



Higher Education Review of New College Swindon

January 2015

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at New College Swindon. The review took place from 20 to 22 January 2015, and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Mary Meldrum
- Mr Mike Slawin
- Mrs Kanyanut Ndubuokwu (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

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

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

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

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.³ A dedicated section explains the method for Higher Education Review⁴ and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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

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

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about New College Swindon

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

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

Good practice

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

- The well-resourced staff-initiated scholarly activity that maintains industrial and academic curriculum currency and enhances learning and teaching (Expectation B3).
- The prompt and effective response by programme leaders and teaching staff to feedback from students (Expectation B5).
- The clear and supportive assessment process that culminates in prompt and helpful feedback (Expectation B6).

Recommendations

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

By July 2015:

- revise the Student Involvement Policy to reflect the contribution of higher education students as partners to decision-making in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5)
- improve the College-level oversight, monitoring and review of programmes to recognise the distinct requirements of higher education students (Expectation B8)
- further develop and implement the higher education-specific College-level strategy for enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The recently instituted Student Staff Liaison Committee that allows senior management to engage with all higher education students and follow-up issues to enhance the student learning experience.(Expectation B5).
- The appointment from September 2014 of a Higher Education Manager (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement is an increasingly important focus of higher education delivery at New College Swindon, however, the College recognises that it is still developing mechanisms to more fully involve students in quality assurance and enhancement activities. Currently the College involves students using a range of formal approaches including staff/student liaison meetings, course representative systems and module feedback, and informal approaches that capitalise on good relationships between higher education students and both delivery and managerial staff.

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

About New College Swindon

New College Swindon (the College) was formed as a general further education college in 1983. It is a large college and serves the needs of Swindon and the wider community of Wiltshire and its border areas in Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Gloucestershire. The College has offered higher education provision since 1994, plus Higher National Certificates (HNC) and Higher National Diplomas (HND) since 2011. In February 2012 the College secured for the first time its own HEFCE student number control allocation.

The College enrolls around 3,500 students aged 16-18, and 7,700 students aged 19 or over. In addition there were approximately 1,000 work-based students in learning and 80 on work place training. Within this cohort, in 2014-15 the College enrolled 145 students of which 20 are validated through Bath Spa University. This constitutes one per cent of current College enrolments.

The College's primary focus is on government key priorities for education and skills, linked to employability and career progression. Its vision is to seek to widen and increase participation in high quality, effective and efficient education and training for the economic and social benefits of our customers. Its mission is to provide high quality education, training and services which meet customers' needs, encourage individuals to realise their full potential, support lifelong learning and advance equality of opportunity, help young people, the community and business to prosper.

The College works in collaboration with the following higher education providers:

- a Foundation Degree in Early Years with Bath Spa University
- HNC and HND qualifications with Pearson: Computing; Business & Enterprise; Public & Emergency Services; Early Years; Health & Social Care; Art & Design (Textiles); and Sport (Health, Fitness & Exercise).

A new partnership agreement has been signed with Resource Development International Ltd to develop and promote online and blended degree courses. These will be delivered in partnership with Anglia Ruskin University. The College has responded successfully to the findings of the last QAA review in November 2010.

Explanation of the findings about New College Swindon

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College delivers its higher education provision in partnership with Bath Spa University and Pearson. The higher education qualifications that it offers are mapped to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) by the awarding body, Bath Spa University (the University), and the awarding organisation, Pearson.

1.2 The College engages with the validation and approval process as prescribed by Pearson and the University. It is also subject to the University's Periodic Review process. For Pearson programmes, it has undergone several approval activities in order to deliver its range of HNC and HND programmes. In addition, to revalidate a course every five years the College must resubmit curricula vitae and staff training records together with details of the programme itself.

1.3 The University and Pearson scrutinise the level, qualification title and content as part of the validation, approval and re-approval process to assure the programmes are at the right level, contain the appropriate learning outcomes, and reflect the title of the programmes.

1.4 The approaches of the University and Pearson conform to the Expectation. Approval documentation supports that the College engages with these approaches.

1.5 The review team reviewed documentation and certificates of approval produced by the awarding body and organisation, as well as communication and external examiner reports. In addition, the team met staff and the Principal.

1.6 The approval processes for the University and Pearson assure that the College's engagement with the Expectation takes place, and as a result the College has had a successful record in programme development.

1.7 The review team concludes that the College manages its responsibilities in line with the requirements from the University and Pearson. Therefore, 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

1.8 The College works with the University and Pearson's academic frameworks in order to govern how they award their higher education qualifications. The capacity of the College to fulfil these frameworks is assessed at the validation and approval stage. External examiner visits and scrutiny takes place to assure that academic regulations are being observed. The University has a requirement for a five-year periodic review for the course, as well as an annual partnership review, and Pearson has a five year re-approval and resubmission process.

1.9 This approach is consistent with the requirements to meet the Expectation. In order to test the effectiveness of the approach, the review team reviewed the processes of the awarding partners and scrutinised a range of documentation, including course handbooks, the Student Handbook, Staff Handbook and external examiner reports, as well as meeting staff and students.

1.10 The review team concludes that the College works to the frameworks identified and that assessment and level is as it should be. Discussions with staff confirmed their understanding of academic frameworks.

1.11 The College produces a partner report for the University and Pearson undertakes an annual review of the College. The review team identified that the College discharges its responsibilities effectively and confirms the College's own evaluation, as well as requiring an action plan response.

1.12 For University-validated provision, the College holds internal exam boards, and for Pearson-validated provision it holds HNC/D review meetings.

1.13 The review team concludes that the College manages its responsibilities in line with the requirements of the University and Pearson. Therefore 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 The College is responsible for delivering programmes in accordance with its awarding partners' regulations and the definitive programme documents approved through validation.

1.15 The College produces documentation which includes definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for each programme of study. This is made available to students through programme specifications and unit handbooks available on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Programme managers are responsible for ensuring programmes are delivered in accordance with the definitive programme document.

1.16 The review team tested this Expectation through scrutiny of programme specifications, course handbooks, programme validation and review documents, and discussed the arrangements with staff in meetings.

1.17 The College is registered as a Pearson provider. This requires it to re-validate courses every five years, and resubmit curricula vitae and staff professional development records alongside details of what will be taught. Once approval is given, the College is required to wait for a two-year period before it can apply to specialise. For instance, following application of this process, the College was able to offer a Criminal Law module on the Public Service HNC/D courses.

1.18 The College produces documentation which includes definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for each programme of study. This is made available to students through programme specifications and course and unit handbooks which are available on the VLE and in the learning resource centre. Programme managers are responsible for ensuring programmes are delivered in accordance with the definitive programme document.

1.19 The College follows University procedures in regard to programme re-validation. This is the same as that for initial validation, with the additional requirement that curriculum development teams include a reflection and review of the course operation over the previous approval term. The process was followed by the College in the revalidation of the Foundation Degree Early Years, resulting in new syllabus aims and outcomes.

1.20 Minor moderation guidelines are contained in the University's Minor Modifications Policy. Any major modifications will require the course to be fully re-approved. The University has adopted a risk-based approach to minor modifications, whereby the approval process is dependent on the change being made, and whether it constitutes a change to the course or to a module.

1.21 The review team concludes that definitive programme information is clear, accessible and appropriately managed, ensuring 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

1.22 The College's current higher education awards are accredited by Bath Spa University (BA Early Years) and Pearson (Higher Nationals). It follows University and Pearson processes for approval of taught programmes. The College is responsible for working with its awarding partners to ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK standard for the qualification.

1.23 The College has undergone formal validation and approval with the University for its Foundation Degree Early Years. This is detailed in the University Course Planning and Approval Handbook. External expertise was used as part of this process. Assignments are agreed by an external examiner and work is second marked internally when completed.

1.24 Pearson Higher National programmes are subject to an approval process reviewed on a five-year basis. Two years into the successful running of the programme, units can be added as a College specialism, but the College has not yet taken up this option. Work is internally moderated and moderation information checked by the subject verifier who completes an annual report

1.25 The team met senior staff and course leaders and examined a range of documents, including course review reports, internal moderation reports and external examiner reports

1.26 The University's requirements ensure that there is an external member on panels for the approval of new programmes and on programme periodic review panels, and that there is employer engagement in the design of programmes. The annual monitoring process monitors responses to partner approval and review conditions and recommendations, as well as to external examiner reports. The approval processes for Pearson Higher National programmes are followed. The external examiner reports confirm standards on both University and Pearson programmes.

1.27 The review team found that the programme approval and review procedures work effectively. There is evidence of externality within the programme development and approval processes and staff are aware of the relevant procedures. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.28 The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered by the College is overseen by the University, as the awarding body for the Foundation Degree, and Pearson, as the awarding organisation for the Higher National programmes. These awarding partners are responsible for ensuring that the achievement of programme learning outcomes are met through assessment and for ensuring that both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.

1.29 The College follows the University's processes for the oversight of the design and approval of the Foundation Degree Early Years. Pearson processes are used to oversee the design and approval of Higher National programmes. The University modules have learning outcomes and it provides the assessment. An external examiner is appointed by the College and approved by the University. Pearson programmes have an annual external examiner assessment visit to review assessment and verify against national standards.

1.30 The review team looked at programme and assessment documentation, external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports and met senior staff, course leaders and teaching staff.

1.31 The College meets the monitoring and review requirements of its awarding partners. External examiner reports confirm programme learning outcomes are met.

1.32 The team considers that the design and operation of the mechanisms used by the College for ensuring the achievement of programme learning outcomes is met through assessment, and those for ensuring that both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied, are sound and aligned with Chapter A3 of the Quality Code. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.33 The oversight of the processes for design, approval, monitoring and review of modules, programmes and qualifications is the responsibility of the awarding partners. Programme approval processes are conducted using the processes set down by the University for the Foundation Degree and by Pearson for the Higher National awards. The College is responsible for curriculum development, qualification delivery and maintenance of academic standards.

1.34 The review team met senior staff, course leaders and teaching staff. The team examined programme monitoring documentation including annual reports and external examiner reports.

1.35 The College clearly followed the awarding partners monitoring and review processes. External examiner reports were received and, together with the awarding body's annual monitoring, confirm that UK threshold academic standards are achieved and the academic standards required by the awarding partners are being maintained.

1.36 The team considers that awarding partners processes used by the College for the monitoring and review of programmes are sound and aligned with Chapter A3 of the Quality Code and that these explicitly address the achievement of UK threshold academic standards and the maintenance of academic standards required by the awarding partners. The 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

1.37 For the awarding partner programmes, validation requires external and independent expertise to be part of the approval process. In addition, independent expertise is identified as a requirement of the five-year Periodic Review process for the University, and the re-approval process for the Pearson. In addition, the College makes use of industry expertise through its relationships with employers and industry contacts, as well as for students' work placements.

1.38 The review team considered the processes for annual monitoring and review, as well as documentation relating to validation and approval, and external examiners' reports. Meetings with staff and students also took place.

1.39 In addition to using external expertise as part of approval processes, the College uses external examiner reports as part of its monitoring and review processes.

1.40 For the Foundation Degree Early Years there is engagement with the University's annual monitoring process, where the external examiner report is incorporated into actions. In addition, externality is supported through work-placements which are an integral part of the Foundation Degree Early Years.

1.41 Higher National courses in Health & Social Care, and Early Years have a compulsory placement element, with well-established external links. Optional placement opportunities also exist with the Higher National Public Services programme. In the Business and Computing programmes, external expertise is used in 'live briefs' for assignments.

1.42 The review team is satisfied that external and independent expertise is appropriately used by the College, and therefore it meets the Expectation. 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

1.43 In reaching its judgements about the quality of student learning opportunities the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Overall, the College is effective in managing its responsibilities, in conjunction with the degree-awarding body and organisation, and maintaining academic standards.

1.44 From its scrutiny of a wide range of evidence, and through the meetings that the review team had with a staff and students, the team concludes that effective use is made of relevant subject and qualification benchmarks and external expertise in the development of programmes and their subsequent approval and monitoring. Furthermore, the review team confirms that effective use is made of input from external examiners and link tutors from the degree-awarding partners.

1.45 The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the College's degree-awarding body and organisation **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 and Approval*

Findings

2.1 The College processes for and involvement in programme design and approval are subject to the processes of the foundation degree awarding body, Bath Spa University, and the Higher National awarding organisation, Pearson.

2.2 The design and approval of programmes is discussed and agreed by the Curriculum Development Group. For the University, awards submitted by the College for both approval and re-approval are developed in accordance with the University's formal validation process. The University is responsible for ensuring that curriculum development takes account of learner voice and employer feedback connected to the partner colleges. The College manages the design and content of the award in accordance with University requirements. College curriculum teams develop proposal documentation as part of the validation process. For the Higher National awards, the College submits new proposals through the approval process with Pearson and after two years of running the course successfully, can apply to do specialisms within the programme.

2.3 The team met senior staff, course leaders, support staff and examined documentation included awarding partner procedures and guidelines, programme approval and review documents and committee minutes.

2.4 The team confirms that the quality assurance and quality improvement procedures operating at the College ensure that curriculum provision is regularly reviewed and adapted to meet both student and employer needs. The College Head of Higher Education provides course leaders with updates about higher education and the subject and qualification benchmark statements in the higher education course leaders monthly meetings. Course leaders confirmed that curriculum change is informed by staff scholarly activity, legislative change, external examiner feedback and student feedback. New programmes are proposed by College staff by presenting a business case and these are approved through the Curriculum Development Group.

2.5 For the Foundation Degree in Early Years, curriculum development is undertaken by the team responsible for the area of study under the direction of the Link Tutor at the University. The College programme team attend events at, and work with, the University and other colleges to amend specifications. For the Higher National awards, College staff liaise with Pearson who advise on structuring of programmes. The College supported workshops with Pearson to inform development. The College internal health check process is also used to inform programme development.

2.6 The team found that there was a sound process in the College for proposing new programmes and that there was good engagement with the awarding partners' processes. The team recognises that there is scope to extend employer involvement in informing the development and engaging in the delivery of Higher National awards, however, the team

concludes that the College policy and procedures for programme design and approval meet the Expectation 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*

Findings

2.7 Admission to the College's higher education provision is through UCAS and direct application to the College. The College has a robust process for admissions, following UCAS and awarding partner procedures. General admission principles are set out on the College's website, admission policy is published on the College's VLE. The College's approach to recruitment, selection and admission meets the Expectation in principle.

2.8 The review team met senior staff, programme leaders, teaching staff, and students to test the operational effectiveness of the College's admission processes and whether the College meets the Expectation. The team also looked at the documents in regards to the Admission Policy on the College's website and other related policies on the College's VLE.

2.9 The College's Admissions Policy provides an inclusive, fair and transparent admissions process which is aligned to the College's Fees Panel terms of reference. There are other policies, for example Fees, Equalising Opportunity and Celebrating Diversity, and Student Behaviour Support & Disciplinary. There is also a Marketing Strategy. Students and staff also have access to the information on the College's VLE. Information about additional learning support is also available on the College website and VLE. However, there are currently no higher education students accessing additional learning support.

2.10 The Head of Marketing and the Marketing Team organise regular open days and advice and guidance sessions where course leaders meet prospective and current students. Student Services staff who are also present at these sessions have undertaken advice and guidance training. Open days are attended by local higher education providers and speakers.

2.11 The College has a standard procedure for recruiting students onto higher education courses. This involves students applying to the College via the website or in writing, and applicants are then invited in to meet a member of the higher education teaching team to discuss their suitability for the course. A decision leading to either a conditional or unconditional offer or rejection is then made and communicated to the applicant and information is sent about when to attend a future induction event.

2.12 Students the team met confirmed that the admission process was efficient and fast. They found their induction to be very helpful. They received good pre-enrolment information and suitable documentations, including handbooks. The majority of the students the team spoke with had interviews with specialists. For students who applied through accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APEL), the admission and guidance were conducted by course leaders. The College has a procedure for enrolling a student to a course without entry requirements which requires students to complete a Personal Learning Programme.

2.13 The College acknowledges its responsibility to ensure that information provided to current and prospective students is accurate, accessible and fit for purpose. The College's Admissions Policy is monitored and reviewed annually to take into account the latest College requirements and responses to national initiatives. The Marketing team are responsible for the annual review of admissions, working in collaboration with programme managers.

Students can access information through a variety of mediums such as the website, course leaflets, higher education prospectus, VLE and course handbooks. The College also gathers students' views from surveys at induction and at key points in the academic year.

2.14 The review team concludes that the College has consistent procedures and clear admissions policies which are understood by students and staff. Therefore 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

2.15 There is an overall College Strategic Plan that has a commitment to meeting the needs of students. Complementing this is a Higher Education Development Plan which states that the College has a commitment to developing students' skills 'to enhance their life and employment opportunities'.

2.16 A comprehensive higher education Student Handbook has information on a range of aspects of learning and teaching. As well as sharing teaching strategies, it provides guidance on assessment, resources, support and other useful information for students. This is supported by course handbooks, which provide course-specific information.

2.17 For teachers of higher education courses there is a comprehensive Staff Guide For Higher Education Delivery. Among a range of useful information for staff, it contains teaching and learning strategies.

2.18 There is an established observation process. The formal annual observation allows for a professional discussion and is graded, and the policy also allows for peer-based observations to take place for professional development and sharing good practice purposes. These peer observations also take place on an annual basis.

2.19 Student views on learning and teaching are captured in module and mid-year reviews, and, along with the new Staff/Student Liaison Committee (which has taken over from an established student representative system) this informs team meetings and monitoring activities.

2.20 An overall higher education report was produced in November 2013 which was informed by a range of key sources. This was provided to the College Senior Management Team. As well as commenting aspects of learning and teaching, it also included a quality improvement plan. This process is now moving to a more course-specific self-assessment report approach, and reflects on the effectiveness of learning and teaching.

2.21 The College promotes bespoke higher education staff development activities. This includes higher education development days and external events run by the awarding partners and by other external organisations. Staff new to teaching higher education courses are monitored by course leaders in their initial year.

2.22 The College centrally supports all staff engaged in higher education to undertake scholarly activity to maintain current subject and industry awareness. All staff have an annual performance review which identifies opportunities for staff development. With reference to learning and teaching, the performance review specifically refers to the observation policy, and, where further action is required, staff can be made to undertake training.

2.23 There is a commitment to improving learning and teaching at the College. Measures are used to review and improve learning and teaching, as well as the approach to scholarly activity and staff development.

2.24 To test how effective the College was in meeting the Expectation, the review team reviewed the observation policy and completed observation documentation, and looked at the Student Handbook, course handbooks module handbooks, the Staff Guide For Higher Education Delivery and a range of policies. Annual programme monitoring and other review information was considered and course teams' reflections on teaching and learning within it. In addition, the College's approach to staff development and performance review was investigated. The Expectation was further tested by meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, and students.

2.25 Staff whom the team met regarded the College's two-tier observation process of both graded and peer observation as supportive. Course leaders confirmed that peer observations in particular allow them to share good practice at course leader meetings.

2.26 The team was advised that all staff who teach higher education at the College are required to undertake scholarly activity in order to remain subject aware and industry current. The Principal ensures that the approach is well supported through central funding and that the impact of scholarly activity is assessed. Staff members identify relevant opportunities, and are allowed time to undertake scholarly activities through remittance of teaching time. Where a cost is incurred, this is considered and allocated by the College centrally. The well-resourced staff-initiated scholarly activity that maintains industrial and academic curriculum currency to enhance learning and teaching is **good practice**.

2.27 From the evidence and the meetings that took place with staff, students and the Principal, the review team concludes that there is a commitment to reflect on, and review the effectiveness of, approaches to learning and teaching in order to enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. Students confirm that they are enabled to develop as independent learners and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

2.28 The review team concludes that Expectation B3 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

2.29 The College is committed to effectively resourcing higher education courses. There is a dedicated library budget and students have opportunities to make a direct request to the library for the purchase of books and periodicals. The majority of higher education provision is delivered in bespoke accommodation and classrooms, making it distinct from the rest of the College. This higher education-only teaching space and accommodation has been instituted as a result of student feedback.

2.30 Resources for higher education programmes are scrutinised through the approval process by the awarding partners. The process reflects the Expectation to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.31 To test the Expectation, the review team looked at approval documentation, spoke to staff and students, and had a demonstration of the College's VLE as well as having access to it.

2.32 The College has a well used and comprehensive VLE. It contains information that is course specific but also provides information on a range of support services that the College offers. Students confirm they find it a valuable resource. There is a dedicated careers section called Careers Coach with links to career opportunities, and includes help on interviews, putting together a curriculum vitae, and other useful information.

2.33 Students are positive about resources. They confirm that they have sufficient library resources and that access to online resources and useful links are available on the VLE.

2.34 To enable students to develop their potential the College also offers a range of services that include help on personal issues such as finances, housing, a counselling service, chaplaincy, as well as offering study skills support through the Library Open Learning Centre.

2.35 There is an induction programme for higher education students that provides information on how to access support from student services, joining the National Union of Students, and accessing the enrichment opportunities. The College undertakes a survey on the effectiveness of its induction process, asking questions about pre-enrolment as well as student awareness of key aspects such as initial feedback on teaching, key policies, awareness of support opportunities, library resources and VLE. Students confirmed that the induction process was comprehensive and helpful.

2.36 There is an established policy for identifying additional support for students in higher education. It contains information on how they can access that support, links to government agencies, and information on accessing the Disabled Student Allowance.

2.37 The review team concludes that resources are adequate and that the College monitors them. Students are given sufficient support to enable their development. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.38 The College's approach to student engagement is defined in the Student Involvement Policy - The Student Voice, which is available to all students on the VLE. The aim of this policy is to ensure that the views of students have their maximum impact on the quality of the learning experience and wider student life. The College and its Corporation believes that embracing student views and offering structured opportunities for students to have direct involvement in assessing and shaping their own learning experience is vital to quality improvement, increasing student success and developing our students as effective citizens in the wider community.

2.39 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's approach by talking to senior staff, programme leaders, teaching staff, and students. The team also considered the student submission and evaluated student representative structures and the minutes of Staff/Student Liaison Committee on the College's VLE.

2.40 The College actively seeks the views of students in a variety of ways. It also gathers students' views from surveys at induction and at key points during the academic year. All students studying on higher education programmes are able to express their views through their student representation at Staff/Student Liaison Committees.

2.41 The Staff/Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) meets three times a year. The agenda at these meetings is a combination of topics and issues compiled by course leaders, College managers and higher education students in collaboration. The minutes of the meetings and any resulting actions are shared with the Head of Higher Education and the Director of Curriculum, who refer them to other staff as necessary. The Director of Curriculum and Head of Higher Education receive notes of all course meetings so they can review student feedback. This, along with other methods of collecting students' views, has enabled senior managers such as the Head of Higher Education to listen to the student voice and take actions accordingly. Additionally, the module evaluation forms from the Foundation Degree Early Years and the HNC/D provide informal ongoing feedback that is subsequently addressed in tutorials and staff-student representative meetings. The introduction of the new Head of Higher Education has enabled a new learner voice schedule to be designed and implemented although it is yet to be embedded. All higher education students on university-validated provision complete evaluation forms at the end of each module. These evaluations provide students with an opportunity to express their views and assess their learning experience. They also provide teachers with ongoing feedback on how they can improve the student experience. The team finds the prompt and effective response by programme leaders and teaching staff to feedback from students to be **good practice**.

2.42 Students are invited to attend SSLC meetings. The team heard at the meeting with students that minutes of the SSLC meeting are distributed via email and made available on the VLE. Students reported that their feedback had an impact and had, for instance, led to changes in higher education facilities in the College. Student representatives from the College's University courses are invited to attend the latter's Student Representatives Committee. The College provides training for student representatives; however, it is not higher education specific. The review team finds that the Student Involvement Policy does not fully engage with the higher education students and therefore the **recommends** that the College revise the Student Involvement Policy to reflect the contribution of higher education

students as partners to decision-making in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience by July 2015.

2.43 The team **affirms** that actions are being taken in order to enhance the student learning experience by the recently instituted SSLC that allows senior management to engage with all higher education students and to follow up issues.

2.44 Higher education students have access to specialist software on the College's VLE which allows them to keep track records on their achievements towards their learning outcomes, check their grades and enhance their progression through their programme. The system also records students' learning needs and medical conditions which are monitored by staff. The team was advised that students receive prompt formative assessment and feedback on their assignments, often within a week, and at the latest two weeks after submission. Students the team met described the feedback as excellent and some were given a clearly structured action plan.

2.45 The College offers an induction day during which higher education students can access support from Student Services and can participate in enrichment activities, join the College's Students' Union as well as the National Union of Students (NUS) and any of the college 'theme' weeks which are orientated around various academic and non-academic activities and designed to help students integrate. Students are provided with a College 'Z card' of basic student information and are told about the existence of other VLE-based information. The College is affiliated with the NUS in order to keep students up to date with current NUS campaigns, policies and initiatives and entitle them to an NUS student discount card. The College acknowledges that this could be developed further and is working to incorporate this into the Higher Education Learner Voice Schedule.

2.46 Higher education students have access to independent advice and guidance both from their University Careers Service (for foundation degree students), or from the College's Careers Adviser (for HNC/D students). Student services will assist higher education students with the appointments; the College also provides drop-in sessions twice a week.

2.47 The team concludes that the College engages students and provides appropriate platforms for them to communicate with each other and the College. The majority of students understand how the representation system and other mechanisms operate and the College monitors and responds effectively to the student voice. The 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

2.48 The College's awarding partners have policies, regulations and processes to set and maintain standards for each award of credit or a qualification, to ensure the level of assessment. These are reflected in the College's policies, regulations and processes.

2.49 There are College moderation and internal verification processes for marking and moderation that are clearly documented for the conduct of assessment. The College has an Examinations Policy that covers higher education examination arrangements, coursework and appeals. Assessment marking is carried out against marking criteria on both foundation degree and Higher National awards. The College has its own Internal Verification and Moderation Policy and has its own APEL Policy.

2.50 The Exam Board for the Foundation Degree Early Years is chaired by the University and considers the results of a group of colleges involved in delivering this award. Higher National Exam Boards are run by the College and the outcomes are reported to the University.

2.51 The review team scrutinised assessment regulations, course handbooks, internal verification reports, external examiner reports and met senior staff, course leaders and teaching staff.

2.52 The Higher Education Handbook has clear guidelines on assessment criteria for foundation degree programmes. It refers to grading criteria for HNDs, however, it does not give criteria for the grading system. The team was told in meetings with staff that grading criteria are included in the individual module handbooks and saw examples of this. Students the team met said that they were clear about the criteria used to mark their work, that they were fully briefed on the requirements of the assessment, well supported during assessment and that they received excellent and very prompt feedback. Assessment was returned within two weeks of work being submitted. The team also found clear evidence of briefing about plagiarism in the Higher Education Handbook and all students said that staff were very clear about the requirements for originality of work and clear referencing. In addition, the College supports students through a study skills programme which is intended to build the student's capability in learning and assessment at the higher education level. The team considers that the clear and supportive assessment process that culminates in prompt and helpful feedback is **good practice**.

2.53 Course Leader meeting minutes gave clear evidence of debate about assessment practice and support for students. Staff the team met confirmed that there is good support for them in developing their assessment practice. External examiner/verifier reports confirm that the processes for internal verification, marking and moderation are largely consistent.

2.54 The review team concludes that the College operates a robust approach to assessment that ensures that there are equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment. There is good support for students and the underpinning procedures are

well-known to staff and students. The team concludes that the College meets the Expectation 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

2.55 The awarding partners take responsibility for the appointment of external examiners. The University appoints an external examiner who reviews module plans and assignments, and attends the assessment boards to confirm marks. An annual external examiner report is produced using an agreed template.

2.56 For the Higher National programmes, Pearson's external examiners undertakes annual visits, considering and reviewing the quality of assessment planning, the validity of the assessment decisions and the consistency of the assessment process. A report following a standard template is produced.

2.57 The College makes use of these reports in annual monitoring and review, discussions at programme level, providing information for quality improvement plans, for informing staff development needs, and share the findings with students. This approach enables it to meet Expectation B4 of the Quality Code in theory.

2.58 The team tested the approach by reviewing external examiner reports, looking at documentation where external examiner information was used and discussed, and the section of the VLE where external examiner reports are shared with students. The team also looked at the student submission, and held discussions with staff and students.

2.59 Course leaders meet as a team and discuss the outcomes of external examiner reports. Findings are shared with students, some are emailed, and some are placed on the VLE. Where students are named, findings of the report are shared rather than the report itself. In the past, this has been through the student representatives' meeting, although the recently instituted Staff/Student Liaison Committee will in the future share findings with a wider audience.

2.60 The College uses the information in the reports to inform course review, its Quality Improvement Plan, and to share good practice. In the past, information from external examiner reports has been included in an overall College report which informed a College Improvement Board, although this approach is being adjusted for the current year.

2.61 While external examiner reports are shared with student representatives only 12 students from 141 identified in the student submission knew of or had seen an external examiner report. Students confirmed, however, that they were aware that, should they wish to find an external examiner report, it would be made available to them.

2.62 The review team concludes that external examiner reports are used to inform and, where necessary, initiate quality improvement activity. Students are aware of external examiner reports and are able to access them. Therefore 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

2.63 The College has an annual quality cycle overseen by the College Improvement Board that includes programme monitoring and review. In addition, the College has to meet the monitoring and review processes of its awarding partners.

2.64 The College annual quality cycle feeds data upwards from programme level monitoring to the College Improvement Board. This leads into an annual College Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Programme teams prepare Annual Monitoring Reports which include action plans and these take into account student performance and student feedback. There is also a regular health check of programmes.

2.65 In addition to the College processes, for the foundation degree programme the College is required to complete an Annual Monitoring Report for each course. Pearson specifies the external verification process for the Higher National awards and this closely maps the College's own internal Verification and Moderation Policy.

2.66 The review team met senior staff, course leaders, teaching staff, support staff and students and looked at College and awarding partner programme monitoring and review documents.

2.67 The team saw an incomplete College-level SAR for 2012-13 and a QIP for 2013-14. It was not clear to the team if any of the discussion in the SAR and QIP included higher education since this was insufficiently differentiated from the further education provision. The team also saw a higher education QIP for 2013-14 and noted that this was monitored by the College Improvement Board.

2.68 There was robust evidence of proactive programme-level monitoring and review. The University process is clearly well managed at the College level and there is good engagement of College staff with their counterparts at the University. The external examiner reports also confirm the process. On the Higher National programmes the team saw end-of-unit reports. Issues raised by students informally were clearly picked up and discussed at higher education Course Leader meetings and appropriate actions taken and monitored. Higher education Staff/Student Liaison Committee meetings have clear action plans and there is evidence of the Higher Education Manager monitoring progress on actions resulting from issues raised by students at these meetings.

2.69 The College has taken some deliberate steps to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities. It provided a new wing for higher education students in 2011 and there were changes in Library provision in response to student requests. However, the team could not always see clear links from the robust monitoring of actions at programme level to the taking of steps to improve quality for higher education students at College level. The team **recommends** that the College improves College-level oversight, monitoring and review of programmes to recognise the distinct requirements of higher education students.

2.70 Higher education provision is a very small percentage of the total student body and there is very low visibility of it in the College-level consideration of programme monitoring and review. The strategic steps taken to improve the quality of learning opportunities for

higher education students tended to be subsumed in actions taken for the large body of further education students and there needs to be more thought given at College level to explicit consideration and differentiation of the needs of higher education learners. The team therefore concludes that the College does not meet the Expectation and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: *Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality*

Findings

2.71 The College has separate complaints and appeal policies. Students making complaints and academic appeals are able to use the College's internal procedures, and those of its awarding partners, where relevant. The College procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals are fair, effective and timely and allow for the Expectation to be met in principle.

2.72 To test the effectiveness of the College's procedures, the review team met senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students. The team examined the policy and procedures available to students on the VLE and in the student handbook.

2.73 The College has complaint procedures in place and has annually reviewed all the complaints and compliments. Details about how to complain is available in the Student Handbook as well as the College's VLE. There are several channels for students to complain when they are not satisfied with the service: speak to the Subject/Personal Tutor or the Faculty Manager; or provide feedback via student questionnaire and focus groups. Alternatively, students are able to talk to the Student Liaison Officer, Student Services Manager or Student Union President, complete a feedback card (available in all reception areas), and write to the Quality Manager.

2.74 There are two records of complaints over the last two years. Both matters were investigated and actions were taken and the matters resolved. Students the team spoke to confirmed that the College dealt with their complaints promptly, investigation took place and they were updated with responses via email.

2.75 The College has appeal procedures and a policy for internal assessments. Student confirmed that they are aware of the academic appeals procedure and how to access further information, should they need it, via the VLE. However, there is limited information about how to make an appeal in the Student Handbook. None of the students the team spoke to had experience of an academic appeal.

2.76 The team found that the complaints system operated by the College is effective but that the appeals procedures lack clarity and consistency. Overall, however, the team concludes that the College meets the Expectation 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

2.77 The College does not have delegated arrangements with third parties for the delivery of programmes.

2.78 The University programme and two of Pearson's programmes delivered by the College have work placement as a compulsory requirement. For the University's programme, a Mentor Handbook provides extensive guidance to workplace mentors and their role in the student's learning. In other programmes, while not compulsory, a work placement is an additional enrichment opportunity. The College recognises its responsibilities for arrangements with employers, and while students are expected to find their own work placements, staff provide support in securing placements where necessary. Once the placement is confirmed, the Course Leader confirms that the placement is appropriate for the programme. The College also carries out a formal health and safety check of the placement provider. Overall the approach enables the College to meet Expectation in principle.

2.79 The review team reviewed the documentation including the Mentor Handbook, health and safety forms, workplace observation documentation, and met staff who had oversight of work placements. In addition, the team met students who provided information on how the approach worked in practice, providing their experience of placements, and the support they received in securing and undertaking them.

2.80 Students are positive about the placements themselves as well as the arrangements in place to secure them. In one example, a student had secured a permanent position and promotion from a placement found for them by College staff. Students consider work placements a valuable part of their programme.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B11: *Research Degrees*

Findings

2.82 The College does not offer research degrees, therefore Expectation B11 is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.83 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Overall, the expectations are met, with the exception of Expectation B8, where the risk posed was judged to be moderate.

2.84 Following scrutiny of evidence, the review team recommends that the College should revise the Student Involvement Policy to reflect the contribution of higher education students as partners to decision making in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience and improve the College-level oversight, monitoring and review of programmes to recognise the distinct requirements of higher education students.

2.85 The review team also identifies good practice in the well-resourced staff-initiated scholarly activity that maintains industrial and academic curriculum currency and enhances learning and teaching, the prompt and effective response by programme leaders and teaching staff to feedback from students and the clear and supportive assessment process that culminates in prompt and helpful feedback.

2.86 The review team was able to affirm that the recently instituted Student/Staff Liaison Committee allows senior management to engage with all higher education students and follow up issues to enhance the student learning experience.

2.87 The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

3.1 The College website provides a wide range of information about the College's higher education provision for prospective applicants, current students and all stakeholders.

3.2 The College provides students with extensive information about their higher education programmes in handbooks and quality assurance policies through the College's VLE. Such arrangements indicate that the Expectation is met in principle.

3.3 The review team tested that information was accessible and fit for purpose by scrutinising the College website and VLE, prospectuses and programme handbooks. The review team also met senior staff, programme leaders, teaching staff and students.

3.4 The College publishes a full-time Higher Education Prospectus each year and a part-time adult prospectus three times a year. Information within these publications is checked for accuracy by the heads of faculty and programme delivery teams.

3.5 The College website provides a comprehensive range of publicly accessible information and has detailed information about all of the College's higher education offer. An electronic Prospectus illustrates the full range of programmes and is also available in hard copy. The team found some inconsistency in the use of awarding body logos in the electronic version of the Student Handbook 2014-15. The website provides information on all higher education courses offers, an explanation of qualification level, details about entry requirements, fees, duration of the programme, mode of attendance, progression route after completion the programme, programme specification brief, main subjects and modules, UCAS information about specific programmes, student support/services and facilities available and additional learning support. It also contains extensive information on being a higher education student at the College. There are a wide range of policies available on the website, for example, Additional Support, Complaints, Fees, Admissions, Student Involvement, Equalising Opportunity and Celebrating Diversity, as well as careers and higher education advice. Minutes of Governors' meetings are also available.

3.6 After enrolment onto a programme, students are able to access the comprehensive VLE site. This site is specifically for higher education students and gives them access to the external examiner reports, and other key higher education documentation and offers further opportunities to share their views about their student experience. It also provides access to course handbooks, module handbooks, lesson and lectures notes. Students whom the team met reported that they found the VLE useful. The College also monitors and reviews student use of the VLE to inform further developments.

3.7 The team concludes that the College's management of information about higher education provision is effective, ensuring that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.8 In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information produced about the College's provision, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team scrutinised a range of documentation (both published in hard copy and electronic versions) made available to prospective, current and former students and other stakeholders.

3.9 Overall, the review team finds that the College has considered the formal requirements of Expectation C and has ensured that it can demonstrate its compliance with the broad expectation. The College has approval mechanisms in place for ensuring that published information is accurate.

3.10 The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College Strategic Plan includes overarching aims to deliver high quality learning, teaching and assessment and continuous improvement with a strong commitment to the Learner Voice. The plan covers the whole student body in the approach to enhancement of student learning opportunities. The College has a strong commitment to provide outstanding opportunities for all of its learners and looks to foster a wide breadth of skills through a highly flexible, personalised curriculum offer that serves to meet the needs of every learner

4.2 There is a College Improvement Board that considers the cycle of papers and reports, working to a defined quality cycle. The College SAR 2012-13 and QIP 2013-14 is the summary report of the quality cycle. The QIP is a themed action plan. In addition to the College-wide SAR and QIP the team saw a separate Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan for 2013-14.

4.3 The College Strategic Plan takes account of external input from the Learning Enterprise Partnership and from employers. Higher education Course Leader monthly meetings are held where programme-level enhancement is discussed. The Higher Education Learner Voice Schedule includes a variety of ways of collecting student feedback, including the Staff/Student Liaison Committee, currently chaired by the Head of Higher Education. A summary overview of higher education external examiner reports for 2013-14 was available.

4.4 The review team tested the College approach to enhancement by looking at both top-down and bottom-up processes, reviewing key documentation, including the College Strategic Plan, quality cycle reports, course leader reports, external examiners' reports and committee minutes. The team also discussed enhancement in meetings with the Principal, senior and academic staff, and students.

4.5 The Higher Education Course Leader's Group is the focus for programme-level quality enhancement and it was evident from the meetings of monthly meeting minutes and the meeting with course leaders that this was a forum for sharing good practice and following up on student feedback. It is not clear to the team where action plans for higher education are tracked and how the programme plans feed into College-level actions. There is some discontinuity in reporting and higher education is not always clearly distinguished in College-level reports. At programme level there is clear evidence of student feedback being acted on and of deliberate steps being taken to improve the quality of student learning opportunities. Students gave the team examples of programme-level responsiveness to needs.

4.6 There is evidence of deliberate steps being taken at College level to enhance student learning opportunities. In 2011 a new wing was added to provide dedicated space for higher education in response to the analysis of student feedback, and more recently steps have been taken to include staff with higher education-specific responsibilities on the college Senior Management Team to better represent the interests of higher education students. The team **affirms** the appointment from September 2014 of a Higher Education Manager, at a more senior level as part of the Senior Management Team, and notes that there are clear indications of a more strategic approach being taken to the enhancement of learning opportunities for higher education students.

4.7 Staff also gave an example of student feedback on availability of library books resulting in a College decision to create a budget to enable higher education students to order new stock directly. There was some College-level review of data. However, this was not clearly tracked through for higher education and there were inconsistent reporting formats and a lack of continuity in reporting. These arrangements include supporting higher education with a dedicated column in the Annual Quality Cycle, a Quality Improvement Plan for higher education, a representative for this sits on the Curriculum Development Group, and the Staff/Student Liaison Committee.

4.8 Taking these points together, while the team noted that there are clear indications of a more strategic approach being taken to the enhancement of learning opportunities for higher education students, the team **recommends** that the College further develop and implement the higher education-specific College-level strategy for improving the quality of student learning opportunities.

4.9 Although the College's Strategy may not be fully integrated at all levels, the team concludes that deliberate steps are being taken to enhance the quality of learning opportunities. Therefore 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 about the enhancement of learning opportunities the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team judged that the expectation is met and the risk is moderate.

4.11 The review team is able to conclude that the College takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities, affirming the appointment from September 2014 of a Higher Education Manager, at a more senior level as part of the Senior Management Team, while at the same time recommending that the College further develop and implement the higher education-specific College-level strategy for improving the quality of students learning opportunities.

4.12 The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Findings

5.1 The review team investigated student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement. The College recognises that it is still developing mechanisms to more fully involve students in quality assurance and enhancement activities. At present, the College involves students using a range of formal and informal approaches.

5.2 The completion of evaluation forms at the end of modules/units (a requirement of the awarding body and organisation) are used. These contribute to course review and evaluation, and are discussed at course team and course leader meetings.

5.3 Students are represented at course meetings and contribute to course-related discussion. In the past, there have been termly staff-student review meetings with a curriculum area student representative. These are now being superseded by the planned Staff/Student Liaison Committee which commenced in November 2014. The Head of Higher Education will meet all higher education students through this process.

5.4 There is a good relationship between staff and students. Students feel staff are very approachable. Informal dialogue is seen as a valuable tool for quality enhancement by both staff and students.

5.5 The College undertakes a survey on the effectiveness of its induction process, asking questions about pre-enrolment and student awareness of key aspects such as initial feedback on teaching, key policies, awareness of support opportunities, library resources and VLE.

5.6 Programme leaders undertake class-based focus groups which encourage open discussion and inform action plans if appropriate.

5.7 The College has recently devised a Student Involvement Policy which applies to the whole College. However, Chapter B5 of the Quality Code was not used as a reference and higher education students did not play any part in its development.

5.8 One method the College feeds back information to students about how their contribution has made a difference is the display of 'You said, we did' posters. However, the College states that the measures to feed back to students are currently under review and will include a period of consultation with students and staff regarding how to achieve this.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 29-32 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

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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