



# Higher Education Review of North West Kent College of Technology

October 2014

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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 North West Kent College of Technology. The review took place from 7 to 9 October 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Sam Butler (student reviewer)
- Dr Alan Howard
- Mr Kevin Kendall.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by North West Kent College of Technology 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)<sup>1</sup> setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

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

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

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)<sup>4</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode).

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106).

<sup>3</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about North West Kent College of Technology

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at North West Kent College of Technology.

- 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 North West Kent College of Technology.

- The annual planning of assessment and the timely and developmental feedback provided for students (Expectation B6).
- The effective process for the development and provision of significant specialist resources which enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities (Expectation B4 and Enhancement).
- The development and embedding of a distinctive higher education experience (Enhancement).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to North West Kent College of Technology.

By February 2015:

- ensure that programme specifications are consistent in scope and content and that definitive versions are easily accessible to staff and students (Expectations A2.2 and C)
- ensure that the policies for extenuating circumstances and appeals are comprehensive and embedded as part of an effective regulatory assessment framework (Expectation B6).

By March 2015:

- ensure that the teaching observation process supports the development of independent learning and critical thinking (Expectation B3).

By September 2015:

- further develop and implement quality assurance structures and policies, clarify responsibilities and identify clear reporting lines and actions (Expectations A2.1 and B8)
- increase the involvement of students in the formal quality assurance and enhancement processes (Expectation B5 and Enhancement)
- develop a process for providing oversight of external examiners' comments to identify and share good practice and address issues arising (Expectation B7)

- establish and implement a College-wide policy and procedures for the provision of work-based and placement learning (Expectation B10).

## **Affirmation of action being taken**

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that North West Kent College of Technology is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The further development and embedding of specific College policies and regulations for the award of academic credit and qualifications (Expectation A2.1).
- The development of a more planned approach to staff development and scholarly activity (Expectation B3).
- The development and embedding of specific policies and procedures for Pearson programmes (Expectation B6).
- The embedding of the revised template for annual review to provide a more consistent cross-College approach (Expectation B8).

## **Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

The College's Student Involvement Strategy outlines a commitment to create a supportive and successful environment which will motivate individual students to be engaged and challenged, developing them both personally and intellectually. The College's aspiration is to move towards a genuine partnership between students and staff. The student voice has developed effectively over the last few years with a systematic approach to engaging with students through student representative meetings, teaching and learning focus groups and surveys.

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

## **About North West Kent College of Technology**

North West Kent College of Technology (the College) is a general further education college with two main campuses in Dartford and Gravesend, Kent. The College's mission 'to excel and to inspire' is supported by a series of strategic aims which are reviewed annually. Widening participation is central to the College's ethos, along with the provision of progression routes for students studying at Level 3. The College's Higher Education Strategy refers to the Quality Code and links to the overarching institutional aims, including its commitment to further develop higher education in North West Kent.

The College has been in partnership with the University of Greenwich (the University) since 1991. With the University, the College mainly delivers foundation degrees and Higher National programmes, either franchised or validated for delivery solely at the College. The College delivers one honours programme. The College also works in partnership with one awarding organisation, Pearson Ltd, offering Higher National Certificates and Diplomas.

In 2014-15 the College had 207 higher education students (186 full-time and 21 part-time) on 11 programmes of study. The number of students on higher education programmes has declined since the last QAA review in 2010 when it had 364 students. The College continually reviews the curriculum it offers. New programmes have been established to reflect local need and the College's existing resources and expertise. All but one of its higher education programmes are delivered at the Dartford campus; the other in engineering is

offered at Gravesend. A dedicated Higher Education Centre was opened in September 2012 providing study rooms, offices, students' social spaces and a small specialist library.

Since the last QAA review in 2010 there have been a number of changes in the organisational structure with a view to enhancing quality and improving the learning and teaching experience. Higher education programmes are currently managed within the curriculum directorates overseen by assistant principals. The recently appointed Higher Education Development Manager has a cross-College role to facilitate, support and develop higher education across all directorates.

The College has made good progress in addressing the five areas of good practice, two advisable and two desirable recommendations from its last QAA review. The College provided a recent update to the action plan which outlined detailed information on how it had addressed the outcomes of the previous review. Further work is taking place to ensure that consistent arrangements are in place for providing guidance and support to students and mentors.

## Explanation of the findings about North West Kent College of Technology

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.1 The College delivers programmes in partnership with the University of Greenwich and Pearson. The qualifications provided by the College adhere to the principles laid out in the University's Memorandum of Agreement and Quality Assurance Handbook. These specify the external reference points, including *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), that form the basis of programme approval. The College offers franchised and validated programmes in partnership with the University. Pearson provides the regulatory framework for Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) qualifications.

1.2 The College shares responsibility with the University for programme development and approval and for modifications. These responsibilities are set out in the Memorandum of Agreement and include the production of programme specifications and module outlines. These are internally checked and then validated by the University. Similarly, the College produces contextualised programme specifications for Higher National programmes validated by Pearson.

1.3 The College has recently established a post of Higher Education Development Manager (HEDM). Responsibilities include oversight of programme development, liaison

with the awarding body and awarding organisation, and providing support to programme leaders in preparation of validation documents, programme specifications and reviews. Link tutors from the University provide academic support. A development officer is provided to work with the College on new programmes. These regulatory frameworks enable the College to meet Expectation A1 of the Quality Code.

1.4 The team reviewed relevant College and University documentation for programme development and approval, including quality assurance policies and procedures, to confirm that these enable it to meet Expectation A1. The team tested the approach taken by reviewing documentary evidence and talking to link tutors, senior College staff and others involved in programme delivery.

1.5 The College works effectively with its partners to ensure compliance with delivery, assessment and award requirements. Senior staff understand the notion of maintaining standards set by awarding partners and are clear about their varying responsibilities. Key staff understand external reference points, including the Quality Code and the *Foundation Degree Quality Benchmark (FDQB)*.

1.6 Programme specifications are produced by teaching staff with guidance and advice from the HEDM who is experienced in using the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and qualification descriptors. There is clear evidence that mapping levels in the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and programme learning outcomes is undertaken. The programme learning outcomes matrix is well designed for its purpose. The role of the University link tutor successfully enables regular communication between staff teams and the awarding body, and supports the quality assurance process.

1.7 The College discharges its responsibilities effectively within the context of its agreements with its awarding body and awarding organisation. Specification of learning outcomes ensures that programmes align with the FHEQ and other external reference points. Student assessment demonstrates that learning outcomes are achieved. Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A1 is met and that risk in this area is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

1.8 The College's Memorandum of Agreement with the University includes clear responsibilities for designing and maintaining validated programmes. Subject Benchmark Statements are used effectively by the College to inform standards and are referenced to the intended learning outcomes. In each curriculum area, an assistant principal has strategic oversight for planning and delivery. The HEDM has cross-College oversight of quality assurance and operational matters and reports to the assistant principal responsible for higher education. Consideration of the subject and qualification benchmark statements is made as part of curriculum development, before submission to the University for formal approval.

1.9 The College's Higher Education Strategy 2013-15 provides areas for development. Institutional plans to formulate specific policies, procedures and committee frameworks are outlined in a detailed quality enhancement plan. A range of new policies have been developed recently and the College intends to establish a Higher Education Committee in 2014-15 to provide oversight of quality assurance and enhancement. These processes enable the College to meet Expectation A2.1 of the Quality Code.

1.10 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the College's processes by scrutinising documents setting out programme approval and review processes, reading reports of approval and review events, and talking to senior management, teaching staff and students.

1.11 Awarding partner regulations and policies are well embedded and understood. The College is currently developing specific higher education policies and procedures, especially for programmes delivered on behalf of Pearson. The review team **affirms** the action taken by the College in respect of the further development and embedding of specific College policies and regulations for the award of academic credit and qualifications.

1.12 The team saw examples of new policies, including those relating to assessment and marking, assessment board regulations and extenuating circumstances. However, the assessment policy does not contain detailed regulations, and the extenuating circumstances policy fails to specify admissible circumstances, or actions open to the extenuation board. The process for developing, reviewing and amending internal policies is unclear and there are no obvious reporting lines to committees.

1.13 The introduction of the Higher Education Committee is proposed as a key element in the deliberative structures for quality assurance and enhancement. However, senior managers and programme-level staff are unclear about the committee's intended role and how they would be involved. Terms of reference, constitution and membership for the new committee are not available, and senior staff acknowledged the lack of current formalised structures for oversight and review. The team therefore **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College further develops and implements quality assurance structures and policies, clarifies responsibilities and identifies clear reporting lines and actions.

1.14 Academic frameworks and regulations are in place and understood. However, the College recognises the need to further develop and embed internal policies to govern how academic credit and qualifications are awarded. These need to be established within a more explicit quality assurance and enhancement framework. The team therefore concludes that Expectation A2 is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

1.15 The College shares the responsibility of programme approval and review with its partners. The College formally considers and approves programme specifications at initial approval and during periodic review. Explicit links are made between assessment and learning outcomes. Programme specifications set out the aims and intended learning outcomes for each programme. The Higher National programmes are developed and managed in line with the specification provided by Pearson. Provision of this information enables the College to meet Expectation A2.2 of the Quality Code.

1.16 The review team looked in detail at policies and processes for developing programmes, creating programme specifications, and their publication. Staff discussed new programme development, and the review of current programmes. The team tested the understanding of this process in meetings with senior staff, delivery staff, those who manage the partnerships, and the marketing team.

1.17 Although staff understand how they input into the development and review of programmes, the programme specifications are inconsistent across the College. There is a lack of clarity about the location of all programme specifications, and how these are produced.

1.18 Programme specifications validated by the University follow a consistent approach, and provide a definitive record. However, those provided for Higher National programmes are inconsistent in content, and vary in both scope and format. The College has recognised this as an area for development and is working towards providing standardised programme specifications.

1.19 Programme specifications are accessible through the staff intranet. Students are provided with this information either through the programme handbook or College website. However, while students receive the full information, there is confusion around which documents provide the definitive version, and information given is often fragmented. The team **recommends** that, by January 2015, the College ensures that programme specifications are consistent in scope and content, and that the definitive versions are easily accessible for staff and students.

1.20 Overall, the College understands its responsibilities for maintaining a definitive record of each programme. Information about the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected achievement is available to students, but needs to be more consistent in format and more readily accessible. The team concludes that Expectation A2.2 is met, but that the level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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 *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark (FDQB)* and Subject Benchmark Statements are used by the College when writing new programmes. Appropriate documentation shows the mapping of modules for each programme to the learning outcomes. These are also benchmarked to the FHEQ. Pearson programmes also take into account National Occupational Standards. External examiners' reports confirm that programmes meet the relevant academic standards. New programmes are approved by curriculum managers and an assistant principal, supported by the HEDM. These are ultimately signed off by the Principal, following a business planning process, which ensures their relevance. The College also has regular programme reviews which consider a set of performance indicators. The University has a five-year review process for programme re-validation. These processes enable the College to meet Expectation A3.1 of the Quality Code.

1.22 The review team considered all the relevant documentation, including minutes of meetings, and reports and held meetings with the Principal, senior staff and programme leaders and teaching staff.

1.23 The College has successfully validated a number of new programmes with both Pearson and the University. Staff understand the expectations of higher education but there is no formal College policy or procedures for the approval of new programmes. This will be within the remit of the Higher Education Committee. External academic or employer participation in programme development is variable. However, the current informal system has been generally effective, and the responsibilities and processes are agreed and understood by staff.

1.24 Overall, the processes for the internal approval of new programmes are in place and understood by staff, although the College recognises the need for these to be formalised. The review team concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.25 Programme outcomes are validated through the awarding body's and organisation's processes, and a definitive validation document is produced for each programme. Module outcomes are then mapped to the knowledge, understanding, and intellectual, practical and transferable skills in the programme learning outcomes. Module specifications show the assessments used to demonstrate evidence of achievement of the module outcomes. Module specifications are published in programme handbooks. The College operates an effective internal verification process for both assessment briefs and student work. Staff provide feedback on the suitability of the assessment tasks. This approach enables the College to meet Expectation A3.2 of the Quality Code.

1.26 External examiners' reports confirm that programmes meet the relevant academic standards for the awards offered. Examiners' comments inform the annual programme reviews, and the institutional report submitted to the University. An institutional report for Pearson programmes is not currently undertaken.

1.27 The review team examined all the relevant documentation, including module and programme specifications, validation reports, external examiners' reports and programme and institutional reviews. The team also met a wide range of staff and students.

1.28 Programme outcomes are stated in the definitive programme specifications. There is a clear link from these to the assessment tasks. Assessments are well planned and timely and developmental feedback is given to students, which they value. This is good practice, which is addressed under Expectation B6. The College has an effective system in place to internally verify assessments, and external examiners' reports confirm that academic standards have been met.

1.29 Overall, the College has systems in place to ensure that the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable, and that the award of qualifications and credit is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.30 The Memorandum of Agreement details how the University monitors academic standards through the Partnership Development Group, link tutors, external examiners, annual programme monitoring reports and the Annual Institutional Report. The University's Quality Assurance Handbook describes its quality assurance procedures for approving, monitoring and reviewing programmes. As a centre approved by Pearson, the College follows the procedures and quality assurance processes required. These are well used and understood by staff delivering Higher National programmes. This approach enables the College to meet Expectation A3.3 of the Quality Code. For programmes validated through the University processes, a definitive validation document is produced.

1.31 University programmes are reviewed every five years through a critical appraisal and review. This is produced by the programme leader with support from the University link tutor. A review meeting with the University takes place and a definitive document is produced by the programme leader in conjunction with the University. Industrial organisations and employers are also involved in the approval of programmes through membership validation and review panels.

1.32 Both the University and Pearson deploy external examiners who visit the College at least once a year and produce an annual report for each programme. The good practice and any issues arising are addressed by the staff team, and included in the programme monitoring reports.

1.33 The University also designates link tutors from relevant faculties who provide academic support and advice. This is in addition to support provided by the Partnership Development Officer and staff of the partnership division. Regular meetings are held with programme teams and to liaise with the HEDM.

1.34 In addition, the College operates an internal annual programme review process that takes into account relevant data on admissions, progression, student feedback and the relevant external examiners' report. Comments from external examiners inform these reports, confirming that academic standards have been met. For validated programmes, external examiners' reports, and also programme monitoring reports, are considered through the University's quality assurance processes.

1.35 The review team examined documentation from the College and University relating to programme monitoring and review and met senior managers, programme leaders, link tutors and teaching staff.

1.36 Procedures are in place using both University and College-designed processes to monitor and review programmes. These are well understood by staff, are embedded in practice and work effectively. This is also evidenced through external examiners' comments and programme monitoring reports which confirm the process is working in practice.

1.37 Overall, monitoring and review mechanisms are in place to confirm that UK threshold academic standards are achieved, and the review team therefore 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**

1.38 The College uses external expertise in programme development, validation and review. External academic and industry input is sought during new programme development and the University and Pearson both use external representation in validation. External examiners are employed on all programmes and report explicitly on the setting and maintenance of standards. Link tutors from the University provide continuing academic support and advice to programme leaders. These frameworks and associated guidance enable the College to meet Expectation A3.4 of the Quality Code.

1.39 The team tested the use of external expertise by reading external examiners' reports, annual programme review reports and minutes of meetings of the Higher Education Forum, and through meetings with staff and students.

1.40 External examiners' reports are considered as part of annual programme review and a detailed response to the examiner is provided. The review team read a sample of reports, all of which commented in appropriate detail on the setting and maintenance of academic standards. Programme review reports are detailed and reflective, but could include more explicit reference to the maintenance of standards.

1.41 The team found good communication between the College and the University. Link tutors attend Higher Education Forum meetings where reports from programme committees are received. The Forum meets three times a year and although the team heard that staff found the meetings useful, their attendance is often rather limited.

1.42 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 review team concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met and the level of risk is low.

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



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

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

1.44 Although all of the applicable Expectations in this area have been met, the risk is judged moderate in two cases: Expectations A2.1 and A2.2. In all sections related to academic standards the College is also required to adhere to the procedures of its awarding body and organisation. There is one recommendation to support the further development and implementation of the College's own quality assurance structures and policies to provide greater institutional oversight and action planning. This is further supported in the affirmation of action taken by the College to introduce its own process for oversight and management of academic standards. A further recommendation specifically relates to making sure that programme specifications provide an accessible and definitive record of a programme of study.

1.45 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the College's degree-awarding body and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The College's programme approval policy and procedures are not yet fully formalised or embedded within the committee structure. New programmes validated by the University follow the procedures in the University's Quality Assurance Handbook. The FDQB descriptors are used as a guide in producing generic and specific learning outcomes. For University awards, programme leaders are required to incorporate Subject Benchmark Statements into programme learning outcomes. The College establishes areas for programme development in consultation with the University link tutor and other members of the partnership team. Developments are overseen by senior managers and the HEDM. Following a business planning process, proposals for new programmes at the College are approved by curriculum managers and signed off by the Principal. Industry organisations and employers are also involved in the approval and review of programmes.

2.2 For Higher National programmes, following Centre recognition, programme approval is sought from Pearson to run a range of HNC/D programmes. Validation of Pearson programmes follows the procedures outlined in its quality assurance processes. The College selects the course units to incorporate both the mandatory and the optional units and meet the required number of credits.

2.3 The approach the College takes towards programme design and approval enables it to meet Expectation B1 of the Quality Code.

2.4 The HEDM has responsibility for oversight of programme development, liaison with the University, and providing support for programme leaders and others in the preparation of validation documents and specifications. For University-validated programmes a development officer works with the College on new programmes. Programme specifications are produced by teaching teams with guidance and advice from the HEDM, who is experienced in using the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and qualification descriptors.

2.5 The review team took account of relevant documentation, including records of programme design and approval processes and the minutes of meetings of senior management and programme teams, along with validation reports, and talked to senior staff, academic staff and students.

2.6 Records of programme design and approval demonstrate clearly that the College ensures there is a market and a rationale for each new programme. This rationale confirms that each new programme is valid, and is designed to meet the needs of students and employers. The process is well understood and clear to College staff. No formal evidence of business planning is available. There is also no formal process for the involvement of students or external stakeholders. Niche programmes, such as professional writing, have been developed successfully with the initiative coming from programme level rather than through market research. This matter is addressed as part of the recommendation in

Expectation A2.1 which asks the College to further develop and implement its quality assurance structures and policies and clarify responsibilities.

2.7 Overall, the College has effective processes in place for the design and approval of programmes and has validated a number of awards in recent years, although further formalisation of the internal process is required. The team concludes that Expectation B1 is met and the associated risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission***

**Findings**

2.8 The College has a clear policy and procedures for managing its responsibilities for fair admissions. These are consistently applied and made explicit to students before application. The College's Admissions Policy sets out clear responsibilities, with programme leaders setting entry criteria. These are reviewed by the HEDM in consultation with the assistant principal responsible for higher education. The policy also sets out the process for application, admission and appeals.

2.9 Applications are submitted through UCAS and the admission of students to Pearson programmes and non-franchised University programmes is the responsibility of the College. The admission of students to franchised programmes is the responsibility of the University. The process for complaints and appeals related to the admissions process is defined in the University admissions procedures. This approach enables the College to meet Expectation B2 of the Quality Code.

2.10 The review team looked at the admissions process in detail, including the Higher Education Prospectus and College website, and talked to students, admissions and support staff, academic staff and employers.

2.11 The admissions policy explains clearly how admissions are managed in the College and responsibilities are understood by relevant staff. The process for appeal against unsuccessful admission is clearly stated in the admissions policy and implemented by staff. However, this information is not explicitly available in the information published for students. The prospectus has a section dedicated to explaining the admissions process and includes links to the website for further information. All candidates are given an interview or audition. Current students act as College ambassadors on open days and receive training to ensure they provide accurate information to prospective students on admissions and application.

2.12 Entry criteria are appropriate and set within the framework outlined by the University and Pearson. The responsibility for entry criteria depends on the programme. For example, the University sets entry criteria but programme leaders have some flexibility, especially with Higher National programmes. The team is confident that the relevant staff are aware of their responsibilities in ensuring entry criteria are fair.

2.13 Overall, the team confirms that there is an effective admissions policy which is applied consistently across all programmes. Students are treated consistently and fairly throughout the selection and application process. The team therefore concludes that Expectation B2 is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching***

#### **Findings**

2.14 The College's approach to learning and teaching and the provision of learning resources is defined in its Teaching and Learning Guidelines. Teaching staff are expected to plan and design their activities with care and to use a variety of teaching methods, including group work, practical work, lectures and tutorials. Work-based learning is an important component of all programmes.

2.15 The Teaching and Learning Guidelines set guidance about teaching observation and staff development. This strategy places much emphasis on innovative and creative teaching, designed to enable students to develop critical thinking and independent learning. This approach is underpinned by the Learning and Development Strategy which provides a framework that supports and encourages continuous professional development. This enables the College to meet Expectation B3 of the Quality Code.

2.16 The review team tested and evaluated the effectiveness of the policies and procedures for learning and teaching by scrutinising relevant policies, procedures and records of teaching observations, reviewing staff CVs, and through meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

2.17 Teaching staff are appropriately experienced and well qualified, and many have strong industry links. All members of staff are expected to hold or be working towards a teaching qualification. Students are positive about their educational experience, including small class sizes, helpful staff and provision of resources on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Students find that staff are responsive to emails and generally supportive and accessible.

2.18 College policy ensures that core information about the College and individual programmes is available on the VLE. Content such as programme handbooks and access to e-resources is well presented. Individual staff provide content within their own curriculum area to support classwork and independent study. The College recognises and rewards good practice and innovation in the use of e-learning by staff. Some programmes, such as performing arts, use external platforms like microblogging sites to facilitate interaction and enable students to showcase their work. Good use is made of a range of digital technologies to support learning, and tablet computers are loaned to students. Use of the VLE by students and staff is monitored and informs future requirements.

2.19 All programmes include a component of work-based learning, and a wide and varied range of experiences are offered. Responsibility for organisation and management of work-based learning occurs at programme level and the review team found some variability in the provision of documentation and handbooks. This matter is addressed as part of the recommendation in Expectation B10, concerning the establishment of College-wide policies and procedures. Many College staff work in industry, or have close links with it, and students feel this enriches their learning experience.

2.20 Each member of staff has at least one graded lesson observation a year using an Ofsted model. Only lessons graded outstanding or good are considered acceptable as part of the College's strategic aim to ensure inspirational teaching and learning. The College's plans for enhancement recognise the need to adapt the process to ensure greater relevance to higher education. This focus is currently missing from the observation process, and further attention to analytical and evaluative skills is planned. The review team **recommends** that, by March 2015, the College reviews the teaching observation process to ensure that this supports the development of independent learning and critical thinking.

2.21 The College provides a wide range of staff development activities. These support the maintenance and enhancement of their knowledge and skills. The College also recognises that staff development procedures are an area for enhancement, particularly in developing specific activities relevant to higher education. Staff provided examples of staff development, including an internal Higher Education Conference in July 2014 with a focus on digital literacy and the use of plagiarism-detection software. Further evidence of staff engagement with external training and development opportunities relevant to higher education include UCAS training for the Higher Education Information Officer, engagement with the Learner Voice Practitioner Network, involvement with JISC, and attendance at training sessions provided by the University. The review team recognises the progress being made and **affirms** the development of a more planned approach to staff development and scholarly activity.

2.22 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B3 is met and the risk is low. Staff at all levels conveyed to the review team a strong sense of their investment in, and commitment to, the College's approach to enhancing learning and teaching.

**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**

2.23 The Higher Education Strategy provides the framework for the College's development and delivery of resources. A Higher Education Centre providing dedicated teaching accommodation and staff offices was opened in 2012. The Centre provides a small self-service higher education library that includes areas for private study and recreational space. The Centre provides students with ready access to e-books and e-journals via the VLE.

2.24 The College arranges an induction programme for new students and at enrolment students are allocated a personal tutor who is usually their programme leader. Students confirm this to be useful and are invited to declare additional learning needs during application and at registration. Academic progress is overseen by the programme leader and class registers are taken to monitor attendance.

2.25 Study skills support is provided in tutorials and through the use of Open University online study skills modules accessible through the VLE. Academic information, including programme handbooks, is also made available to students electronically. The frameworks, strategies and guidance that the College has in place enable it to meet Expectation B4 of the Quality Code.

2.26 To test the operation of these policies, the review team spoke with staff and students, and scrutinised the Higher Education Strategy, resource planning information, external examiners' reports and annual monitoring reports.

2.27 There is an effective tutorial system and staff and students are provided with a checklist, including topics for individual and group meetings. Staffing arrangements at the College mean that the programme leader is often the most effective person to act as tutor. The tutor role description has greater focus on academic than pastoral support. Satisfaction with the tutorial system is evident through tutorial survey results and discussion with students. If they have a problem, students are clear about what they should do, and who they can contact. One external examiner commented that strong support mechanisms are in place.

2.28 The review team found evidence of a clear process through which support for students with disabilities is arranged. The College has not experienced the need for retrospective allowance to be made for students diagnosed with a disability mid-session, but staff confirmed such cases would be considered by an extenuating circumstances board.

2.29 The Student Involvement Strategy seeks to foster a supportive and successful learning environment. There is sound evidence of one-to-one support for students making the transition from Level 3 to Level 4 study. The University provides additional guidance and support for students moving from Level 5 to Level 6 study. Potential high achievers are encouraged and supported through tutorials and take on Student Ambassador roles.

2.30 Resource planning is considered as part of programme development and annual programme review. The College responds quickly to feedback and makes changes where possible. The Higher Education Centre provides a distinctive study environment, which is appreciated by students, although some state that they would like greater access to computers and printing. Students generally value the library and other resources provided,

including the provision of e-books. Students praised a process through which programme leaders or students can request that items are bought for the library through the library coordinator. The coordinated process for ensuring provision of library and electronic textbooks and the proactive process to respond to demand ensure appropriate maintenance of resources. The presence of an on-campus theatre is clearly greatly valued by performing arts students as a professional working environment. The effective process for the development and provision of significant specialist resources which enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities is **good practice**. This matter is also addressed under Enhancement.

2.31 Overall, the review team found strong evidence that there are effective processes to monitor and evaluate resources and support mechanisms 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**

2.32 The College gives students a wide range of opportunities to be engaged and to provide feedback on their learning experience. The College's Student Involvement Strategy sets out the structures for student representation and identifies six priorities. The key areas include student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement. College staff at all levels stress the importance of listening and responding to students' views. These arrangements enable the College to meet Expectation B5 of the Quality Code.

2.33 The review team considered the methods in place for student engagement, including policies, minutes of programme committees, discussions with students and student representatives, talks with academic and support staff and the Lead Student Representative.

2.34 The College has established an effective partnership with students underpinned by a variety of formal and informal communication mechanisms. Students speak very positively about the range of opportunities to engage with staff and make their views heard. They are positive about the attitude of staff towards their feedback, and how their views are represented at all levels within the institution. The College undertakes surveys and focus groups to ascertain students' views. Questionnaires are completed after induction, mid-programme and on exit.

2.35 Recently, specific higher education focus groups have been introduced. The system of student representation is well established and one student is elected from each cohort, who meets every term with student services to discuss their experience. Students selected at random meet the assistant principal responsible for teaching, learning and support, although these meetings do not have a specific focus on the higher education experience. Students also have opportunities to meet external examiners and the University link tutors.

2.36 Students are involved in programme committee meetings and staff commented that their views are crucial in the ongoing review of programmes. Students confirmed that there were ample opportunities for them to contribute to programme reviews throughout the year. The College has recently introduced a certificated online training course for student representatives who will be required to undertake this role.

2.37 The College is in the process of reviewing and extending the involvement of students in its deliberative structures. Discussions are ongoing about formalising a discrete higher education student representation on the governing body. Membership of the planned Higher Education Committee is intended to have student representation. However, these plans have not been formalised and there is a lack of clarity about when they will be introduced. The team **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College increases the involvement of students in the formal quality assurance and enhancement processes.

2.38 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B5 is met and that risk in this area is low. Students are able to make their views heard but there are further opportunities to formalise students' involvement in the deliberative processes for quality assurance and enhancement.

**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**

2.39 Module specifications include assessment information and the tasks required for each to demonstrate that the learning outcomes have been achieved. The Assessment and Marking Policy and an assessment procedure document support staff in assessment practice. Programme-specific assessment front sheet templates are used and assessment briefs are internally verified to ensure that they enable students to meet the learning outcomes. Criteria-based feedback is used and a sample of assessed work is internally verified and also seen by the external examiner. Some University programmes also have a standards verifier who samples assessed work. Assessment brief verification tracking sheets are used for both Pearson and University programmes.

2.40 Progression and Award Boards are conducted at the University and are attended by programme leaders. Assessment Boards for Pearson programmes have recently been introduced, and take place at the College according to the new policy. Appeals processes are set out in the student handbooks. For Pearson programmes, there is a Higher Education Appeals Policy introduced in June 2014. Processes are in place to ensure that assessment is reliable and external examiners' reports confirm that assessments are appropriate and programmes meet the relevant academic standards. These policies and procedures enable the College to meet Expectation B6 of the Quality Code.

2.41 The review team examined all the College documentation relating to assessment, including the documents referenced above, and held meetings with students, programme leaders and teaching staff.

2.42 There is a good range and variety of assessment tasks. Assessments are well timetabled, enabling students to plan their workload. Timely and developmental feedback is given to students to help with future assessments. Students spoke positively about the speed with which helpful feedback is provided and how the effective planning of assessment allowed them time to consider and reflect. This is **good practice**.

2.43 The College has an effective internal verification system in place. This assures the quality of assessment tasks, and external examiner reports confirm that academic standards have been met. The College's policy on the recognition of prior learning is only used in rare cases and the policy and procedures are not clearly understood by staff.

2.44 The College uses a specialist plagiarism-detection software and has internal procedures to deal with suspected cases. The recent Higher Education Conference at the College inducted staff to its potential use in the assessment process, but there is no consistent approach or policy on how and when it should be used.

2.45 The review team found clear guidelines on extenuating circumstances for University-validated programmes. These are well understood and implemented effectively. The College has developed its own extenuating circumstances policy for the Pearson programmes. This new policy is not yet well embedded and in discussion with students and staff it was evident that there is some confusion about roles and responsibilities. The new

policy does not detail what action an internal extenuating circumstances board can take, or what circumstances can or cannot be considered. More clarity is required to ensure that all students are treated fairly and equitably.

2.46 In June 2014, a Higher Education Appeals Policy was introduced for Pearson programmes, although this has not yet been embedded in practice, and is not fully understood by staff. There is a lack of clarity among staff and students about the process and procedures for students appealing against assessment decisions, and the criteria on which appeals may be based. The review team therefore **affirms** the development and embedding of specific policies and procedures for the award of academic credit for Pearson programmes. However, the team **recommends** that, by February 2015, the College ensures that the policies and procedures for extenuating circumstances and appeals are comprehensive and embedded, as part of an effective regulatory assessment framework.

2.47 Overall, the team concludes that Expectation B6 is met and the associated risk is low. The team affirms the development of specific policies and procedures for Pearson programmes, although these need further refinement and embedding. Students' assessments are well planned.

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

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

### **Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

#### **Findings**

2.48 The College follows the University's procedures for the appointment and induction of external examiners. Pearson appoints examiners for its programmes. The College is responsible for providing external examiners with the information, documentation and evidence they request, and for complying with their recommendations.

2.49 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, and external examiners' reports are made available to students on the VLE. The use made of external examiners enables the College to meet Expectation B7 of the Quality Code.

2.50 The team scrutinised selected external examiners' reports, looked at relevant policies on the induction of examiners, minutes of relevant committees and correspondence, and held meetings with staff and students. The team tested how examiners' reports are used and responded to by the College.

2.51 External examiners' reports are generally comprehensive and supportive. Positive feedback includes praise for the experience and qualifications of teaching staff, and the provision of good specialised resources. Potential issues relate to aspects of support for students, the use of grading criteria and inconsistencies in feedback. A substantive issue concerning assessment and moderation processes was raised by the external examiner for the Foundation Degree in Early Years in 2013. The review team found that the concerns had been appropriately reviewed in the annual programme report and associated action plan. The external examiner endorsed the action taken, and expressed satisfaction with current processes and procedures in 2014.

2.52 External examiners' reports are considered and responded to as part of the annual programme review process. Responses to comments, recommendations and areas of good practice are informed by discussions with students and staff at programme committee meetings. Detailed commentaries and action plans are produced by programme teams. However, there is no process by which oversight takes place of examiners' comments to identify and draw out common problems and areas of good practice for wider dissemination. It is unclear how external examiners' reports are used in the deliberative structure, or will be considered at the proposed Higher Education Committee. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College develops a process for providing oversight of external examiners' comments to identify and share good practice and address issues arising.

2.53 The review team considers that the College's processes for actioning and monitoring issues arising from external examiners' reports are sound. Appropriate consideration is given to reports in the quality assurance process at programme level, although there is no mechanism for drawing out common themes or issues. 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**

2.54 The University is responsible for the approval and review of its programmes. Annual programme monitoring reports, as set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook, are prepared and submitted by the College according to the University Memorandum of Agreement. Continued approval to offer programmes is subject to the satisfactory outcome of annual monitoring, periodic review and the implementation of any conditions, requirements or recommendations requested by the University's quality assurance process. Pearson is responsible for approval and review of HNC/D provision through its approval, external examination and review processes.

2.55 Programme monitoring reports for each University programme are produced annually by the programme leaders. These are moderated by the HEDM and forwarded to the University. For Pearson programmes a course review document, currently based on the further education model, is produced and moderated by the HEDM. The review documents use a range of evidence, including results of student surveys and recommendations from external examiners. They also include an action plan for improvement which is signed off by the assistant principal at the end of each year.

2.56 The College reports annually on the totality of its University provision by completing an Annual Institutional Report. This is considered by University Faculty Academic, Quality and Standards Committee and also by the University Academic Quality and Standards Committee. There is no equivalent report produced for Pearson programmes.

2.57 The University also reviews programmes on a five-year cycle, which may result in recommendations. The College has a rolling programme of review of its portfolio of programmes through business planning documentation. This is presented to the Principal each March. The approach the College takes towards programme monitoring and periodic review enables it to meet Expectation B8 of the Quality Code.

2.58 The review team examined University and Pearson quality assurance policies and procedures, and scrutinised College programme monitoring reports and external examiners' reports as well as discussing the processes during meetings with staff.

2.59 Operationally, the monitoring and review processes are effective, regular and systematic. The programme monitoring reports and Annual Institutional Report for University programmes are embedded within the University quality cycle. The College is in the process of establishing and embedding a new programme review template for Pearson programmes to provide a more consistent approach across all higher education programmes. The review team **affirms** the development and embedding of the revised template for annual review to provide a more consistent cross-College approach.

2.60 From September 2014 all programmes will be using a higher education quality calendar linked to the University quality cycle. This will provide greater consistency in monitoring and review. The introduction of the planned Higher Education Committee is also intended to provide greater oversight across provision, and more rigour. This matter is addressed in the recommendation in Expectation A2.1 asking the College to further develop

its quality assurance structures and processes, clarify responsibilities and identify clear reporting lines and actions.

2.61 Overall, there are processes in place for the routine monitoring and review of individual programmes. Systems to monitor actions arising from these processes are effective. However, there is inconsistency between University and Pearson programmes and there are further opportunities for the College to standardise approaches and have oversight of provision. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.62 During induction, students are made aware by staff, and through their handbooks, how they can access the procedures and processes for complaints and appeals. Students confirm that they know what to do if they have a complaint or appeal, and understand the systems. Students also confirm that they can make a complaint or appeal without being disadvantaged. Clear information is available on the VLE. The College follows the procedures for complaints and appeals established by the University. The College's complaints and compliments report sets out the statistics for cases considered. These arrangements enable the College to meet Expectation B9 of the Quality Code.

2.63 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the arrangements for handling complaints and appeals by scrutinising policies, looking at published information and holding meetings with students and staff. In principle, the policies and procedures are appropriate to meet Expectation B9.

2.64 The complaints procedure is clear to both students and staff. At the informal stage complaints are investigated by programme leaders and curriculum managers. Formal complaints are addressed by the HEDM or assistant principal responsible for higher education. The final stage of the internal procedure is overseen by the Deputy Principal. Students who remain unsatisfied can contact the University or Pearson. The academic misconduct policy is thorough, and sets out clear scope, definitions and responsibilities. The complaints procedure and academic misconduct policy are being reviewed during the current academic year.

2.65 There is less clarity about assessment appeals and whether students can challenge academic judgement. This matter is addressed in the recommendation in Expectation B6 asking the College to ensure its policies and procedures for appeals are comprehensive and embedded as part of the regulatory framework.

2.66 The team concludes that the College's process for complaints and appeals is fair and meets Expectation B9 and that the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

2.67 The College does not deliver learning opportunities with other organisations. However, the College has responsibility for the effective management of its arrangements with employers and placement providers where learning takes place within the work environment and constitutes an integral aspect of the student's programme of study.

2.68 The University provides guidelines and procedures for the provision of work-based learning and recognises that work-based learning is an integral part of foundation degrees. All programmes include a component of work-based learning, and a wide and varied range of experiences are offered. Organisation and management of work-based learning occurs at programme level. However, there is no evidence of how the College has oversight of this activity. The institutional approach taken towards the quality assurance of placement learning does not enable the College to meet Expectation B10 of the Quality Code.

2.69 In considering whether the Expectation is met in practice the review team looked at documentary evidence, including handbooks for employers and placement providers. The team discussed with senior managers and staff the way in which the College demonstrates awareness of its responsibilities for managing work-based learning opportunities.

2.70 The QAA review in 2010 considered it desirable for the College to review its policy for work-based learning to ensure that consistent arrangements are in place for providing guidance and support for students and mentors. Although the College's subsequent action plan indicates that progress is ongoing, the review team found variability between programmes in terms of the guidance and documentation provided.

2.71 For engineering and science programmes, work-based learning handbooks are thorough, and include a range of information useful to students and mentors. The team saw evidence of relevant documents for work-based learning in sports science, including a useful logbook for completion by students. The handbook for early years work-based learning is less comprehensive.

2.72 Staff are not clear about the College's responsibility for managing provision delivered in the workplace. The Expectation places responsibility with the College rather than awarding body or awarding organisation, and this distinction was not evident in discussion. The team **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College establishes and implements a College-wide policy and procedures for the provision of work-based and placement learning. This matter is also addressed in Expectation B3.

2.73 In view of the lack of consistent arrangements for oversight and management of work-based learning opportunities, the review team concludes that the Expectation is not met, and that the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Not met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**



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

**Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees***

**Findings**

2.74 The College does not offer research degrees.

## The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.75 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Most applicable Expectations have been met and the risk is judged low in most cases. One Expectation (B10) has not been met and the associated risk is considered moderate. This is because of a lack of an overarching policy and procedures for the provision of work-based and placement learning.

2.76 There are two examples of good practice: in Expectation B4 relating to the provision of resources (which also relates to Enhancement), and in Expectation B6 relating to effective assessment practice.

2.77 The team identified six recommendations. Three of the recommendations relate to improvements that could be made to structures, processes and procedures which the review team considered to be operating sufficiently well at the time of the review visit. Together these are intended to allow the College to develop more robust systems and oversight of the totality of its higher education provision to enable the improvement of the quality of learning opportunities. The team further affirms three actions the College is already undertaking.

2.78 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

### **3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities**

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

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

##### **Findings**

3.1 The College provides information for a wide range of stakeholders, including prospective students, current students, staff and employers. Information is made available through its website, prospectus, interviews and open days and key information sets on the Unistats website. Current students are able to access the VLE, which holds electronic versions of student handbooks and external examiners' reports. The College's strategic vision and mission is made available to students and other stakeholders, and is communicated effectively through its brand and published information. The team reviewed a wide range of published information and material provided in hard copy and electronically. These procedures and protocols enable the College to meet Expectation C of the Quality Code.

3.2 The review team tested that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy and scrutinised a wide range of information published in hard copy and electronically on the website and VLE. The team also had discussions with students and staff, including the marketing staff team.

3.3 The College works closely with the University to ensure that all information is accessible and accurate and conforms to the protocols agreed with the University. In accordance with its partnership agreement the College is responsible for publishing information about publicity and marketing, the Higher Education Prospectus, programme specifications, student support materials, programme handbooks, module information, and teaching and learning guidance.

3.4 Responsibility for website information rests with the marketing department in conjunction with curriculum managers and the HEDM. Sign-off is undertaken by the assistant principal responsible for higher education. Generic student handbook information is produced by the marketing department with programme leaders taking oversight of programme handbooks, and ensuring that information and regulations are appropriate to the award offered. A recent review of handbooks has identified a need for further information to be included. Subsequently, a new template for programme handbooks has been implemented across the College and staff confirmed the structure to be improved, with final sign-off prior to these being issued by the HEDM.

3.5 Programme specifications are available to students in a variety of formats, but staff and students are uncertain how to access the definitive versions. This matter is also addressed in Expectation A2.2 where the team recommends that the College ensures that programme specifications are consistent in scope and content, and that the definitive versions are easily accessible by staff and students.

3.6 The Higher Education Prospectus provides a useful overview of all the programmes on offer, explains the application process and includes information on UCAS. It also includes testimonials from current and former students. Current students are used as ambassadors for open days, having been given guidance and training for their role.

3.7 The VLE provides an additional effective source of information and is used extensively by both students and staff. It provides general higher education information, including policies, study skills resources, learner voice feedback and student representative details. Students are positive about their experience with the VLE and gave examples of where effective use by staff had enhanced their learning experience.

3.8 A higher education marketing schedule is produced with a designated member of the marketing team responsible for checking the accuracy and validity of marketing materials. This allows for cross-referencing of the website, programme specifications and prospectus information to ensure consistency. Staff understand the processes for producing, checking and signing off information although these are not fully documented in policy. The process for checking accuracy is informal, but reflects the small nature of the team and the development of a higher education marketing strategy.

3.9 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation C is met and the associated risk is low. The College has in place appropriate measures to ensure that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Students confirm that the information provided to them is helpful, accurate and comprehensive.

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

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

3.10 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk was low.

3.11 Information published is fit for purpose and trustworthy. Processes for the development and verification of information are understood by staff, although these are not always formalised in policy. Students confirm that information is comprehensive, accessible and helpful to them and supports their learning. Programme specifications need to be more consistent and accessible to students and staff.

3.12 The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College Strategic Plan and Aims applies to the whole College, with continual improvement based on a College-wide model using the outcomes of the self-assessment process. At an institutional level the Higher Education Committee is intended to play a key role in enhancement, although its role has not yet been formalised. The College-wide Teaching and Learning Policy provides a specific framework and process for the enhancement of teaching and learning.

4.2 The College uses programme reviews, student focus groups and surveys, and external examiners' reports to continually improve the quality of its provision. Programme teams also meet regularly along with student representatives and University link tutors to share good practice and discuss areas for improvement.

4.3 The Lesson Observation Policy and Teaching and Learning Guidelines effectively support the enhancement of teaching practice. Academic managers at the College also conduct learning walks as part of a peer observation process. In 2014 these were carried out by the Higher Education Development Manager and student representatives. The College has produced a detailed Action Plan for Enhancement and is monitoring progress.

4.4 The College has made a significant investment in resources for teaching and learning in recent years, including a Higher Education Centre, a sports block and the Miskin Theatre. These developments have clearly enhanced the learning opportunities for students.

4.5 Enhancement is implicit in many of the aims and priorities although not specifically mentioned in the Higher Education Strategy, and is further supported by the Teaching and Learning Strategy. The College's Action Plan for Enhancement provides a specific higher education focus. This indicates that in 2014-15 a Higher Education Committee will be created with responsibility for the development and enhancement of higher education within the College. The Higher Education Development Manager produces a termly report for the Quality and Standards Committee of the Corporation. The student voice feeds into programme reviews but does not feature formally in the higher education deliberative structure at a higher level.

4.6 The review team examined key documents, including the Higher Education Strategy, the Teaching and Learning Strategy, programme monitoring reports, the Lesson Observation Policy, and the Action Plan for Enhancement, and held meetings with students and staff at all levels within the College.

4.7 Deliberate steps are being taken in the College to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. This is primarily through the programme monitoring and review process supported by the Teaching and Learning Strategy and the Lesson Observation Policy. There is also a detailed higher education Action Plan for Enhancement, which provides comprehensive coverage of desirable steps to reinforce the distinctive requirements of higher education.

4.8 There is a lack of clear reporting lines and structures for higher education which the College plans to address. This matter is further considered in the recommendations described in Expectations A2.1 and B8. The team also recommends that the College

consider further ways of increasing the involvement of students in the formal quality assurance and enhancement processes. This matter is also addressed under Expectation B5. The recently introduced higher education quality calendar supports staff in engaging with the enhancement process. Planned refinements to the programme monitoring review activities are intended to assist in improving the consistency and rigour of the process.

4.9 The review team considers the effective process for the development and provision of significant specialist resources which enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities as good practice already addressed under Expectation B4.

4.10 The review team were impressed by the commitment at all levels of the College in their desire to make the experience for higher education students a distinctive one. There is a clear intention to provide the small group of higher education students, within a largely further education environment, with an opportunity to be considered as a unique entity with particular needs and aspirations. This is supported by a management structure which allows higher education to have a significant voice. Students spoke positively of the processes for engagement and for having their voice heard and responded to, with evidence that their comments lead to further changes and enhancements. The College's support for the development and embedding of a distinctive higher education experience is **good practice**.

4.11 Overall, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met and the associated risk low. The College takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities although it recognises that some of the structures and processes need further development and refinement. The College has effective processes in place to enhance learning and to support a distinctive higher education experience.

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

## The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.12 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. The team considers the Expectation to have been met, based on the extent to which the College has introduced and integrated a set of initiatives to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities. There are two areas of good practice: the support and development of a distinctive higher education experience and the process for establishing significant specialist resources for higher education. However, the College's approach to the monitoring and review of enhancement activity is at an emerging stage. Enhancement is driven informally rather than systematically embedded through higher education structures with explicit roles and responsibilities.

4.13 Therefore, the team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.



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

### Findings

5.1 The review team investigated student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement at the College. The College's Student Involvement Strategy expresses the commitment to create a supportive and successful environment which will motivate students. This strategy has developed over the past years through student representative meetings, teaching and learning focus groups, and surveys.

5.2 Students provide feedback and responses to marked assignments. At the end of the year, students are involved in signing off assessment portfolios. This involves them checking and agreeing grades prior to submission to the awarding body. At this stage students confirm that they are satisfied with the fairness and accuracy of the grades that they have been awarded. Students stated that this enables them to develop academically.

5.3 Student ambassadors were appointed in 2014. The role includes working alongside College staff on a wide variety of activities. These include conducting learning walks with the Higher Education Development Manager as part of the peer lesson observation process. Students are also engaged through attendance at prospective student interviews and tutorial sessions; assisting in the implementation of student focus groups; contributing to content on the VLE; developing and updating College policies and the student charter; updating course representative training resources; and meeting external examiners and University link tutors.

5.4 Student representatives are involved in programme committee meetings. Their input is considered by the College to be essential in shaping the delivery, assessment and content of all programmes, and some examples are given. Staff value the contribution student representatives make to the review and enhancement process.

5.5 Staff are expected to acknowledge and respond to student feedback. Responses are given to students through the VLE, noticeboards and emails in the form of 'You Said, We Did' publications, survey findings, minutes from meetings, action plans, and policy and procedure changes.

5.6 Students at the College feel they are listened to and can make recommendations and suggestions on any issue. The role of the representative is becoming more formalised and there is an opportunity to ensure students are more fully involved in the formal decision-making committees, as well as contributing in earlier stages.

## 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 27 to 29 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](http://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](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx).

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

### **Framework**

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

### **Framework for higher education qualifications**

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

### **Programme (of study)**

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

**Programme specifications**

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

**Public information**

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

**Quality Code**

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

**Reference points**

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

**Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

**Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)**

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

**Threshold academic standard**

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

**Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

**Widening participation**

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

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