Higher Education Review of Milton Keynes College

March 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 Milton Keynes College The review took place from 8 to 10 March 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr David Mayall
- Ms Daphne Rowlands
- Dr Axel Palmer (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Milton Keynes 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 4. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

In reviewing Milton Keynes 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.

Amended judgement - June 2017

Introduction

In March 2016, Milton Keynes College underwent a Higher Education Review, which resulted in the following judgements: the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body and other awarding organisation meets UK expectations; the quality of student learning opportunities does not meet UK expectations; the quality of the information about learning opportunities requires improvement to meet UK expectations; and the enhancement of student learning opportunities meets UK expectations.

Negative judgements are subject to a formal follow-up by QAA, which involves the monitoring of an action plan produced by the College in response to the report findings.

The College published an action plan in August 2016 describing how it intended to address the recommendations, affirmations and good practice identified in the review, and has been working over the last seven months to demonstrate how it has implemented that plan.

The follow-up process included three progress updates and culminated in a desk-based analysis of the College's progress reports and the supporting documentary evidence by two reviewers. The desk-based analysis confirmed that the recommendations and affirmations relating to the quality of student learning opportunities and the quality of the information about learning opportunities had been successfully addressed.

QAA Board decision and amended judgements

The review team concluded that the College had made sufficient progress to recommend that the judgements be amended. The QAA Board accepted the team's recommendation and the judgements are now formally amended. The College's judgements are now as follows.

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

Findings from the follow-up process

The team found that the College had made progress against the recommendations as follows.

Recommendation - Expectation B4
With regard to enabling student development and achievement, the online personal development planning process for students has been reviewed and its effectiveness increased. The new tutorial system is clear and easily understood by both staff and students. The system is carefully monitored and results confirm that the new tutorial system is beneficial for students, who find the collaborative approach to a developmental target system useful. The College has made good progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation - Expectation B5
In respect of student engagement, the College has further developed the effectiveness of formal student representation and feedback mechanisms. There is now increased student participation in the deliberative structure. Involvement with the National Student Survey has

been strengthened and actions arising from internal and external surveys are now shared on the intranet and embedded into the College's quality plan. The College has made good progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation - Expectation B8

With regard to programme monitoring and review, the College has developed a more transparent and robust methodology for monitoring its higher education programmes. The new processes provide senior management with greater clarity about the totality of the higher education provision. The College has developed a key performance indicator report, which is regularly monitored and enables management to have more effective oversight of higher education programmes. The College has also made progress in ensuring that programme team meetings are attended by the relevant senior staff. There is improved monitoring of quality enhancement plans and more formal tracking of actions at these meetings. There is now more effective monitoring at programme level through end-of-unit reviews, which feed into programme quality enhancement plans. The College has made good progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation - Expectation B10

In respect of managing higher education provision with others, the College has clarified the scope of the policy on placements and work-related activities. The revised policies also clearly set out all stakeholder responsibilities and are easily accessible by staff, students and placement providers. In addition, the College has improved its oversight of the arrangements for placements and work-related activities. The new policies have been fully implemented and there are now written agreements in place for all relevant activities; risk assessments are carried out as required. The College has also implemented an effective system for logging and monitoring work experience. The College has made good progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation - Expectation C

With regard to information about higher education provision, the College has taken corrective actions to eliminate inconsistencies in the content of published information, and ensured that it publishes accurate and complete information. There is now an Information Approval Policy, which clarifies the process for the approval of all public information and the roles and responsibilities of key staff. The College User Code of Practice Policy ensures the accuracy of information on the virtual learning environment (VLE). There are centralised controls over regulations, policies and procedures, marketing communication and communication with media. Authorisation is now required for all new information and major changes to existing information. Changes to public information and to student handbooks are now processed through change request forms, with a log held centrally of change requests and approvals. Although there is limited progress against issues regarding fee and programme information on the website, the College has made sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Affirmation - Expectation B3

The College has continued to improve the VLE in order to support the development of students' independent learning skills. The student induction programme has been enhanced to support the use of the VLE. The College has also taken significant steps to strengthen student access to online materials for skills development. An effective online resource has been developed enabling students to develop research and study skills. An online course for staff is now available that enables staff to raise awareness of issues concerning digital learning and helps them to support students to become independent learners. The College has also developed access for higher education students to a discrete online forum within the intranet. The College has made good progress against this affirmation.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Milton Keynes College

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

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

Recommendations

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

By September 2016:

- review and further develop the effectiveness of the online personal development planning process for students (Expectation B4)
- review and further develop the effectiveness of formal student representation and feedback mechanisms (Expectation B5)
- further develop the mechanisms for the effective oversight of the monitoring and review of its higher education provision (Expectation B8)
- clarify the scope of the policy on placements and work-related activities and identify the arrangements for any provision that falls outside it (Expectation B10)
- ensure effective management oversight of the policy and arrangements for placements and work-related activities (Expectation B10)
- ensure that all information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (Expectation C)
- clarify the responsibilities for the approval and monitoring of published information and put in place clear policies and procedures for their management (Expectation C).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The actions taken to improve the virtual learning environment in order to support the development of students' independent learning skills (Expectation B3).

Theme: Student Employability

Milton Keynes College's Higher Education Strategy states that it is the College's aim to develop the skills that local employers require. Current and future skills needs will be identified through a dialogue with local employers. The College is a leading partner with the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP). Employability skills are a key feature of the College's higher education provision and are integrated into the curriculum. All courses are vocational in nature and include work-based or work-related activities and personal development planning as a mandatory or optional component. The College has

developed strong relationships with local employers, and this has provided work-based and work-related learning opportunities, including field trips, for higher education students. Local employers also contribute to programme design and delivery as guest speakers. Students value the vocational nature of the College's higher education provision and the opportunities available to develop their employability skills.

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

About Milton Keynes College

Milton Keynes College (the College) is a general further education college, which was created in 1982 through the merger of two further education colleges at Wolverton and Bletchley. It has a typical annual intake of approximately 10,000 students and employs nearly 650 members of staff, who are based at three sites across Milton Keynes: at Chaffron Way, Bletchley and Silbury Boulevard in the commercial district of Milton Keynes. Higher education programmes are offered at both sites. The College has delivered higher education programmes in partnership with various degree-awarding bodies for over 50 years. It initially delivered Higher National programmes in Engineering from its Wolverton campus. Since then, the higher education portfolio has widened and at the time of the review included Pearson programmes in Engineering, Photography, Graphic Design and Public Services. The College also delivers a Foundation Degree in Psychology and Criminal Behaviour franchised from the University of Bedfordshire, and is in negotiations with the University of Northamptonshire about the delivery of foundation degrees in other subject areas. Higher education student numbers are small, with 150 HEFCE-funded students in the current academic year.

The College's aim is to be the best general further education college in the country and deliver the highest quality education to all learners. The College welcomes those who want to learn and improve, and will seek to meet individual needs where appropriate and possible. It aims to build strong partnerships with communities and businesses and is committed to working to grow the local economy and create greater opportunities for all.

Since the QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2011 the College has reorganised the structure of key operations linked to curriculum, management and support services to align them with its Strategic Plan. A review of the College's provision informed the new academic management structure, resulting in the creation of faculties aligned to current and anticipated skills needs articulated by employers. The College has also appointed a faculty director to the cross-College role of Director of Quality and Student Experience. The Higher Education Strategy was refreshed and shaped by discussions with the Link Governor for Higher Education, representatives of SEMLEP, the local authority and a range of employers.

The higher education committee structure has remained broadly the same since the IQER. However, a recent review of deliberative structures resulted in the creation of a Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee with student representation. Its business cycle has been aligned to relevant elements of the Quality Code. In addition, the higher education student journey has been reviewed, and processes have been amended to ensure that higher education has a distinctive focus within the College. Part of this work has been the development of a higher education programme review process. To support teaching and learning a higher education-specific staff development programme has been developed for the current academic year.

The College has built on the six areas of good practice identified in the IQER, particularly with regard to the relationship with local employers and the peer observation of teaching

process. While the College has addressed the advisable recommendation on the production of consistent and up-to-date student handbooks, and the three desirable recommendations, work on the improvement of the virtual learning environment (VLE) is still ongoing.

Explanation of the findings about Milton Keynes 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 Milton Keynes College

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The higher education provision at the College is small, limited in 2015-16 to 150 students on five Pearson-approved Higher National programmes in Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Photography, Graphic Design and Public Services, and a Foundation Degree in Psychology and Criminal Behaviour franchised from the University of Bedfordshire (the University). While Pearson and the University are responsible for setting the academic standards of the awards, and have overall responsibility for the maintenance of those standards, the College is responsible for delivering and assessing the programmes of study, and for maintaining the academic standards of Pearson and the University, as set out in the responsibilities checklists and the collaboration agreement. The College has its own programme approval process and produces definitive programme documents. The approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.2 In considering this Expectation, the review team examined College, in addition to Pearson and University, procedures for programme approval and the programme specifications. The team tested its findings through discussions with members of staff.

1.3 Pearson and the University, through their programme design and approval processes, have responsibility for ensuring that qualifications are at the appropriate level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*

(FHEQ), and that the programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptors, are named in accordance with titling conventions and frameworks, and have qualifications that mark the achievement of positive programme learning outcomes. The Pearson programmes are aligned to the FHEQ via the Qualifications and Credit Framework.

1.4   The College has its own internal validation process for the approval of higher education provision. Approval meetings are chaired by the Deputy Principal Quality and Curriculum, and attended by directors of faculty and the Director of Quality and Student Experience. An approval event schedule is in place. The approval process is clear and primarily functions as a process for business approval, but also includes some element of curriculum and content development. This process is framed within, and informed by, the College's wider strategic aim of driving local and regional development initiatives in partnership with industry, local employers and local government. For Pearson programmes the College's responsibilities are limited to the selection of appropriate units from a prescribed list. The review team found that all Higher National programmes delivered by the College follow Pearson's rules of combination.

1.5   The College's higher education provision takes into account national benchmark statements through its working relationship with Pearson and the University. The content of the programmes and the requirements outlined in the subject and qualification benchmark statements are contained in the programme-related documentation that students receive. The College works in partnership with Pearson and the University, notably the University link tutor and the external examiners, to ensure that the academic standards of its higher education provision are appropriately maintained. The external examiner reports seen by the team confirm that the programmes are assessed at the correct levels.

1.6   The review team found that the College has in place adequate processes to ensure that threshold academic standards are met. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.7 The College is responsible for maintaining academic standards through its academic framework. The Academic Board retains ultimate responsibility for maintaining the standards of the awards, and delegates aspects of the monitoring and review of programmes to the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee. The Deputy Principal Quality and Curriculum, the Director of Quality and Student Experience, the Higher Education Academic Coordinator and faculty directors have responsibilities for managing academic standards for higher education provision at College or faculty level. The College has a range of strategies and policies, including a Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy; an Assessment and Internal Verification Policy, which includes the Malpractice and Maladministration Procedure; a Boards of Study Policy; an Examinations Policy and Procedure; a Higher Education Extenuating Circumstances Policy; a Higher Education Plagiarism Policy and Procedures; and a Higher Education Academic Appeals Policy, which together constitute the College's academic framework. The College does not have its own academic regulations but conforms to those of Pearson and the University. The College's academic framework is sufficiently robust, and the design of policies and processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.8 In considering this Expectation the review team looked at the terms of reference, agendas, and minutes of deliberative committees; job descriptions of senior quality managers; and policies and procedures for teaching, learning and assessment, and met senior staff, academic staff and students to explore governance arrangements, management responsibilities, the implementation of academic policies and procedures, and the application of academic regulations.

1.9 The Higher Education Academic Board holds overall responsibility for the academic work of the College, including the monitoring and maintenance of academic standards. The Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee is responsible for the evaluation of quality assurance processes, to ensure the overall delivery of standards. Both committees meet regularly and discharge their responsibilities appropriately. The Deputy Principal Quality and Curriculum and the Director of Quality and Student Experience have oversight of operations at College level. Faculty directors have overall responsibility for quality and standards in their faculties, and are responsible for producing the annual Faculty Self-Assessment Report, which reviews key strengths and areas for improvement for all provision, including higher education. Faculty directors are members of the Academic Board and the Senior Leadership Team.

1.10 The Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy sets out the College's approach to developing a higher education learning culture, transferable skills, personalised learning and challenging assessments. The Strategy also sets baselines for staff, staff development and resources, and identifies primary responsibilities for the delivery of the Strategy. It is complemented by a range of ancillary policies on assessment.

1.11 The primary responsibility and authority for establishing transparent and comprehensive regulations to govern how academic credit and qualifications are awarded rests with Pearson for the Higher National programmes and the University for the foundation

degree. Full details of assessment regulations for Higher Nationals are contained in the Pearson BTEC Centre Guide for Assessment and Qualification Specifications. Teaching staff have undertaken Pearson training in relation to assessment. Two staff development sessions on teaching, learning and assessment have also been arranged in partnership with the University for staff teaching on the foundation degree. The academic regulations for Higher National programmes are communicated to students at induction but only limited information is included in programme handbooks. Similarly, staff have access to the University's academic regulations - including the rules for assessment, progression, exams, academic offences, appeals and complaints - but it is less clear how students access them, as they are not explicitly referenced in the Course Handbook. Students commented that they are advised as and when there is an issue.

1.12   The correct application of the regulations is overseen by the Assessment Boards. No credits or awards can be made until confirmed at the appropriate Assessment Board and with the approval and confirmation of the external examiner. The Foundation Degree in Psychology and Criminal Behaviour is initially considered at the University's Pre-Board for Psychology, prior to ratification at a Field Board of Examiners. The College's Course Manager is invited to attend the Pre-Boards. All Higher National programmes are taken through Boards of Study, which function as Assessment Boards and meet Pearson's requirements for the establishment of such boards. Since November 2015 programmes are considered by a single board, which has independent external representation. The College's system of academic governance and its adherence to Pearson academic regulations ensure the transparent award of credit and qualifications.

1.13   The College has an appropriate academic framework and an adequate system of governance in place to secure academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.14   Pearson and the University, together with the College, maintain a definitive record of each programme. College course specifications are the definitive record of each programme and qualification, detailing the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected achievements of programmes of study. These documents demonstrate compliance with Pearson and University requirements, as well as the College's academic and regulatory framework, and would enable the College to meet Expectation A2.2.

1.15   In considering the Expectation, the review team scrutinised the programme documentation provided by the College and met staff, including a University representative, and students.

1.16   Pearson has clear requirements for the production of contextualised programme specifications and their contents, which the College follows. Based on the guidance from Pearson, the College has developed its own course specifications for each Higher National programme. These clearly state the aims, entry requirements, learning outcomes, learning teaching and assessment strategies, and student support arrangements for the programme. They also specify the course structure and list the units selected for delivery by the College from the Pearson qualification specification. These are referenced in the course and unit handbooks. Course specifications are also available on the VLE.

1.17   For the foundation degree the College has developed a course specification, which follows the format of the Higher National specifications and is modelled on the more comprehensive course information form, which constitutes the University's programme specification for this programme. While the College's course specification accurately specifies the FHEQ level and the credit value of both the proposed award and the constituent modules in line with the University's academic framework and regulations, it incorrectly names the College as the awarding organisation (see Expectation C).

1.18   The review team considers the College's course specifications to provide a definitive record of the College's provision. The team also considers definitive programme records to be broadly fit for purpose and saw evidence of compliance with Pearson's and the University's requirements. 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

1.19   The College is authorised by Pearson to deliver a number of Higher National programmes, which have been developed by Pearson. Similarly, the collaboration agreement with the University grants permission to the College for the delivery of the Foundation Degree in Psychology and Criminal Behaviour. This programme was developed and approved by the University through its own programme approval processes.

1.20   The responsibility for the approval of programmes is shared between the College and Pearson, however, the College's responsibilities for setting academic standards during programme design are limited to selecting an appropriate combination of units and devising effective assessments.

1.21   The College has its own procedures for the approval of new programmes, but it is the approval processes and procedures of Pearson and the University that ultimately ensure that academic standards for the programmes delivered at the College are set at a level that meets the UK threshold standard for each qualification. This approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.22   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's programme approval processes by examining relevant documentation relating to programme proposals and minutes of the approval panel, and met a range of staff, including a University representative, and students.

1.23   The College has established an effective internal programme approval process, which ensures that all new programmes have a strategic curriculum fit. According to the College's internal validation procedure for higher education provision, proposals for any new or substantially revised courses are considered initially by the relevant curriculum areas as part of the annual curriculum planning process. Outline proposals are then submitted on a pro forma to the faculty director. A validation panel chaired by the Deputy Principal Quality and Curriculum considers the proposal and confirms that it is compatible with the College's Strategic Plan, has adequately considered all relevant resource implications, and has appropriate academic and pastoral support arrangements in place.

1.24   The review team found clear evidence that new programme proposals are agreed by the internal approval panel, following the College's procedures, and then ratified by the Academic Board. Staff whom the team met demonstrated a clear understanding of procedures relating to the approval of new programmes and described confidently the development of such programmes. The team found that the current processes for the approval of new programmes varies in the level of detail considered, with less information available for Higher National programmes. In each case, the programme approval process is primarily concerned with the business case and does not involve detailed scrutiny of the academic case, such as the structure of the programme's units, its assessment strategy or an evaluation of supporting documentation, such as programme specifications or assessment schedules. However, after a programme has been approved in principle, programme teams effectively plan unit combinations and design quality assessments for

Higher National programmes. For University programmes the University's programme approval process ensures adequate consideration of the academic aspects.

1.25   The College is fulfilling its responsibilities through adhering to Pearson's requirements and to its own internal approval procedures. The limited responsibilities the College has in this area leads the review team to conclude 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

1.26   The College is responsible for the assessment of all its higher education programmes. It has an Assessment and Internal Verification Policy governing assessment design and processes for Higher National programmes. The Boards of Study Policy sets out the remit of the Assessment Board for these programmes. The Board ensures that credit is awarded only through the achievement of intended learning outcomes by selecting units from Pearson's national programme specifications according to the rules of combination and by designing assessments that fulfil the intended learning outcomes of each unit. The Academic Board has a duty to ensure that academic standards are maintained and that the Assessment and Internal Verification Policy is consistently applied.

1.27   For the University programme the College follows the University's assessment regulations. Assessments are set by the College and agreed with the University link tutor. The achievement of module learning outcomes is considered at University Pre-Boards of Examiners and final grades are agreed at Boards of Examiners, which also confirm that threshold academic standards have been achieved. The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.28   To test the effectiveness of the College's assessment procedures the review team scrutinised external examiner reports, programme documentation, and examples of internally verified assessments and assignment briefs. The team also met senior staff, academic staff and students.

1.29   All programmes have an appropriate assessment strategy, which is detailed in the course specification and set out in the course handbooks. Assignment briefs for Higher National programmes state the unit-level intended learning outcomes and grading criteria at pass, merit and distinction level. Assignments for these programmes are internally verified before they are distributed to students; internal verification of grading is used to ensure the quality and consistency of assessment by verifying that assessment decisions have been reached fairly and accurately. The College's Assessment and Internal Verification Policy for Higher National programmes is available to staff on the intranet. Assessment practice is also governed by policies on malpractice and maladministration. Assessment for the University programme is internally marked against University marking criteria and internally moderated.

1.30   Boards of Study and Pre-Boards of Examiners meet according to a schedule and confirm unit or module grades, thus ensuring that credit is only awarded where learning outcomes have been met. The College has recently reviewed its Board of Study structure for Higher National programmes and a single, centralised Board of Study with external representation from another College has been introduced for all programmes to ensure consistency of decision making.

1.31   External examiners and verifiers confirm the validity of assessment decisions and that assignments are set at the appropriate level to meet the UK threshold standards for the qualification. Their reports confirm that the level of assessment, marking and internal verification and moderation procedures are effective. There is also clear documentary evidence that the College rigorously implements the regulations of Pearson and the University and its own policies in its assessment practices. Pearson assessment requirements of double-marking and internal verification practices are effectively followed and culminate in the submission of a student report form outlining final course grades. Students confirm that assessment practices are fair and generally understood by them. Staff demonstrated their clear understanding of assessment processes.

1.32   The College has rigorous assessment design and internal verification and moderation procedures in place. External examiners confirm that UK threshold standards are met and that the award of qualifications is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.33   Pearson and the University bear ultimate responsibility for the monitoring and review of their programmes' academic standards, but the College must ensure that procedures are in place for routine monitoring and review. Higher National programmes are reviewed annually through a combination of surveys, module evaluations and programme reviews, the latter feed into Faculty Self-Assessment Reports and ultimately into the College's Higher Education Quality Enhancement Plan. The University monitors its own programme, the results of which are shared with the College. It also carries out periodic reviews of the programme and the partnership. The next institutional review will take place in April 2016.

1.34   The Higher Education Academic Board has overall responsibility for the quality of higher education, including the monitoring of programmes and the maintenance of academic standards. It is chaired by the newly appointed Director of Quality and Student Experience, whose remit includes the effective implementation of the annual review process. The Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee considers and signs-off quality enhancement plans from faculties in an effective and timely manner in accordance with its terms of reference. The Director of Quality and Student Experience works with faculty directors to operate and oversee the programme quality monitoring system for Higher National programmes.

1.35   The combination of an internal system of annual monitoring and reporting, the annual external examiner and verifier reports, and the periodic reviews carried out by the University would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.36   To test the effectiveness of the systems for monitoring academic standards the review team considered documentation resulting from the College's annual monitoring procedures, its most recent Quality Enhancement Plan, and external examiner reports. The team also scrutinised minutes of deliberative committees, such as the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee, and met academic and senior staff, and students.

1.37   Pearson programmes are first reviewed at course level, resulting in programme review reports. Programme reviews take into account recruitment and attendance data, reports from external examiners, feedback on teaching and learning strategies, and assessment information, and effectively help maintaining standards. Programme reviews generate quality enhancement plans, which feed into a College-wide higher education enhancement plan. Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of the processes used to review Higher National programmes.

1.38   The College's responsibility for the monitoring of the University's programme is limited. Internally, the programme team monitors the programme through a programme review report and enhancement action plan using the College pro forma for Higher National programmes. Recorded meetings take place biannually between the Course Leader and the University link tutor. The notes are shared with the College. The University produces its own

annual portfolio monitoring report in which the foundation degree programme is included. This report is considered by its Teaching and Learning Committee.

1.39   The College's processes for monitoring and reviewing programmes are appropriate for the level of responsibility the College has in this area. Processes for review and monitoring are effectively implemented, and assist in ensuring the maintenance of standards. 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

1.40   The College's main source of external and independent expertise in maintaining academic standards are the external examiners and verifiers appointed by Pearson and the University. The roles and responsibilities of external examiners, including consideration of reports, are clearly defined in Pearson and University documentation. The College expects the reports to be used as a source of evidence for other quality assurance activities. The Board of Study for Higher National programmes includes an independent external representative. The College's processes for the use of external examiners would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.41   To evaluate the College's use of externality to set and maintain academic standards the review team met academic and senior staff. The team also scrutinised external examiner reports and the outputs of quality assurance processes, such as annual programme reviews.

1.42   The College's internal programme approval process does not make use of external independent expertise. Its approval processes do not include a requirement for external scrutiny of the proposed programme. The College has, however, limited responsibilities in this area and the review team appreciates that Pearson and the University are ultimately responsible for setting the standards of its programmes. Nevertheless, there is some evidence of informal external input from employers into the design of modules or assessment.

1.43   The College follows Pearson's and the University's expectations for the use of external examiner reports. Recommendations and comments from their reports feed into the annual programme monitoring and review process, with a section designated for this in the programme review template. Annual programme review reports examined by the review team confirm that they are generally reported on, and where this was missing it was picked up in the report moderation process. With one exception, external examiners reports have not raised any issues with the programmes' standards. The external examiner for the Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) in Electrical and Electronic Engineering and Mechanical Engineering initially blocked the qualification due to a lack of available assessments, although this was subsequently released for certification.

1.44   Following a recent review of its Board of Study structures, the College included an independent external representative in the membership of the Board to strengthen oversight of academic standards for Higher National programmes.

1.45   In line with the extent of its responsibilities the College makes appropriate use of external expertise in the maintenance of academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.47   All seven of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated level of risk is low in each case. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area.

1.48   The College has rigorous policies and procedures for maintaining academic standards. The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body and other awarding organisation at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1   The programmes the College delivers are designed and approved by the University and Pearson. They ensure that programmes are developed in line with the FHEQ and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. For the development of Higher National programmes the College can choose the units for delivery within the rules of combination specified by Pearson. The College operates an internal programme approval process for all new higher education provision. The Higher Education Academic Board considers and ratifies the decisions made by an internal approval panel. In view of the College's limited responsibilities in this area the process for approving new programmes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.2   In considering this Expectation the review team examined the College's internal approval process and consulted committee minutes to judge the effectiveness of the College's programme development and approval processes. The team also held meetings with academic and senior staff.

2.3   The College's Higher Education Strategy reflects the intention to provide more higher-level skills programmes for students to inform curriculum development. Local market information feeds into new programme proposals and there is a clear rationale for the approval of higher education programmes based on demographic issues and local needs. For Higher National programmes there is some informal employer input into the overall content of the programme.

2.4   The approval process for new programmes is effective and follows the processes described in the College's internal validation procedures. The College has an annual schedule and approval events take place each term. The programme approval panel has clear terms of reference that ensure proposals have a sound curriculum fit and are in line with the College's Strategic Plan. The approval process does not include detailed scrutiny of the academic content of the programme, which is the responsibility of Pearson and the University. The Higher Education Academic Board has oversight of the development of higher education programmes, and its agendas and minutes demonstrate that it discharges its responsibilities appropriately. Course specifications for Higher National programmes show that the College abides by Pearson's rules of combination and selects appropriate units to form coherent programmes that are appropriate for the College.

2.5   The College has effective processes in place for the development and approval of programmes, which are appropriate for the level of responsibility it has in this area. 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

2.6   The College is responsible for recruitment, selection and admission to its higher education programmes. It has its own Higher Education Admissions Policy, which was approved by the Senior Management Team and outlines the management of recruitment, selection and admissions. Implementation of the Policy is overseen by the Customer Services Manager. The Higher Education Academic Board is responsible for approving the admissions criteria in line with the requirements of Pearson and the University. Entry requirements for all courses are clearly stated on the College's website. The website also states the course fees and gives a brief overview of the programme. The College aims to provide fair and equal access to all prospective students who meet the admissions criteria, and takes into account the needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities in the admissions process. The Higher Education Student Charter sets out precisely what students can expect from the College with regards to the application and admissions processes. Rejected applicants have the right to appeal an admissions decision and are dealt with under the College's Complaints Policy. The information, processes and procedures in place at the College regarding recruitment, selection and admission would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.7   In considering this Expectation the review team scrutinised information provided by the College, including the Admissions Policy, interview records, acceptance and rejection letters, and met staff with responsibility for admissions and students.

2.8   The Higher Education Admissions Policy specifies the application requirements for full and part-time courses, teacher education, and professional and chartered institute courses. Applications for admission to higher education programmes are invited via the College website or, alternatively, for Higher National programmes, through UCAS. There are small conflicts between the Policy and the website, where the former states that applications for full-time courses may be made via UCAS but is silent on part-time courses, and the latter states that applications for Higher National Certificate (HNC) courses can only be made to the College. Potential applicants viewing the website are made aware of the programme entry requirements and are able to complete an online application form. Application processing and follow-on are described in the online prospectuses.

2.9   The Higher Education Admissions Policy applies to all applicants, including those students who have completed a previous level 3 course at the College and intend to progress on to a higher education programme. Students progressing internally are only required to submit a brief written statement with their application. For some programmes an interview forms part of the selection process. Students confirmed that all, except progressing, students had attended an interview as part of the selection process. Following a pilot an academic writing assessment will be introduced as part of the selection process for the academic year 2016-17.

2.10   The Higher Education Admissions Policy clearly sets out the responsibilities of those involved in selection and admissions. Admissions decisions are made by academic staff, who receive training at local level. Application documentation, interview records and

communications with applicants are kept electronically by the customer services team. They also undertake 'learning walks' during interviews to check processes are working correctly. Offer letters clearly state whether the offer is made unconditionally or conditionally, and identify any conditions where applicable. They also state the course fees, including any additional course costs, and signpost financial and learning support available. Rejection letters give the reason for the unsuccessful application. Following successful application prospective students are invited to open days to find out more about the course and view the facilities. They are also asked to attend a formal admission day, supported by customer services, to ensure that all aspects of admission, including funding, are adequately supported.

2.11   The College recruits about half of its higher education students through progression from further education programmes. It supports the transition of these students into higher education through the Passport to Higher Education Success system, where participating students receive support and guidance and take part in taster days and progression activities in exchange for a guaranteed offer of a place subject to minimum entry requirements. Progression events are an effective way of assisting students in making an informed decision with regards to their programme. Students also have access to careers and course guidance advisers, including a dedicated Higher Education Adviser, who can support them in making informed decisions about their choices.

2.12   The recruitment, selection and admission policies work effectively. They are well understood by staff and students. Students confirmed that the application process was clear and that they had received appropriate communications from the College about their applications. There have been no appeals against admissions decisions for higher education students.

2.13   The review team found that the College has appropriate processes in place for the recruitment, selection and admission of students onto its higher education programmes, and that these processes are followed. 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

2.14   The College articulates its strategy on learning and teaching and student engagement by means of key policy and strategy documents. The broad learning and teaching objectives for higher education are in the College's Higher Education Strategy, which aligns with the Strategic Plan 2013-17 and refers to the 'distinctiveness of the higher education experience'. The Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy sets out the College's strategy for the systematic approach to learning, teaching and assessment, and defines the kind of graduate the College aims to produce. The Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy sets out a set of aims for a culture of broad student engagement.

2.15   The newly formed Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee, with extended terms of references, superseding the previous Higher Education Teaching and Learning Forum, is responsible for the development of a culture of excellence in teaching, learning, innovation and assessment practices and sharing of good practice. The Teaching and Learning Observation Policy outlines the processes of classroom, peer, mentoring and teacher training observations and learning walks, all of which aim to evaluate teaching standards and set expectations while identifying opportunities for tutor development and the sharing of good practice. The College has policies and procedures in place that would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.16   In considering this Expectation the review team examined relevant documentation provided by the College, including the strategic documents and policies, staff CVs, and staff development plans, and met teaching staff and students.

2.17   The Teaching and Learning Observation Policy is not higher education-specific and covers observation of both further and higher education. It is reviewed every other year and published on the staff intranet. Observations of teaching are linked to appraisal, professional development and programme team end-of-year evaluations. Teaching staff confirmed that they have been useful for identifying professional development needs. Staff are observed on an annual basis by trained observers. Unlike further education observations, observations of teaching for higher education are not graded. There is a lesson observation planning schedule, and outcomes of teaching observations are recorded on teaching observation forms with evaluative comments and a summary of key strengths, good practice and areas for development. The observation forms examined by the review team confirm that observers provide extensive and helpful comments, resulting in the development of observation action plans, which clearly indicate the steps necessary to complete the actions and timescales for completion.

2.18   All teaching staff are appropriately qualified. Staff qualifications are checked by the University as part of the approval process, and with Pearson as part of the approval process to run a programme. All new higher education teaching staff are assigned an Improvement and Innovation Leader, who provides the induction during the first four weeks of the teacher's employment, followed up within eight weeks by a teaching observation. Teaching staff reported that annual appraisals take place with the line manager. These set targets for

teaching are reviewed during the teaching observation process. Students met at the visit were complimentary regarding the teaching and support they receive from staff.

2.19   Teaching and learning is reviewed on an annual basis as part of the programme review process, which includes a section on teaching and learning. It operates a rating system for teaching and learning and requires comments on good practice and areas for improvement. The actions identified in the review are monitored at programme meetings and at the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee.

2.20   The Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy makes reference to continuing professional development (CPD) and scholarly activity, including professional updating, but the College does not have a higher education staff development policy. There is an annual plan for internal CPD for higher education teaching staff, which covers a range of aspects of higher education teaching and assessment, as well as programme development and review. The College recognises that more needs to be done in this area, most notably scholarly activities, and the need for enhanced CPD opportunities has been identified through various internal and external quality monitoring mechanisms. Teaching staff who met the review team reported that more staff development opportunities are being developed. They also confirmed that the College supports them in pursuing higher qualifications if they are relevant to their job. Five members of staff are also being supported to develop their portfolios for accreditation by the Higher Education Academy.

2.21   Overall, the learning environment is fit for purpose. The College recently installed dedicated higher education spaces at all campuses, which students appreciate.

2.22   The College's VLE is being enhanced, and used more and more effectively to provide information on courses and resources to students. The review team **affirms** the actions taken to improve the virtual learning environment in order to support the development of students' independent learning skills.

2.23   The College has effective systems in place for assuring, reviewing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, including processes for reviewing the quality of teaching. 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

2.24   The College has a number of processes in place to enable higher education students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Its approach to enabling student development is incorporated in its Strategic Plan. It refers to the aim of creating open and inclusive learning communities and involving students in the development and delivery of their learning experience. The Higher Education Strategy aims to: meet individual students' needs and to provide an individualised learning experience by empowering students to make informed decisions about their learning; promote deep learning and reflection; and develop critical, analytical reasoning and thinking skills. The Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy sets out a series of ambitions in relation to the student learning experience and the development of the academic, personal and professional potential of students. The SEND (special educational needs and disability) and Additional Learning Support Policy, which applies to all provision, including higher education, provides the framework for supporting the special needs of students.

2.25   The Higher Education Academic Board has overall responsibility for the academic work of the College, supported by the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee, which monitors the overall quality of the learning experience. The College provides an induction for all its students. Student support arrangements are described in course handbooks and on the website, with personal tutors and learning support staff providing extensive academic and pastoral support. The College's processes and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.26   In considering this Expectation the review team examined relevant documentation, including assessment and student support policies and procedures. The review team met students, and academic and professional support staff to explore the College's arrangements for the academic, personal and professional development of students.

2.27   All students receive an induction, although the nature and length of this shows some variation between programmes. At induction, students are provided with a range of useful information about their courses and the support available to them, including support for students with disabilities. This information is also available in the course handbooks. Students generally, though not unanimously, expressed satisfaction with the inductions they had received. The College monitors the quality of the application and induction processes for all College students, including higher education, through annual student surveys.

2.28   All programmes contain an element of personal development planning. Students are allocated a personal tutor, who helps them to monitor their own progress and signposts them to support, where necessary, through the online Individual Learning Plan (ILP) process. The ILP system is intended to assist students in developing personal development targets and to give direction on their journey as independent learners. Students reported to the review team that the system in its current form is not working effectively. While students value the personal tutorials, the online ILP SMART system is not seen as developmental. The review team **recommends** that the College review and further develop the effectiveness of the online personal development planning process for students. The College is aware of student opinion and intends to develop the ILP process into a more reflective activity.

2.29   The College commits adequate resources to the higher education programmes. The resources and facilities required to deliver new provision are identified as part of the internal approval process, when development teams are asked to comment on the human, physical and learning resources needed. Resources are reviewed annually as part of the course review process. Students have good access to resources, including those for franchised students who have access to both College and University resources. Students have the opportunity to provide feedback on resources through the student representative system. In response to such feedback the College has recently created dedicated study space for higher education students on each campus. Students confirmed that, in general, they are satisfied with the learning resources and that recent improvements have been made, but some issues in relation to shared resources, out-of-date software and printing costs were also identified.

2.30   While there is evidence of resources being obtained in response to student feedback, the College recognises the need for further investment into higher education. Staffing levels are currently lower than the average for the sector. The College recognises this, and reported that a recruitment budget was being built. It is taking a strategic approach to physical resource planning and is undertaking a review of facilities and space for higher education as part of the growth planning. There is a clear commitment to put more resources into higher education teaching and management.

2.31   The College has recently appointed a Head of e-Learning and significant headway has been made to progress the e-learning agenda, notably in relation to the VLE, staff and student engagement with it, and the design and accessibility of the site. The College's VLE, which is also used as a student intranet, currently holds online course and assessment information, and higher education policies, and facilitates access to online study skills tutorials. Students on the foundation degree also have access to the University's VLE, which provides a similar range of information. Students can access both the VLE and an integrated learner monitoring and support system, which hosts ILP SMART, allowing them to develop and track their learning independently online. The College also provides higher education-specific digital literacy training. Social media are currently not used to support learning or the development of a learner community.

2.32   The use of the VLE in supporting student learning varies between courses. It is used minimally in some areas, by staff and students, but extensively and enthusiastically in others. The College is working towards establishing minimum standards for the information that should be available. It recognises that the use of the VLE needs to be developed further so that independent learning skills can be developed throughout the student journey, including the pre-course stage, which would support the transition of learners into higher education (see Expectation B3).

2.33   The higher education academic toolkit effectively develops students' academic writing skills. The HND Public Services complements this resource with an initial assessment writing activity.

2.34   The College has a range of professional support staff to support student learning, including library, careers and employability, and information technology specialists. Students confirmed that they are aware of the services available to them and generally feel well supported. Student Services work closely with the Higher Education Academic Coordinator and student representatives. The library has a link coordinator with responsibility for higher education resources. Resources are reviewed using the student voice and campus meetings. Student Services are reviewed by direct student feedback, in student representative and Student Council meetings, and with the Higher Education Academic Coordinator acting as a liaison with support departments. The Careers Service offer support for job searches, CV writing and work with academic tutors. However, this is more a reactive

relationship and no monitoring of student take-up is undertaken. The College's SEND and Additional Learning Support Policy details the support available for students with complex needs. Staff and students are also provided with a guide on disabled students' allowances. The College is reviewing the accessibility of learning materials to meet different and complex student needs.

2.35   The review team found that the processes and resources in place at the College designed to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential are used effectively. 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

2.36 The College aims to work in partnership with students and their representatives. It articulates its student engagement through a Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy and an overarching College Student Engagement Strategy. The Student Charter for higher education students includes the College mission statement, together with expectations and obligations of the College and students.

2.37 The College has a multifaceted approach to ensuring the formal representation of students on deliberative bodies. Students are represented on the governing body but are currently not from the higher education student cadre. However, there are student representatives on the Higher Education Academic Board and the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee. There is no students' union but the College has a Student Council, which does include higher education student representation. The Higher Education Student Forum, a meeting of student representatives with the Higher Education Coordinator, is the main forum for students to provide feedback to the College.

2.38 There is a student representative system at the College, and student feedback is also collected at College level through a variety of means, including student surveys, focus groups, and the National Student Survey (NSS). Both formal and informal methods are used at module level. The structures and processes in place at the College would allow this Expectation to be met.

2.39 In considering this Expectation the review team examined documentation such as the Student Engagement Strategy and the Student Charter, relevant committee minutes, student survey results, and feedback to students on actions taken. The team tested the effectiveness of the processes in place in meetings with staff and students.

2.40 Although there is provision for student representatives on higher education committees there is little evidence that the representatives attend regularly. In contrast, minutes of the Higher Education Student Forum and the cross-College Student Council demonstrate that the student voice is heard. The Higher Education Student Charter is not an active reference point for students. Most students who met the team were unaware of it.

2.41 At induction and through course handbooks students are made aware of how they can make their voice heard, including the selection of student representatives, but there is no formal policy for the selection of representatives. Students who met the review team confirmed that there are student representatives in place for all courses, however, not all students had a clear idea of the selection process. Student representatives reported that they receive training, which some part-time students found difficult to access. However, a student representative pack explains what the role involves. Course representative meeting notes show that staff and students meet regularly, and students actively participate in the discussion of issues arising for their programmes. Students who met the team advised that they receive feedback from their representatives on issues raised, through verbal reports to class, social media or emailed notes.

2.42 Student views are regularly captured in module reviews, student surveys and online feedback mechanisms. There is some evidence of analysis of such feedback and closure of the feedback loop through the You Said, We Did process. Meetings with staff and students

also provided clear evidence that the student voice is heard and actions are being taken. The College prepares a useful summary of NSS outcomes, but it does not systematically use the outcomes to inform planning; students were unaware of NSS results.

2.43   There is no lack of opportunity for students to provide feedback to the College; students know how to raise issues, including, if appropriate, with the Senior Leadership Team. Students who met the review team stated that their preferred route for providing feedback to the College was through the course tutor, which was considered to be an effective method in resolving issues. An alternative route was through the Higher Education Coordinator. Students feel that their views are heard and valued, and gave examples of issues raised and resolved. The review team notes that staff and students enjoy good, informal communication. Students appreciate the positive outcomes of this approach.

2.44   The College has taken steps to engage with students but the engagement by students does not extend to all the areas where their voice could be heard, and the College does not routinely use formal student feedback to inform planning. The review team **recommends** that the College review and further develop the effectiveness of formal student representation and feedback mechanisms.

2.45   The College takes deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.46   The College has a strategic commitment to being a provider of effective teaching and learning in order to maximise students' potential; it prioritises timely assessment in its Higher Education Strategy. The Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy sets out key aims and principles of assessment. The Assessment and Internal Verification Policy - together with a range of ancillary policies and procedures such as the Higher Education Extenuating Circumstances Policy, Higher Education Plagiarism Policy, Higher Education Academic Appeal Policy, and the Malpractice and Maladministration Procedure - informs the College's assessment practices. The comprehensive Recognition of Prior Learning and Achievement Policy sets out the way in which credits can be obtained through prior work and experience.

2.47   The College has responsibility for the design, first-marking and internal verification or moderation of assessment for both Pearson and University programmes in accordance with their academic regulations. Assessment is managed at programme level. For Higher National programmes assignment briefs and assessments are internally verified before they are released to students. Internal moderation of assessment takes place for the foundation degree. A Board of Study confirms assessment grades for Higher National students before they are submitted for external verification by Pearson. The University's Board of Examiners confirms final grades and qualifications for foundation degree students. The College has processes and procedures in place that would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.48   To test the effectiveness of the College's assessment policies and processes, the review team examined graded work, internally verified and moderated assessment briefs and student work, and external examiner reports. The team also met students, senior staff and academic staff.

2.49   The College-wide Assessment and Internal Verification Policy, which applies to Higher National programmes, is appropriately detailed, setting out the requirements for assessment design, internal verification of assessment and feedback to students. The policy is available on the staff intranet. Assessment of Foundation Degree students is governed by the University's policy on assessment.

2.50   Staff reported that students are given explicit assessment information; students confirmed that they understand what they have to do to achieve different grades within their assignments, and demonstrated an understanding of the internal and external verification systems. Course handbooks contain a brief overview of assessment. Unit handbooks for Higher National programmes provide a useful mapping of the unit learning outcomes to the learning outcomes that are tested in each assessment task.

2.51   Assessment is carefully mapped and planned. Assessment planners for Higher National programmes detail the learning outcomes assessed, and indicate submission and return dates, including for feedback, for each unit. Assignment front sheets have the hand-in date clearly displayed. Assignments are submitted electronically and plagiarism-detection software is used for most programmes. The College has a robust Higher Education

Plagiarism Policy, which includes an outline of the steps being taken if plagiarism is suspected.

2.52   The College is consistently implementing its quality procedures relating to the verification of assignment briefs, and standardisation meetings are held to ensure that assessment is fair. Examples of assessment briefs for Higher National programmes seen by the review team are detailed, and include unit learning outcomes, the assessment criteria, and scenarios that make links to the external environment. External examiner reports for the HND Public Services programme comment on the good quality of assignment tasks. Similarly, assignment briefs for the foundation degree have clear guidelines for students, and include the learning outcomes and threshold assessment criteria. Internal verification of briefs and assignments for Higher National programmes is carried out effectively, with actions required logged. Moderation records show that, following the University's requirements, assignment briefs for the foundation degree are double-marked in accordance with its academic regulations, and records are being maintained using the University's documentation.

2.53   Examples of assessed student work seen by the review team show that constructive, developmental feedback is given to students. Written feedback is generally very detailed, both in terms of strengths and areas for improvement, and is returned within the College's guidelines of a three-week turnaround time. The quality of some feedback is commended by the external examiner. Students whom the review team met confirmed that feedback on assessment is useful and constructive.

2.54   Examination boards are held following the prescribed procedures. Pre-Boards of Examiners for the foundation degree are attended by the Course Leader, prior to the final examination board confirming grades. The collaboration agreement with the University indicates that all disciplinary matters are to be reported to the University. The College meets Pearson's requirement for the consideration of assessment results. An overarching Board of Study will scrutinise grades awarded for Pearson programmes in the current academic year. The Board will include an independent external member and will replace the individual Boards of Study for each programme that the College has previously held.

2.55   The latest external examiner reports generally confirm that assessments are appropriate and that there is adequate internal verification. The report for the engineering programmes raised some concerns with regards to the clarity of assessment task grading, which the College has subsequently addressed.

2.56   The College has reliable processes in place for assessment and is working within its policies and that of Pearson and the University. 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

2.57   The College has limited responsibilities for external examining. Pearson and the University are responsible for defining the role, nomination, training and recognition of the work of external examiners, whereas the College is primarily responsible for putting into effect the recommendations of external examiners and making effective use of their reports in quality assurance and enhancement. External examiner reports are reviewed by the Programme Manager and deputy faculty director and are monitored by the Head of Improvement and Innovation - Teaching and Learning. Reports are presented to the first Higher Education Academic Board meeting after receipt for consideration. External examiner reports are available to all students on the VLE. The College's process for receiving, reviewing and responding to reports would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.58   To test the effectiveness of procedures for the receipt of, and response to, external examiner reports, the review team read external examiner reports and traced the use of these in the College's internal quality assurance documentation, such as course reports and relevant committee minutes. The team also met academic staff, senior staff and students.

2.59   The responsibilities for the nomination and appointment of external examiners are set out in the BTEC Quality Assurance Handbook 2012-13: External Examination and the University's Procedures for External Examining of Taught Courses. The College has input into the nomination for the external examiner of the University, although the final decision and responsibility for appointment, induction and training rests with the University.

2.60   At College level the Head of Improvement and Innovation - Teaching and Learning considers all reports, provides brief comments on them and raises actions for the programme team to address. Reports are then forwarded to faculties. Course review reports show that programme teams consider them, and a summary of good practices and recommendations is included in the review report. The Higher Education Academic Board has oversight of the external examining process. Minutes of Board meetings demonstrate that external examiner reports are presented to the Board and noted.

2.61   The latest external examiner reports are positive, identifying good practice and confirming the maintenance of academic standards, robust assessment, internal verification and moderation processes. The exception is the report for HNC/D Electrical and Electronic Engineering and Mechanical Engineering programmes, which initially blocked the release of marks. The College addressed the issues identified and the block was lifted. No direct responses to external examiner recommendations are expected for Higher National programmes but the reports contain the opportunity for comment on action points from the previous report. Reports that the review team examined show that the College is addressing the recommendations made by external examiners. Responses to the reports for the foundation degree are provided by the University.

2.62   Students have minimal engagement with the external examining reporting process, although some Pearson external examiners meet small groups of students during their verification visits. Students indicated that they were aware that external examiner reports are available to them on the VLE, but very few students access them.

2.63   The College has generally effective procedures for using external examiner reports. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.64   The College has a range of methods for monitoring its programmes. The Higher Education Quality Enhancement Cycle integrates the outcomes of annual programme monitoring and action planning. Annual programme review reports feed into Faculty Self-Assessment Reports. College-wide evaluation of higher education results in a Higher Education Quality Enhancement Plan. Responsibility for programme monitoring is delegated to the Higher Education Academic Board and the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee, which comprises the Director of Quality and Student Experience, and programme leaders. The University has primary responsibility for the periodic review of the foundation degree. There is no periodic review process for Pearson provision. The range of College programme monitoring processes and well-defined reporting lines would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.65   The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising the documentary evidence provided by the College, which included annual course reviews and quality enhancement plans, faculty and College self-assessment reports, and the College's Quality Enhancement Plan, as well as minutes from deliberative committees. The team also met senior and teaching staff, and students.

2.66   The Higher Education Quality Enhancement Cycle document provides a diagrammatic overview of the process for programme reviews. The College monitors its provision annually through a combination of data analysis, external examiner reports and student surveys. Both senior staff and academic staff understand and confidently articulated the College's quality assurance procedures for the monitoring of programmes. Each programme produces an annual programme review report and Quality Enhancement Plan. Programme reviews and the associated quality enhancement plans seen by the review team are comprehensive and reflective. A parallel programme monitoring process for the foundation degree programme is undertaken by the University, the results of which feed into its own quality system.

2.67   The Higher Education Coordinator undertakes a review of programme reports and identifies key themes across all higher education provision. Progress against course quality enhancement plans, which are updated termly, is monitored by the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee, and a report is received by the Higher Education Academic Board, both of which include student representation. The ongoing scrutiny of quality enhancement plans during the year enables the effective monitoring of programmes. Student representatives contribute to reviewing and monitoring programmes through the Higher Education Student Forum.

2.68   Programme review reports feed into a Faculty Self-Assessment Report, which also includes further education provision. They do not directly inform the higher education-specific College-level evaluation of provision. The College has recently reviewed its processes for the monitoring of higher education provision at College level, and the previous College self-assessment report, which covered all College provision, was replaced with reflective self-assessment of higher education, which reports against the expectations of the Quality Code. Outcomes are captured in a comprehensive Higher Education Quality Enhancement Plan. A traffic light indicator system is used to monitor areas in need of

improvement and actions have review dates matched to them. The governing body receives brief overviews of the performance of the College's higher education provision.

2.69   The College has the ability to generate reports on key performance indicators for higher education programmes at school and College level, but these are analysed and reported separately from faculty and College enhancement plans, thus limiting the College's ability to have a comprehensive overview of its higher education provision. The review team **recommends** that the College further develop the mechanisms for the effective oversight of the monitoring and review of its higher education provision.

2.70   The College does not operate an internal periodic review procedure. The foundation degree is, however, periodically externally scrutinised by the University via a quality review process that supplements the programme-specific scrutiny afforded by external examiners and the internal annual monitoring of programmes. There is no requirement for the periodic review of Pearson programmes.

2.71   Programme review reports consider the programmes' overall effectiveness in a number of areas and log external examiner actions. The resulting programme quality enhancement plans have measurable actions and are updated regularly. Deliberative committees effectively scrutinise these quality assurance reports and monitor progress against actions. Likewise, the College self-evaluation reports address perceived strengths and weaknesses, and the resulting Quality Enhancement Plan identifies appropriate actions. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.72   The cross-College Complaints Policy and the Higher Education Academic Appeals Policy detail the processes the College applies for handling student complaints and academic appeals. Both policies are available to students on the VLE. Students are also made aware of their existence through course handbooks. The design of the processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.73   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's procedures by examining policy and guidance documents, and reports on academic appeals and complaints, and through discussions with staff and students.

2.74   The Complaints Policy applies to all higher education programmes, including the University's foundation degree programme. Although responsibility for complaints and academic appeals for students registered on its awards remains with the University, complaints against the College are dealt with by the College according to its own complaints procedures.

2.75   There are a number of methods for lodging a complaint, including: the use of a comments slip; via email; telephone calls directly to staff; via the customer services email service; using social media; or by contacting the Executive Director for Innovation and Improvement, a member of the Senior Leadership Team or the Principal directly. All complaints will be acknowledged within one working day of receipt and complainants can expect a full response to the complaint within 10 working days. Unsatisfactory resolutions of complaints can be escalated to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. The Complaints Policy includes helpful references to other documents, such as the Higher Education Academic Appeals Policy, and has a document management stamp indicating owner and renewal date. There is provision for a suitable level of confidentiality where appropriate.

2.76   The Executive Director for Innovation and Improvement is responsible for monitoring the timely and effective implementation of the Complaints Policy, and the Deputy Principal Quality and Curriculum is responsible for overseeing the complaints process. Formal complaints are managed by the Manager for Adult Learning Development. The College routinely monitors formal complaints through regular reports to senior managers and an annual report to the Board of Governors. Reports are not higher education-specific but the review team was informed that disaggregated complaints data are kept by the complaints manager and shared with heads of school. Nevertheless, disaggregating data at College level would provide greater clarity of the issues affecting cross-College higher education provision.

2.77   The Course Handbook directs students to the Complaints Policy. It does not contain the Policy itself but links to it via the VLE. The College website only makes a general statement about the option to lodge a complaint but does not explain the process or link to the Policy. Students whom the team met confirmed that the Complaints Policy is on the VLE and that they know how to complain, if necessary, although issues are usually dealt with to their satisfaction informally by tutors.

2.78   The College's Higher Education Academic Appeals Policy supports and supplements the appeals process of Pearson and the University. Relevant University procedures will only be invoked where the issue cannot be resolved internally or the appeal is in relation to an examination. While students are encouraged to follow the College's internal policy, the policy makes it clear that they have the right to appeal directly to Pearson or the University, as relevant. If a student wishes to appeal an assessment outcome the Course Handbook directs them to the Higher Education Academic Appeals Policy on the student intranet. It does not provide a link to it but it does summarise how to lodge an appeal using the College's procedures.

2.79   The Higher Education Academic Appeals Policy has a document management stamp indicating owner and renewal date. The appeals procedure consists of a two-stage process involving an informal and a formal stage. The Policy clearly states processing times and the grounds on which an appeal can be made. Following an appeal student work is second-marked and if the issue remains the University is involved. The review team found that the processes were well understood by students and staff. Students and staff confirmed close informal communication, which enables them to resolve any issues. There have been no academic appeals in the last two academic years.

2.80   The College has robust complaints and academic appeals policies and procedures in place. 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

2.81 The College provides a range of work-related opportunities for all full-time higher education students. Activities can range from placements and live projects to work experience or work shadowing. The College has arrangements for delivering these learning opportunities with a wide range of organisations other than the University, including employers and external organisations. Work placements form an integral part of the Foundation Degree in Psychology and Criminal Behaviour and are formally assessed. In the case of Higher National programmes they are not formally assessed but feed into unit assessments or personal development portfolios. The Work-Related Activity Handbook outlines the expectations, roles and responsibilities of students, as well as tutors and placement providers supporting students, during their work-related activity placement. The Safeguarding - Health and Safety Work Experience Placements Policy and Procedure document sets out the mandatory steps to be taken by the College to ensure work-related placements are safe. The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.82 In considering this Expectation the review team examined the College's arrangements for the management and support of work-related activities, including its health and safety policy, the guidance provided to staff, students and placement providers, and relevant documentation for setting up and managing work-related and work-placement activities. To test the effectiveness of the arrangements in place the team also met staff, students and employers.

2.83 The pilot Work-Related Activity Handbook, which emerged from the work of the Work-Related Activity Steering Group, defines work-related activity as work experience, mandatory vocational placements, live projects, mentoring, shadowing, internships, volunteering, industry forum workshops and industry speakers. The College adopts a risk management approach to work-related learning and there is an emphasis on students taking partial responsibility for the risk assessment process. Risk ratings range from low to medium and high.

2.84 For each work-related activity to be undertaken by students a placement provider agreement form (for low risk activities) or a placement provider approval form (for medium and high risk activities) has to be completed and shared with students and the relevant faculty. Students are asked to complete a risk assessment, which is signed-off by the placement coordinator.

2.85 The scope of the Safeguarding - Health and Safety Work Experience Placements Policy and Procedure document, which governs the risk assessment element of work-related activities, covers a more limited range of activities than the ones listed in the Work-Related Activity Handbook. Staff gave contradictory statements as to which higher education provision would be covered by the Policy and it remained unclear whether all courses and all work-related activities would fall under the Policy. The review team **recommends** that the College clarify the scope of the policy on placements and work-related activities and identify the arrangements for any provision that falls outside it.

2.86   The College was unable to provide documentary evidence that its work-related activities policy has been implemented. There is evidence of a risk assessment in accordance with the Health and Safety Work Experience Placements Policy for one placement on one programme. No evidence was available for any of the other Higher National programmes or for the 16 placement providers of the foundation degree. Nor was there evidence that the required agreements with work-related activity and placement providers described in the Work-Related Activities Handbook are in place for any of the programmes. Employers who met the review team, and who are providers of work-related activities, with one exception, were unaware of any formal agreements. Similarly, there was no evidence that risk assessments described in the Work-Related Activities Handbook had been carried out by students and signed-off as required. The College admitted that it could not be sure that all programmes followed the policies. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure effective management oversight of the policy and arrangements for placements and work-related activities.

2.87   The Code of Professional Conduct included in the Work-Related Activity Handbook places a duty on the College to provide appropriate and timely information to work-related activity providers and students before, during and after students' placements. While students confirmed that they are well prepared for work-related activity placements, employers stated they had received little information from the College.

2.88   The College's policies and procedures for the management of learning opportunities with others are not effective, which gives rise to two recommendations. There is a lack of clarity concerning the scope of the Health and Safety Work Experience Placements Policy and Procedure in relation to the nature and range of work-related activities covered. In addition, there are significant gaps in the implementation of the College policy stipulated in the Work-Related Activity Handbook with regards to agreements with placement providers, and student and staff risk assessments. This is particularly significant for the programme that has a mandatory and assessed placement. The review team concludes that the College is in breach of its policy and procedures, and that the Expectation is not met. Due to the nature and extent of the problem the associated risk level is deemed to be serious.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

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

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

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.91   Of the 11 Expectations in this judgement area, 10 Expectations are applicable to the College. Out of these 10 Expectations nine are met and one is judged not met. Expectation B11 is not applicable to the College as it does not offer research degrees. Expectation B10 is judged to have a serious risk. This is reflected in the two recommendations, which concern the clarification of the scope of the policy on placements and work-related activities, and the effective management oversight of the policy and arrangements for placements and work-related activities.

2.92   There are three recommendations in this judgement area for Expectations that have been met with a low risk level: the review and further development of the effectiveness of the online personal development planning process for students (Expectation B4); the formal student representation and feedback mechanisms (Expectation B5); and the further development of mechanisms for the effective oversight of the monitoring and review of higher education provision (Expectation B8).

2.93   In relation to Expectation B3 the review team affirms the actions taken to improve the VLE in order to support the development of students' independent learning skills.

2.94   All but one of the Expectations in this judgement area are met. The majority of the Expectations have a low risk rating. However, the one Expectation that is not met carries a serious risk rating due to the nature and extent of the issues identified. The College is in breach of its policies on the health and safety of work-related activities and this affects almost all of its higher education provision.

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

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1   The College provides a range of information about its higher education provision to students, staff and external stakeholders, and in a variety of ways, including print and digital formats on internal and external websites. Responsibility for the College's provision of a large proportion of information, including publishing data, rests with its Marketing Services. The publication of information is governed by the Higher Education Information and Approval Guidance document. There is also a procedure for the approval of subsequent changes to course information. The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.2   The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing the procedures and a range of published information, including web-based information about the College, the University and Pearson; information about the College's programmes published on its website, on the VLE and in prospectuses; as well as handbooks and guidance published for students and staff. The team also discussed the effectiveness of the College's practices and procedures for the publication of information with students, and with senior, academic and professional support staff.

3.3   The College's main vehicle for communicating with its stakeholders is its website, which contains a range of useful information for prospective students and external stakeholders. The College's externally facing website contains its strategy, vision and values, and information regarding all courses delivered, including higher education. There are also links to the cross-College full-time and part-time prospectuses, with the higher education programmes included in both. Information about student support services for all students and study facilities is also provided. Key Information Sets are absent from the website.

3.4   The Higher Education Admissions Policy is not published on the website but information on application processing and follow-on are described in the online prospectuses. The programme pages on the website identify the University and Pearson as the awarding partners, and give information on entry requirements, course fees and whether students are expected to pay for additional materials. Students who met the review team confirmed that, in general, the information they received before commencing their programme was accurate, however, not all students had been aware of additional course costs prior to the start of their programme. Programme Managers are responsible for the content of programme pages on the website, and any changes to this information are routed via the Higher Education Coordinator for approval.

3.5   The collaboration agreement with the University stipulates that 'any and all advertisements, prospectuses and other marketing media, communications and correspondence related to or naming the courses will include the words, "[Name of Course] is validated by, and leads to an award of, the University of Bedfordshire"'. However, the website uses alternative wording, such as 'franchised' or 'delivered and franchised by', while the Course Handbook refers to 'organised in conjunction with the University of Bedfordshire'.

These inconsistencies have not been picked up by the College's processes for ensuring the accuracy of its published information.

3.6   Most College policies and strategies clearly specify authorship, date of approval and review date, version, approval body and medium of communication, thus enabling timely review of information and ensuring version control. In contrast, the terms of reference for higher education committees and groups are undated and it is not always clear whether they have been approved by the relevant approval body. The course specifications that the College produces are equally undated so that it is difficult to ascertain whether they are current, and the specification for the foundation degree wrongly names the College as the awarding body. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure that all information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.7   The College also publishes information about its higher education programmes on the UCAS website. The Higher Education Coordinator is responsible for amending and updating information on the UCAS website, but there is no documented process for this. Information about the College's alumni association, which is run by an external organisation, is hosted on the College's website. The content is managed by the Head of Marketing and subject to the Higher Education Information and Approval procedure.

3.8   At the commencement of their programme students receive course-specific induction information. During induction students are also given information about how to use the VLE. The VLE contains useful information for students and staff, such as programme-related information and programme handbooks, and offers access to external examiners' reports. Foundation degree students also have access to the University's VLE, where handbooks, assignment briefs and submission dates can be found. The College VLE also hosts an integrated learner monitoring and support system, which has online action planning and target setting facilities.

3.9   Use of the VLE by programmes varies, with minimal use in some areas and a preference by students for using an external website. The College conducted a review of the use of the VLE and recognised that there were some inconsistent practices across programmes, and that teaching staff need more support to create materials. The College has recently appointed a Head of e-Learning and much progress has been made since then, particularly with improving the design and accessibility of the site and staff engagement with it (see Expectation B3).

3.10   Parts of the VLE are also used as a student intranet and contain a higher education information portal where higher education policies, the Higher Education Student Forum, study skills materials, and information about student life can be found. The content is monitored by the Head of e-Learning. There is no separate policy for ensuring the accuracy of information on the VLE. The process for the approval of information follows the Higher Education Information and Approval Guidance.

3.11   Course handbooks, which are made available on the VLE but not used by all students, contain much useful information about the programme and learning support. The College does not undertake any evaluation of the effectiveness of course handbooks and their use by students.

3.12   The College's processes and procedures for the approval of published information, and for checking and monitoring of their accuracy, are not fit for purpose. The Higher Education Information and Approval Guidance states that it is a policy but it does not provide any detail about the creation, verification of accuracy and approval of published information. It merely lists ownership of certain types of locally produced information. The Guidance has no ownership and approval date and its status is therefore unclear. Equally, the procedure for Approving Offering and Course Information Change Requests does not provide any detail

about the processes to be followed for approving and amending information. It is an IT help sheet for online approval of such information. The review team heard that there was a process for checking the accuracy and consistency of information and its approval, but this could not be clearly articulated. Staff described an informal process that does not involve a documented policy and process requiring approval or sign-off at every stage; nor is there a formal process for monitoring the continued accuracy of information published. The review team **recommends** that the College clarify the responsibilities for the approval and monitoring of published information and put in place clear policies and procedures for their management.

3.13   The College's processes and procedures for the production and management of information are not sufficiently robust to ensure that information is always fit for purpose and trustworthy. The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and level of associated risk is moderate, as insufficient emphasis is given to assuring the quality of information.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

3.15   Expectation C is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate. There are two recommendations in this area concerning the fitness for purpose of some of the information the College produces and the processes for ensuring the trustworthiness of information.

3.16   The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** 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 is committed in its Higher Education Strategy and Strategic Plan to enhancing the student experience. The Strategic Plan sets out ways in which the College intends to enhance the learning experience, including revising its quality systems. The Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, and the Teaching and Learning Observation Policy, contain a commitment to reflect on performance, improve student learning and share good practice. The Higher Education Student Charter outlines what students can expect from the College with regards to their learning experience.

4.2   The College enhances students' learning opportunities, both as a result of projects initiated at College level and as a result of sharing instances of good practice. Responsibility for enhancement is spread between staff, students and deliberative committees, with clearly defined responsibilities. Although the College has no single, formalised enhancement strategy, the design of the processes for enhancing student learning opportunities combined with the opportunities for sharing good practice would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.3   To evaluate the effectiveness of the enhancement procedures and activities, the review team scrutinised minutes of the Higher Education Academic Board and the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee. The team also held meetings with senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students, and considered quality assurance documentation, such as self-assessment reports and sections of the VLE.

4.4   Deliberate steps are taken at College level to effectively enhance students' learning opportunities. The College has recently reviewed its deliberative committee structures that support the quality assurance and enhancement of higher education programmes with a view to enhancing management oversight and providing greater levels of student engagement and representation. This resulted in, among other things, the creation of a Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee with student representation. The equally new quality enhancement cycle outlines the processes employed for self-assessment, action planning and process improvement with regard to higher education programmes, and provides clarity on how the key elements of the refreshed deliberative structure contribute to it.

4.5   The revised Teaching and Learning Observation Policy clearly differentiates higher education teaching observations from those of further education provision. Observations are designed to be developmental and are ungraded. Outcomes inform the design of staff development activities. The Policy has not been in force for a whole academic year but early indicators show that it is effective in improving teaching.

4.6   The College's processes for capturing and disseminating good practice operate effectively. Programme level committees are used to drive initiatives that students consider valuable enhancements to their learning. Programme reviews include reflections on what works well, thus enabling the identification of good practice, and result in effective quality enhancement plans. For example, the HND Public Services programme put in place a bespoke learning programme for students with complex needs. Sessions and academic supervision focus on differentiated needs and have included the provision of an additional

unit to meet the specific needs of students. The Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee devotes part of its agenda to discussing good practice.

4.7   The College is taking strategic steps to enhance student learning through the use of technology. The recent appointment of a Head of e-Learning has led to the first improvements in the structure and functionality of the VLE, and staff and student engagement with it has increased. Firm plans are in place for the further development and use of the VLE (see Expectation B3).

4.8   Student feedback mechanisms have informed the allocation of resources to enhance student learning and have resulted in the creation of dedicated higher education learning spaces that support independent and peer learning. Student feedback has also enhanced the curriculum and programme delivery. The Higher Education Student Forum provides an effective conduit for student views to be heard.

4.9   The College takes deliberate steps to enhance students' learning opportunities at both institutional and programme level, and effectively records and shares good practice. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.11   The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area.

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

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The College's Strategic Plan identifies the need to build strong partnerships with the community, businesses and other stakeholders, and to contribute to the economic health of the region as a priority. The Higher Education Strategy states that it is the College's aim to develop the skills that local employers require, and that current and future skills needs will be identified through a dialogue with local employers. The College is a leading partner with the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership and aims to ensure that vocational skills and training are held in high esteem as a driver of the local economy and community. The planned further extension of higher education provision is to ensure the appropriate development of higher level skills among the local and regional workforce.

5.2   The College does not have a separate enterprise and employability strategy but identifies a key role for itself in regional and local development initiatives. It is the biggest training provider locally, working with 3,000 local companies, primarily in relation to its further education provision. It also works with a number of business advisory groups, however, with the exception of Engineering, none are explicitly linked with higher education provision.

5.3   Employability skills are a key feature of the College's higher education provision and are integrated into the curriculum. All courses are vocational in nature and include work-related activities and personal development planning as a mandatory or optional component.

5.4   The College has developed strong relationships with local employers and this has provided work-based and work-related learning opportunities, including field trips, for higher education students. There are strong links with employers for courses such as the Foundation Degree in Psychology and Criminal Behaviour and the HNC/D in Public Services, where work-placements are either mandatory or feed into unit assessments, but are more limited in the Photography and Graphic Design areas. Local employers also contribute to programme design or programme delivery as guest speakers. Students value the vocational nature of the College's higher education provision and the opportunities available to develop their employability skills.

5.5   The College has established a Work-Related Activity Steering Group with a remit to review policy, consider roles, develop a handbook, promote cross-College working and identify risks. The Careers Service offers general employment guidance and support.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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