



Higher Education Review of Newcastle-under-Lyme College

October 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 Newcastle-under-Lyme College. The review took place from 7 to 9 October 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Kevin Kendall
- Mr Charles Sanders
- Mr James Perkins (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are found on page 5 followed by numbered paragraphs starting on page 6.

In reviewing Newcastle-under-Lyme 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, please 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=2859

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Newcastle under Lyme College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Newcastle-under-Lyme College.

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Newcastle-under-Lyme-College.

- The well-regulated and transparent operation of higher education provision (Expectation A2.1).
- The new online recruitment and admissions system enhances student recruitment, admission and enrolment (Expectation B2).
- The integrated and well-organised approach to work-based learning gives students the opportunity to learn and apply skills and knowledge to prepare them for relevant employment or further study (Expectations B3 and B10).
- The well-focused and integrated range of student support services enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Newcastle-under-Lyme College.

By September 2016:

- ensure the consistency and completeness of relevant documentation in the programme monitoring and review process at module level (Expectation B8).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The College's steps to involve students further in key decision-making bodies with responsibility for higher education (Expectation B5).
- The progress the College is making with its enhancement strategy (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

There are processes in place to enable students to acquire employability skills and knowledge. There are three strands to the strategy: 'work aware'; 'enterprising, skilled and experienced'; and 'work ready'. The strategy commits the College to providing opportunities to develop and practise skills appropriate to their career aspirations and carry out work-related tasks in realistic work environments or on employer premises.

Support for students is available through several arrangements including access to a contracted external careers advice service offering confidential careers guidance; a College Work Shop providing support for job applications; CV writing; interview techniques; and advertising local employment opportunities. Further careers support is available to students from the awarding body, through their student portal. Students on University-validated programmes have access to virtual learning environment (VLE) software for careers-related advice.

The College has links with the Local Enterprise Partnership regarding skills needs in the region and engages with local employers to ensure all students are able to develop employability skills and broader skills alongside their academic studies.

There are different models to prepare students for employment including day-release, work-based learning, the use of 'real life' assessments, showcasing work and involvement in Council-led projects.

The College employability strategy is monitored through mechanisms such as curriculum plans, lesson observations, student numbers on placements, student feedback, employer feedback and destination data. All students feel they have developed new skills and become aware of current industry practices and feel that the programme developed skills and knowledge for their next steps, with evidence to show that the majority of students gain employment or go on to higher study.

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

About Newcastle-under-Lyme College

Newcastle-under-Lyme College (the College) was formed in 1986. It is one of three colleges in the conurbation and, with a further four colleges in Staffordshire, forms the Association of Staffordshire Colleges; it also offers a programme from Pearson. The College opened a £60 million campus in January 2010 and added a new Performance Centre and an outdoor Education Centre in 2015. There is a University Centre for the delivery of higher education programmes in art and design, early years, engineering, health and social care, ICT, music technology, psychology, sport and teacher training. There are currently 318 higher education students.

The College's strategic objectives are to develop students who are enterprising and achieve great things, supported by staff who deliver excellence in teaching, learning and assessment and where students enjoy learning.

The College is currently working with Staffordshire University to deliver higher education programmes through a franchise agreement. The exact arrangement of the agreement between the University and the College is outlined in 'Schedule A1 of the Collaborative Agreement between Staffordshire University and Newcastle-under-Lyme College', which sets out the rights and obligations of both parties. Recently, the College worked with the University of Derby to approve a Foundation Degree in Sport Coaching and Development. The College is currently applying to HEFCE to allow direct funding of 36 students, and the status of this application and the College's readiness for this is being considered by the Senior Management Team (SMT).

Since the QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) report published in June 2011, there have been a number of changes at the College:

- a decline in the number of adult part-time higher education students
- a change in staffing in the senior management structure and responsibility for higher education programmes
- a number of changes to curriculum management structures and staffing
- change in management of marketing and public relations
- approval to be a partner College of the University of Derby
- approval for direct funding from HEFCE for 36 students from September 2015.

The main challenges facing the College in relation to its higher education provision include the reduction in student numbers, mainly for part-time and adult students, caused by the increase in student fees and the removal of the 'capping' of student numbers.

The IQER report identified six areas of good practice. These included the work of the Higher Education Forum, the rigour of the internal verification process, the higher education portal for easing communications and for providing additional learning opportunities and the use of social media. In all cases, the College has built on these to enhance the provision. There were three desirable recommendations in relation to increasing the availability and take-up of staff development activities specific to higher education and further encouragement of staff regarding scholarly activities. It was also considered desirable to continue to develop feedback to students in relation to issues raised and further development of College higher education publications to project a more visible image. All three of the recommendations have been actioned and evidence supports noticeable improvements in all of the areas.

Explanation of the findings about Newcastle-under-Lyme College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

1.1 The College has a long standing franchise partnership with Staffordshire University (the University) as set out in the Collaborative Agreement. All current programmes are validated by Staffordshire University with the exception of the HNC Health and Social Care which is run through the University under licence from Pearson. In addition, the College has recently become approved as a partner of the University of Derby and has approval to deliver the Foundation Degree in Sport Coaching and Development which has not yet recruited.

1.2 New degree programmes are validated using university validation and approval processes which specify external reference points; including *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*. The College also has a new programme approval procedure, which is used prior to entering the University processes.

1.3 Staffordshire University Typology of Award Outcomes and Indicative Descriptions of Levels guidelines are used as a basis for validation and these are based on the FHEQ. The University has also produced a document on credit and higher education qualifications, which provides information on how the University's awards relate to national frameworks and standards and how the awards are structured. Programmes can also be amended using University procedures and are reviewed every five years, according to the University procedure.

1.4 The College has clear line management responsibility for the development of higher education programmes including the Principal, the Director of Curriculum and Performance, the Heads and Assistant Heads of Department and Award Leaders, with the support of the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Coach and staff at all levels in the University. These regulatory frameworks enable the College to meet Expectation A1.

1.5 The team reviewed relevant College and University documentation for programme development and approval, including all the University validation and approval processes and guidelines, to confirm that the Expectation is met. The team tested the approach taken by reviewing documentary evidence, including that available through the College HE Portal, and talking to the Quality Officer from the University, the Principal, senior and teaching staff involved in programme delivery.

1.6 The programme specifications for the FdA Working with Children, Young People and Communities, the FdA Music and Audio Production, the HNC Applied Computing, the FdA Graphics and Digital Design, the FdA Photography, the FdA Contemporary Art Practice, and the FdSc/HNC Engineering demonstrate that the above procedures have been taken into account in the writing and approval of this document as have the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.7 All College staff have access to partner University guidance regarding programme specification and approval process documents via the HE Portal and they have a good understanding of the processes involved. This enables the College to operate an effective internal approval process for new programmes before they enter the University processes.

1.8 The College effectively fulfils its responsibilities within the context of its agreement with the University. The approval processes for programme specifications ensure that the programmes align with the FHEQ and other external reference points. Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A1 is met and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.9 The collaborative agreement between Staffordshire University and the College includes clear responsibilities for designing and maintaining validated programmes. Academic governance of programmes is through the University, firstly through their validation processes and subsequently through their internal academic review processes. Responsibility at the College lies with the Director of Curriculum and Performance and is then delegated to the Heads of Department through the line management structure.

1.10 The University is also responsible for determining the assessment processes that are used to demonstrate the achievement of intended learning outcomes. This responsibility is through the approval process, the procedure for award amendment and the design and revision of modules procedure. The University Assessment Principles, Policies and Procedures Regulations govern the award of academic credit and qualifications.

1.11 The College has a clear senior management structure with well-defined roles and responsibilities for higher education as well as a clear reporting structure through the HE Strategy Group, the HE Curriculum and Operations Group and other cross-College committees including the SMT and the College Corporation. The University processes and the well-defined roles and responsibilities within the College enable Expectation A2.1 to be met.

1.12 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the College's processes by scrutinising documents setting out programme approval and review processes, examining internal reporting structures, and talking to senior management, teaching staff and students.

1.13 The SMT meets weekly and key actions and issues are taken to either the HE Strategy Group, which meets termly, or the HE Curriculum and Operations Group, which meets twice termly chaired by the Director of Curriculum and Performance. Heads of Department and all staff teaching on higher education programmes attend the HE Curriculum and Operations Group as well as weekly meetings within departments and programme teams. Minutes of relevant meetings demonstrate that higher education programmes and issues are dealt with effectively. Senior staff and teaching staff have a good understanding of higher education policies and procedures and how they are enacted through the College reporting processes. The team therefore considers that the well-regulated and transparent operation of higher education provision is **good practice**.

1.14 Academic frameworks and regulations are in place and understood by College staff at all levels. The College internal management and reporting structure works effectively and is understood and acted on by all relevant staff. The team therefore concludes that Expectation A2.1 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.

1.15 Programme specifications are considered to be the definitive records of programmes. Approval of programme specifications is the ultimate responsibility of the University and while the College acknowledge this, it monitors programme specifications through senior committees and its internal quality team. Programme specifications are designed to reference appropriate levels on the FHEQ, module of programme delivery, and subject of the award.

1.16 Staffordshire University, as the awarding body, is responsible for the creation of records of study to students and alumni. The processes in place allow the Expectation to be met.

1.17 The team met students, teaching and senior staff of the College, and also considered programme specifications and handbooks, in addition to the College's collaborative agreement.

1.18 Programme specification templates supplied by the University clearly indicate programme structure, learning outcomes, credit values for programmes and individual modules, as well as providing references to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. This information was also found to exist within programme handbooks.

1.19 Students understood that they were studying on programmes awarded by another institution, but delivered by the College, and stated that programme specifications sufficiently described the nature and level of their awards, as well as the aforementioned elements. Senior staff were confident that staff within the College were familiar with the contents and typology contained within definitive records, a feeling echoed by teaching staff who also indicated they were confident in locating these documents, as well as accessing supporting information related to these definitive records such as guidance notes or policies. At programme level, the team was assured through conversations with staff that relationships with the University and networks of local colleges also embedded programme specifications as the definitive reference point for delivery and assessment of the programmes.

1.20 In considering the College's maintenance of academic standards in using a definitive record for programme delivery and assessment, the review team was assured that the College was appropriately maintaining standards. The review team found widespread understanding of the presence and purpose of the definitive record among staff and students. Expectation A2.2 is therefore met with a low level of associated risk.

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

1.21 The College follows its own procedures for the approval of new higher education programmes prior to documentation being considered for validation by its awarding partners who are responsible for ensuring that academic standards are maintained at a level that meets the UK threshold as prescribed by their own academic framework and regulations. Each new programme must be scrutinised by a College validation panel, signed off by the Director of Curriculum and Performance and approved by the College SMT prior to being submitted for University validation.

1.22 Specific responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of UK threshold and awarding body academic standards is clarified in relevant University documentation, whose programmes are approved for a period of five years.

1.23 The College has clear processes in place which link directly to the quality process requirements of the University. The review team therefore considers that the processes and procedures for the approval of taught programmes meet the Expectation.

1.24 The review team considered a range of documentary evidence including policies and procedures, records of validation meetings, and University programme specifications. It also met and questioned groups of teaching staff, students, employers and senior staff, including a Quality Officer from the University.

1.25 The College's approach to the approval of new programmes has been strengthened recently with the establishment of the HE Strategy Group and the HE Curriculum and Operations Group. These groups ensure effective management and governance in the running and development of higher education at the College in line with the requirements of the College higher education strategy. The boards allow for approvals or re-approvals to be discussed at both operational and strategic level, prior to any College validation event and approval by the SMT. Students contribute their views to new programme development through the recently established College Student Board and higher education student focus groups.

1.26 The College values the contribution made by employers to the design and programme approval process. In the development of the FdSc in Electrical and Electronic Technology, FdA in Creative Industries - Graphics and Digital Design, and the PGCE (Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector), for example, local employers made significant contributions to the process. Other external advisers for validations, programme advisers and module link tutors are provided by the University.

1.27 The College Principal sits on the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Board which works with local employer organisations to determine local skills needs and educational requirements at the required academic level. College staff were not involved in the approval process for the Pearson HNC in Health and Social Care as this is a pre-approved programme run under licence from the University.

1.28 Assessments on programmes are designed by the University in cooperation with the Staffordshire University Consortium of Colleges to ensure that learning outcomes are set at the required level to meet the UK threshold standard. External examiners for University programmes are appointed and trained by them and ensure that academic levels meet the UK threshold standard through use of their external examiner reports.

1.29 Annual monitoring of higher education programmes at the College is carried out by the HE Curriculum and Operations Group to ensure that programmes meet the standards set by the University in conjunction with a higher education action plan. The University holds specific responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of UK threshold and awarding body academic standards, which are clarified in relevant documentation. Reporting to the University is achieved through module monitoring reports and programme annual monitoring reports. In addition a composite cross-College partner summary report is submitted annually.

1.30 The review team considers that the programme approval processes of the College and the University are effective in ensuring that academic standards are set at a level that meets the UK threshold. Quality assurance processes are robust and the use of external examiner reports, with rigorous monitoring of the teaching and learning process on an ongoing and annual basis ensure effective and high quality delivery of its programmes.

1.31 The College and the University work together in an integrated manner to ensure that the academic standards on programmes meet the UK threshold level for the qualifications delivered. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met and that 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

1.32 Responsibility for the setting and maintenance of academic standards for programmes delivered by the College lies with Staffordshire University. The College adheres to the requirements of the University's Typology of Award Outcomes and Indicative Description of Levels which determines achievement of module and programme learning outcomes in relation to meeting the UK threshold standards and the Assessment Principles, Policies and Procedures Regulation. College staff are made aware of the requirements of these procedures, which cover assessment design, marking and moderation during their induction process.

1.33 External contribution is made by subject specialists appointed by the University, and all programmes are designed and approved by the University with module content, assessment strategies and learning outcomes specified in the relevant programmes specifications. The programme approval and validation process ensures that module and qualification learning outcomes meet the requirements of the FHEQ and the appropriate *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*.

1.34 Members of programme teams attend assessment boards held by the University and have the opportunity to contribute to the assessment strategy and any amendments to specific assessments. Assessment requirements and achievement of learning outcomes are also specified in programme handbooks, which are available to each student.

1.35 The Pearson Higher National award comprises off-the-shelf modules with module and programme learning outcomes pre-determined. All assessments are internally marked and verified by the programme teams prior to moderation and standardisation at the University. The assessment process is subject to scrutiny by external examiners/moderators appointed by the University.

1.36 Annual monitoring of each programme takes place in line with the requirements of both the College and the University and includes reviews of assessment.

1.37 The review team considers that the processes and procedures followed by the College in line with the requirements of the University enable the standards outlined in Expectation A3.2 to be met.

1.38 To test the Expectation, the review team conducted meetings and questioned members of senior staff, teaching staff and students at the College and a Quality Officer from the University. The team also reviewed documentary evidence informing quality and standards including assessment procedures, policies and regulations of the College and the University, external examiner reports, annual programme monitoring reports, the higher

education action plan and the higher education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Review report.

1.39 The annual monitoring processes of both the College and University provides effective oversight of programmes. Within the College, programme tutors provide regular module monitoring reports throughout the year and an end-of-year annual monitoring report. These are subject to internal scrutiny through the HE Curriculum Operations Group reporting through to the HE Strategy Group chaired by the Director of Curriculum and Performance. Both higher education groups reflect on student achievement and feedback and quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Student input into this process, confirms that the assessment becomes progressively more challenging and complex from Level 4 to 5 and that feedback received is valuable to them.

1.40 Issues arising from monitoring reports form part of the higher education action plan listing actions required on each programme. The action plan is considered at the HE Curriculum Operations Group with progress on actions monitored by the Quality Manager. All module monitoring reports and annual monitoring reports are forwarded to the University for scrutiny and discussion in line with its own quality processes with representatives of each College programme team attending annual assessment boards at the University.

1.41 External examiners use the University report template to comment on academic rigour and standards achieved for each programme. Their feedback ensures the validity of the assessment process and also comments on whether achievement of relevant learning outcomes at the appropriate level has been demonstrated. External examiner reports are considered by each of the College programme teams, and the HE Curriculum and Operations Group. Individual external examiner reports are compiled into a summary report which provides an overview specifying items to be added to the higher education action plan. The external examiners' reports are available to students and staff via the College HE portal.

1.42 In the delivery of its higher education programmes, the College adheres to both its own quality processes and those of the University. In this regard the review team noted the highly effective relationship and level of understanding between the staff of both institutions. Both institutions have rigorous quality processes and requirements in place which allow for the achievement of learning outcomes at the appropriate level while ensuring that their own and UK threshold academic standards have been satisfied. The review team confirms that Expectation A3.2 is met and that 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

1.43 Higher education provision at the College is subject to the monitoring and review procedures of its awarding partners. Staffordshire University undertakes review of provision every five years with programme reviews annually. External examiners/moderators are appointed by the University to ensure maintenance of academic standards and submit annual reports for each programme.

1.44 The College's own processes for monitoring and review of programmes include the use of student module feedback forms, module monitoring reports and annual monitoring reports, which are scrutinised by the College HE Curriculum and Operations Group and monitored by the Director of Curriculum and Performance and the Quality Manager. Outcomes from this Board inform the HE Strategy Group, the College SMT and the higher education action plan.

1.45 The reports are forwarded for scrutiny to the University in line with its quality assurance requirements. The College also provides an annual partner summary report to the University. This is derived from the College annual monitoring processes including external examiner reports and informs the University's annual monitoring requirements. An annual monitoring meeting including progression statistics produced by the University is held to undertake a constructive and critical evaluation of each programme and is attended by programme staff from the College.

1.46 The team confirms that the processes in place within the College and the University allow the Expectation to be met.

1.47 The team reviewed a range of documentary evidence and met with and questioned groups of College and University staff, and students.

1.48 University programmes are reviewed annually in accordance with its procedures for collaborative partners. Annual monitoring reports are completed by College curriculum leaders and then submitted to the University.

1.49 Those completing the annual monitoring report draw on external examiners' reports, module monitoring reports, student focus groups, and statistical evidence to complete the annual report. The section relating to academic standards requires the authors to use external examiner reports to reflect specifically on, curriculum design and development, programme aims and learning outcomes, and the assessment process.

1.50 The University requires the module monitoring reports and annual monitoring reports to be signed off by the College Quality Manager before submission to the University faculty. The College uses the annual monitoring reports to develop a higher education action plan, which is scrutinised by the HE Curriculum and Operations Board and monitored by the Quality Manager.

1.51 The College provides a partner annual summary report outlining all aspects of the provision delivered including recruitment, admissions, resources, learning and teaching progression and student attainment, plus areas of good practice and areas for development. This report is considered by the University through its own quality assurance processes.

1.52 Inspection of quality process documents, including the higher education action plan, module monitoring reports and annual monitoring reports, HE Strategy Board and HE Curriculum and Operations Group terms of reference, student feedback sheets and external examiner reports, and the partner annual summary report provided the team with appropriate evidence that the College was monitoring and reviewing programmes effectively. These documents inform the SMT and provide input into the College higher education strategy and the higher education specific Teaching, Learning and Assessment Review report. The process allows for the College to monitor and maintain its academic standards in a systematic and robust manner.

1.53 Discussions with staff and students confirmed their understanding of how the process of monitoring and review functioned in the College and its relation with the University processes and procedures. College staff confirmed positive relationships with module link tutors and programme advisers at the University, which ensures easy functionality between the quality requirements of each organisation.

1.54 The review team confirmed that the monitoring and review processes employed within the College and the University are robust, work effectively in providing for UK threshold standards to be achieved, and ensuring academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained. The team concludes that Expectation A3.3 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

1.55 The College uses external expertise in programme development, and the University procedure states that approval panels include an external academic and an internal academic from the University with appropriate subject expertise. External examiners are appointed by the University for all programmes and they must write an annual report on the programme confirming that assessments are appropriate and academic standards are being maintained.

1.56 The College states that it works with a number of key strategic partners to ensure that the curriculum meets skills needs both locally and nationally. A recent example of this is employer involvement in the development of a foundation degree in outdoor education, which it hopes to deliver from 2016 onwards. There are also a number of formal and informal employer advisory groups which advise on curriculum content if required, for example in health and engineering.

1.57 College staff work closely with the University through their programme adviser and through nominated subject tutors for every University-validated module. They also have an annual review of programmes at strategic level. The College states that the University of Derby also provides extensive support across the range of specialisms at the University.

1.58 The use of University staff, external examiners and employers in programme development and maintaining academic standards enables the Expectation to be met.

1.59 The team tested the use of external expertise by reading external examiners' reports, annual monitoring reports, the higher education action plan and minutes of meetings where higher education is discussed, and met senior and teaching staff, and employers.

1.60 External examiners' reports are considered an important part of annual programme review and recommendations from these are carried forward into the higher education action plan which is overseen by the Quality Manager and enacted through the Curriculum and Operations Group. The review team read a sample of external examiners' reports, all of which commented in appropriate detail on the setting and maintenance of academic standards. The reports are published on the HE Portal and are available for scrutiny by staff and students. The College has many external links with employers, which inform curriculum developments and this was confirmed through meetings with staff, students and employers.

1.61 Overall, the review team is satisfied that external and independent expertise is appropriately used by the College. Comments from external examiners and other external sources are responded to appropriately. The team therefore concludes that Expectation A3.4 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

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

1.63 The College uses the processes of its awarding body and organisation effectively for academic standards to be maintained. These processes are well supported by College procedures and staff members demonstrate full understanding of the College's responsibilities.

1.64 All seven Expectations are met and the associated level of risk is low in all areas. There is one area of good practice. Therefore the review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The awarding body and organisation are responsible for the design and development of new programmes. The College works closely with its awarding partners and contributes to the process when new programmes are being developed. Stimuli for new programme development derive from various sources. The College recognises the need for progression opportunities for its own further education students who may wish to study locally, and responds to student feedback and student focus groups. It also works closely with and responds to the needs of local employers in developing new programmes. In the case of the FdA in Sport Coaching and Development, the College was approached by the University of Derby who had identified progression opportunities in this area locally. Any new proposals must fit with the College's mission, vision and strategic objectives as outlined in the higher education strategy.

2.2 Inherent in any new programme development is the College's need to ensure that any proposal is based on a sound business case and that it is firmly supported by local industry and fits with the College strategic vision and its higher education strategy. The College has its own internal approval process for programme development in the new programme validation procedure.

2.3 The recent introduction of the HE Strategy Group and the HE Curriculum and Operations Group allows for formal discussion and consideration of new higher education programme proposals. New proposals are considered at a College validation panel and if approved by SMT the proposal is submitted for consideration in accordance with the validation procedures of the relevant awarding partner.

2.4 Operational responsibility for new programme development rests with the College curriculum leader supported by the award leader from the University who jointly produce the programme specification using the University template. Through discussion with staff and employers, the review team was able to establish that those involved with programme development are aware of and take account of the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*. The professional development team and higher education teaching and learning coach assist staff who are unfamiliar with the process of programme development and design and College continuing professional development (CPD) events are used for this purpose.

2.5 The College draws on a range of internal and external expertise in developing and designing new programmes including employers, other further education colleges as part of the Staffordshire University Consortium of Colleges and the Partnership Manager, Award Leaders and programme advisors from the University.

2.6 The College acknowledges that, previously, students have had limited formal involvement in programme development and design and this is acknowledged in the higher education action plan for 2015. Recent developments now provide for the inclusion of

student views on all programme developments through student focus groups and the Student Board.

2.7 The review team considers that the College's processes and procedures for programme design, development and approval meets Expectation B1.

2.8 The review team considered a range of documents provided by the College concerning the programme design, development and approval process, including those relating to recently approved programmes. In addition, it met teams of teaching staff, senior staff including a Quality Officer from the University and students.

2.9 College staff take an active role in the development of new programmes. They were highly involved in the recent developments of the FdA in Working with Children, Young People and Communities with the University and the FdA in Sport Coaching and Development with the University of Derby, attending the validation events of each. College staff do not contribute to the Pearson Higher National programme development as this is an off-the-shelf programme licensed to the University.

2.10 Any recommendations for developments or changes to programmes are discussed at the HE Curriculum and Operations Group, included in the College higher education action plan and then follow the College's higher education programme approval process.

2.11 Module monitoring reports, annual monitoring reports and external examiner reports are scrutinised and discussed by the HE Curriculum and Operations Group and help inform the College of any potential areas for programme development or review. Programme leaders for each programme contribute to the annual monitoring meeting held by the University where developments to programmes can be proposed and discussed.

2.12 External input into the approval process is viewed as particularly important and the College works closely with a variety of external agencies that inform programme development. The Principal sits on the LEP Board which works with local employer organisations to determine local skills needs and educational requirements. The College values the contribution made by employers to the approval process in, for example, the development and review of the FdSc in Electrical and Electronic Technology, FdA in Creative Industries - Graphics and Digital Design, and the PGCE (Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector).

2.13 Once approval has been made by the College for a new programme, proposals are forwarded to the University for consideration through its own quality assurance processes. External advisers for validations, programme advisers and module link tutors are provided by the University.

2.14 The evidence presented to the review team in documentary form and through meetings with College staff, students and the Quality Officer from the University, demonstrates that the College and its awarding body have effective processes in place for the design, development and approval of programmes. The review team confirms that Expectation B1 is met with a low level of associated risk.

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

2.15 Recruitment is given strategic oversight through the Head of Learning Resources and Guidance and the HE Strategy Group. The HE Curriculum and Operations Group is also responsible for recruitment, admissions, and UCAS (the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service). The College monitors the effectiveness of recruitment, selection and admissions at a senior level. In order to continuously review the validity of student selection, internal progression, achievement and success rates are monitored and reported.

2.16 The College adheres to the Schwartz Report 2004 principles of fair admission. During recruitment, the College aims to ensure applicants are informed about the entry requirements and any required individual diagnostic testing, the former of which is decided by the University in consultation with curriculum leaders. Full-time applications are managed through UCAS, with part-time applications processed via an electronic form accessible from both the College and University websites. Applications for the FdA Psychology foundation year are handled exclusively by the University, as this leads directly into its own programme.

2.17 Curriculum leaders are tasked with making selection decisions, and subsequently successful applicants invited to interview. The College has a significant rate of internal progression from further to higher education, and where the College is confident in the academic acumen of a candidate the process may be less formal. Applicants are made either unconditional or conditional offers, or rejected at this stage. Decisions are recorded on the University's student record system (used also by the College), and automatic communications to candidates are made. Part-time applicants are also recorded on the system, although the College communicates with them directly. The College is also involved in the UCAS clearing process. Candidates applying at this time are interviewed either in person or over the phone. Unsuccessful applicants may appeal the decision within five working days of its receipt.

2.18 Successful applicants are informed about enrolment, term dates, timetables and induction processes, as well as being invited to pre-sessional higher education specific events to help support the transition to this level of study.

2.19 The process as described would allow for the Expectation to be met.

2.20 The Expectation was tested through meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, students, and through consideration of a range of documentation including the higher education action plan, minutes of the College HE Strategy Group and SMT meetings, the College admissions policy, examples of communications to applicants, the College's Higher Education Strategy, an application monitoring document,

2.21 The College pays particular attention to communicating with applicants during and in between the stages of recruitment, selection and admission, through established timelines of three weeks between application and (if appropriate) invitation to interview, and one to two weeks' notice of interview dates. Automated communications to applicants are from, and

clearly branded as, the University. The timeliness of communications is monitored alongside application progress.

2.22 One example of enhancement made as a result of this oversight relates to a specific programme, where processing applications was taking too much time, and as a result the process was redesigned to rely more heavily on electronic solutions, all of which was recorded, given a deadline for completion and actioned out of the College higher education action plan. Senior, teaching and support staff all highlighted the benefits of the new process and the increased efficiency it has provided, and recently enrolled students were also complimentary about the timeliness of information. The review team found the new online recruitment and admissions system enhances student recruitment, admissions and enrolment, and considered this to be **good practice**.

2.23 The College is aware that increased fee levels, student choice and a localised desire for part-time study are having an impact on their ability to recruit full-time candidates. It benchmarks itself against other colleges offering franchised programmes from the University, and changes in sector practice or UCAS processes are communicated to staff and help shape College-wide paperwork, such as guidance on the process, conducting interviews and making offers. The designated member of senior staff is actively involved in recruitment, selection and admissions conferences and activity within the broader sector, and disseminates this to relevant members of College staff.

2.24 The information provided to staff regarding admissions was found to be widely acknowledged and understood, with various responsibilities such as who makes decisions and the nature of applications to higher education programmes well known. Support staff were found to play a key role in supporting activity, such as taster sessions and a higher education welcome morning. Taster sessions were an existing practice for further education applicants, which was subsequently extended to higher education activity.

2.25 The College has a well-established, widely understood and pragmatic approach to recruitment, selection and admission of students, and as such the review team found the Expectation to be met with a low level of associated risk.

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

2.26 The College Teaching, Learning & Assessment Strategy is linked to the College's mission and strategic aims and contains key performance indicators. Performance against the key performance indicators are regularly reported to the HE Strategy Group and the SMT. The College Teaching, Learning & Assessment Strategy is shared among staff via the College staff Portal and teaching staff and students have access to it through the HE Portal. There is also a College teaching and learning procedure which applies to both further and higher education. This procedure includes key aspects of teaching and learning, such as the student journey, the assessment journey and practice, teaching and learning technologies, target-setting, professional development and outstanding teaching.

2.27 Teaching staff are guided by the programme specifications and module descriptions when planning their teaching. The quality of teaching is monitored annually through teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) department reviews as outlined in the College Teaching, Learning and Assessment Procedure. This procedure outlines the internal observation process for teaching staff. Following the review, a report is produced and actions included in the College higher education action plan. In addition to the formal TLA reviews, the quality of teaching is monitored through higher education specific peer observations and learning walks.

2.28 All staff have industry experience and/or an appropriate teaching qualification, or are currently working towards their teaching qualification. Staff undertake a minimum of 10 days' professional development every academic year in line with College professional development procedure. The CVs of all higher education staff are checked and approved by the University before staff can teach on any University programme in line with the University procedure. The College recently appointed a higher education Teaching and Learning Coach to assist staff in their professional development.

2.29 Module evaluation forms are completed by students at the end of every module and these are used to inform the annual module monitoring report which is completed by the College Curriculum Leader and forwarded to the Award Leader and College Quality Manager. The feedback from these annual monitoring reports, along with other feedback such as external examiner reports is used to enhance the programme in the future. Issues identified are included in the higher education action plan, which is monitored by the Quality Manager.

2.30 The College Teaching, Learning & Assessment Strategy, supported by staff development and approval processes, teaching, learning and assessment reviews, and annual monitoring reports enables the College to meet Expectation B3.

2.31 The review team tested and evaluated the effectiveness of the policies and procedures for learning and teaching and met senior staff, teaching staff and students. They also examined the learning resources available to students through the HE Portal.

2.32 Staff engagement in wider scholarly activities has taken place as indicated through the CPD schedule and the number of staff studying for higher degrees and attending university events. The HE Teaching and Learning Coach also has a very useful supportive function in ensuring that staff are familiar with higher education issues. Peer observation of teaching to share good practice and the use of video for self-reflection are also very useful tools to enhance teaching and learning, as are the module monitoring reports and feedback sheets completed by students.

2.33 In the 2014-15 higher education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Review, 95 per cent of lessons were graded good and outstanding, with 20 per cent being graded outstanding. This is considered at the HE Curriculum and Operations Group along with the retention and achievement on higher education programmes. Any issues are then reported to the HE Strategy Group and SMT.

2.34 The HE Portal is an excellent resource for both staff and students. As well as containing all the policies, procedures and regulations relevant to higher education at the College, it also contains very useful learning materials for each module of study which students can access at any time either at College or remotely.

2.35 Work-related learning is an essential component of all modules. Programmes, such as teacher education, early childhood studies and health and social care have formal work placements as part of the programme, others such as creative studies make extensive use of live briefs in their teaching and some students are employed and attend the College on a part-time basis, as is the case in engineering. The review team therefore considers that the integrated and well-organised approach to work-based learning giving students the opportunity to learn and apply skills and knowledge to prepare them for relevant employment or further study is **good practice**.

2.36 Both staff and students conveyed to the review team a strong sense of belief in teaching and learning to prepare students for employment in graduate positions. Overall, 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

2.37 The College has a staffing structure which includes designated staff responsible for student services, learning resources and careers guidance. The College Strategic Plan and the Teaching, Learning and Enhancement Strategy outline available support for students and the need to develop access to resources. Good practice in student development and achievement is disseminated through the higher education teaching learning and assessment reports. Self-assessment reports review the services which support student development and achievement on an annual basis, using data drawn from student surveys, module evaluations, social media, focus groups and informal discussions with students.

2.38 Before enrolment, applicants are informed of the choices available to them on their programmes through the College and UCAS websites, including the resources and facilities which will be available to help them develop. Advice is available from staff and curriculum leaders, during open events and formal interviews, as well as 'Keeping Warm' events which allow students to further acquaint themselves with the College. A standard presentation is used for induction which includes key information for new students.

2.39 The College has invested £60 million in new build which includes a Higher Education Centre. All teaching rooms have smart boards and other technology is also available, for example, a 3D printer and software for Graphics and Music Technology. All programmes have their own College-based VLE containing information and resources, some programmes also use the University VLE.

2.40 The College Learner Entitlement Procedure outlines the support mechanism in place for students. Students find advice, support and guidance initially from the induction presentation and the Student Charter, which outline the roles and responsibilities of both academic and Student Support Services. Students who need individual support in their studies, for work placements or for careers guidance, can either refer themselves to the relevant place or can be referred by appropriate teaching staff.

2.41 Information for support and guidance is also provided in programme and module handbooks. Students have the opportunity to develop academic skills through completing their programme, study skills modules and resources on the College's VLE. The Teaching, Learning and Enhancement Strategy outlines how all students will develop employability skills on their chosen programme. Students are given information in relation to career progression and management through the College careers services. The College was recently awarded the matrix Standard for advice and guidance.

2.42 The strategies, staffing structure, procedures and documentation that the College has in place enable it to meet Expectation B4.

2.43 To test the arrangements and resources that the College has in place to support students, the review team scrutinised relevant strategies, reports and procedures, examined the HE Portal and spoke to staff and students.

2.44 Teaching staff are aware of the College strategy and procedures for student support, and of the overall student progression journey. Feedback from external examiners, the University and from students are used to identify areas for improvement. The student submission was used effectively as a development opportunity for students and in it they

reported positively about the available learning resource, how they learn new skills and become aware of current industry practices. Students said that their communication and academic skills had improved.

2.45 Students are very aware of where to go to for support if needed, both at College and on work placements. They are complimentary about the standard of support that they receive. Therefore, the review team concludes that the well-focused and integrated range of student support services enabling students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential is **good practice**.

2.46 Overall, the review team found strong evidence that there are effective processes in place for the College to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Expectation B4 is therefore 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

2.47 The College defines student engagement as representation of the individual and collective student voice and the active participation of students within their learning and teaching. The College is committed to working in partnership with students to assure and enhance the quality of its students' educational experience. Students' contribution to the College is recognised through the 'Student of the Month' competition, for which higher education students are eligible.

2.48 The College actively encourages students to share feedback through informal discussions between staff and students, surveying students and module evaluations, and student representatives attending committees. Each higher education programme has a student representative and there is a Lead Student Representative for higher education students, who attends student focus groups and senior College committees. These students are offered training and are provided with a detailed role description.

2.49 Students are provided with access to information about quality and standards of their programmes through the College online HE portal, which is used by the College to close the feedback loop for students. This includes access to external examiner reports, College operational action plans (relating to outcomes of surveys and internal reviews), student survey results data, and annual programme monitoring reports among others. The effectiveness of student engagement is considered at a strategic level on an annual basis, with input from student representatives and discussion of survey outcomes. This is considered alongside the Learner Involvement Policy.

2.50 The design as described would allow for the Expectation to be met.

2.51 The team considered the student submission, documentation provided to student representatives including training presentations, role descriptions and guidance, student representative surveys, minutes and/or terms of reference for senior committees such as the HE Curriculum Operations Group and new Student Board, and completed module evaluation questionnaires. This was also tested in meetings with the College Principal, students, as well as senior staff, teaching and support staff.

2.52 Student representative training clearly explains the remit and responsibilities of the role, indicates appropriate staff to liaise with, and tips for being effective. Students were broadly aware of the training available to them; however, in past years attendance has been highlighted as varying. In order to support students to engage in informed discussions, guidance notes are provided to explain the purpose of, for instance, external examining arrangements. Students reported that student representatives and the College both feedback outcomes in response to their issues. Higher education student focus groups also provide students with a formal method for identifying good practice and areas for improvement. Student representatives, when surveyed, agreed that the student representative system enhanced students' experience.

2.53 The College senior team noted that while existing mechanisms are sufficient to share the student voice, there is an ongoing consideration as to how to further engage students in quality assurance and enhancement. One such initiative which has recently begun is the new Student Board. At senior level it has been noted that the formality of

governing body meetings can be off-putting to student members. Therefore, a new Student Board was established for the academic year 2015-16. This new Student Board, chaired by a member of the governing body, has responsibility for providing student-led strategic oversight of the student experience, including student support.

2.54 Recent programme approvals have involved a greater level of student representation through focus groups. There are plans to strengthen student involvement in module revalidation and review. This is considered to be the desired aim for strengthening student involvement. While this begins to take shape, the review team **affirms** the College's steps to involve students further in key decision making with bodies with responsibility for higher education.

2.55 Throughout the review, the team were assured that a holistic, concerted and well-meaning effort is made to ensure students are encouraged in a variety of ways to engage in and reflect on their student experience. There is a well-established model of student representation. A reflective approach is taken to student engagement, with annual review of its effectiveness by both staff and students. As such, this 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

2.56 The College conducts all assessments and recognition of prior learning in line with the requirements of the University's Assessment Principles, Policies and Procedures Regulation and the Recognition of Prior Learning Scheme. All assessments are set at annual programme board meetings attended by staff from each of the University's Consortium of Colleges. The Higher National programme in Computing adheres to the Pearson regulation for assessment. Programme specifications including programme and module learning outcomes are determined by the University. Programme handbooks include assessment guidelines for each programme with assessments mapped to learning outcomes which are part written by the University. Other information, such as assessment schedules are arranged by the College. These are available for all staff and students either directly through the University Portal or the College HE Portal. Assessments on the Pearson Higher National qualifications are marked by the College and moderated by Pearson under their licence agreement with the University.

2.57 Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is available to students on all programmes. The College informs students about the possibility of achieving RPL during their induction, although no students have used this process in recent years. Recognition of prior learning is available in accordance with University regulations and students are made aware of this in award handbooks.

2.58 The evidence of the assessment and RPL processes provided by the College demonstrate that Expectation B6 is met.

2.59 In order to test the Expectation, the team held meetings with College senior staff including a Quality Officer from the University, teaching staff, support staff and students, and also studied documentary evidence provided by the College and the University.

2.60 The College follows the University's marking and internal verification processes which include second-marking of assessments. Marking is undertaken by members of the programme team who have significant industry-related experience and are able to ensure that all learning outcomes have been assessed and achieved at the appropriate level. Assessments are moderated by the University to ensure consistency of achievement of learning outcomes and as defined in individual programme specifications. The module monitoring reports and annual monitoring reports are used by the College to ensure that the assessment programme fully meets the required learning outcomes. End-of-module feedback forms allow the College to ensure that the views of students are formative in this process.

2.61 External examiners and moderators are appointed by the University and Pearson to monitor the integrity of the assessment process to ensure that it is equitable, valid and reliable. This also allows for appropriate enhancement of the assessment process through the annual monitoring process.

2.62 Programme team members receive support and guidance on assessment from University programme advisers and link tutors. Programme staff attend the annual programme monitoring meeting at the University and can contribute to discussion concerning the assessment process. Any adjustments to assignments for students with additional learning needs are made in consultation with the College Student Services Team.

2.63 Information on the assessment process is covered in the induction of new staff and through the College CPD programme. The higher education Learning Coach also provides support for tutors to ensure the rigour of the assessment process. Good practice in assessment is shared through CPD events and the HE Curriculum and Operations Group.

2.64 In order to ensure that students develop assessment literacy they are introduced to assessment at induction, where assignment briefs and assessment criteria are explained to students. Aspects of good academic practice are addressed before each assignment or in specific modules. Academic misconduct is dealt with in accordance with the University's Procedure for Dealing with Breaches of Assessment Regulations - Academic Misconduct. Student achievement is recorded in departmental recording systems. The College is currently trialling the use of the Pro-Monitor online recording system with the HND in Computing which, if successful, will be rolled out later in the academic year 2015-16.

2.65 Students commented that they found their assessments challenging and understood how it helped them reflect on their work and progress. They also commented on how assignments became more challenging as they progressed from Level 4 to Level 5.

2.66 The review team concludes that the College has an effective, well monitored and robust framework for ensuring the quality of its assessment and RPL processes. This is supported by University appointed external examiners whose reports feed into the annual monitoring review process. The assessment and RPL processes are clearly understood by both staff and students.

2.67 The College adheres to the requirements of the University and Pearson, who ensure, through their own processes, that the assessment process is equitable, reliable and valid. The review team therefore confirms that Expectation B6 is met and that the level of associated 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

2.68 External examiners are nominated and appointed by the University. Each programme has an external examiner allocated to it who produces an annual report using a template and guidelines produced by the University. They comment on the currency of the curriculum and the rigour and fairness of the assessments. They also provide feedback to the College on the comparability of standards and student achievement.

2.69 The name of each external examiner is included in the Award Handbook and on the HE Portal. The College provides students with guidance on external examining which explains the external examining process, what an examiner does, what is contained within the reports and how the reports are shared and actioned upon receipt. Annual reports from the external examiners are also included on the HE Portal for students to access.

2.70 The College's Quality Manager reviews all external examiner reports and produces a summary of strengths and areas for improvement which is discussed at the HE Strategy Group and informs programme review. This is shared with staff and students on the HE Portal. The College responds to external examiner reports in a section in the annual reports.

2.71 The College produces an action plan containing issues from external examiners' reports. The Quality Manager reviews this with curriculum leaders to ensure timely completion of actions. Curriculum leaders respond to external examiners' reports through a section at the end of the report template. The University has a procedure for dealing with any serious concerns raised by external examiners, but to date none has been raised at the College. External examiners visit the College every year to review academic standards, student work and attend the assessment boards. External examiner feedback is considered as part of the annual programme review; it informs the higher education action plan.

2.72 The team scrutinised selected external examiners' reports, read relevant University policies on external examining and associated documents, and held meetings with staff and students. The team tested how these reports are used and responded to by the College. The evidence of the use made of external examiners' reports by the College demonstrates that Expectation B7 is met.

2.73 The College is clearly aware of its responsibilities and where to access appropriate information regarding external examining arrangements. External examiners use a standard template provided by the University to comment on academic standards. However, reports can relate to multiple providers of franchised programmes, and the College can find it difficult to identify whether an area for development or a strength relates to it or another provider. The University produces a summary of all comments from the reports for the College to highlight strengths and areas for improvement. The College responds to this feedback in annual summary reports. The College also acts on recommendations raised by external examiners through the higher education action plan, which is very comprehensive and is followed up at curriculum review meetings by the Quality Manager.

2.74 The College has robust procedures in place to monitor and act on issues raised by external examiners and consequently the review team concludes that Expectation B7 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

2.75 Formal responsibility for the operation of effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review of programmes rests with the University and Pearson. The College, accordingly, has a series of monitoring and review processes which inform the University in line with its requirement. Guidance notes provided by the University outline the process with relevant timescales.

2.76 The quality monitoring process is coordinated by the Director of Curriculum and Performance and the Quality Manager. The process requires each programme to reflect upon its delivery and achievement during the year through use of key performance indicators including end of module feedback data, module monitoring reports, student focus group information, annual monitoring reports, assessment data and external examiner/moderator reports. The HE Curriculum and Operations Group has responsibility for monitoring programme delivery, ensuring enhancement of the curriculum and developing and monitoring the resulting cross-College higher education action plan. This Group reports to the HE Strategy Group which has overall responsibility for annually reviewing and evaluating programmes.

2.77 Students provide further input to annual monitoring through the College Student Board, module evaluation forms, the internal students survey, the NSS results higher education feedback box, higher education focus groups and higher education learning walks.

2.78 Once the College has completed its internal monitoring and review processes, relevant documentation in the form of module monitoring reports, annual programme reports and the Partner Annual Summary Report are forwarded to the University. In addition to its annual monitoring processes, the University undertakes review of the College's provision every five years.

2.79 The review team considers that the College operates effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review of programmes and hence meets the requirements of Expectation B8.

2.80 In order to test the Expectation, the team considered a wide range of monitoring and review documentary evidence including student feedback forms, module and annual feedback reports, external examiner reports, HE Curriculum and Operations Group and HE Strategy Group minutes and the Annual Partner Summary Report. It also had the opportunity to meet teaching staff, senior and support staff and students.

2.81 The College annual monitoring and review cycle is thorough and robust and involves a series of integrated stages. Students provide feedback on module evaluation forms upon completion of each module. The programme leader uses this data to compile a module monitoring report followed by a composite annual monitoring report at the end of the year. All of these documents are presented to the HE Curriculum and Operations Group for scrutiny prior to being forwarded to the University. The Group produces and monitors the action plan, which incorporates programme-specific and cross-College issues. The action plan is valuable in providing a profile and actions for each programme in terms of areas for

improvement, evidence for success, actions, timescales, persons responsible and impacts. The Quality Manager reviews all the annual reviews and the higher education action plan and completes the Partner Annual Summary Report which is returned to the University.

2.82 The College SMT uses the information fed back to it through the monitoring and review process to inform the annual higher education specific Teaching, Learning & Assessment Report, the annual self-assessment report and the higher education in further education strategy. Appropriate evidence was available to the team in the form of templates and completed forms for all parts of the monitoring and review cycle. The team acknowledges the well-understood roles and contribution made to the monitoring and review process by the two higher education groups, the Director of Curriculum and Performance and the Quality Manager.

2.83 In the case of some programmes, the standard University student module evaluations forms are not being used for the initial collection of student feedback comments, although student comments are listened to acted upon. There is also some inconsistent completion of module monitoring reports with some reports such as the Foundation Degree in Technology and the Foundation Degree In Early Childhood Studies not being fully completed, in that issues were not resolved or actions completed from the previous year. Other module monitoring reports provide a full and comprehensive overview of the performance of the module while others provide only small amounts of detail. These inconsistencies apply to modules from different programmes and also within programmes. Consequently the team **recommends** that the College should ensure consistency and completeness of relevant documentation in the programme monitoring and review process at module level.

2.84 The College has developed its own quality processes which meet its own requirements and follows those of the University and Pearson. There is a robust and systematic documentation process. Procedures ensure the operation of an effective monitoring and review of programmes. There is one minor issue in relation to part of the module monitoring process that the College needs to resolve and a recommendation has been made accordingly. This notwithstanding, the team considers that Expectation B8 is met with a low level of associated risk.

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

2.85 Appeals and complaints are monitored at a senior level and this information is used to identify areas for enhancement. Information about appeals and complaints is detailed in student handbooks and online portal and it is explained during induction. The College adheres to the University's distinction between academic appeals and complaints. Academic appeals are managed by the University which operate this process under their own policies and procedures. Students are informed that they can make appeals on the basis of material error or irregularities, or justifiably previously undisclosed extenuating circumstances. Students are able to access support from the University Students' Union.

2.86 The College states that students can raise issues or make complaints without risk of being disadvantaged by the College or University. Early and informal resolution of complaints is encouraged. A three-stage process exists, consisting initially of an informal discussion between complainant, their personal tutor and the Learner Manager. If so desired, the next stage is a formal complaint and is followed up by a College manager who responds with an outcome within 15 working days. If required, complaints are progressed to an internal review by the Director of Learner Engagement & Partnerships. If this internal process is exhausted, complaints are escalated to the University and students would subsequently be supported in appealing to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. All staff responsible for dealing with complaints are given training and familiarised with the appropriate policy and procedure from the University.

2.87 The designed processes and procedures would allow for this Expectation to be met.

2.88 The team considered student handbooks, the student induction presentation and internal complaints procedures. It reviewed the University's policy and process for academic appeals for information and minutes of senior committee and team meetings. The team met students, senior staff, teaching and support staff.

2.89 Students are directed to the complaints policy during their induction presentation, and while the students the team met had not needed to make a complaint, they were confident they knew where to find information through the online portal, from support and academic staff. Student handbooks contain detailed information regarding academic appeals and direct students to the online portal for up-to-date information. During a demonstration of the VLE, it was noted by the College that work needed to be done to ensure complaints information was presented in a central location for all students, as it was not contained on all programme pages.

2.90 The College stated that complaints are seldom serious in nature, having received only four formal complaints since 2010. These related to areas of concern about the broader student experience. There is room within senior committees to consider these issues. However, given their limited occurrence, understandably this had not taken place over the last few years. Senior staff acknowledged that while there are mechanisms in place to identify areas for enhancement arising from student appeals and complaints, their low occurrence limits their impact.

2.91 In the case of appeals, academic staff noted that they were able, if necessary or desired, to attend meetings at the University regarding the outcomes of student appeals. Support staff were aware of policy and procedures, and noted that students often seek them out informally with concerns. The College's close relationships between students and staff generally was felt to enable early informal resolution to take place.

2.92 There is a formalised and embedded procedure for handling student appeals and complaints. Students and staff are able to access online and in printed documentation detailed information about appeals and complaints. There is an early resolution of student issues before they materialise into formal complaints. The review team found the Expectation to be met with a low level of associated risk.

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

2.93 The College does not have degree awarding powers, and delivers franchised awards on behalf of the University of Staffordshire. A Memorandum of Understanding confirms the delegated responsibilities afforded to the College, alongside a Collaborative Agreement. The Collaborative Agreement states that the programme teams are responsible for maintaining ongoing employer engagement. The College also has an Employability Strategy, which gives the College its strategic direction.

2.94 The main area in which the College manages higher education with other organisations is through work-based experience or placements. This is done either through existing arrangements between students and employers, brokering by the College on behalf of students, or through specifying employment within entry requirements. The College does not delegate the management of academic standards or assessment responsibilities to employers, but they play a vital role in enabling students to achieve learning outcomes.

2.95 Programmes containing formal work-based learning include Health and Social Care, Working with Children, Young People and Communities, Art and Creative Technologies, Teacher Education and Engineering where students are part-time and in employment. For the HNC/FdSc Engineering and FdA Early Childhood Studies students are required to arrange a placement opportunity or paid employment to last for the duration of the programme as part of the entry criteria. In many instances the employer funds the programme and therefore instigates the student enrolling and completing the programme.

2.96 There is extensive documentation giving guidance and advice regarding work-based learning including the Work Experience Strategy, Introduction to Work Experience: Guidelines for Placement Providers, Work Experience Guidance and documentation for students and Work Experience Agreement for Provider. The University provides an Employer and Placement Provider Handbook for the FdSc Working with Children, Young People and Communities. For teacher training programmes, the College seeks placements internally at the College for any candidates who have not secured their own placements. Teacher training staff develop relationships with mentors at their placement and the University takes responsibility for offering mentor training. The placement is also provided with a handbook that contains information about the programme, observation process and qualification.

2.97 Employers engaged in this activity are expected to identify a supervisor or mentor for a student, provide students with company policies, and accommodate the need for students to have supervised learning. For the rest of the programmes, students are encouraged to seek work experience or any work-related study, but the College does not normally facilitate this. Many programmes, particularly in the creative subject area use live assessment briefs from industry.

2.98 The College also works with many other organisations to the benefit of its students, examples include councils, schools, other colleges, community organisations, Jobcentre Plus, Skills Staffordshire, Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce, the Town Centre

Partnership, Businesses Improvement District, the LEP and many local, regional and global companies.

2.99 The guidelines produced by the University and the College, along with the processes put in place by the College and the excellent relationships with placement providers enables Expectation B10 to be met.

2.100 The review team examined documentary evidence including policies and placement handbooks, and met staff, students and employers.

2.101 The College operates a variety of models of work-based learning depending on the programme and subject area. These range from formal placements with observations, to work placements with mentor supervision, to the need for employment before starting the programme. Programmes that do not have formal work placements make wide use of live briefs from industry contacts to give students real work experiences. The College has a clear employability strategy and recognises the importance of giving students the skills needed for future employment which the students also appreciate. The review team therefore recognises that the integrated and well-organised approach to work-based learning gives students the opportunity to learn and apply skills and knowledge to prepare them for relevant employment or further study is **good practice**.

2.102 The review team therefore concludes that the arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with other organisations are implemented securely and managed effectively, and therefore the Expectation is met and the level of associated 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

2.103 The College does not offer research degrees.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.105 There are three good practices relating to the online recruitment and admissions system, the management of work-based learning and student support. There is one recommendation regarding the documentation at module level in the annual review process. There is one affirmation concerning student engagement.

2.106 All seven Expectations are met in this area and the level of risk is low. Therefore, the review team concludes that the quality of learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 Information about the College regarding its mission, values and strategic ambitions is published online for public and internal reference. Also available on the website is an explanation about the relationship with Staffordshire University. All information about the College is checked by the University to ensure it aligns with its own policies.

3.2 Prospective students can access information about application, the full extent of the College's higher education provision and existing facilities and support in the College prospectus. This is also available online, with links to UCAS and student financial guidance.

3.3 The pre-entry information for students is clear and accessible. This is also the case for students upon arrival where students are informed about their programmes, schedules and assessments. Returning students are not re-inducted, but changes or updates are communicated before they re-enrol. Throughout their studies, students can also access information about their programme through award handbooks. Upon completion of their studies, students are provided with transcripts and certificates of study by the University and Pearson.

3.4 Information about the maintenance of standards and College quality assurance is available through the College online portal. Placement providers are supported in understanding their role in maintaining standards and any specific quality assurance processes affecting them through tailored handbooks.

3.5 The design as stated above would allow for this Expectation to be met.

3.6 The team tested the Expectation in meetings with senior staff, students, teaching and support staff, employers and placement providers and through a demonstration of the College's VLE. Evidence considered in relation to the Expectation includes pre-sessional communications about events, induction presentation, the student submission, a marketing materials approval policy, senior committee minutes, student handbooks and programme specifications.

3.7 The College operates a series of internal checks resulting in senior management signing-off information. The accessibility and accuracy of information involves relevant support staff where it relates to their services. The College then submits printed documentation and marketing materials to the University for approval which then notifies the College of any required changes. The University is supplied with copies of the final documents for record as standard practice.

3.8 Individual programme listings on the website use a standard template, including entry requirements, content, assessment methods, progression opportunities, available funding, associated costs, and term dates. Invitation welcome events are designed to enable students the opportunity to enquire or take action in these areas with support from the College.

3.9 The higher education student induction covers all aspects of their educational experience, including feedback mechanisms, key policies and procedures, plagiarism avoidance, appeals and complaints processes, and available facilities and support. Award handbooks are created using a template from the University. The College localises the content where applicable. The College elaborates on much of the information contained within programme specifications. This practice was understood by senior, teaching and support staff. Significant changes to this template are discussed at a senior level. Students find award handbooks are helpful as clear points of reference.

3.10 Students confirmed that the information they received before they arrived reflected their experience, in some cases the reality exceeding the expectation. Students also noted that information available to them helped them make informed decisions about the right programmes of study. Programme handbooks are regarded as being very helpful. Opinions were more varied on the website, with some students indicating that while it is easily navigable and informative, some information can sometimes be updated at a late stage. However, it is clear that for current students their main reference point for information is the VLE.

3.11 The VLE is well received by staff and students alike. Staff responsible for supporting the maintenance of standards and quality assurance know exactly where to go, and in order to ensure the currency of information, live links to webpages from the College and University are used rather than files to ensure version control. During the demonstration, the review team was shown the accessibility of electronic versions of handbooks, programme specifications, module descriptors, calendars, class presentations, online submission routes, annual monitoring reports, external examiner reports and relevant guidance for students. Where information exists in multiple places, the use of links to single pages rather than duplicating documents is the preferred practice, but where this is not the case it is monitored to ensure consistency.

3.12 Placement handbooks include information about the roles of the College, benefits to the employer, student needs, relevant forms or assessment logs, and staff contacts within programmes. Placement providers noted that, where needed, they are provided with handbooks which clearly explain the expectations placed on them with regard to providing learning opportunities, and the expectations placed on the students. This is further supplemented through effective working relationships with link staff at the College.

3.13 The College places a strong emphasis on the need for reliable, trustworthy and accessible internal information. Increasing use of electronic documentation and live links rather than duplicated documents helps streamline information and ensure consistency. Staff are generally aware of the required processes for approval of documentation, and the close working relationship with the University enables the College to produce information that is fit for purpose. As such, the review team found this Expectation to be met, with a low level of associated risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.15 The College follows the University procedures and uses its own processes effectively to ensure that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.16 The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low. Therefore, the review team concludes that the quality of information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College has an Enhancement Strategy which is well documented and clearly expressed. It embodies its approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities in its document Teaching, Learning and Enhancement Strategy for Higher Education Students 2014-15 to 2016-17. The College defines enhancement as 'taking deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of learning opportunities'.

4.2 The strategy defines a series of key aims and objectives which it intends to achieve through use of measurable indicators. This approach to enhancement is embedded across the College and links to the higher education in further education strategy, the higher education action plan and annual monitoring reports. At the SMT, HE Strategy Group and HE Curriculum and Operations Group meetings, enhancement issues are discussed and noted.

4.3 The College incorporates and values the student voice as one of the drivers in the enhancement process and has recently established a College Student Board to enable this to be included. A range of enhancement activities and initiatives at various levels across the College was evidenced by the team during the review process and confirmed at meetings with teaching staff, senior staff, support staff, students and employer representatives.

4.4 The team considers that the deliberate steps being taken to improve the quality of student learning opportunities would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.5 In order to test the Expectation the team reviewed a wide range of documentary evidence, and followed thematic lines of enquiry to determine how and where the process of enhancement was embedded within the structural and operational framework of the College. The team met and questioned the Principal and Director of Curriculum and Performance, and groups of students, senior and teaching staff, support staff and employer representatives in order to confirm its findings.

4.6 The College has introduced a series of structural and strategic changes since its last QAA (IQER) review in 2010. The establishment of the HE Strategic Group and the HE Curriculum and Operations Group provides forums where enhancement policies, processes and activities, and elements of good practice are regularly discussed.

4.7 Enhancement recommendations and actions from these Group meetings feed into SMT meetings, and are then considered and embedded in relevant operational documents including the higher education action plan under the strategic oversight of the Quality Manager, the Annual HE Teaching, Learning and Assessment Review, the higher education specific teaching and learning walk summary, the higher education CPD programme and the Staffordshire University partners annual summary report.

4.8 The team noted a wide range of activities and developments in many areas of College life which evidence enhancement taking place. All potential students (including pre and post application) are invited to a higher education welcome morning to meet staff, other potential students and view facilities in order to ensure that their application decisions are well informed and appropriate.

- 4.9 An integrated online system for student recruitment, enrolments and admissions has been introduced in close liaison with Staffordshire University from September 2015. This means students can now complete all administrative requirements on their first day in College and can gain immediate access to all relevant College and University online teaching and learning materials and administrative and support information, allowing them to start on their programme of study.
- 4.10 A series of staff development initiatives are also aimed at enhancing the student learning experience. Recent introductions include the higher education specific peer observation process which allows colleagues teaching higher education to observe and learn from one another and is additional to those teaching observations which form part of the College's performance management process.
- 4.11 A further innovation approach to improving the quality of teaching and learning is the introduction of the process which involves the use of a self-following video camera used by tutors to record and then observe their own teaching. Teaching staff confirm that they are able to gain valuable insights into aspects of their own teaching that displays, for example, good practice or areas for development, through dialogue with colleagues and/or through filmed observations of their own teaching styles and approach.
- 4.12 Senior staff play an active role in the enhancement process through the themed walks programme. Themes include: advantages and disadvantages of doing higher education at a College rather than at a University; quality of resources available to the students; satisfaction with recruitment enrolment and induction, and opportunities for feedback. Students can also take an active part in this process. Overseen by the Director of Curriculum and Performance, feedback from this process is provided to the HE Curriculum and Operations Group for consideration and the dissemination of good practice.
- 4.13 The College provides a series of CPD opportunities for staff who deliver higher education programmes. CPD events and activity may be provided by the College or by the University or other external agency and are targeted at specific issues aimed at enhancing teaching and learning.
- 4.14 The recent appointment of a higher education-specific Teaching and Learning Coach with extensive higher education experience is a further integral part of the teaching and learning enhancement strategy. The coach supports staff providing advice on good practice in higher education delivery, shadowing for new higher education tutors, organises and develops the CPD programme and inducts staff new to higher education teaching at the College.
- 4.15 Students are being further integrated into the College quality processes in a variety of ways. They now have input into the annual NSS evaluation, and involvement in compilation of the annual monitoring report. The recently established Student Board is aimed at ensuring student engagement in the quality process at the College as widely as possible.
- 4.16 Infrastructure enhancements include the upgrading of personal computers in the dedicated Higher Education Centre and the upgrade of the College internet connection which has increased connection speed significantly. Impacts on the quality of the learning and teaching opportunities are measured and fed into the quality assurance process in a variety of ways dependent on the initiative or procedure. Outcomes are monitored through use of student focus group and student feedback surveys, external examiner comments, improved NSS data, or feedback from CPD activities and events. The College higher education action plan identifies the measure for each initiative.
- 4.17 There are many examples across the College at both strategic and operational level where enhancement initiatives and activities are being undertaken, although collectively

these appear somewhat uncoordinated. The team considers that the development of an enhancement action plan, similar to the higher education action plan would be beneficial to the College in helping drive its enhancement strategy forward in a more coherent and systematic manner.

4.18 The College's higher education Teaching, Learning & Enhancement Strategy clearly defines the College's comprehensive approach towards ensuring that student learning opportunities are enhanced. The College has established a series of initiatives aimed at making enhancement an integral part of all aspects of the College's work. Meetings attended by the team demonstrated that the Principal, senior staff, teaching staff and support and administrative staff understand both the concept and importance of enhancement in the teaching and learning process, and support the College in its measures to achieve this. The review team **affirms** the progress the College is making with its enhancement strategy.

4.19 Overall, the College demonstrates that it is taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of its students' learning opportunities and therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met with a low level of associated risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.21 The College has a clear enhancement strategy which is strategic and makes use of information from students, annual monitoring and external examiners. The progress the College is making with its enhancement strategy is affirmed.

4.22 The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low. Therefore, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities is **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The College has an Employability Strategy, which states that it aims to provide its students with access to a range of work-related opportunities, appropriate to their level of ability, experience, interests and aspirations, which enable them to develop skills, attributes, knowledge and behaviours in order to enhance their chances of securing a fulfilling and rewarding career path. There are three strands to the strategy: work aware; enterprising, skilled and experienced; and work ready.

5.2 The College Engagement Strategy, under the 'work aware' strand, commits the College to providing students opportunities to increase their awareness of a range of career paths, job roles, potential progression routes and qualifications required to understand the skills and attributes employers are looking for.

5.3 The College Employability Strategy commits the College to providing opportunities to develop and practise skills appropriate to their career aspirations and carry out work-related tasks in realistic work environments or on employer premises. Further, there is a commitment to make students 'work ready' through ensuring students are recording their skills, regularly updating their CVs and providing opportunities for students to understand local job markets.

5.4 Students have access to a contracted external careers advice service offering confidential careers guidance which operates on-site. The College 'Work Shop' provides support for job applications, CV writing, interview techniques and advertises local employment opportunities. All academic teaching staff are kept up to date with local, national and international information about relevant labour markets and are currently or have previously been active practitioners in their respective fields, and bring this experience into the classroom, visiting lecturers are also employed. Further careers support is available to students from the University, through their student portal. Students on University-validated programmes have access to eCoach for careers related advice.

5.5 The College accesses labour market information and has links with the LEP regarding skills needs in the region and engages with local employers to ensure all students are able to develop employability skills and broader skills alongside their academic studies.

5.6 The College has a range of models to prepare students for employment. Some programmes, such as the HNC/FdSc Engineering programmes, study at the College on day release from their employer, whereas teacher training students are expected to locate their own placements. There are opportunities to train within the College. For some, the existence of employment or placement arrangements is a requirement of entry. Where there is no specific placement module, the College ensures students are engaged with 'real life' work projects for, and valued by, employers, designed to reflect the current needs and practice in the workplace, such as exhibitions, working with companies, placements/internships. One example of this is a 'live brief', where students develop products which have gone into production with local employers, made products for exhibitions inspired by local architecture, and been involved in local Council-led projects. Examples of this include showcasing work in the NULC shop in the local town centre called MADE Here ('Media, Art & Design Enterprise'), where current and former students can produce and sell their work.

5.7 The College Employability Strategy is monitored through mechanisms such as curriculum plans, lesson observations, student numbers on placements, student feedback, employer feedback and destination data. Recent data for foundation degrees found that 37

per cent of students go on a top-up degree and 59 per cent go into employment. All students feel they have developed new skills and become aware of current industry practices.

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 30-33 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 programme 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 programme 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 programme 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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