foundation degree provision, MMU retains control of programme design and modification. The College is phasing out its foundation degree programmes and only the programme in Supporting Teaching and Learning will continue in 2015-16. The College's future focus is on BTEC HNC and HND provision. BTEC Pearson programmes are managed in accordance with the awarding organisation's quality assurance handbook.

1.12 The College does not have a definitive quality manual or equivalent but the policies and procedures relating to higher education are collated through the Higher Education Hub, which is accessible to staff and students. These include the College's Higher Education Programme Planning and Validation Procedure and its assessment policy and procedures, which include coursework submission, academic misconduct and assessment malpractice, although these are contained in separate documents rather than under a unified assessment policy.

1.13 The College's quality procedures are reviewed and approved throughout the College's committee structure, culminating in final approval at the governing body. They are maintained and reviewed by the College's Quality and Professional Development Manager. The College provides detailed programme handbooks, which include general College and programme information as well as information on the programme and module structure outcomes, content, resources and assessment. Students are also referred to the awarding bodies' programme specifications. Direct reference to higher education quality frameworks tend to be via the awarding bodies' quality procedures.

1.14 The College holds assessment boards which are chaired by a senior independent member of staff for all Pearson qualifications. The Pearson external verifier is invited and, in some cases, employer partners. MMU provides a link tutor to support the College, and staff attend events and programme committees at the University. Monitoring of programmes is carried out by University staff and covers all foundation degree provision.

1.15 The team found that the regulatory frameworks of the College's awarding bodies and organisation control the award of qualifications and credit for both its foundation degree and BTEC Higher National provision. The College works within these regulatory frameworks and has built them into its own procedures and quality review. The College's processes would enable it to meet the Expectation.

1.16 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the College's processes by considering programme documentation. These included regulatory frameworks, policies and procedures from awarding partners, the College's internal documentation and the institutional Self-Evaluation Documents. In meetings with the review team, senior and academic staff demonstrated a clear understanding of the policies and procedures and their responsibilities.

1.17 The awarding partners have mature and robust procedures in place, providing confidence that standards, the award of qualifications and the determination of credit are protected. These are augmented by the College's own procedures, which indicate proactive engagement. Academic frameworks and regulations are in place and understood. There are effective internal and external monitoring arrangements and a clear reporting process through a committee structure with reporting lines that specifically address the College's higher education provision.

1.18 The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.19 The College's Higher Education Programme Planning and Validation Procedure details the arrangements for developing new programmes. This includes the requirement to develop programme aims and learning outcomes together with the need to construct a programme specification. This process is also applied to any major modifications to programmes.

1.20 Programme specifications for students studying Higher National programmes are made available as part of their Student Handbook. Students studying for foundation degrees are also able to access detailed programme specifications via the awarding body's virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.21 The team found that the documented arrangements for programme development, which explicitly refer to the requirement to construct programme aims, learning outcomes and specifications, together with the comprehensive information made available to students through handbooks and the VLE, would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.22 The team tested this Expectation by considering programme specifications, programme handbooks and the VLE. The team also met staff, students and representatives from the College's awarding partners. In addition, the team reviewed the College's Higher Education Programme Planning and Validation Procedure and staff training materials.

1.23 Students confirmed that they are provided with clear and detailed programme information. The team was able to review programme specifications in student handbooks and on MMU's website. Handbooks contain learning outcomes, modular information, details on assessment, teaching methods and resources.

1.24 Staff are briefed on the development of programme specifications and definitive information as part of their preparation for delivering Higher National provision. Staff also reported that they reflect on the suitability of programme specifications annually to inform dialogue with the awarding partners.

1.25 The team found that the College's clear guidance for constructing programme specifications, high involvement of the awarding partners, training for staff and clear information provided to students mean that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.26 It is the responsibility of MMU to design and approve modules, programmes and qualifications, align the awards to the appropriate FHEQ level and ensure academic standards are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations. Pearson ensure that the appropriate FHEQ level is set and that it meets the UK threshold standards of its higher education qualifications. Both partner agreements confirm the College's institutional-level approval for higher education programme delivery.

1.27 A member of the College senior management team and responsible for the development and quality of higher education provision across the College.

1.28 The College operates an internal process called the Programme Planning and Validation Procedure that provides a framework for the internal approval of new programmes. This process is used in the development of the College Higher National provision to replace most, but not all, of its foundation degree programmes. This directly responds to the aims of the College Strategic Plan and to the HEC partnership's Strategic Plan of which the College is a partner.

1.29 These processes and procedures are suitable to meet the UK threshold standard for the qualifications and are in accordance with the awarding partners' and the College's academic frameworks and regulations.

1.30 The review team discussed with senior staff the progress in the process of replacing programmes, expanding higher education provision and responding to employer and student demand. The team found that senior academic and service area staff are well informed about new programme developments and that the process enables them to apply the academic frameworks and regulations of the awarding partners.

1.31 As a result of scrutinising the College's partnership documents and information gained in meetings with College staff, and those from the awarding partners, the review team conclude that the arrangements for implementing the processes for the approval of taught programmes ensure that the Expectation is met and the level of risk 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

1.32 Through adherence to its Internal Verification and Moderation Policy the College ensures that standards of assessment are consistent and meet national requirements. Formally constituted examination boards are held by MMU and informed by the College's assessment decisions and external examiners' reports. The College policy states that all programmes should document and have in place arrangements, procedures and processes for the internal verification and moderation of student assessment. Assessment plans should be made available by programme leaders and checked for content and relevance by the Internal Verifier.

1.33 The College ensures that the Internal Verifiers are occupationally competent and meet the national standards of the awarding bodies and College Internal Verification and Moderation Guidance. The procedures for managing and applying this process are articulated in the policy and include interacting with the standards verifier and external examiner.

1.34 In parallel with the internal processes and procedures, the Higher National programmes are all subject to Pearson Standards Verification processes that are clearly laid out by the awarding organisation. The external and internal processes together provide an appropriate framework to meet the Expectation's criteria.

1.35 The College Higher National programme teams follow the Pearson Centre Guide to Assessment. This is especially valuable in ensuring compliance with the assessment of the learning outcomes and grade descriptors. The College staff make effective use of this guidance and also use the assessment checking service offered by Pearson.

1.36 The review team checked the authenticity of these processes in meetings with internal verifiers and moderators, and senior and academic staff. The review team was assured that the process is effective and there is sufficient internal and external professional dialogue and cross-checking to confirm that standards are being met. Academic staff confirmed to the review team that the College's internal verification and moderation procedures addresses any inconsistencies.

1.37 The team concludes that there are ample, appropriate and necessary measures in place to confirm that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.38 The College's agreements with both Pearson and MMU are reviewed at set periods. Pearson does not have a formal periodic review process, with the Standards Verifiers confirming the College's quality and maintenance of standards through annual reporting, programme and centre approval.

1.39 The Standards Verifiers for Higher National programmes annually monitor and review the programmes and, working alongside the programme teams, comment on how well the programme is maintaining and achieving UK threshold academic standards. They also consider the internal verification process and the sector-specific experience and knowledge of the internal verifiers.

1.40 The MMU quality assurance processes, Programme Approval, Review and Modification (PARM), includes a periodic review of programmes. The periodic review in 2010 concluded that the College is aligned with the ethos, vision and aims of the University. There is a shared responsibility for annually reviewing programmes between the College and the University. The College's Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document template includes the Quality Code's Expectations. This enables the programme teams to focus on meeting UK threshold standards and degree-awarding body standards.

1.41 The team examined the evidence submitted, including the College's annual review cycle. The review team found that this process is appropriate in providing a formal process to regularly monitor and review higher education programmes. In addition, the College's programme and service support area's annual Self-Evaluation Documents contribute to its College Improvement Plan. The action plan developed from the College's Self-Evaluation Document includes the actions from the MMU Continuous Improvement Plan relevant to programmes at the College.

1.42 The MMU external examiners provide annual reports that inform the monitoring and review of its programmes. Within their remit they confirm that the College meets the UK threshold standards.

1.43 College compliance with UK threshold standards is monitored and reviewed as part of the MMU link tutors' role. They report the outcomes to the Head of the appropriate University Department. The MMU link tutor also normally attends and reports to the University Programme Committee.

1.44 The College's link tutor is expected to be familiar with the MMU requirements in Schedule One of the University Collaborative Agreement and Programme Definitive Document. The link tutor also attends the University faculty meetings to discuss the Continuous Improvement Plan process. The College undertakes programme monitoring and review of its MMU provision. It identify features of good practice and areas for improvement. Consequent recommendations and actions are made within the Programme and Cross College Higher Education Curriculum Self-Evaluation Document and Self-Assessment Documents. These processes would enable appropriate monitoring and review.

1.45 The review team tested the processes by checking programme reviews, self- evaluation documentation and the MMU external examiner reports. The team found that the processes were generally effective. However, in meetings with the College's academic staff and MMU link tutors, the review team found that practice was not consistent in all programme areas. In particular it was noted that there was no College representation by the Aircraft Maintenance programme staff at the University Programme Committee in autumn 2013 to address the monitoring and reviewing concerns arising from the previous academic year's external examiners' report.

1.46 Overall, the College provides sustainable, clearly articulated processes for monitoring and reviewing programmes that address UK threshold academic standards. The College has recently introduced additional measures to check timely receipt of, and response to, external examiner reports.

1.47 The review team is satisfied that measures are in place to ensure that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.48 The inclusion of external expertise in the design, operation and review of programmes is specified in the regulatory frameworks of the College's awarding partners. The College's programme approval procedure specifies that external members (employers, academics and awarding body representatives) are included in its validation panels. External examiners are appointed by the College's awarding body and awarding organisation and visit the College to confirm the process and standard of assessment. BTEC Pearson undertake an annual centre quality review and development visit which results in a summary overview report of all its provision. These approaches would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.49 The College has established a Business Advisory Group with members drawn from employers, service providers and community groups in the region. The College is a member of HEC, a consortium of five colleges offering higher education provision. The purpose of the consortium is to share good practice, provide mutual assistance and engage in collaborative activities.

1.50 The team reviewed course documentation, policies and procedures relating to programme approval and monitoring, reports of programme validation panels, business case proposals, and external examiners' reports, and met staff and link tutors. Additionally, the team met employers involved in supporting work-based learning and advising the College through the Business Advisory Group.

1.51 Externality is inherent in the process of the awarding partners and the College's involvement of local employer networks and the consortium. The formal use of external experts in validation panels is more limited in practice than the policy suggests.

1.52 External examiner reports are timely and detailed and address issues critically and transparently where they arise. Staff demonstrated commitment to, and awareness of, the value that employers and external stakeholders brought to the College's provision, the development of the employability agenda, and the design of programmes to meet regional needs.

1.53 Overall, external and independent expertise is appropriately used. The College meets the requirements of its awarding partners and has initiated effective processes of its own. Comments from external examiners and other external sources are generally responded to appropriately. Therefore, the review team considers the Expectation is met and the 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 awarding organisations: Summary of findings

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

1.55 There are seven Expectations in this area and all are met with a low level of risk.

1.56 The review team found that the College's revised management structure, together with its relationships with its awarding partners, Manchester Metropolitan University and Pearson, ensure that any issues in the maintenance of standards are identified and addressed. The awarding partners have mature and robust procedures in place which provide further confidence that standards are maintained.

1.57 The College provides clear guidance for constructing programme specifications along with a high involvement of the awarding body and organisation. This is augmented by staff training and clear information for students.

1.58 In addition, the College provides sustainable processes for monitoring and reviewing programmes that address UK threshold academic standards and make good and appropriate use of external and independent expertise.

1.59 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards 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 All new programme proposals are presented and agreed through the College Higher Education Planning and Validation Procedure to ensure that programmes are aligned and consistent with the College's Strategic Plan. The Procedure also provides staff with guidance and support in the planning and development of programmes. A proposal is submitted to the Head of Academic and Higher Studies in the first instance to outline the programme to allow viability and resources to be considered. The second stage of the process scrutinises the academic case through a validation panel, and this can result in conditions of approval. It is the responsibility of the panel chair to verify that all conditions have been met before it is sent to the external validating body. Once approved by the validating body, the programme can be added to the College portfolio.

2.2 The College has a formal Business Advisory Group and aims to establish one for each programme to provide external expertise in the development of programmes and assist in ensuring that programmes are effectively aligned to local employment needs.

2.3 As the strategic direction for higher education at the College has shifted from foundation degrees to Higher National awards, a number of programmes have been discontinued. The process for programme closure is also outlined within the Procedure and involves an initial discussion at senior management level, followed by a written submission to a validation panel, which acts with the same rigour as for an initial programme approval. The above approach to programme approval would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.4 The review team examined the Procedure and explored how this was used in practice to consider new and discontinuing programmes. The team met relevant staff and students to discuss their understanding and involvement. The review team also spoke to several employers to ascertain how the programme development process accommodated sector consultation and alignment to local employment needs.

2.5 Membership of the validation panel includes employer representation, a governor and an external College representative. The panel may also involve representation from the awarding organisation and/or student representation. Although students are consulted in the development of programmes, the College recognises that formalising student input on this panel would be beneficial. Evidence from validation panels and discussions with staff demonstrates that the two-stage process is thorough and operates effectively.

2.6 The College consults employers on programme design and development through the Business Advisory Groups that have been established for some programmes. The College aims to have a formal and separate Group for each programme. The employers met by the team confirm that the College is effective in ensuring that programmes are aligned to local employment needs and that their views on changes and additions to the curriculum are taken into account. Furthermore, the employers talked highly of the teaching staff, facilities and the College's approach to ensuring that students received a good deal when studying their respective programmes.

2.7 The College consults students regarding the development and validation of their programmes. Of particular note was consultation with HND Sport students which resulted in units requiring significant capital investment in fitness testing equipment. The unit and required resources were approved and the provision was later praised by the external examiner who judged the facilities to be excellent. Staff and students met by the team cited further examples across a number of programmes where the College actively sought student and employer feedback to determine what would be most beneficial to the needs of the student cohort. The approach to engaging students and employers in the programme design, development and approval process is effective in aligning provision to local employment needs and is **good practice**.

2.8 The College follows appropriate procedures for the discontinuation of programmes. The process ensures that due consideration is given to the reasons for closure, how students have been informed, what resources are needed to support the students in transition and what impact closure has within the wider context. The team found this process to be robust in dealing with potential complications and students met by the team were not aware of any issues arising from the discontinuing provision.

2.9 The review team considers that the College has appropriate and effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes that apply to both new and discontinuing provision. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.10 The College operates an Admissions Policy which outlines the processes that applicants can use to apply for higher education programmes. The policy was most recently updated in 2014 to reflect the College's decision to only accept direct applicants and move away from the UCAS application process. Applicants are invited to attend an interview undertaken by trained staff to determine suitability prior to being accepted. The College offers taster sessions by arrangement, in which an applicant can drop into classes currently being taught to inform their application decision.

2.11 The College's data protection nominee ensures that the process is compliant with legislation and that confidentiality for applicants is maintained throughout the application process. Appeals against admissions decisions can be raised through the College's Complaints Policy. The admissions policy framework in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.12 The review team examined all relevant evidence, including application packs, staff training materials for conducting interviews, the College's Complaints Policy and College oversight of the admissions process. The team also discussed the approach to admissions with staff and with current students to ascertain their experience.

2.13 The College has moved away from the UCAS process in light of data indicating that this was not best serving student or College needs. However, it retains its membership of the UCAS group and can take advantage of the benefits that this group offers. The team found that the College's decision to change its admission approach was taken with appropriate consideration and assists the College's aim to align provision with local employer needs. It also reduces costs for employers sponsoring their employees on higher education qualifications.

2.14 Staff involved in the recruitment process are provided with guidance and are formally trained by the Head of Student Services and the Head of Learner Experience who also undertake observations during interviews to ensure that there is appropriate support for staff. The College Senior Management Team has responsibility for the admission process with monthly reports submitted to this group for consideration.

2.15 Applicants are issued with an information pack with specific higher education information and the team determined that the advice and guidance included was sufficient as a basis for decision-making. The College provides course information sheets to give a detailed picture of each programme. These include the entry requirements, course content, progression and assessment information.

2.16 The majority of the students met by the review team had a pre-existing relationship with the College through previous study and confirmed that the experience of applying for higher education programmes had been positive. Although the College offers taster sessions to potential students, the uptake for this is low. All students met by the team considered that an appropriate level of advice and guidance was provided before beginning their

programme, although the thoroughness of the induction process was inconsistent between programmes. Some students met by the team did not consider themselves fully inducted and had to seek clarification about College policies and processes after the induction period. Other students commented favourably on the study skills booklet provided prior to enrolment which was considered helpful in understanding the higher education context.

2.17 The College has received one formal appeal against the recruitment processes. It was responded to effectively and appropriate further advice was given, including the option of referral to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.18 The review team considers that the College has appropriate processes and policies in place to allow for admissions decisions that are fair, transparent and reliable. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.19 The College has a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy which covers all further and higher education provision. A draft Teaching and Learning Strategy is also in preparation arising from the Association of Colleges (AoC) Scholarly Activity research project, of which the College is a lead partner. The Scholarship Development Manager for the AoC project is based at the College and has produced a draft Teaching and Learning Strategy to be considered alongside other college submissions to produce a common HEC consortium strategy.

2.20 An Observation of Teaching and Learning Policy governs the approach to monitoring and all teaching staff undergo unannounced graded teaching observations based on Ofsted criteria and learning walks which are carried out by staff trained in observations. Those teaching on higher education programmes also engage in peer observations. Reports of teaching observations are included in Curriculum Area Reviews, which cover all levels of provision. A report on Higher Education Peer Review outcomes is also produced to inform staff development. Student feedback on teaching is gathered informally at course meetings and formally in module feedback and internal surveys, which feed into the annual monitoring process.

2.21 The College provides staff development opportunities and staff can also access support from the degree-awarding partners. Development opportunities and sharing of good practice are facilitated through the HEC consortium. The processes in place for supporting and monitoring teaching and learning would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.22 The team examined the College strategies and policies, reports of teaching and peer observations, external examiner reports and results of student feedback. In addition, the team met senior, academic and support staff and students to clarify and confirm the approach to learning opportunities and teaching practices.

2.23 The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy includes reference to higher education, although it does not draw on higher education frames of reference. The College's involvement with the AoC Scholarly Activity research project has prompted development of a draft Teaching and Learning Strategy which is more detailed but also provides limited guidance for higher education delivery. Teaching and learning tasks are designed by programme teams to meet the characteristics and needs of their students, and staff are supported internally and externally.

2.24 Observations of higher education teaching are carried out by staff with experience of delivering at this level. The latest Peer Review report indicates that 63 per cent of staff delivering higher education also underwent peer observations. Staff also deliver on further education programmes and will be observed in teaching either higher or further education sessions. Reports of teaching observations are included in Curriculum Area Reviews which cover all levels of provision and there are processes in place to address poor performance in observed teaching, including additional staff development.

2.25 The College is involved in the HEC consortium annual conference where good practice in teaching and learning can be shared. Good practice in pedagogy from other institutions was shared at the 2015 HEC Annual Conference and staff indicated that they received guidance and internal staff development from experienced staff, university Link Tutors and external verifiers. A new university partner relationship planned for 2016-17 includes elements of joint delivery between College and university staff to support delivery and ensure teaching is appropriate.

2.26 Staff delivering higher education are supported in engaging in research and scholarly activity, including through the AoC Scholarship project Enhancing Scholarship in College Higher Education to Enrich Student Learning, HEC consortium events, staff conferences and development days. A number of staff have achieved Higher Education Academy recognition with support from the College and university partners.

2.27 Student feedback on teaching is gathered informally at course meetings and formally in module feedback and internal surveys which are used to inform the College Self-Evaluation Document. Examples reviewed by the team are generally very positive. Students met by the team reported positively on the teaching and learning they receive and compared it favourably with that offered at other higher education institutions with which they had experience.

2.28 The processes for observations and staff development work are sufficient to ensure that learning and teaching takes place at the appropriate academic level and in ways that are appropriate to students. Small class sizes and good communication between teaching staff and students help to ensure that the process works in practice.

2.29 The review team considers that the College has appropriate mechanisms for articulating and reviewing learning opportunities and teaching practices and therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.30 The College has an Equality and Diversity policy which supports the College mission 'to empower through learning'. The annual College Self-Evaluation Document reports on the student profile by age, gender, disability, background and location. Students have access to the College's support systems through the online Higher Education Hub, the virtual learning environment (VLE), the College's website and an open access student support centre that provides a range of study skills sessions. In addition, students have access to a dedicated HE Study Centre within the Learning Resource Centre (LRC). These facilities provide guidance and support on academic, pastoral and financial matters and careers guidance.

2.31 The College has appointed a Student Liaison Officer who meets groups of students throughout the year. In addition, all students are allocated a personal tutor from within the programme team. Arrangements and resources available to students are outlined in an induction and through course handbooks.

2.32 Learning resource requirements are examined as part of the programme validation process, including consultation with employers, and are monitored through student feedback, including programme team meetings, HE Teaching Team meetings, student surveys and programme Self-Evaluation Documents. The approach to the provision of resources at the College would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.33 The team examined evidence of student support processes and the ways in which these can be accessed, including the processes for ensuring adequate learning resources and progression routes to Level 6 study. In addition, the review team met staff and students to discuss the approach.

2.34 Students met by the team confirmed that the dedicated HE Study Centre within the LRC was valuable and had been further developed in response to student feedback, such as providing facilities for students to use their own electronic devices. A programme of academic support is offered at the LRC, including refresher sessions to coincide with assessment periods and lunch time drop-in sessions. LRC staff work with programme teams to ensure appropriate learning resources are available, to trial new resources and attend HE Teaching Team meetings. The LRC staff produce a study skills leaflet which is available on the VLE. The College plans to introduce a programme of student internships in the LRC by which students can assist their peers in developing academic skills.

2.35 Students met by the team were generally satisfied by the resource provision although expressed some difficulties in using the internet to research information deemed unsuitable for younger students. Staff explained that some sites were blocked by the central IT service although students could apply for access which would be provided if appropriate.

2.36 The College has received favourable comments from external examiners on its physical resources, particularly the Sports Science Lab established as a direct result of resource requirements indicated at validation. The processes for ensuring adequate and appropriate learning resources are based on examination at validation and good communication between programme teams and professional staff and operate effectively.

2.37 Students are allocated personal tutors from the programme team. Tutorials mainly focus on academic matters but also cover pastoral matters and tutors can refer students to specialist support. There is support for students with individual learning needs, including dyslexia and dyspraxia, and with disabilities. Students met by the team expressed satisfaction with the comprehensive support offered by the College. The ongoing process of providing support for study skills at strategic points in the programmes, and on demand, is effective and is commented on favourably by external examiners.

2.38 Following student feedback, the College discontinued the formal induction period and replaced it with programme-level inductions and a dedicated online higher education student Hub page providing necessary information. The role of the Student Liaison Officer includes meetings with each group of students during the induction process to introduce services available. LRC staff provide study skills programmes which are available online throughout the year with additional one-to-one and refresher sessions available on demand. Information is provided in programme handbooks, which are produced to a standard checklist. The processes work effectively in practice and all information is accessible through the VLE, student Higher Education Hub and in handbooks. Some students met by the team stated that they had not been met by the Student Liaison Officer and had a limited induction due to being familiar with the College from previous studies.

2.39 The College has a positive working relationship with Staffordshire University, which previously provided an articulated progression route from the Foundation Degree in Engineering and is now considering progression to Level 6 for the HND Engineering with Aerospace programme. Negotiations are ongoing with other degree awarding bodies to facilitate progression to Level 6 programmes and for further validation arrangements to broaden student opportunities.

2.40 The arrangements for providing and monitoring learning resources are appropriate and the review team considers that there is adequate provision to support student development. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.41 The College operates a formal student representation system, whereby students are elected by their peers to engage in quality assurance processes. A Student Council meets twice a term which allows for student representation of further and higher education students. Two Student Governors are appointed by the Student Council to attend Senior Management meetings, which can be from either the College's higher or further education provision. For 2015-16, the College are piloting a scheme whereby a dedicated Higher Education Student Ambassador is appointed to assist in encouraging student engagement on a more flexible basis. This role is held by a pre-elected student representative who attends College meetings to promote the student voice.

2.42 Student representatives are provided with a Higher Education Course Representatives Handbook and the Student Liaison Officer meets student representatives to explain the role and provide support. The Student Liaison Officer also holds mid-year focus meetings with students, with additional views gathered electronically.

2.43 The College gathers feedback informally and through formal mechanisms, including online surveys, questionnaires and module evaluations. The College receives National Student Survey data as part of the local college consortium, although this arrangement is changing to allow for disaggregated data for the College. The structure for student representation and range of formal and informal feedback mechanisms would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.44 The review team examined relevant evidence, including the Student Submission, Course Representatives Handbook, focus groups and survey data. The team met students and staff during the review, including the Student Liaison Officer and Student Ambassador, to explore the effectiveness of the approach.

2.45 Students have opportunities to provide module feedback and the formal module evaluation form includes sufficient scope for comment on module effectiveness. As module evaluations are not compulsory, completion rates vary and students note that there is ample opportunity to provide feedback in a wider context.

2.46 The Student Council provides a forum to allow student feedback from a cross-College perspective, although student representatives from higher education programmes do not currently attend this group. Furthermore, although provision is in place for a Student Governor to be a higher education student, to date the incumbents have been further education students. The College has recognised this as a weakness and changed the constitution to ensure that the role of Higher Education Student Governor can be held by any higher education student and not just a student representative or the Higher Education Student Ambassador.

2.47 The new role of Higher Education Student Ambassador has not been as effective as intended and although the student in this position received initial training, there is a perceived lack of clarity about the role, the interface with the wider student representation structure and how communication between the College, Student Ambassador and study body is organised. Despite the structures in place, there is a lack of engagement of higher education students in the deliberative structures of the College.

2.48 The student representatives met by the review team had mixed experiences of training, support and meeting attendance. Despite briefing sessions being offered, some student representatives had not received training or the Handbook and there was a mixed understanding of how the role of Student Liaison Officer fitted into the student representation system. The College acknowledged that the process was not operating effectively, partly due to a lack of interest from students in undertaking commitments beyond their studies and partly as the informal mechanisms for exchanging information with staff generally met student needs. The College recognised that more work was required to improve the student representative structure by developing the Student Ambassador role and appointing a Higher Education Student Governor. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College further develops the formal student representation system and training mechanisms to allow for the full and effective engagement of students in quality assurance processes.

2.49 Although the College does not have a sufficiently developed student representative system, the review team noted numerous examples of the College actively listening, responding to and making use of student feedback. Examples include the purchasing of new laptops and software for students studying HND Engineering to enable industry-standard functionality, purchasing of specific equipment for HND Sport students in light of student consultations, and making changes to the dedicated Higher Education Study Centre facility. The College informs students on actions taken to improve the student experience through informal mechanisms and through 'you said, we did' communications. All students met by the review team were of the opinion that programme teams actively sought and acted on their views and they could cite examples of changes undertaken within the academic year and changes resulting from the feedback of previous cohorts of students. The proactive and responsive approach taken by the College in seeking and responding to student feedback enhances the quality of student learning opportunities and is **good practice**.

2.50 Although the formal student representation structure as designed needs further development to be fully effective, the College actively listens, responds to and makes use of student feedback at various levels. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.51 Assessment on all programmes is bound by the awarding partners' regulations, which are available through the Higher Education Hub and included in programme specifications. The College has developed its own assessment policies where required, including an Internal Verification and Moderation Policy, Coursework Submission Policy, Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure, Assessment Malpractice Policy and Exceptional Factors (HE) Policy that supports the fair assessment of students across all programmes.

2.52 Programme staff have a degree of responsibility for the design of assessment on Higher National programmes which is intended to increase as the College becomes more experienced in the delivery of these programmes. Assessment tasks written by staff are subject to the Internal Verification and Moderation Policy before being included in the programme Internal Verification Plan and submitted to the awarding body and organisation for approval. Assignments for foundation degree programmes are submitted to the University Link Tutor and thence to the external examiner. For Higher National programmes they are submitted directly to the Lead Verifier. Assessment boards are held for all programmes and reported in line with awarding partner requirements. There is a policy for recognition of prior learning although applications are uncommon. The assessment framework in place at the College would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.53 The review team examined evidence including College policies, programme specifications and handbooks, assessment briefs, the internal verification and moderation processes, external examiner reports and assessment board procedures. In addition, the team met senior, academic and support staff and students for clarification and confirmation on the processes in place.

2.54 Under the Coursework Submission Policy, most work is submitted electronically and through plagiarism-detection software, although the specifics of this process varies between programmes. Some work is submitted in hard copy with a declaration of authenticity through an HE Assessment Submission Form and Receipt. Students on some programmes are able to submit work electronically for formative feedback. The Exceptional Factors (HE) Policy identifies potential mitigating circumstances in assessment performance, is based on awarding body guidelines and is signposted in Programme Handbooks. Students met by the team confirmed awareness and stated that they had not had reason to use the process. Examples of previous cases provided to the team confirmed that the process operates as outlined.

2.55 Feedback on assessed work is normally given with two weeks. There is some shared moderation of assessment by partners of the HEC consortium. Assessed work is subject to the College internal verification process, which is robust and commented on favourably in external examiner reports. Assessment boards for Pearson programmes are held at the College to an agreed procedure and at the University for foundation degree programmes. External examiner reports consistently confirm the appropriateness of assessment and achievement of learning outcomes.

2.56 The review team noted some inconsistency in the presentation of assessment information between programmes. The programme specifications for Higher National programmes fulfil most of the requirements of the awarding organisation, but only the handbook for HND Engineering includes assessment criteria for completion of learning outcomes which are taken directly from Pearson Unit descriptors. For other programmes, this information is only made available through assignment briefs rather than in handbooks. However, students met by the team considered that the assessment process and marking criteria were clear. Feedback was considered timely and useful by students with opportunities to discuss assessment.

2.57 Performance of assessment is considered at programme and curriculum level at Assessment Boards and is included in programme Self-Evaluation Documents. Programme retention and success rates are included in the Higher Education report to Corporation for consideration at the Teaching and Learning Standards Committee. A summary is also included in the College Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document. Assessment monitoring is undertaken by programme teams and considered at termly Programme team meetings thereby enabling oversight of assessment at all levels.

2.58 The review team considers that the College has effective processes for assessment which are conducted in line with the requirements of the awarding partners. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.59 External examiners and external verifiers are appointed by the awarding partners in accordance with their regulations. Samples of work for foundation degrees are sent to the University Link Tutor following internal verification and included with samples of work from other HEC consortium partners for review by the external examiner. For Higher National awards, programme teams liaise directly with the Pearson external verifier to provide samples of work following internal verification. The external verifier visits the College to examine work and speak to staff and students.

2.60 External examiner reports are sent to the College by the University and inform the programme Continual Improvement Plan (CIP) required by the University and the College Programme Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) that forms part of the College annual quality process. Reports from the external verifier are downloaded by the College from an online site and passed to the programme teams for consideration with responses, actions or recommendations included in the annual programme Self-Evaluation Document (SED) and accompanying QIP. All reports are shared online with staff and made available to students on the Higher Education Hub. The College Higher Education SED identifies common themes and actions, good practice and areas for development. The framework for engaging and acting on external reports would therefore enable the Expectation to be met.

2.61 The review team examined evidence including relevant procedures, external examiner and verifier reports and documentation on actions and responses. The team also met senior and academic staff and students during the review to discuss the approach.

2.62 External examiner and verifier reports are generally very positive with several areas of good practice noted. Where recommendations had been made in the reports, appropriate action had been taken to address the issues raised. Details of consideration and responses to reports by programme teams and Senior Management Team are included in programme SEDs and QIPs and the Higher Education report to Corporation and to the Teaching and Learning Standards Committee.

2.63 The College follows the regulations of awarding bodies for external examining, including meeting internal verification, sampling requirements and responding to reports. Programme teams have ownership of these processes, which are monitored by senior management. Students have access to reports, although awareness among the student body of the location and content of reports is low.

2.64 The College follows the awarding body regulations for external examining and has effective processes for the consideration and response to reports. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.65 The College Quality Improvement Policy outlines the process for the continuous monitoring of programmes. The College's annual quality cycle feeds into the annual College Improvement Plan (CIP), which is a live document that the College uses to develop and enhance provision. At the end of each academic year, programme leaders produce a programme Self-Evaluation Document (SED), which draws upon a range of data and identifies actions that need to be completed for the coming year. Programme SEDs are presented by the programme leader to a Validation Panel comprising senior managers. The Panel determines the overall effectiveness of the programme and agrees a set of actions, culminating in a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

2.66 The College Higher Education SED draws on each programme SED with an overall emphasis on identifying common issues and ensuring that there is a shared strategic objective for improvement. This document is agreed by the Governors and Senior Management Team, with oversight provided by the Head of Academic and Higher Studies.

2.67 The College provision is periodically reviewed by the awarding body to an agreed timescale, usually every five years. In addition, the College operates its own sector reviews every three years, which consider each curriculum area against the College's strategic objectives and analyses departmental statistical data. This information is fed back to the Senior Management Team with any actions being carried forward into the CIP. Within this cyclical review process, the College does not distinguish between further education and higher education provision, although statistical data is separated.

2.68 The College has in place annual review and periodic review processes, the design of which would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.69 The review team examined documentation pertaining to the annual review and sector review processes, including a variety of SEDs, QIPs and minutes of meetings. The team met staff to discuss how the annual monitoring processes works in practice.

2.70 Staff responsible for enacting the annual monitoring process have a clear understanding of the approach and recognise how discussions at programme level and performance monitoring meetings inform programme and College SEDs. All SEDs are presented to a Validation Panel comprising senior managers and the College is working to widen representation to students and external stakeholders. The live rolling action plans are overseen and checked by all Curriculum Managers during regular performance monitoring meetings. These meetings address key issues, such as reviewing the QIP, SED and key performance indicators. Furthermore, they explicitly address student feedback and any relevant surveys that have been completed. Features of good practice from each programme SED are extracted and are used to inform staff development in other programmes.

2.71 Student feedback is incorporated into the annual monitoring process through programme team meetings, which student representatives can attend, and through informal discussions and survey data. The Higher Education SED is discussed at Senior Management Team before being discussed at the Higher Education Teaching Staff meeting.

The Higher Education Student Ambassador has been a member of this committee to allow student feedback and engagement in discussion of the actions arising from the monitoring process. The Teaching and Learning Standards Committee maintains oversight and functions effectively with evidence of key discussions pertaining to higher education and the annual monitoring of higher education.

2.72 Programme SEDs are thorough and include a number of different metrics to outline the overall quality of the programme, including external examiners' reports, performance actions from the previous year and statistical data on success and achievement rates. QIPs reviewed by the team are effective in clearly identifying issues against key headlines and ensuring transparency in the delivery and development of each action. The reports make consistent reference to actions, desired outcomes, target dates, milestones, responsibilities and comments on progress and impact.

2.73 The review team determined that the College's approach to annual monitoring encapsulates a broad range of College activity. The team considered several cases where emerging issues were placed onto a rolling action plan at programme or College level and monitored appropriately. Staff and students met by the team cited numerous examples of where the College implemented a change, based on student feedback, which was then monitored over a number of months. Furthermore, there is a fixed agenda item for higher education on the Senior Management Team meetings to ensure that current and relevant issues that may be arising or developing are discussed at the highest level. Based on the evidence available, the monitoring process in place is effective and robust and includes a range of stakeholders, including employers and students. The programme SEDs make reference to how employers are involved and the extent of involvement of the Business Advisory Group, where these exist. Where a programme is validated by the University, each Self-Evaluation Document also includes actions from University CIP relevant to delivery of that programme. The comprehensive and integrated monitoring process effectively captures and responds to emerging issues and is **good practice**.

2.74 The College have in place a structure that allows for continuous monitoring and review of programmes through the annual monitoring and periodic review process. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.75 The College operates a general Complaints Policy and a separate procedure for dealing with complaints in relation to higher education provision. These formal procedures outline clear timescales for an investigation and a full response. An annual report of all complaints is presented to the Corporation to ensure that procedures are followed fairly and effectively.

2.76 The College Academic Appeals Procedure is available for students who wish to appeal against academic assessment issues. The procedure details each stage of the process and is available to students on the College's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Students are able to access their awarding bodies' appeal procedures if they are unsatisfied with the outcome of the decision within the College. The College is a member of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator to which students have independent recourse at the end of the process. The College has appropriate policies and procedures in place that would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.77 The review team examined documentation including the Complaints Policy and Academic Appeals procedure and evidence of these in operation. The team also met staff and students to confirm their understanding of the procedures and access to appropriate information.

2.78 The College attempts to resolve any complaints and academic appeals informally before these are brought into the formal procedures. No academic appeals have been submitted by students in recent years. The College received a formal complaint in relation to an admission decision that was disputed and the review team confirmed that the College followed the procedure appropriately. The College produces an annual Customer Complaints and Compliments Report which is discussed within the Corporation meetings. This report breaks down all complaints into subsections and charts out where the most complaints arise. Additional reference is made to the level at which complaints arise and whether it is a higher education matter. Within each complaint it indicates how many were received and how this was resolved.

2.79 Students whom the review team met indicated that they had no cause for complaint or appeal and as a result did not demonstrate a full understanding of the processes in place. However, students felt comfortable in approaching their tutor or course representative for an initial informal discussion if needed and were confident that they could obtain information on formal procedures if required. The review team confirmed that the procedures are clearly outlined within the relevant documentation that is available for students to view on the College's VLE. It is a requirement for the inclusion of information relating to academic appeals and complaints within course handbooks, although not all handbooks include this information.

2.80 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.81 All programmes contain an element of work experience either through formal placements or managed projects which may be voluntary or mandatory. Only foundation degrees and the HND Sport Coaching and Sport Development programme have mandatory, assessed work placements that contribute to the achievement of learning outcomes and these require a degree of involvement from employers or voluntary organisations in work-based learning and feedback.

2.82 All assessment is undertaken by College staff although workplace mentor handbooks are provided to support placement providers in understanding their responsibilities for support and feedback. Students usually secure their own placements with support and monitoring by staff. Processes are in place to address unsatisfactory placements and negative feedback from students or providers.

2.83 The College has recently centralised all monitoring of work placements across its provision, including oversight of compliance with health and safety requirements and feedback on placements through completion of standardised forms. Appropriate procedures are therefore in place which would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.84 The review team examined the policies and processes for managing placements and work-based learning, including health and safety monitoring and feedback mechanisms. The team also met academic staff and students and spoke to placement providers.

2.85 While most programmes contain elements of mandatory or voluntary work-related activity to enhance the learning experience, only two programmes currently rely on third parties for the delivery of learning opportunities required to complete assessments. The HND Sport has extensive involvement with commercial and voluntary organisations for work placements. The Foundation Degree Supporting Teaching and Learning includes placements undertaken in the students' current workplace. The employers met by the team spoke positively about the value of the placement and the good contact with the College in understanding their responsibilities and tracking student progress.

2.86 Students met by the team reported positive learning experiences on placements and were satisfied with the preparation and support provided by the College. Where the College has moved from foundation degrees to Higher National programmes, the practice of including placements or work-related learning has continued but information on this is not consistently presented to students in programme documentation. However, the centralisation of documents and monitoring of placements ensure consistency and oversight of this activity.

2.87 The team considers that the College has appropriate and relevant processes for managing learning opportunities provided by others and therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.88 The College does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.89 In reaching its judgements about the quality of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Of the 10 applicable Expectations in this area, all are met and considered to be low risk.

2.90 The review team considers that appropriate procedures are in place to enable the College to monitor and develop the quality of learning opportunities for students on higher education programmes and that, in general, these procedures operate effectively.

2.91 The team identifies three features of good practice in the College's approach to learning opportunities. The College's higher education provision is closely tailored to local needs and the approach to engaging students and employers in consultation as part of the programme design, development and approval processes is effective in allowing provision to meet the needs of stakeholders. The review team also considers that the encouragement for, and engagement with, feedback from students was a strength, creating an environment whereby issues and suggestions can be raised both formally and informally, and addressed promptly to improve the student experience. The monitoring and review process is also considered good practice for the comprehensive and integrated approach that ensures emerging issues are identified from a range of sources and routinely addressed.

2.92 Despite the strength in eliciting and responding to student issues noted above, the review team notes that the formal student representation system, although sound in design, is not fully effective in implementation and recommends that further development of the system and the training mechanisms be undertaken to allow for full and effective engagement of students in formal quality assurance processes.

2.93 Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The College's mission and vision are clearly accessible on its website along with a wider range of relevant information. A section of the College website is dedicated to higher education and houses information relating to fees and finance, entry requirements and individual programmes. Higher education policies and procedures are also available to students and staff via the Higher Education Hub, as are external examiner reports, and students are provided with a link to MMU's website for additional information. A review took place in 2014-15 of the College website to make it more responsive to a range of electronic devices.

3.2 Programme handbooks are available to students through the College's VLE. Individual programme handbooks vary in design but are subject to a Programme Handbook Checklist. Compliance in this area is subject to an annual audit by the Customer Services Team. Academic teams also produce course information sheets, again using a template, and this provides students, especially prospective students, with key information about their potential programme of study.

3.3 Staff are able to access all the guidance and documentation that they need in relation to quality assurance processes and procedures for the management of higher education programmes via the Quality Hub area of the staff intranet.

3.4 The team found that the dedicated higher education section of the website, supplementary course information sheets and taster days for prospective students, coupled with the well-resourced Higher Education and Quality hubs, along with the College's well-understood division of responsibilities for the management of information, are would allow this Expectation to be met.

3.5 The team tested this Expectation by viewing programme handbooks, programme specifications, the VLE and the Higher Education Hub. The team also examined the College website, programme handbook checklist and course information sheets. In addition, the team met students, staff and employers.

3.6 The College's Registrar has a central role in the oversight and management of information produced by the College. Curriculum leaders are responsible for ensuring that academic content generated for the website, course information sheets and handbooks is accurate. This information is sent to the Senior Customer Service Assistant who ensures that central College information is embedded where appropriate. The team found these systems were working effectively to ensure the accuracy of information.

3.7 The team heard that a website review is being brought forward from May 2015 to take account of a change in staffing. This review will have a wider focus than a previous one which focused on improved functionality of the website. The College is also intending to develop their alumni presence by increasing use of the website. The College intends to construct a dedicated section of the site which will enable alumni to log in, network, discuss their professional development and bolster the links between the College's Business

Development Team and their graduates. Information provided by this platform will also be used to enhance information for applicants and prospective students. These plans are currently in an early stage of development.

3.8 The majority of students were positive about the extent to which the information available to them is fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible. Students confirmed that programme information helps them to understand what they need to do to succeed, that learning materials are available, and that they know where to access external examiner reports.

3.9 Students informed the team that the development of an Higher Education Hub, discrete from further education provision, has proven to be a useful repository for key information. They also confirmed that the VLE is easily accessible from the Higher Education Hub and itself contains detailed programme information, including student handbooks and course materials.

3.10 The College has clear processes for developing and approving information and staff understand the role of the awarding partners in the approval process. The team concludes that this Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.12 The Expectation is met with a low risk and there are no applicable recommendations, affirmations or features of good practice. The College's mission and vision are accessible on its website with a range of relevant information. The website was reviewed in 2014-15 to make it more responsive to a range of electronic devices. In addition there is an annual audit by the Customer Services Team.

3.13 Programme handbooks are available to students through the VLE and the majority of students were positive about the information and that it is fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible. They also confirmed the usefulness of the Higher Education Hub and that the VLE is well structured with information that helps them to make informed decisions about the higher education provision.

3.14 Staff are able to access guidance and documents in relation to quality assurance processes and procedures for the management of higher education programmes via the Quality Hub area of the staff intranet. The College has clear processes for developing and approving information and staff understand the role of the awarding partners in the approval process.

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

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College has a commitment to continual improvement at all levels from programme teams to senior management to inform the College Improvement Plan. It states that it has a rigorous performance monitoring and reporting cycle in place to promote the enhancement of learning opportunities and the student experience.

4.2 The College's structures for meetings and management promote the dissemination of higher education issues and management between staff teams and actions approved by senior managers. Staff are responsive to requests for improvement from students. For example, student feedback to tutors resulted in the provision of a quiet higher education study area within the LRC. Further enhancement developments include the alumni portal, the higher education online student hub, and the establishment of the College Higher Education Assessment Board.

4.3 The review team considered the processes contributing to enhancement. These included Senior Management Team minutes, the College structure and membership of meetings, sector reviews, the College Strategic Plan, the Teaching and Learning Standards' Committee minutes, and the strategic priorities of the HEC. The review team also discussed enhancement in meetings with staff and students.

4.4 The team considered the College's partnership with, and commitment to, the HEC and associated initiatives which support the enhancement of student learning opportunities. These include the teaching and learning initiatives, Information Learning Technology (ILT) and learning resources, joint scholarly activity and continuing professional development (CPD).

4.5 In meetings with the review team, staff spoke very positively about the benefits of engagement in sharing of good practice and access to resources. It is the intention of the HEC to also promote opportunities for knowledge transfer and for staff to achieve the Higher Education Academy professional standards.

4.6 The Teaching and Learning Standards Committee minutes record that the addition of Higher National programmes provides a curriculum with flexible delivery and assessment procedures that enable qualifications to be tailored to students' and employers' needs. The review team discussed this in meetings with senior staff and concluded that these are deliberate decisions intended to enhance the College's higher education provision. These developments are coordinated centrally to facilitate efficient dissemination of higher education issues and actions approved by senior management.

4.7 Contributing to the College's enhancement activities are the good links between academic programmes and employment. A Business Advisory Group has been established to enhance employer links with the College's higher education programmes. Several references were made to this in meetings the review team held with staff and employers that demonstrated a wish to further develop this initiative.

4.8 The review team notes in particular the College's link with Barclays that annually provides over 10 apprenticeships to study on the Foundation Degree in Business. Students confirmed the value of the workplace experiences and the positive impact on

employment and career expectations. In addition, students on the Foundation Degree Sports work with local schools and voluntary groups, and major hotel chains support the Foundation Degree Events Management programme.

4.9 The review team rigorously explored the College's approach to improvement and found that it has a strong culture of enhancement. It deliberately takes steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The review team concludes that enhancement activities are planned and that therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.11 The Expectation is met with a low risk and there are no applicable recommendations, affirmations or features of good practice.

4.12 The College's senior management is committed to continual improvement and the College Improvement Plan.

4.13 Examples of improvements in the quality of students' learning opportunities include the provision of a quiet higher education study area in the LRC, the higher education online student Hub and the alumni portal. Also contributing to enhancement are the links between the College's academic programmes and employment.

4.14 Processes enabling and contributing to enhancement are the College's Strategic Plan, the Curriculum and Quality Group, sector reviews and the Teaching and Learning Standards Committee.

4.15 The College's partnership and commitment to the HEC support enhancement through activities and initiatives in teaching and learning, ILT and learning resources, joint scholarly activity and CPD.

4.16 The review team found the College has a strong culture of enhancement and concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The College's Mission, Strategic Plan and its Teaching and Learning Strategy explicitly address regional vocational education needs and the employability of its students. The College has a strong regional presence and close links with regional and local stakeholders, including businesses, service providers and community groups which are most evident through its Business Advisory Group. It is using these links to inform its provision and to provide learning opportunities for its students, particularly in the form of placements, work experience and work-based assignments. In some cases, local employers provide sponsorships to their employees to enrol on the College's programmes and the team heard of cases where this had led to better employment and promotion opportunities. The College aims to provide a work experience opportunity for all of its higher education students.

5.2 The College employs tutors who have relevant industry experience, the benefits of which, in terms of real-world understanding and employability, were commented upon favourably by students in meetings with the review team. The importance of such experience and expertise is also demonstrated in the decisions by the College to close provision when appropriate specialist experience is no longer available.

5.3 All of the College's higher education programmes are vocational, some of which are prerequisites for particular forms of employment. The strategic decision to move away from foundation degrees and to increase the range of Pearson HNCs and HNDs is a response to regional demand, the preferences of students and the needs of regional stakeholders. This reflects the College's desire to provide meaningful work experience and placements in each programme. However, in addition to its Pearson provision, the College provides extracurricular courses to enable and develop cognitive, personal and transferable skills that enhance academic success and the ability to be effective in employment.

5.4 For those students who have the ability and desire, the College has established transition points into bachelor's programmes at Level 6 offered by universities in the region.

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 29 to 32 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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