Higher Education Review of Mid-Cheshire College

February 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Mid-Cheshire College. The review took place from 22 to 25 February 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Glenn Barr
- Ms Joanne Caulfield (student reviewer)
- Mrs Lorraine Copley.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Mid-Cheshire 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 Mid-Cheshire College the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

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

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Mid-Cheshire College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Mid-Cheshire College.

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Mid-Cheshire College.

- The interview observations process conducted by specially qualified staff which secures a consistent and high quality student admissions experience (Expectation B2).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Mid-Cheshire College.

By June 2016:

- make all external examiner reports consistently available to students (Expectation B7)
- formalise the relationship between the key deliberative committees to secure effective review and enhancement of the provision (Expectation B8).

By August 2016:

- strengthen the framework for the management of learning opportunities delivered with employers to ensure systematic oversight (Expectation B10).

By November 2016:

- engage students as partners in the structures and processes of quality assurance at all levels (Expectation B5)
- strengthen the process of training student representatives to equip them fully in their roles (Expectation B5).

By December 2016:

- consolidate improvement activities to provide a more planned, systematic and explicit approach to enhancing student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action that the Mid-Cheshire College is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The introduction of the new quality process to ensure effective institutional oversight of higher education (Expectations B8, Enhancement).

Theme: Digital Literacy

The College has a bespoke facility on its Hartford campus that is used for the development of digital literacy skills for both staff and students. To facilitate e-learning and demonstrate new technologies, the College has appointed an E-Learning Development Officer and E-Learning Coaches. The facility is equipped with up-to-date technologies and staff are required to attend several sessions a year at the facility.

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

About Mid-Cheshire College

Mid-Cheshire College (the College) is a medium-sized general further education college with a total of 207 higher education students. The higher education provision is delivered at two sites in Hartford and Winsford. The College currently delivers a number of foundation degree and Higher National programmes on behalf of the University of Chester, Manchester Metropolitan University and Pearson. The College is part of the Cheshire and Warrington Higher Education Consortium, which includes Macclesfield College, South Cheshire College and Warrington Collegiate.

The College's mission statement is Mid-Cheshire College - where learning comes first. Its vision is to be Cheshire's leading provider of outstanding vocational education and training by 2017. The College aims to do this with its higher education provision through its key strategic aims in the Higher Education Strategy 2014-2017.

Key challenges the College faces include a reduction in funding, a decline in the Year 11 cohort until 2018 and localised decisions on funding for capital and skills. The College's Higher Education Strategy aims to address these challenges with deliberate steps and a strategic aim to secure long-term financial sustainability.

There have been significant changes to the College's higher education provision since the last QAA review in 2011. Due to a strategic decision on its foundation degrees, Manchester Metropolitan University is withdrawing its programmes from the College and the remaining students are under teach-out arrangements. The foundation degrees in ICT, engineering and public services have been replaced by Higher National programmes. The foundation degree in Music has also been replaced by a higher national programme. The College continues to offer programmes validated by Chester University and delivers a number of Higher National programmes, which it hopes to extend.

Other notable changes since the last review have included the appointment of a Higher Education Manager to support the delivery of the strategic priorities of the College's higher education provision, including enhancing the learner experience and identifying new opportunities to increase the numbers of higher education students and programmes. The College's relationship with HEFCE has changed to a directly funded relationship from a

franchised one, which means that the College is required to submit data around Higher Education in Further Education: Student Survey (HEIFES) and Individualised Learner Record (ILR).

The College developed an action plan in response to the recommendations and good practice identified during the last QAA review. The result of addressing the actions includes the appointment of the Higher Education Manager and the development of a yearly staff development plan.

Current higher education provision at Mid-Cheshire College comprises:

Manchester Metropolitan University
Foundation Degree in Sport Coaching and Physical Education
Foundation Degree in Travel and Tourism Management
Foundation Degree in Business
Foundation Degree in Supporting Teaching and Learning

University of Chester
Foundation Degree in Fashion Design
Foundation Degree in Graphic Design
Foundation Degree in Contemporary Photography

Pearson Edexcel
HNC/HND in Engineering
HND in Performing Arts
HND in Art and Design - Fine Art
HND in Art and Design - Games Design and Digital Media
HND in Music/Music Production
HND in Public Services
HND in Computing and Systems Development

Explanation of the findings about Mid-Cheshire College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

Explanation of the findings about Mid-Cheshire College

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 offers foundation degrees and Higher National Diplomas on behalf of two awarding bodies and an awarding organisation. Partnership agreements are in place for awarding bodies and the awarding organisation, which outline responsibilities in relation to academic standards. The awarding bodies are ultimately responsible for setting threshold academic standards and for ensuring that qualifications are aligned to the appropriate level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and take account of the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.2 The College is jointly responsible for programme modifications for Higher National programmes with the awarding organisation. The College is required to submit programme specifications to Pearson for approval, where alignment to the FHEQ is clearly stated. The annual institutional monitoring report from Pearson confirms approval for the College's delivery of Higher National programmes.

1.3 The awarding bodies maintain responsibility for the development and approval of their programmes offered by the College and for ensuring that these are aligned to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. The College has previously collaborated with its awarding bodies on curriculum development via programme revalidation.

1.4   External examiners explicitly address whether the programme's assessment is appropriate for the relevant level of the FHEQ.

1.5   The College's adherence to the policies and procedures of the awarding bodies and the awarding organisation would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.6   The review team tested the College's adherence to the Expectation through scrutiny of the programme specifications and partnership agreements with awarding bodies. It also tested familiarity with the arrangements in meetings with staff.

1.7   Required annual monitoring documentation varies between the College's awarding bodies and awarding organisation, but follows a robust internal procedure of review by the Higher Education Manager. External examiners' reports are formally reviewed as part of the annual monitoring process, and feed into the College-level higher education self-evaluation document.

1.8   The College discharges its responsibilities effectively in this area, as outlined in agreements with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Partnerships between the College and its awarding bodies and organisation are working effectively and staff are aware of their responsibilities in adhering to those agreements. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.9   The College's responsibilities in relation to managing academic standards are detailed in its partnership agreements with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. For the foundation degrees, the College is required to adhere to the relevant academic framework and regulations of its awarding bodies. For Higher National programmes, the College is required to adhere to relevant Pearson frameworks and regulations. The College has its own quality processes for the management and annual review of its provision, which include annual monitoring that is applicable to all higher education programmes delivered. Academic regulations are made available to students via links to College procedures, or those of the relevant awarding body, in student handbooks and on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.10   The Higher Education Performance Monitoring Meeting is chaired by the College Principal to enable strategic oversight of the College's higher education delivery. The College's Governing Body Standards Committee receives a biannual report from the Higher Education Manager. The College's Director of Learning and Quality is ultimately responsible for College-wide higher education, but operational matters are devolved to the Higher Education Manager. The Higher Education Learning and Quality Committee is responsible for monitoring strategic and operational higher education matters, including the maintenance of academic standards, and receives reports, via the Higher Education Manager, of the College's Programme Quality Groups.

1.11   Programme leaders are responsible for ensuring that two Course Review Meetings are held per academic year. Course Review Meetings, and consideration of programme-level management information, lead to the production of an annual programme-level self-evaluation document and Quality Improvement Plan, which evaluates the programme's performance, including the maintenance of academic standards.

1.12   The College has established links with the Cheshire Colleges of Higher Education Consortium, a partnership with a group of local colleges. The College's higher education provision was previously franchised via this Consortium, prior to the College being awarded direct funding from HEFCE in 2015, and the College has maintained its links with the Consortium, whose mission is to 'Improve the growth, quality and efficiency of Higher Education provision in Cheshire Colleges'.

1.13   The processes and procedures of the College, which ensure adherence to the awarding bodies' and organisation's academic frameworks and regulations, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.14   The review team tested the effectiveness of these procedures through meetings with senior staff, academic staff and students; consideration of documentation, including self-evaluation documents, minutes of relevant meetings and student handbooks; and reviewing the College's processes and procedures.

1.15   Internal reporting lines are clear and allow strategic oversight of higher education standards at the College. The review team found committees provided effective oversight of

higher education at the College, including the Learning and Quality Committee and the Higher Education Performance Monitoring Meeting. While recognising the value of the Higher Education Programme Quality Groups, the informal nature of these meetings means they are not recorded, although there is a standing agenda. Academic staff were complimentary about these groups, but as there is no record of business it is unclear how effectively actions are taken forward. A recommendation relating to this has been made in Expectation B8.

1.16   The College's own policies and processes operate effectively and are promoted to staff and students via the College's VLE. Student handbooks contain comprehensive information on academic frameworks and governance, and students and staff demonstrated clear awareness of how to access such information.

1.17   The College has recently reviewed its internal review processes to ensure that it provides effective oversight of higher education (see Expectation B1). These internal processes ultimately inform a College-level self-evaluation document, which monitors the College's performance in the delivery of its higher education programmes. Although finalising the most recent higher education self-evaluation document has been subject to a delay, the process does allow evaluation of higher education delivery to take place across all programmes, with consideration given to the maintenance of academic standards.

1.18   The Higher Education Manager has a pivotal role in the delivery of the College's higher education and the maintenance and oversight of academic standards, although the reliance on one role to create effective oversight of the provision could be seen as a weakness in the governance structure.

1.19   The governance arrangements, policies and procedures allow the College to manage academic standards effectively on behalf of its awarding bodies and organisation. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.20 The College has formalised Partnership Agreements with the University of Chester and formalised Collaboration Agreements with Manchester Metropolitan University, where under the agreements the definitive documentation remains the responsibility of the awarding bodies.

1.21 The College has collaborative partnership agreements with Cheshire and Warrington Higher Education Consortium. The College is a strategic member of the Consortium, which also includes Macclesfield College, South Cheshire College and Warrington Collegiate. The College complies with the aims of the Consortium and ensures that for every module or individual unit of learning there is a formal record of its indicative content and structure accessible on the VLE. This serves as a reference point for staff and students.

1.22 The College's adherence to the requirements of the awarding bodies and the awarding organisation for the maintenance of definitive programme records would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.23 The review team considered the College's supporting evidence, including partnership agreements. The team also met senior and academic staff.

1.24 Definitive records of all awards are retained by the awarding bodies. Copies are also stored at the College and available to students and staff through programme specifications and module definitions on the College's VLE.

1.25 The College ensures that accurate records are maintained according to the awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's requirements through liaison with the awarding bodies' link tutors, Pearson standards verifiers and the Higher Education Manager.

1.26 Students confirmed that they receive a colour-coded sheet for each academic year, which informs them of the module deadline dates. An outline of the programme is available via the website before students commence the programme. Students also confirmed that they have full access to all information about their programme and modules and understand the learning outcomes and methods, and criteria for assessment. The College's website, VLE and samples of handbooks provided to students confirm that the definitive documents are available and serve as a definitive reference point.

1.27 The College maintains and uses programme specifications effectively in accordance with the requirements of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.28 Awarding body and awarding organisation procedures govern the deliberation, scrutiny and involvement of external expertise in programme validation. The College submits proposal documents to the awarding body and organisation for approval. These documents include names and qualifications of teaching staff, assessment activities and programme specifications. College quality assurance procedures set out the process for approving new provision prior to submission to the awarding body and organisation. Approval documents identify resource implications, potential market and numbers of students. Programme design includes setting assessment activities at the appropriate level for the qualification, with reference to Subject Benchmark Statements, the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* and the FHEQ for awarding body programmes, and the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) at Levels 4 and 5 for awarding organisation programmes.

1.29 The process of programme approval and development follows clear stages, articulated in College, awarding body and awarding organisation quality documents. Validation procedures check staff qualifications and assessments to ensure that teaching and assessment standards are set at the appropriate level. These procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.30 The review team considered the College's supporting evidence, including course definitive documents and guidance documents from the awarding body and awarding organisation. The team met senior staff, teaching staff and support staff to explore the relationship between the College and its awarding bodies and organisation in securing academic standards through programme approval.

1.31 The team found that the College conformed to awarding body procedures for the validation of programmes to secure academic standards. Internal College processes ensure that the documentation is complete and appropriate and that the programme is at the appropriate level prior to submission to the awarding body. Processes for minor modification of programmes through annual review allow module content and assessment to remain current. External examiners confirm that the standards of awards are appropriate.

1.32 The College effectively manages its responsibilities for securing academic standards through validation with a clear awareness of external reference points. Processes for designing programmes that meet threshold standards are thorough. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.33   The awarding bodies and awarding organisation retain ultimate responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards for the College's programmes. The College delivers programmes in accordance with its institutional agreements and follows the awarding bodies' and organisation's regulations. The College Higher Education Assessment Policy establishes processes for ensuring that assessments demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. The policy directly references the appropriate chapters of the Quality Code, and contains direct links to relevant awarding body assessment policies, including the recognition of prior learning.

1.34   External examiners provide confirmation that assessments conform to national threshold and awarding body standards. Boards of examiners confirm the award of credit for the achievement of learning outcomes. Internal verification procedures check that assessments allow students to achieve the learning outcomes for their programme. Staff making internal verification judgements receive appropriate assessor and verifier training.

1.35   Robust processes and procedures of the awarding bodies, awarding organisation and College ensure that credit is awarded for the achievement of learning outcomes at the appropriate level. These systems would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.36   The team tested the Expectation by considering various documentation including partnership agreements, the College's Assessment Policy, external examiners' reports and verification and moderation processes. The team also met senior and academic staff and students.

1.37   The College supports awarding body and organisation procedures for maintaining national and awarding body standards through assessment by internally verifying assessment instruments prior to issue, moderating assessed work, and cross-College moderation on programmes delivered with consortium partners.

1.38   Assessment design, marking and moderation processes ensure the award of credit and qualifications for the achievement of learning outcomes aligned to threshold and institutional academic standards. Actions taken by the College as part of the verification process and in response to external examiners show the processes to be effective. In accordance with the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*, the College assesses work-based and work-related learning for its foundation degree programmes, confirmed by students and external examiners. External examiner reports and minutes of assessment boards provide evidence of the effective operation of the assessment processes.

1.39   The College applies its own, awarding body and awarding organisation assessment regulations and procedures effectively. Quality assurance arrangements take account of threshold and institutional academic standards, allowing students to demonstrate learning

outcomes through assessment. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

Findings

1.40　　Annual monitoring and periodic review are the responsibilities of the awarding bodies and organisation and the College is required to adhere to these processes. Internal mechanisms for quality assurance, such as course reviews, internal verification of students' work, the annual self-evaluation process and the formal observation of teaching and learning are in place to ensure that academic standards required by the awarding bodies and awarding organisation are maintained. Course review meetings are held at the end of each academic year in accordance with the College Course Review Procedure. Programme self-evaluations consider the maintenance of academic standards and incorporate quality improvement plans. Programme-level evaluations feed into a summative higher education self-evaluation and action plan. Management information, link tutors and external examiner reports support the course review and self-evaluation processes.

1.41　　The College's arrangements for internal processes of monitoring and review, and external monitoring by its awarding bodies, organisation and external examiners, enable the College to establish that academic standards have been achieved and maintained. The current systems in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.42　　The review team examined completed monitoring documents to check conformity with the processes set out in the policies and procedures. Meetings with senior staff and teaching staff provided further evidence of the application of these procedures.

1.43　　Templates for external examiner reports explicitly require confirmation that academic standards are comparable to other institutions in the UK and are appropriate for the programmes. External examiner reports confirm that programmes meet threshold and institutional academic standards. Annual monitoring report templates require the programme team to consider external examiner reports, and the annual institutional self-evaluation considers external examiner views and confirms that academic standards are met. The College's processes of gathering and analysing achievement data support the process of monitoring and review. The Governors' Standards committee provides further oversight.

1.44　　Comprehensive College, awarding body and awarding organisation processes of review and monitoring at programme and institutional level secure the maintenance of academic standards. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation:　Met
Level of risk:　Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.45 The College's awarding bodies and awarding organisation are responsible for ensuring external expertise in the setting of academic standards. Programmes delivered by the College are subject to the awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's processes in the development, design and review of programmes.

1.46 The College is responsible for maintaining the academic standards of the provision it delivers, to the standards set by the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. It is supported by the expertise of the external examiners appointed by its awarding bodies and organisation. External examiners' reports provide assurance that academic standards are appropriately maintained by the College, by reviewing proposed assessments, verifying grades and confirming standards. The College has a documented procedure for the use of external examiners and standards verifiers in the delivery of higher education.

1.47 For the College's foundation degrees, external examiner reports are discussed by programme leaders and a response is submitted to the College's Quality Manager via the programme-level self-evaluation documents. For programmes awarded by Manchester Metropolitan University, external examiners' reports are sent to the College for action. In the case of University of Chester programmes, the College is required to complete and return an Annual Monitoring Report, which explicitly addresses the comments of external examiners for these programmes. For Higher Nationals, Pearson standards verifiers make an annual visit to the College to meet students, review sample work and follow up on any actions from previous visits. This informs their annual report to the College.

1.48 The arrangements for using external and independent expertise in the maintenance of academic standards would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.49 To test this Expectation, the team scrutinised examples of external examiner reports, programme-level self-evaluation documents and other relevant documentation. The team discussed external involvement in the development of new programme proposals and the maintenance of standards with senior and academic staff.

1.50 External examiner and standards verifier reports provide effective evaluation of the College's maintenance of academic standards. The review team saw evidence that the College's processes for the consideration of external examiners' reports for the maintenance of academic standards are operating effectively and in line with the requirements of its awarding bodies and organisation. Although the College does engage with employers to provide work-related opportunities for students, the team found no evidence of this externality being used in the maintenance of the provision's academic standards. The review team found that the College's approach to the use of external expertise follows its awarding bodies' requirements. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.51   In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of the academic standards of awards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.52   All of the applicable Expectations in this area have been met and the risk is judged low in each case. There were no features of good practice or recommendations in this area.

1.53   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 The validation of higher education programmes is the responsibility of the awarding bodies and the awarding organisation, and the College is involved in aspects of the design, development and approval of those programmes.

2.2 The College course approval procedure applies to all levels of provision but the Higher Education Learning and Quality Committee considers proposals for higher education programmes prior to processing the application through the Approvals Panel, Senior Management Team and, ultimately, the Governors' Standards Committee. A College course approval form outlines the rationale for a programme and resources required as well as fitting with strategic objectives. The College approvals procedure requires a Student Council member and employer representatives on approvals panels.

2.3 The College follows the awarding organisation approval procedures to check the demand for a programme and the provision of appropriate teaching staff and physical resources. The College designs its own programme specifications within the Pearson framework, selecting pre-designed units to contextualise as a coherent programme meeting local and national needs.

2.4 These processes and procedures allow the College to meet its responsibilities for the design, development and approval of programmes, as set out in the agreements with its awarding bodies and organisation. Clear documentation, formal processes and opportunities for staff, students and employers to contribute to programme development and approval would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.5 The review team considered the College's supporting evidence, including the College's strategic plans, agreements with awarding bodies and documents relating to the internal course approval procedure. The review team also met with senior staff, teaching staff, support staff, students and an employer to explore the procedures for the design, development and approval of programmes.

2.6 The College has recently followed the course approval process for HND Music and Music Production and HND Public Services. Evidence provided confirms that internal and external forms and procedures were implemented effectively. College course approval forms appropriately outline the rationale for a programme and resources required. Introduction of the recent suite of Higher Nationals arose from a need to replace curricula withdrawn by Manchester Metropolitan University rather than a newly identified market need. Awarding organisation documentation confirms the appropriateness of resources, teaching staff, assessment methods and programme quality procedures, as well as production of a contextualised programme specification. The College implements awarding body procedures with appropriate supporting documentation. Programme design uses appropriate external reference points including the FHEQ, QCF and Subject and Foundation Degree Benchmarks.

2.7   Liaison between the College Higher Education Manager and the College Employer Services Team enables the College to respond to employer needs and influence the content of programmes. Additional option pathways on Higher National Engineering programmes are an example of a response to a specific employer request. The team heard how College staff liaised with employers during the development of new programmes and consulted a student during the programme design process. The College recently revised its arrangements for the development and approval of new programmes, including with the introduction of students and employers on the approvals panels, although full implementation of these measures is not yet complete.

2.8   Awarding body, awarding organisation and College procedures for programme design, development and approval are clear and applied appropriately. Documentary and meeting evidence confirms the effective application of those policies and procedures. Processes for involving employers, students and external views have yet to be fully implemented; however, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.9   The College's admissions processes are summarised in the College Admissions Policy, which outlines the process by which applicants may access higher education learning. The Policy is under biannual review and supports the College's mission and strategic objectives. The Policy will be developed to include the decision to require all applicants for higher education programmes to apply through UCAS. The process for recruitment, selection and admission is made clear to prospective students through the higher education interviews that take place by arrangement with the relevant course team Procedure for Admissions.

2.10   The College's prospectus is available on its website so that students can make informed decisions about higher education. Admission is direct or through the UCAS system and information about courses can be found on the UCAS website under Entry Profiles.

2.11   The College's processes for admissions, and the staff's awareness of their responsibilities and engagement with the mechanisms for student recruitment, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.12   The review team tested the Expectation by analysing the College's supporting evidence, including procedures for handling admissions, appeals and complaints. The team also spoke with College academic and professional staff and students.

2.13   Entry requirements for higher education programmes are transparent and present no unnecessary barriers to prospective students. Entry requirements for awarding body programmes follow the relevant awarding body faculty guidelines. Entry requirements for Higher National programmes follow Pearson guidelines.

2.14   Applicants can appeal against admission decisions by submitting a complaint via the link on the College website or via direct communication with College staff. This is then processed through the College's complaints procedure. Confidentiality for applicants throughout the applications process and compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 are ensured by the College's Data Protection Nominee, the Deputy Principal. Monthly applications reports are submitted to the College Management Team for discussion at Performance Monitoring Meetings.

2.15   Students are supported to complete their full programme by the College and the awarding body should any programmes be removed from the curriculum offer.

2.16   Staff providing admissions information, advice and guidance are supported and trained by the Head of the Learner Experience Centre. The Head of the Learner Experience Centre carries out observations during interviews by staff with students. This process promotes quality and continuous improvement. Furthermore, the process of observation is mapped against an Admissions Review Framework, supporting compliance with the Admissions Policy, confidentiality and data protection. It also provides the opportunity for early capture of students' additional learning support needs. Staff who carry out the

observations are qualified to Level 4 in Advice and Guidance. The interview observations process conducted by specially qualified staff, which secures a consistent and high quality student admissions experience, is **good practice**.

2.17 The College's Admissions Policy will include the decision to require all applicants for higher education programmes to apply through UCAS. This development ensures a more robust admissions process around information for students. The Head of the Learner Experience Centre has oversight of the UCAS process and staff have been trained effectively to administer the admissions UCAS process.

2.18 The College's recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures adhere to the fair admission of students onto higher education programmes. Effective mechanisms are in place to handle admission complaints and appeals and a comprehensive process of observing admissions interviews is good practice. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.19   The College's slogan is 'Where learning comes first' and it has developed a higher education strategy, which includes the aim of providing 'Learning opportunities which are of the highest quality and which are responsive to student and employer needs and expectations'. The College is a member of the Cheshire Colleges of Higher Education Consortium, which facilitates sharing best practice between its members and the strategic alignment of learning and teaching activities. The College's strategic direction for higher education is articulated in a policy agreed by the Cheshire Higher Education Consortium Teaching and Learning Group. The policy sets out a series of principles for effective learning and teaching. The College is also engaged in a scholarship development project that is being led by the Consortium, which aims to enhance scholarly activity within its Colleges.

2.20   The College has a number of systems in place to review the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, including student surveys, peer observations, external examiner reports and programme-level self-evaluation reports. The College's policy intentions and governance arrangements for the review and enhancement of learning opportunities and teaching practices would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.21   The review team tested the application of the College's approach to learning and teaching by considering committee minutes and relevant documentation. The review team also met with students, the College Principal, and relevant academic and professional staff.

2.22   The quality of learning and teaching is seen as a strength within the College by its staff and students. Students are positive about the quality of teaching and learning support that is made available to them. Students commented on the strong sense of learning community within the College, which is facilitated by highly contactable staff, who often provide one-to-one support to enable students to develop their understanding of their subject area and their broader academic skills.

2.23   Learning and teaching at the College is supported by effective procedures that allow the quality of learning opportunities to be successfully evaluated. The Higher Education Learning and Quality Committee operates effectively in overseeing higher education learning and teaching, and the Higher Education Performance Monitoring Meeting evaluates performance data in this area. The Higher Education Manager holds monthly Higher Education Programme Quality Groups with programme leaders, an informal discussion group to share good practice and oversee learning and teaching development. These meetings are not formally recorded but there is a standard agenda.

2.24   A staff development policy is in place, outlining expectations for staff across the College. Staff development workshops are provided internally, and incorporate provision from the Cheshire Colleges of Higher Education Consortium and Pearson. Staff are encouraged to pursue postgraduate qualifications, and the College maintains records of training undertaken by staff. Staff are required to undertake peer observation of teaching during each academic year and records are held to confirm that this has taken place. Teaching staff are approved by the awarding bodies and awarding organisation and the

College requires all newly appointed staff to hold a teaching qualification. Many teaching staff also have experience within professional settings, and the team heard of the positive impact this has on learning and teaching at the College.

2.25   The College uses its VLE to communicate key learning and teaching policies to staff and students effectively, as well as to provide students with relevant course documentation and learning resources. Students whom the review team met confirmed that the VLE is used effectively by staff across the College, and staff confirmed that the VLE is being actively developed as an interactive learning tool and not simply a repository of information, particularly as part of the College's approach to enhancing digital literacy.

2.26   The College has engaged employers in the delivery of ad hoc, co-curricular workshops, and although the review team met only one employer, they were able to provide an example of a skills-based competition leading to a two-week work experience placement.

2.27   The methods in place at the College to review learning and teaching opportunities, staff development activities and the College's focus on supporting students to learn ensure an effective basis for learning and teaching. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.28   The College's higher education provision is based on two campuses. The Winsford campus was developed specifically to accommodate higher education programmes, and is where the majority of higher education programmes are now based. The College provides on-campus support to students via its Learner Experience Centre, which provides a range of pastoral, academic and careers services for students. While the main Learner Experience Centre (LEC) is based on the Hartford campus, arrangements are in place to enable students at both campuses to access the LEC services. Additional support services are made available to disabled students, and all students with a disclosed disability are provided with a learning needs assessment prior to commencing their studies. Learning support staff work with academic staff to ensure that students' additional needs are met throughout their programme and that any required adjustments to assessment are made. The use of Learning and Progression Mentors has recently been expanded from further education students to include higher education students. The Mentors provide a central point of contact for students requiring pastoral support, advice and guidance.

2.29   The College has a number of systems in place to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources for developing student achievement, including student surveys and data such as achievement and withdrawal. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.30   The review team tested the College's approach to meeting the Expectation by scrutinising the evidence provided, including relevant data and minutes of meetings, and by meeting with senior staff, academic staff and students.

2.31   Both staff and students were highly complimentary about the Winsford campus development as a significant improvement to enable student development and achievement. The campus was developed in response to students' needs and provides a dedicated space for students studying a range of higher education programmes at the College. The College has also developed a new studio for its performing arts provision, based at the Hartford campus, and this has allowed students studying these programmes to benefit from a range of up-to-date equipment to support their learning and future employment.

2.32   The review team found students to be positive about the support provided by the College to enable them to succeed in their studies and achieve their potential, with the majority of students describing the support they had received as highly effective. Tutoring arrangements are in place, often providing one-to-one feedback on academic progress and support for students' transition to higher education study.

2.33   Library facilities are available at both campuses, and staff ensure that the relevant literature is located at the appropriate campus. While some students commented that library resources at the Winsford campus are not always comprehensive, the review team saw evidence that the College is in regular dialogue with students to ensure that their needs in this area are met. Presently, library staff have limited engagement with new programme development, but will source relevant resources as required before a new programme commences.

2.34   The College has recently embarked on a strategy to enhance digital literacy in learning, led by an E-Learning Development Officer. The College's e-learning hub includes digital technologies to support learning, and offers benchmarking tools for the use of the VLE. Staff met by the review team were complimentary about the support on offer for their development in this area.

2.35   The College views employability as important to their higher education provision. Staff and students gave examples of where the use of assessment based on real-world examples is used to support the development of students' employability skills. College Employer Services provides one-to-one support for students' career development, and also provides co-curricular workshops on employability skills development. Some programmes include a compulsory work-based learning placement (see Expectation B10) and many students at the College are studying as part of their existing employment arrangements.

2.36   Evaluation of the arrangements and resources to support students' achievement is carried out via student surveys and in-depth self-evaluation documents. Programme leaders are required to produce an annual self-evaluation document, which requires evaluation of student development and achievement. The Higher Education Performance Monitoring Meeting evaluates performance data in this area, and the review team saw evidence of these mechanisms operating effectively in practice, for example in improving student retention rates.

2.37   The College has sound arrangements in place for enabling students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Students were positive about the resources and support available to them, and regular evaluation and monitoring processes ensure responsiveness to student needs and achievement. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.38   The College's Policy for Learner Involvement details the ways in which students can engage in the quality assurance and enhancement of their programmes of study at course level. Student feedback is collected both informally and formally. The College Student Charter states that learners will have the opportunity to feed back to the College on their course. On a more formal College-wide level, views are gathered through electronic surveys. The National Student Survey (NSS) is promoted to students through a website link on the VLE.

2.39   The existing mechanisms and policies relating to the student voice would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.40   The review team tested the Expectation through the consideration of documentation relating to the self-assessment validation panels, the Policy for Learner Involvement and feedback documentation. The team also spoke to the Principal and senior and academic staff, as well as a broad range of students from different programmes, including student representatives.

2.41   The review team found that the College engages with its student body in different ways. Course representatives are appointed for all course and year groups. Student Ambassadors promote the College by attending Open Evenings and take part in promotional assemblies to Year 11 students in local high schools. Higher education student representatives attend self-assessment validation panels.

2.42   Feedback from students' views is received by senior staff, who investigate issues and subsequently feed back via the VLE and 'You Said, We Did' posters. Students can access information and feedback about the Learner Voice on the VLE. Most students demonstrated an awareness of how the College operates the 'Learner Voice' and provided examples of how the College has acted on feedback.

2.43   The review team found that at course level student feedback is welcomed and is collected in a variety of ways that suit the delivery of the programme and availability of students. The students are positive about the opportunities they have to make their voice heard through student representatives, who attend Course Committee meetings. However, there are no student representatives included in the membership of higher level management team meetings.

2.44   There is little evidence to support the promotion of student engagement, at all levels, as partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of their learning experience. The Policy for Learner Involvement states that students are represented at Governor level by two student Governor representatives, but no appointments from higher education have, to date, been made to these positions. The College has identified at its Standards Committee meeting, in the Learner Involvement Strategy Report, the need to enhance the process through which to select and appoint Student Governors. In 2014-15 the Learner Experience Group replaced the Student Council. The plan for 2015-16 is for the Learner Experience Group to review and improve the meeting structure; improve the feedback given to learners; review and improve the consistency of communication at all levels; and enhance the process through which to select and appoint Student Governors.

2.45   There is little evidence to support the implementation or impact of these initiatives to give students the opportunity, individually and collectively, to engage fully as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. Although the College's Policy for Learner Involvement makes reference to the learner experience having a meaningful role in influencing College decision making at all levels, the review team found little evidence of this happening in strategic and decision-making forums. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College engages students as partners in the structures and processes of quality assurance at all levels.

2.46   The College states that it does provide training for student representatives in Term 1 to engage them in the purpose of the Learner Voice and to support and equip them to fulfil their roles effectively; however, students did not seem to be aware of such training and there was an inconsistent response from staff. Evidence of training Higher Education Course Representatives was not evident in discussions with students. In addition, there was no evidence of a centralised record of students undertaking training to assure the College that training had occurred. Therefore the review team **recommends** that the College strengthens the process of training student representatives to equip them fully in their roles.

2.47   The College has mechanisms to engage students at a course level. Student feedback systems are in place to collate and use feedback in course evaluations and facility and resource effectiveness. However, insufficient emphasis has been given to the College's approach to engaging all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. There was little evidence to show that students receive formal training or documentation to support them in their role. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the risk is moderate as the procedures in place are broadly adequate, but there are some shortcomings in the rigour with which they are applied.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.48   The College has responsibility for the setting, first marking and moderation of assessment and for providing assessment feedback to students. The College Higher Education Learning and Teaching Policy and Assessment and Internal Verification Policy and Procedure articulate the College's overall approach to assessment and align with the policies, procedures and regulations of the awarding bodies and organisation. The College policies on assessment of higher education programmes address coursework submission, academic misconduct, assessment malpractice and exceptional circumstances to support the fair assessment of students across all programmes. Policies structured around *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code establish processes for demonstrating learning outcomes through assessment and contain direct links to relevant awarding body assessment regulations. The agreement with the Cheshire Higher Education consortium requires shared learning and teaching and assessment policies from September 2015.

2.49   The awarding bodies approve teaching staff who undertake assessment. The College submits details of staff qualifications and training in relation to assessment and internal verification to the awarding organisation.

2.50   The College internal verification procedures require verification of assessments before issue. For awarding body programmes, the assessments must be sent to the link tutor and then to the external examiner. The Pearson standards verifier approves programme assessments. The College retains responsibility for internal verification of assessed work and second marking.

2.51   The College's Higher Education Assessment and Internal Verification Policy articulates how the College investigates and responds to unacceptable academic practice. Academic malpractice on Higher National programmes results in formal formative feedback and possible failure of the assessment. In the case of foundation degrees, the College reports suspected academic malpractice to the awarding body whose rules and regulations apply.

2.52   The Higher Education Assessment and Internal Verification Policy aligns the College's arrangements for assessment boards with the requirements of the awarding bodies. The College also holds two assessment boards per year for Higher National programmes, coinciding with assessment boards for awarding body programmes. The College has clearly articulated statements on the recognition of prior learning, whether credited or due to relevant experience, and how this should be implemented.

2.53   The College operates under agreements, regulations and with its own policies and procedures, providing a clear framework for equitable, valid and reliable assessments. College procedures for the recognition of prior learning, avoidance of academic misconduct, moderation and conduct of assessment boards are thorough. Therefore, the systems in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.54   The review team considered the College's supporting evidence, including the College's Higher Education Assessment and Internal Verification Policy. The team examined documentation relating to the operation of assessments, including programme handbooks and external examiner reports. It met with senior staff, teaching staff, support staff and students to discuss the nature of assessments and the operation of assessment processes.

2.55   The College VLE and programme handbooks contain links to awarding body and organisation policies relating to assessment that are available on their websites. Students are made aware of the relevant regulations at induction, in assessment documentation and through discussion of assessment requirements. The College has clearly articulated statements on the recognition of prior learning and staff and students provided examples of where this had been applied appropriately.

2.56   Internal verification processes ensure that assessment instruments enable all students to demonstrate that they have met the intended learning outcomes. Internal verification days support the process, allowing staff to share good practice in assessment. The College works within the Higher Education Cheshire Consortium to verify assessments between colleges and share good practice in grading and provision of feedback. Students, external examiners and standards verifiers confirm that assessments allow learning outcomes to be achieved.

2.57   College policy is to provide feedback on assessments within 20 term-time days of the submission date. Electronic submission processes support monitoring of assessments and feedback. Students confirm that assessors meet agreed deadlines. Students receive both informal and formal feedback to support them to make improvements in subsequent assessed work. Comments from external examiners, standards verifiers and students show that feedback is constructive, extensive, fair and supportive.

2.58   To support them in their assessment practice students can access study skills materials on the VLE and through the Learning Resource Centre, where sessions on assessment techniques are available. For students with protected characteristics, reasonable adjustments are made to assessments in consultation with the relevant body and organisation.

2.59   Steps to encourage good academic practice are thorough. The College supports academic writing and referencing at induction and during the year. Handbooks and the VLE contain guidance on assessment regulations and academic writing. Assignment documents contain originality declarations. Students confirm familiarity with using plagiarism software, and with assessment regulations relating to extensions, late submission and applying for consideration of mitigating circumstances in assessment.

2.60   Work-related assessments are central to the College's approach to assessment. Foundation degree programmes have work-based or work-related assessments in line with the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*. External examiners confirm the range and variety of work-based assessments on foundation degrees. Staff and students provided examples of live briefs and work-related projects, confirming that assessments allow students to link their course experiences to the skills required to be effective in the workplace.

2.61   The College's management of assessment allows students to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes for their programme of study. Processes for conducting assessments are valid and reliable. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.62   The responsibility for the appointment, training and management of external examiners rests with the College's awarding bodies and awarding organisation.

2.63   Awarding bodies act as the liaison between the College and their external examiner. For Manchester Metropolitan University programmes, annual external examiners' reports are sent directly to the College from the awarding body. For University of Chester programmes, the external examiner report is included within the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR). For Pearson Higher National programmes, programme leaders work directly with their external examiner to arrange annual visits and review of students' work. All external examiner reports are received by the College's Quality Manager, who coordinates the process for ensuring external examiners' comments are acted upon. Heads of Learning respond to external examiner reports, in collaboration with programme leaders. The College higher education self-evaluation document collates external examiners' comments at a College level, via collation of programme-level self-evaluation documents, with the intention of identifying common themes. The process for sharing external examiners' reports with students is conducted via the VLE.

2.64   The arrangements in place in using external examiners' reports to monitor and improve higher education provision at the College would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.65   The review team tested the College's approach to the Expectation by scrutinising the evidence provided, including external examiner reports and programme and College-level self-evaluation documents. The Expectation was also tested through meetings with students and academic staff.

2.66   The review team found that the College has adequate processes in place in relation to external examiners. Staff demonstrated awareness of the importance of external examiners for supporting the development of learning opportunities and the maintenance of academic standards. Reports scrutinised by the review team demonstrated that the comments of external examiners were considered appropriately for the awarding bodies and organisation, and that areas for improvement identified by the external examiner were responded to adequately.

2.67   The internal validation process for programme-level self-evaluation documents includes scrutiny of actions arising from external examiners' reports, which feeds into the College-level higher education self-evaluation document. The draft version of the higher education self-evaluation document was made available to the review team, which collated comments from the external examiners. The new process for compiling the higher education self-evaluation document may allow the College to pull together themes from external examiners' comments and critically evaluate these at the College level.

2.68   Students demonstrated limited knowledge of the external examiners system. Some students recalled meeting external examiners or subject verifiers, indicating that it was a positive experience that allowed them to provide feedback on their course. Students did not know where to access external examiners' reports, although students on a specific programme were able to describe a process whereby staff had discussed the content of an external examiner's report with them. The College uses the VLE to distribute external examiners' reports, but the review team found this method to be inconsistently applied

across all programmes. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College makes all external examiner reports consistently available to students.

2.69   The College's processes for the use of external examiners' reports are in line with the requirements of the awarding bodies and organisation and are robustly used by the College through their monitoring and review processes. Availability of external examiners' reports to students is inconsistent, but as rectifying this omission will not require any major structure or procedural change, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.70 Annual monitoring and periodic review of higher education programmes are the responsibilities of the awarding body and awarding organisation, and the College is required to adhere to these processes. However, the College has its own extensive internal monitoring and review processes. The timetable and process for monitoring applies to all programmes at the College, including higher education, although higher education programmes complete documentation aligned with the Quality Code.

2.71 End-of-year course review meetings develop programme self-evaluation documents with a quality improvement plan. External examiner reports and College management information on recruitment, retention and achievement support the annual monitoring process. Any inputs from the awarding body link tutors or annual monitoring reports also inform the programme self-evaluation document. Student views feed into the review process through survey data and records of student meetings and forums. Termly reviews allow programme teams to identify any issues requiring short-term action, and quality improvement plans produced by Heads of Learning underpin the monitoring process.

2.72 Programme self-evaluation documents are presented by the Programme Leader to a 30-minute validation panel consisting of the Deputy Principal, the Director of Learning and Quality, the Director of Business Development and Partnerships, the Higher Education Manager, a student, a College Governor and an external panel member from another college in the HEC Consortium. The process secures robust, valid and reliable self-evaluations.

2.73 Programme self-evaluation documents inform the College's Higher Education self-evaluation document, which Governors and the College Strategic Leadership Team approve. The course review documentation for higher education programmes, together with the College programme-level self-evaluation document and College overarching self-evaluation document, are currently being reviewed to align them more directly with the Quality Code. Quality documentation for programme validation is being reviewed to provide procedures for protecting the academic interests of students upon closure of a programme.

2.74 The College, awarding body and awarding organisation processes for regular and systematic programme monitoring and review would allow the Expectation to be met. Students and external panel members have opportunities to scrutinise and challenge review documentation. Monitoring processes are evaluated and improved to align with the Quality Code.

2.75 The review team considered the College's supporting evidence, including the Course Review Procedure and calendar. Examination of self-evaluation documents at programme and College level, together with their associated action plans, confirmed the effective operation of the processes. The team met with senior staff, teaching staff, support staff and students to explore the relationship between the College and its awarding bodies and organisation and to clarify the processes of programme review and monitoring.

2.76 In 2015 the College embarked on a process of improving its institutional oversight of higher education. Improvements include a new Higher Education Manager post, revisions to

policies and processes, and new monitoring and review documentation. The team was informed that although the first iteration of the new higher education self-evaluation document was in draft form at the time of the review, its timing would conform to the established timetable in future years. Records of meetings and review documentation show effective quality improvement processes within the College, but enhancement opportunities are not systematically identified through the review process. The new higher education self-evaluation document specifically addresses opportunities to enhance the student learning experience, opportunities not explicitly identified elsewhere in the review process. The changes have allowed the College to make oversight more effective but also to align more closely with the Quality Code. College processes for higher education self-evaluation validation panels now require the inclusion of an external or employer representative and a student member, whereas panels held during 2014-15 had governor attendance but no employer or external presence, and only four out of 11 meetings had a student representative. Quality documentation for programme validation now provides procedures for protecting the academic interests of students upon closure of a programme, although no programmes have yet been through this process. The review team **affirms** the introduction of the new quality process to ensure effective institutional oversight of higher education.

2.77   The Higher Education Learning and Quality Committee provides effective management and oversight of higher education provision. Monthly meetings of the Higher Education Programme Quality Groups inform the work of the Higher Education Learning and Quality Committee. Duplicated meetings on different days allow participation by all programme leaders. The emphasis of the group meetings is debate, sharing good practice and managing higher education programmes. There is a standard agenda but no formal record of the meeting. The Higher Education Manager passes the main points arising from the group to the Higher Education Learning and Quality Committee. While recognising the valuable role played by the Higher Education Manager in the process, and the benefits of the informality of the group, the review team identified a weakness in relying on an oral report from one individual in such an important channel of communication between programme leaders and the formal committee structure of the College. To ensure that all actions and potential enhancements are consistently captured, the review team **recommends** that the College formalises the relationship between the key deliberative committees to secure effective review and enhancement of the provision.

2.78   Extensive use of data gathered through College-wide management information systems informs the review and monitoring of higher education programmes throughout the annual cycle. Monitoring of applications, admissions, retention, absence, achievement and progression statistics takes place as part of higher education performance monitoring by College management, at programme level and by the Higher Education Learning and Quality Committee. Data from the observation of teaching, student surveys, and audits of staff and student use of the VLE inform the monitoring and review of the teaching and learning process. Improvements arising from programme monitoring and review include staff development on contextualised grading, changes to assessment briefs, and improvements to library stock and accommodation for study and social space.

2.79   The College's monitoring and review processes are effective, regular and systematic, and result in actions to secure improvements. Therefore, the Expectation is met. Although the monitoring and review processes are broadly effective, the weakness identified in the process of communication between programme managers and the committee system leads the review team to conclude that the level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.80   The procedures for dealing with comments, suggestions, compliments and complaints are outlined in the College's Complaints Procedure.

2.81   Comments, suggestions, compliments and complaints are used to inform continuous improvement as part of the ongoing performance review and self-assessment process for higher education programmes.

2.82   Within the procedure for comments, suggestions, compliments and complaints, timescales are set with acknowledgement of complaints and explanation of the procedure. Monitoring of complaints is carried out by the Quality Manager, who briefs the Principal termly. The Quality Manager prepares an annual report, which is taken to the College Management Team and Quality Council.

2.83   In terms of academic appeals, the grounds and procedures for appeal are determined by the appropriate awarding body or awarding organisation. The internal College Procedure for Appeals is followed to facilitate this. The Procedure for Academic Appeals sets out the stages, level of activity and timescales. The appeal process is also recorded and logged at each stage. The College is engaged with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). The College engages with the OIA's good practice guidelines and framework.

2.84   The policy and procedures governing academic appeals and complaints for HND awards are outlined in the College's Academic and Appeals and Complaints Policy and Procedures. These are also found on the College's VLE and within programme handbooks. These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.85   The College Procedure for Appeals is followed in respect of appeals against an internal/external assessment/qualification. An external assessment/award is determined by the awarding body or awarding organisation.

2.86   The College provides opportunities for students to make appeals or complaints about the quality of learning. During their induction process, students are informed how they can make formal complaints. Students are also informed that they can raise issues with their Programme Leader, student representative, the Learner Voice Coordinator, any member of the Learner Experience Centre Team or any member of staff to whom they feel more comfortable speaking.

2.87   Robust procedures for complaints and appeals are in place and easily located through the VLE. Students are aware of complaints and appeals procedures and where they can access them. However, students confirmed that complaints are usually dealt with informally. Students raise issues with their Programme Leader, student representative or other members of staff, and confirmed that in the majority of instances issues and concerns are dealt with responsively.

2.88   The College has appropriate and effective processes in place to secure accessible and timely handling of academic appeals and student complaints. Although rarely used, staff

and students are aware of the processes and where to access them. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

Findings

2.89   The College has responsibilities delegated to it by its awarding bodies and awarding organisation for managing and delivering work placements, where they form an assessed part of the programme. This currently applies to a small number of programmes, in the areas of business, sport, education, and travel and tourism. In these instances, the College has responsibility for managing the work placement arrangements, and completing documentation to ensure that employers, staff and students are familiar with the responsibilities of each during the provision of a work placement.

2.90   The review team tested the College's processes for meeting the Expectation by considering programme specifications, programme handbooks and relevant documentation for work placements. The review team also met staff involved in delivering programmes that include work placements, and a student who had undertaken a work placement. The team was unable to meet with employers who provide assessed work placements.

2.91   The College's process for establishing links with employers for higher education work placements is not centralised, and these links tend to evolve at a programme level, on an ad hoc basis. Students on programmes with a compulsory work placement are required to source their own placement if they are not already in employment, but the College does hold a central record of where students are located during their placement activity. Staff described the College's process for site visits of employers providing work placements, where the College ensures that students are not put at risk by undertaking a particular placement. Some academic staff on particular programmes also visit students while they are on placement, as part of the assessment process.

2.92   The College has developed a handbook for employers facilitating a work placement and for the students undertaking it. This handbook outlines the employer's responsibility to the student and includes a template agreement, requiring the employer to confirm that they are compliant with relevant legislation, including health and safety. Students must ensure that these agreements are signed, but they are not held centrally by the College. There is no formalised process for the evaluation of work placement providers, or for managing the termination of a work placement.

2.93   Both senior and academic staff are confident in the responsibilities towards students while they are completing a work placement and were able to cite examples of how they support students who are studying on these programmes. Staff were also able to describe the assessment process for students on placement, where students agree objectives with staff beforehand, and informed the review team that assessment of the placement is conducted by academic staff, not employers. Staff were also able to cite examples of where the College was able to accommodate students on an 'in-house' placement at the College when they were unable to source a placement themselves.

2.94   The College does have a documented procedure for ensuring that work placement providers are suitable, which applies to both further education and higher education, but evidence received by the review team did not align with this procedure, as the documentation was more further education-focused. Staff acknowledge the need to review

their processes for higher education work placements to ensure greater central oversight, and a position paper is being developed to commence this review.

2.95   While acknowledging that staff are confident in their duties towards students undertaking credit-bearing work placements, and that there are some mechanisms in place to ensure appropriate work placements and the subsequent documentation relating to them, the review team found that there is no systematic oversight in place for higher education programmes with work placements, assuring consistency and evaluation of their effectiveness. The College does record placement activity but agreements with employers are not centrally located, allowing an increased element of risk in compliance. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College strengthens the framework for the management of learning opportunities delivered with employers to ensure systematic oversight.

2.96   The College has some mechanisms in place to track and record work placements, but these arrangements are established and monitored at course level. The College's approach to working with employers who provide higher education placements does not allow sufficient central oversight to ensure that arrangements are implemented securely and managed effectively. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is not met, and the risk is moderate as problems identified are confined to a small part of the provision.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.99   Of the 10 applicable Expectations in this area, eight were met and two were not met. Seven Expectations have a low level of associated risk, while the remaining three have a moderate level of associated risk. There is one feature of good practice in this area, five recommendations and one affirmation.

2.100   The good practice relates to Expectation B2. The team found that the College's process for admissions was strengthened and promoted quality by observations carried out on staff conducting admissions interviews. The observations, conducted by specially qualified staff, were considered by the review team to be good practice, as they ensure consistency and promote quality improvement.

2.101   There are five recommendations identified in this area. Two relate to Expectation B5. Although the review team found some mechanisms for student engagement, most are limited to standard feedback formats or programme-level engagement. Student representations do not occur at the more senior-level committees where strategic decision making and input is considered; therefore, the review team concludes that there is a lack of considering students as partners in managing higher education at the College. Furthermore, the training of student representatives lacks a systematic and consistent approach which would allow the College to assure itself that students are being properly and appropriately prepared and informed of their role as representatives. An absence of recording which students have received training also contributes to a lack of systematic approach. Taken together, the recommendations resulted in Expectation B5 not being met, but the risk is moderate as the weaknesses in the system of student engagement could be easily rectified.

2.102   There are inconsistences around the availability of external examiners' reports to students, which has led to a recommendation in Expectation B7.

2.103   The review team found that the College has appropriate and robust mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing programmes. However, the review team is concerned about the relationship between the regular Higher Education Programme Quality Groups and the more senior Higher Education Learning and Quality Committee, in particular that the communication between the two forums relied on the attendance of the Higher Education Manager without the formal recording of discussion or actions. Although the current system is deemed positive by College staff, the team considers that the over-reliance on the Higher Education Manager as the conduit between the two groups is a risk to effective programme oversight. These findings have led to a recommendation of formalisation, and the level of risk is deemed moderate.

2.104   Work placements at the College are requirements on a small number of programmes and the review team found that College staff are clear about their responsibilities in managing these mandatory requirements. There are some procedures in place that track the placements and visits are undertaken to ensure compliance. However, there is a lack of strategic oversight in this area, so evaluation of the system does not occur. Furthermore, the absence of any centralisation of agreements with employers is a weakness in the management of this area, which leads the review team to make a recommendation around strengthening the systems. The team concludes that the Expectation is not met, with the risk being moderate, as only a small part of the provision is affected.

2.105   There is one affirmation in this area. The review team found that while the College has effective programme monitoring and review processes in place, its decision to develop an annual higher education-specific review process would enhance student learning opportunities by establishing more effective oversight. At the time of the review this process had not been through the completed cycle and therefore no evaluation of the process and its impact had been undertaken, hence the affirmation.

2.106   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, values and aims are communicated in its published public documents. The College currently has two managers who jointly administer the sign-off of information intended for the public domain. The two managers check all course information to ensure that it is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy before it is published on the website. The new Head of Marketing and Commercial Operations will have overall oversight of produced information in the future.

3.2   The College publishes information on the website and within the prospectus to ensure that prospective students are informed regarding individual courses and how to apply, along with an overview of the course. Prospective students are also provided with course information sheets when visiting the College information events.

3.3   A range of policies, procedures and resources are available on the VLE and College website, such as the College Mission Statement, and the Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity, and Freedom of Speech Policies. Links to the relevant awarding bodies and organisation and assessments are available on the VLE and are embedded within the relevant College policies and procedures.

3.4   The College Management Information Services team provides Key Information Set (KIS) data to assist students in their choices, for example quoting '98 per cent of learners agreed teaching on my course is good'. The National Student Survey is promoted via a link on the VLE to encourage students to take part. The National Student Survey data is deemed by the College as not reliable. This is due to the small cohorts of students and the inclusion of all colleges within the Higher Education Cheshire (Consortium) being presented via Macclesfield College as the College responsible for the HEFCE return for all colleges in the Consortium.

3.5   The College holds two Higher Education Open Evening events per year for prospective students. Both senior management and curriculum staff are available to discuss programme details and provide information on what students can expect in respect of the demands of studying at higher education level.

3.6   The College's Policy for Admissions and Procedure for Admissions outline the process of admissions. Information on how students can appeal against a decision invites students to write to the Principal within 14 days of being informed of the decision. However, applicants can appeal against admission decisions by submitting a complaint via the link on the College website or via direct communication with College staff.

3.7   The various forms of information made available regarding course content and its delivery to prospective and current students, as well as staff, would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.8   The review team considered College-produced and published information intended for the public domain and internal audiences by accessing the website, the internal VLE and

documentation relating to the content of courses and policies supporting the delivery of programmes. The review team also spoke to staff and students.

3.9   Students confirmed that they are well informed in respect of the content and structure of their learning programme through the information provided to them. They confirmed that they can easily access the course information and materials on the College's VLE. They also confirmed that their course handbooks are available online but that they have not seen programme specifications. A variety of methods of information availability are used to ensure that prospective students select an appropriate programme of higher education study which will enable them to achieve their learning goals.

3.10   The sign-off for accuracy of College information currently lies with the Higher Education Manager and the head of Learner Experience and works effectively. Oversight of the sign-off process will become the responsibility of the Head of Marketing and Commercial Operations and Director of Business Development and Partnerships.

3.11   The College produces information that is fit for purpose, accurate and accessible in respect of its higher education provision. Although currently there is no overall oversight of sign-off for information, the current arrangements are effective, ensuring accuracy and relevance. Students are satisfied with the availability and relevance of the information. Therefore, the review team concludes that the wide range of approaches used to provide accurate and accessible information means that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.12   In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations, affirmations or features of good practice. The review team therefore 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 relies on its quality improvement process to secure enhancement of student learning opportunities. Regular monitoring of programme performance, action planning and listening to the student voice provide opportunities for identifying enhancement. The College gathers student opinion through formal and informal channels at tutorials and learner voice meetings and through student representatives. College processes for monitoring and review provide opportunities to reflect and improve provision at programme level and the new process of higher education self-evaluation allows focused reflection at College level. The Higher Education Programme Quality Groups and Higher Education Learning and Quality Committee allow discussion and sharing of good practice across the College. Further identification and sharing of good practice arises from the Cheshire Higher Education Consortium. The Higher Education Strategy identifies priorities for enhancement, dedicated higher education study space, social space and improvements to ICT infrastructure.

4.2 Opportunities for enhancement and sharing good practice arise from quality improvement processes and from listening to student opinion. An ethos promoting the improvement of student learning opportunities is clear across the College. The College Higher Education Strategy identifies deliberate steps to enhance student learning opportunities. Therefore, the current mechanisms in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.3 In testing the College's strategic and operational approach to improving the quality of students' learning, the review team met with the Principal and senior staff and examined the College's Strategic Plan and Higher Education strategy. Meetings with teaching and support staff and students confirmed the commitment to improve. Minutes of committee meetings and self-evaluation documents provided evidence of where the College has identified and implemented improvement opportunities. The College provided a summary of how it uses deliberate steps through its Higher Education Strategy, which in turn has informed improvement initiatives.

4.4 The College has effective strategic leadership and an ethos of encouraging improvements to student learning opportunities. Although the College Strategic Plan does not explicitly mention enhancement, the Higher Education Strategy establishes priorities for enhancement. College membership of the Cheshire Higher Education Consortium provides further opportunities for identifying enhancement initiatives with other colleges. The Principal and senior staff confirm the deliberate steps taken at College level to enhance student learning.

4.5 The team encountered a range of examples of enhancements implemented by the College. The Higher Education Strategy identified priorities of providing dedicated higher education study space, social space and improvements to ICT infrastructure. Meetings with senior staff confirmed these priorities. Moving most higher education programmes to the Winsford campus, appointing a Higher Education Manager, reviewing higher education policies, encouraging scholarly activity and improving admissions and retention were further examples provided to the team. The College-wide digital literacy strategy, supported through

the e-learning hub, provides opportunities to enhance higher education teaching and learning.

4.6   In addition to deliberate steps at College level, good practice shared at programme level leads to improvements in student learning opportunities. Graded and peer observations also facilitate the sharing of good practice. However, the use of quality assurance procedures to identify opportunities for enhancement, leading to the integration of enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner, is insufficiently explicit. Examples identifying enhancement opportunities from the student voice are limited. In meetings with the team students confirmed improved social and study facilities as well as programme-level improvements. However, the lack of effective training for student representatives or involvement of students as active partners in quality processes, as detailed in Expectation B5, limits students' contribution to identifying and evaluating the impact of initiatives. Communication between the Higher Education Programme Quality Group and the Higher Education Learning and Quality Committee remains informal. While providing a forum for discussion without the constraints of formality, the lack of any record of conclusions or actions from the Programme Quality Group creates a risk that opportunities and initiatives for improvement are insufficiently communicated through the committee system. The lack of systematic use of employer participation in review processes, as described in Expectation B8, further limits the identification of improvements. These findings support the affirmation in Expectation B8. Although the team found some mechanisms in place identifying enhancement, a systematic approach to enhancement is underdeveloped through its formal systems of review. Therefore the review team **recommends** that the College consolidates improvement activities to provide a more planned, systematic and explicit approach to enhancing learning opportunities.

4.7   The College has a clear commitment to encouraging improvements to the quality of learning opportunities. The College identifies and shares good practice and has discernible enhancement initiatives. Although quality assurance procedures are broadly adequate, the team identified shortcomings in the systematic management of enhancement as expressed in the recommendation. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met but the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.9   There is one recommendation in this area, with no features of good practice and no affirmations.

4.10   The team found that the College's approach to enhancement is determined by its Higher Education Strategy and mechanisms for disseminating good practice and through its quality improvement processes. Enhancement initiatives are captured and initiated through these processes but they are not explicit and systematically monitored. The lack of student engagement as partners in the management of higher education and the informal nature of communication between two key higher education forums create a weakness in the College's approach. However, the review team considers that there are current foundations in place for effective enhancement, and the introduction of the new quality process should introduce a more systematic identification and evaluation of enhancement. The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy

Findings

5.1   The Higher Education Strategy lists as an aim, under the College's Quality Standards and Learning Experience, 'Supporting the provision of high quality learning resources and environment including e-learning and ILT'.

5.2   The College has a full-time E-Learning Development Officer, who is supported by E-Learning Coaches. The bespoke teaching and learning hub facility, based within the main Hartford campus, is used for the development of digital literacy skills of both staff and students.

5.3   The E-Learning Development Officer gives feedback to the curriculum Heads of Learning regarding the levels of engagement with e-learning of all staff members in their team, to ensure that staff are receiving the most relevant and current training. Staff are required to demonstrate to the Head of Learning how they are going to use the hub and to show in the planning (Scheme of Work) how this will be embedded in the delivery of programmes.

5.4   Groups of staff can access the hub, where the E-Learning Development Officer will provide guidance and support to staff in teaching a particular session that embeds a new technology. Plans for the hub include organised weekly groups of staff to look at the course units they are covering. Teaching staff can book time with these specialist staff in the hub to see the technologies demonstrated and to practise applying them to particular topics or activities.

5.5   The hub is equipped with a range of digital literacy resources, for example a smart board and tablets. Staff confirmed that they value the training and feedback which, supports them in developing their students' skills and their own practice.

5.6   Staff development takes place three times a year in the hub, with different teams of staff engaged in using a range of digital literacy resources. The E-Learning Development Officer schedules training sessions based on evidence received from reflections and feedback in course reviews and the College self-evaluation documents. Staff were positive about the College 'digi-fest' in February 2016 which was organised by the E-Learning Centre team, where students and staff demonstrated different media and learning technologies.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 30 to 33 of the Higher Education Review handbook.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

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

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

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

Tel: 01452 557 050
Web: www.qaa.ac.uk