Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of OLC Europe t/a Organisational Learning Centre

July 2018

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at OLC Europe t/a Organisational Learning Centre. The review took place from 10 to 12 July 2018 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Ian Duce
- Dr Steve Hill
- Ms Cara Williams (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

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

The QAA website gives more information about QAA[2] and explains the method for Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).[3] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code
[2] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk
[3] Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers):
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/higher-education-review

Key findings

Judgements

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision.

- 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**.

- The quality and wide range of staff development opportunities available and the support provided by OLC to staff (Expectation B3).
- The particularly effective deployment of the intervention system provided by OLC in partnership with University Centre Colchester (UCC) which provides opportunities for additional individual pastoral support to students potentially at risk (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations**.

By November 2018:

- ensure the right of appeal is clearly communicated to all unsuccessful applicants (Expectations B9, B2 and Part C)
- review and update public information for prospective applicants to ensure it is clear in relation to additional charges (Expectation Part C)
- share appropriate reports with students to further develop their role as partners in their education (Expectation B8).

By January 2019:

- ensure the VLE is developed further so that all students have access to information about their learning opportunities and available support services (Expectation Part C).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team affirms the following action being taken to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to students:

- the steps being taken by OLC to strengthen its practices in the use of data to improve learning opportunities (Expectation B8).

About OLC Europe t/a Organisational Learning Centre

OLC (Europe) Ltd trading as Organisational Learning Centre (OLC) is a private further and higher education college which was started by academics from Salford University and has been operating primarily in the Greater Manchester region of the UK since 1998. OLC initially offered provision to privately funded corporate clients and in 2007 BTEC Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) were offered to overseas students. From 2011 it has offered this provision to publicly funded UK students. Currently OLC's headquarters are based in a former police station with adjoining county court in Castle Street, Bolton, with other campuses in Manchester and, more recently, in London.

OLC offers Pearson accredited higher education programmes including BTEC Higher National courses, primarily in Business and Health and Social Care. The majority of Pearson students at OLC are taught in conjunction with partner colleges, that is, Sunderland College for HND Health and Social Care and University Centre Colchester, part of Colchester Institute, for HND Business. Where HNDs are taught in conjunction with a partner, that partner takes primary responsibility for the students. OLC delivers the teaching and learning in line with the requirements of both the partner institute and Pearson. OLC has responsibility for teaching, creation of learning materials and assessment for these programmes. OLC also offers the Pearson BTEC Level 5 Diploma in Education and Training as an internal programme for staff development. The majority of OLC's students study on the HND in Business and the more recent HND in Health and Social Care, which jointly make up the bulk of the student body.

Since the last QAA review OLC has undergone several major changes. The most impactful of these changes has been the ending of the relationship with Stockport College, who had previously been partnered with OLC to run the HND in Business for students in Bolton and Manchester. The end of this partnership happened concurrently with the start of the partnership with University Centre Colchester (UCC) for students in London, allowing a smooth transition for students. As students in Bolton and Manchester came to the end of their first year of study with Stockport College they were transitioned onto the start of the second year with UCC. As the student experience provided by OLC remains consistent between courses run with partner institutes, disruption to the students' studies remained minimal. The partnership with Sunderland College to run the HND in Health and Social Care is another major change as this subject has not previously been taught at OLC but additional specialist staff have been appointed to deliver this programme.

At the time of the visit there were approximately 240 students enrolled on level 5 and HND programmes.

Explanation of the findings

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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   Ultimate responsibility for setting academic standards and ensuring that requirements of the relevant reference points are met lies with OLC's awarding organisation (Pearson) and partner colleges, Colchester Institute (UCC) and City of Sunderland College (CSC). OLC is approved by Pearson to deliver and assess Higher National and other courses, in accordance with the academic standards of awards defined by Pearson. Some Pearson programmes are on the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF), and others on the Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF). OLC's role is to be aware of the positioning of its awarding organisation's programmes on the relevant academic frameworks, and to reflect this in OLC's delivery of the programmes.

1.2   OLC has recently terminated a delivery partnership with Stockport College, in which it delivered and assessed Pearson programmes on behalf of Stockport College. OLC students on the Stockport College programmes were transferred to UCC, which is responsible to Pearson for meeting required academic standards. OLC's role is to jointly

design and deliver Pearson programmes, carry-out assessment, moderation and feedback, deal with student complaints and appeals, and provide information to students. OLC has also formed a similar relationship with Sunderland College to deliver Pearson Higher Nationals in Health and Social Care. OLC also runs Pearson courses in its own right as internal programmes for staff development, currently the BTEC Level 5 Diploma in Education and Training.

1.3 OLC is developing a future partnership with the University of East London to deliver their level 3 access to HE course and a level 6 top-up degree initially in Business but then later Health and Social Care and Hospitality in 2019.

1.4 Students of UCC and Sunderland colleges are directly regulated by Pearson who are directly responsible, and are monitored and reviewed by Pearson. OLC's own students are monitored by Pearson directly through its processes and procedures. OLC or its partner colleges are responsible for maintaining the standards of the awarding organisation, and evaluating and maintaining the students' learning experiences. Detailed specifications for programmes are developed by the awarding organisation and in each case the qualification is positioned at the appropriate level on the various national frameworks and aligns with the various Subject Benchmark Statements. For Higher National courses, the BTEC qualification specifications are written by Pearson, and the college/OLC is then expected to capture the 'local dimension' by making available its own tailored programme specifications. The processes put in place by the awarding organisation ensure that the awards are correctly positioned at the relevant level of the FHEQ, RQF and QCF, are aligned with Subject Benchmark Statements which would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.5 The review team considered the effectiveness of OLC's implementation of awarding organisation practices and procedures by examining programme specifications, minutes of relevant meetings, awarding organisation regulations, and reports from external examiners. For its Higher National provision, OLC and its partner colleges jointly generate their own locally tailored programme specifications derived from Pearson's overarching specification, but contextualised by its own procedures and processes. The tailored programme specifications contain clear and relevant information regarding level and Subject Benchmark Statement adherence and the review team considers that these met the requirements of the awarding organisation.

1.6 While the awarding organisation has ultimate responsibility through its own regulatory frameworks for ensuring that the relevant external reference points are adhered to, there is evidence that OLC manages its own procedures for doing this effectively within its devolved responsibilities, as shown in the detailed responsibilities checklists provided. OLC's organisational chart describes the structure of committees and functional hierarchy to allow it to uphold its responsibility contained within partnership agreements. These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.7   OLC's awarding organisation defines academic standards and determines the award of credit for each programme. OLC designs, delivers and assesses its Higher National courses in accordance with the frameworks and processes set out in the awarding organisation's guidance, including the BTEC procedures for standards verification and external examining; and in accordance with its responsibilities to its partner colleges where appropriate.

1.8   OLC has codified its various policies and procedures for both staff and students, including a teaching, learning and assessment policy, a grading policy, a policy and detailed procedures for internal verification, a staff teaching and learning handbook, and a College Handbook. Tailored programme specifications for the College's/OLC's higher education provision define the names of awards and the level and credit rating of their constituent units.

1.9   OLC has an established committee/meeting structure within which academic matters are considered and addressed. Academic governance is overseen by OLC's Director of Academic Affairs (DoAA), who delegates authority to the Academic Committee (ACM), which comprises all academic staff and student representatives. ACM receives inputs from other OLC committees. Assessment boards for Higher National provision are convened by the colleges/OLC to confirm that students have met the requirements of their award. OLC's processes would enable it to meet the Expectation.

1.10   The review team considered the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining reports from external examiners, OLC policies, its agreement with its delivery partner, records of meetings of committees and assessment boards, and relevant BTEC guidance. The team also held meetings with academic and senior staff and students.

1.11   The Student Handbook, unit handbooks and the Teaching and Learning Handbook for staff provide an appropriate level of detail and address Pearson's expectations of providers. External examiners comment positively upon the thorough, well-documented processes and the handbooks. OLC audits its policies on a periodic basis to ensure continuing alignment with the Quality Code and updates staff accordingly where change is considered necessary. OLC's agreements with its college partners require explicit continuing alignment with the Quality Code.

1.12   Policy is underpinned by regular monthly, and termly staff meetings and weekly operations meetings in which time is committed to standardising assessment and spreading good practice. Staff met by the team demonstrated their understanding of where to find, and how to use, the relevant documentation. Students confirmed that the College Handbook and the virtual learning environment (VLE) provide details of relevant procedures and policies.

1.13   All academic staff and students, regardless of site, are invited to Academic Committee's Teaching and Learning Review (TeaL) meetings. In addition, a weekly operations meeting of senior staff provides updates to progress on actions and reports to relevant academic committees. Monthly meetings of the Academic Committee address most

academic matters, referring matters of principle or detailed deliberation to the termly TeaL meetings. Annual Programme Review (APR) meetings reflect upon programme performance holistically, whereas unit and programme assessment boards (UAB and PAB) consider student performance in specific units and programmes respectively. Programme committees provide opportunities for programme teams to meet, to engage with students and to manage the delivery of a particular programme.

1.14   The awarding organisations have responsibility for academic frameworks and regulations. OLC adheres to these requirements and has appropriate processes in place to ensure that staff understand and fulfil their responsibilities in this regard. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.15   OLC is responsible for providing students with programme specifications for all Pearson HN programmes. OLC's responsibilities in relation to its partnership organisations are defined through formal agreements. For the UCC HNC/HND Business programme, OLC produces the programme specification and is responsible for updates. UCC is responsible for unit selection, although in practice this was done by joint agreement with OLC, with UCC having final approval. The programme specification is tailored to meet the needs of the OLC student cohort on the basis of local context. The contextualised programme specifications record the specific unit structures, taking the core units supplied by Pearson. This is informed by discussions with local universities and OLC staff who teach or have taught at other higher education institutes locally. For the Sunderland HND Health and Social Care programme, Sunderland produces the programme specification and is responsible for updates. Sunderland is responsible for unit selection and sets the units for the QCF iteration of the course. For the RQF iteration, units were selected by joint discussion, with Sunderland having final approval. UCC has the right to alter all or any part of the programme specification at any time. OLC also runs Pearson courses in its own right as distance learning programmes for overseas students and as internal programmes for staff development. Currently two such programmes are active: BTEC Level 5 Diploma in Education and Training, for staff, and the HND in Business, distance learning which currently has no students enrolled. Programme specifications exist for both programmes and the responsibility for their production rests with OLC. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.16   The review team met senior managers with responsibility for standards and quality, programme and unit leaders, teaching staff, representatives from UCC and Sunderland and OLC students from across the HNC/D programmes offered. The review team evaluated the effectiveness of these arrangements by examining programme specifications, assignment briefs and unit guides and the team discussed their availability and use with teaching staff and students.

1.17   OLC understands its responsibility to use programme specifications as reference points and teaching staff are familiar with specifications and their purpose. They are also clear about the use of the Quality Code and FHEQ links. All programme specifications clearly identify accurate programme titles, qualification and credit frameworks indicating credit value and level, and the total qualification time in the case of the RQF.

1.18   Students confirm that programme specification and unit guides are provided to them in hard copy during induction and that these are also accessible on the VLE. During meetings with staff and students the review team was informed of a high level of awareness and use of programme specifications. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.19   Responsibility for the design and approval of units, programmes and qualifications lies with the awarding organisation, Pearson, who ensures that they satisfy UK threshold academic standards.

1.20   Within Pearson's approved programme structure, OLC designs and approves the learning materials, the delivery of units and their assessments for the HNC/HND Business in partnership with UCC. For the recently introduced HND in Health and Social Care with Sunderland College, OLC is responsible for the planning and delivery of the units designed and approved by the partner.

1.21   Responsibilities at OLC are overseen by Programme Managers who delegate to Unit Lead Tutors the production of learning activities, materials and assessments with reference to Pearson's programme and unit specifications. These procedures reflect OLC's limited responsibilities for approving programmes and would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.22   The effectiveness of the approach was considered by reviewing OLC, partner college and awarding organisation documentation and by meeting staff and students.

1.23   OLC staff are aware of the awarding organisation specifications, and revisions to them that may arise are discussed at Academic Committee meetings where interaction with Pearson is a standing agenda item. The team also learnt that staff attend RQF conferences and have good relationships with colleagues at Pearson and have been involved in their research.

1.24   Overall, the awarding organisation is responsible for positioning the qualifications at appropriate levels and alignment with qualification descriptors, credit values and Subject Benchmark Statements. OLC works alongside the awarding organisations to fulfil its limited role in designing and delivering the provision that it offers in order that the programmes meet UK threshold standards; therefore the Expectation is met and the 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   Credit for units is claimed from Pearson through the partner college where students have demonstrated completion of the specified learning outcomes. Likewise, where students have accrued credit in the specified combination of units for an award, OLC is responsible for communicating the results to the partner college to enable them to claim the award. For the BTEC Level 5 Diploma in Education and Training the OLC directly claims the credits and awards from Pearson.

1.26   The Unit Lead Tutor holds responsibility for setting assessments for each unit to allow students the opportunity to achieve learning outcomes. Assessments are marked against the specific learning outcomes and assessment criteria, with feedback provided to students to help them to improve their performance.

1.27   OLC and the partner colleges have an internal verification process to ensure that a sample of marking meets internal and external standards. Grading is further monitored within Pearson's external verification visits where samples of internally verified work are compared with the assessment tasks and structure, grading decisions and feedback given, against their framework and guidance.

1.28   At the end of each unit an assessment board checks the achievement of each student and makes the recommendation for the claim of credit from Pearson where learning outcomes have been achieved. Progression of students on the HND Business programmes with UCC is discussed in a joint internal progression board.

1.29   After delivery of all the units a joint examination board with the partner college considers student achievement across the programme and where the appropriate combination of credits has been accumulated the board recommends the qualifications are claimed from Pearson. These arrangements would enable OLC to ensure that credit and qualifications are only awarded when relevant learning outcomes are achieved and UK threshold and the awarding organisation academic standards are satisfied.

1.30   The mechanisms described above were considered by reading documents including programme specifications, external examiner reports and assessment board minutes and by discussing arrangements with staff and students.

1.31   External examiner reports and oversight reports from awarding and accrediting bodies indicate that OLC is rigorous in meeting the expectations of the awarding organisation with regard to setting and marking assessments and ensuring feedback to students so that they have an opportunity to complete learning outcomes and, where appropriate, gain credits and qualifications.

Staff understood the framework for setting and marking assessments, and students whom the team met confirmed that they were provided with clear information on learning outcomes and how to achieve them.

1.32   OLC working within the framework set by the awarding organisation and with its partner colleges operates robust assessment procedures for ensuring that credit and qualifications are awarded when learning outcomes are achieved and academic standards are met and therefore the Expectation is met with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.33   The alignment of the programmes with UK threshold standards is the responsibility of Pearson as the awarding organisation and they employ annual verification visits to ensure that OLC meets Pearson's and UK academic standards. The processes for assuring that standards are maintained by the provider are laid out in guidance documents by Pearson.

1.34   Assessment boards at unit and programme level consider the achievement of students in relation to the awarding organisation's standards and they consider the delivery of units and programmes and their alignment to Pearson's academic framework. Unit Lead Tutors recommend amendments to future delivery of the units to Academic Committee.

1.35   Pearson's annual Academic Management Review (AMR) monitors the processes for explicitly addressing the achievement and maintenance of academic standards and these are further monitored by the internal Annual Programme Review (APR) which collates the external oversight of the awarding organisation. The APR shows that standards are monitored and reviewed as well as considering wider aspects of the programme delivery.

1.36   Academic meetings consider external reports and formulate and monitor action plans. OLC has the necessary mechanisms in place to allow the Expectation to be met.

1.37   The review team met staff and students and examined documents from the awarding organisation, the provider and its partner colleges including minutes of committees, external examiner verifications and annual monitoring reports to test whether processes for monitoring and review of programmes were effective in explicitly addressing academic standards.

1.38   The AMR and external examiner reports indicate satisfaction with internal verification and sampling of student work. The unit and internal progression board minutes demonstrate review of individual student performance. There is evidence that OLC reviews external examiner reports and issues from assessment boards within the APR and also as a standard agenda item at TeaL.

1.39   OLC maintains and operates monitoring and review procedures to meet the requirements of its awarding organisation and in doing so demonstrates the achievement of UK threshold academic standards and confirms that the standards of its awarding organisation are maintained. The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.40   OLC's main approach to externality involves Pearson's external examiner visits, where they comment on academic standards, student work and facilities. OLC has no involvement in the appointment of external examiners.

1.41   Pearson is responsible for arranging external oversight of academic standards and alignment with relevant frameworks. This is undertaken through Pearson's programme development, validation and review processes. Pearson provides external examiner oversight at key stages of setting academic standards through learning outcomes, and maintaining academic standards through sampling students' assessed work and examining colleges'/OLC's processes and procedures. The college/OLC acts on external examiner reports as appropriate in order to ensure that arrangements meet the expectations of the awarding organisation.

1.42   OLC appoints staff who have experience of teaching and assessing at other higher education institutions. Some of these staff currently hold external examiner appointments at other higher education providers. Staff are encouraged to maintain links with their professional bodies. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.43   Review of the records of these practices and discussion with staff enabled the review team to consider how far these processes work in practice. The team met the Managing Director, senior management team members, programme teams and senior staff to discuss operations.

1.44   All Pearson external examiner reports confirm standards are secure and being maintained. Several members of OLC academic staff are external examiners at UK HEIs. Academics from other HEIs are occasionally brought in to discuss issues and hold seminars with staff members. The principal ways in which independent and external expertise is used are through exchange with the awarding organisation and the operation of the external examiner and standards verifier systems provided by Pearson. There is little externality beyond Pearson's role currently evident at the OLC. There is no external membership on the Board of Directors and no formal mechanism for involving external staff in activity which will impact on programmes. However, some OLC staff have current or recent external examining posts at other institutions. Staff are encouraged to extend their external experiences and engagement through teaching placements, other work experience programmes, and professional body membership. This engagement provides an opportunity for staff development and exposure to alternative viewpoints. Recent partnership developments with UCC and Sunderland College provide further opportunities to develop external engagement. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

1.47   The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at OLC **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 Overall responsibility for design, development and approval of the programmes lies with Pearson and for ensuring that OLC as an approved centre operates in accordance with their requirements. Compliance with Pearson's requirements is checked through external examiner and AMR processes.

2.2 OLC identifies its responsibilities within Pearson's framework as being limited to the choice of units that make up the qualification and the design, development and approval of the learning materials and assessments required to meet the learning outcomes specified by the awarding organisation. These responsibilities are held jointly with UCC for the HNC/HND in Business and with Sunderland College for the HND in Health and Social Care. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.3 The effectiveness of the processes for design development and approval of programmes was examined by discussing their operation with senior and academic staff and by examining minutes of meetings, handbooks and other documents.

2.4 New programme proposals are considered by the Board of Directors, in line with current business objectives. The team heard that when a new programme is proposed with a partner due diligence processes are carried out to establish the financial and academic credentials of both partners, and if satisfactory this leads to the development of a formal contractual agreement including programme specifications and student learning opportunities. These processes successfully underpin the current arrangements with UCC and Sunderland College for delivery of Higher National programmes, and discussions with University providers for future developments including top-up awards are at an advanced stage.

2.5 Responsibility for oversight of individual programmes lies with programme managers, with overall responsibility for academic affairs being overseen by the DoAA. Matters of programme design, development and approval are reported, considered and monitored through the Academic Committee and are considered in joint meetings with the partner colleges. The team heard that the partner colleges value working with OLC and regard its provision highly.

2.6 OLC operates effective procedures and thereby discharges its responsibilities within the framework for design, development and approval of programmes established by the awarding organisation. Therefore the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.7   OLC recruits and admits its students adhering to the entry criteria set by each of its partner colleges, in line with requirements set by Pearson. OLC interprets the admissions criteria and is responsible for promoting and marketing, selecting applicants, making offers and enrolment, induction and orientation of new students and making student registrations in a timely manner.

2.8   Applicants complete application forms provided to OLC by the partner colleges and all applicants are interviewed by trained OLC staff based upon an interview schedule. The OLC Admissions Policy sets out procedural guidance, and pre-recruitment meetings on admissions decisions are held with all academic tutors, refreshing and updating staff of the admissions processes and criteria, including the latest interpretation of recruitment requirements set by the partner colleges. Successful applicants receive an offer letter followed by enrolment and rejected applicants are informed via email. Admissions decisions are based on the evidence provided by applicants on their application forms and performance and evidence supplied during interview. Ultimate responsibility for admissions and procedures surrounding admissions, including appeals, is held by the Director of Academic Affairs, who represents the interests of the Board of Directors. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2,9   The review team met senior managers with responsibility for standards and quality, programme and module leaders, teaching staff, partner college representatives and OLC students from across the programmes offered, including both Bolton and London campuses. The team reviewed the evidence supplied by OLC, including the Learner Recruitment, Registration and Certification Policy, the Admissions Policy, Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) Policy, Public Information Policy and Approval Procedures and the Appeals and Complaints Policy.

2.10   The programmes are advertised on the OLC website, Facebook advertisements and Twitter. Promotional literature is also sent to community groups and sixth-form colleges.

2.11   Prospective students receive programme information through recruitment agents and on the OLC website. These contain information about entrance requirements, where to find application forms and how to apply, as well as providing details on the relevant programmes. Applicants are also encouraged to contact OLC by phone and email for further information if required. The OLC website currently includes general pre-contract information and the review team heard there are plans to develop this information to ensure its transparency and to be proactive in providing feedback to applicants who are not accepted onto a programme, including signposting to the right of appeal admissions decisions. This has led to a recommendation in B9.

2.12   All applicants are interviewed and OLC provided the review team with an interview guide. Staff involved in the selection process are trained to ensure they are making appropriate judgements. The interview form completed by each applicant is discussed with two academic tutors in each interview to ensure balance. As part of the recruitment process,

staff check students' existing experience and qualifications in order to appraise applicants of any AP(E)L opportunities. In previous years many students were admitted based on previous experience rather than on qualifications attained. This practice has been largely discontinued with over 90 per cent of applicants now admitted with appropriate academic qualifications.

2.13   OLC is committed to widening participation and will consider students without the specified academic qualifications based on previous work experience. The majority of OLC's recruitment activity revolves around 'wider access' students, particularly mature students and those from ethnic backgrounds not traditionally represented in the British higher education system.

2.14   All students met by the review team confirmed they had received an induction that they found to be valuable in terms of providing them with clear information about OLC, expectations of them, programme information, links to relevant policies and support available to them while studying at OLC.

2.15   The Business Systems Manual includes target recruitment figures and an evaluation of HNC/HND student enrolment numbers is also carried out. OLC collects data on the number of applicants, interviews, places offered, rejected, and current students for its HND programmes.

2.16   Systems are transparent, fair and are underpinned by structures and processes. Therefore these policies and processes allow the Expectation to be met and the 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

2.17   OLC has in place policies, strategies and operational practices relating to the development of teaching and learning activities, including the E-learning Policy and Strategy; the Grading Policy; the Homework Policy; Internal Verification Policies and Procedures; the Staff Development Policy; the Staff Observation Policy; the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and Strategy; and the Teaching and Learning Handbook. Between them they define OLC's arrangements for the development of learning opportunities and the associated support for staff. The OLC Handbooks for Students, the Teaching and Learning Handbook and the College/Student Agreements share the approaches to teaching and learning with its students.

2.18   All students receive clear guidance and support from their tutor/assessors and receive detailed and constructive feedback in relation to their assessed work. Students speak very positively about their experiences on the programme and the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and support they had received. The staff delivering and assessing the Higher National programmes are very well qualified and experienced practitioners in their fields. OLC is currently delivering the QCF and RQF HNC/Ds and make use of the Pearson sample assignments for the majority of units, adapted to take into account local needs and to incorporate the higher grade requirements for Merit and Distinction. In each case, the briefs are fit for purpose and contain vocational scenarios and a range of tasks which adequately meet the unit assessment requirements at each criterion level. The assignments also provide students with opportunities to apply theory and knowledge appropriately. All the briefs are internally verified prior to being issued to students. Assessment and internal verification records are accurate and maintained to an appropriate standard.

2.19   The Director of Academic Affairs is responsible for the quality of teaching, overseeing learning, teaching, and the student experience. He carries overarching responsibility for the annual review of academic programmes. Programme Managers have overall operational responsibility for the effective delivery and assessment of awards and Unit Leaders are responsible for ensuring the production of teaching material, coordinating the teaching for their units and managing unit assessment.

2.20   OLC has an induction programme for new teaching staff and appoints mentors to support new teachers. A mandatory programme of staff development is in place, a record of staff continuing professional development (CPD) is maintained, and staff performance is routinely and formally reviewed. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.21   The review team examined the effectiveness of teaching and learning procedures by reading relevant documentation relating to the policies, strategies and operational practices for teaching and learning, external examiner reports, annual programme monitoring reports, course handbooks and minutes of relevant committee meetings. The team also held meetings with senior, teaching and support staff and with students.

2.22   OLC continually assesses, improves and promotes its ethos and quality standards to staff, who are required to regularly update their knowledge and understanding of expectations regarding support for students.

2.23   The OLC induction programme for new teaching staff works effectively. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy gives a comprehensive overview of the OLC's approach to teaching, learning and staff development. It is reinforced by statements in the Teaching and Learning Handbook and in tailored programme specifications. The Staff Handbook includes details of induction and appraisal. Overall, the various policies and strategies are comprehensive, fit for purpose and meet the requirements of the awarding organisation.

2.24   While there is no formal policy or framework to regulate the recruitment and selection of staff, OLC aspires to recruit staff with an appropriate academic experience and qualifications. Meetings with staff and scrutiny of reports from external examiners and staff curricula vitae supported this.

2.25   Recently appointed teaching staff are required to undertake an Initial Professional Development Programme and encouraged to undertake a teaching qualification. All academic staff are encouraged to seek professional recognition or qualified teacher status through bodies such as the Higher Education Academy or the Society for Education and Training.

2.26   OLC has a CPD programme to allow staff to strengthen their teaching and learning skills to support students. The programme includes a Pearson level 5 Certificate in Education and Training, attending QAA, Pearson and industry conferences, and academic skills sharing sessions.

2.27   The Staff Development Policy indicates that 'Staff development at OLC supports staff in developing the skills, behaviour and knowledge they need and that all staff should also be engaged in continuous learning to enhance their performance in their roles'. Staff are expected to identify personal development needs, both pedagogic and discipline-based. These are prioritised and supported accordingly.

2.28   OLC operates a process of teaching observation. Peer observations are used to support staff and spread good practice, whereas observations by senior staff form part of the appraisal process. Formal appraisal of staff takes place twice a year, following which OLC conducts a training needs analysis to inform the subsequent staff development programme.

2.29   OLC has effective staff induction, development, teaching observation and appraisal processes in place. This enables staff to maintain currency in both pedagogic and discipline-specific areas. Overall, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low. The review team felt that the quality and wide range of staff development opportunities available and the support provided to staff by OLC is **good practice**.

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

2.30   OLC has a number of policies in place for the support and development of students. These include the Learner Development Policy; the Support Policy; the E-Learning Policy and Strategy; the Homework Policy; the Reasonable Adjustment and Special Consideration Policy; the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy; the Teaching and Learning Strategy; the Equal Opportunities Policy; and the Disability Strategy. The various policies and strategies articulate OLC's aims to provide consistent and flexible systems and adequate resources to support teaching and learning, including for those students from diverse backgrounds and with additional learning needs. The Handbooks for Students and the Student Agreement provide the formal mechanism to signpost these arrangements to students.

2.31   All students are allocated a personal tutor and receive an induction to the College/OLC and their programme, a Student Handbook, and separate guidance for each unit studied. The Director of Academic Affairs exercises oversight of the student experience, and is assisted by Programme Managers.

2.32   OLC is small, and does not have a large infrastructure of support services. Students receive structured support in dedicated classroom sessions to develop their academic skills and employability, as well as both academic and pastoral support through their personal tutors. There is a Head of Student Welfare with a team of student welfare administrators. There is a small library at each teaching site with wireless connectivity for student access to email and the internet and students have access to printing and desktop computers in each delivery centre. OLC operates its own VLE to support students. Students registered through the partnership colleges have access to all student services and resources of those colleges. The processes OLC has in place would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.33   The review team tested the effectiveness of OLC's arrangements and resources by scrutinising relevant documents relating to its approaches to providing support and resources for students and by reviewing a selection of information available on the VLE. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and support staff.

2.34   The review team found that the procedures for implementing, monitoring and evaluating arrangements and resources work effectively. The Learner Development and Student Support Policies lay out in detail OLC's approach to developing students as learners and providing additional non-academic support. Students and external examiners comment that tutors provide strong motivation and support. The Reasonable Adjustment Policy gives guidance to entitlement and procedures for students with disabilities, in order to provide the equality of opportunity enshrined within the Equal Opportunities Policy and the Disability Strategy. OLC reviews and updates its policies and strategies on a regular basis.

2.35   The student induction programme is comprehensive, addressing, among other topics, health and safety, prevention and safeguarding matters, the programme structure and the basic principles of academic writing. Students are introduced to the careers and employability development programmes, assessment workshops, critical-writing skills days and ICT development sessions. Students confirmed that the induction programme, together with the various student handbooks and unit materials, provide sufficient programme information.

2.36   OLC makes use of proprietary software for the detection of plagiarism, both to assist in the development of students' writing skills, and to minimise opportunities for academic malpractice. OLC believes that there has been a notable positive impact following its introduction. Students from Bolton, Manchester and London met the review team and were positive about the resources and facilities provided by OLC.

2.37   There is a data-driven intervention system to identify students at risk of non-achievement (ARONA) which logs non-attendance and non-submission of work and is used by personal tutors to identify student needs and deliver appropriate support. The review team felt that the OLC intervention system is **good practice**.

2.38   The team found the Expectation to be met and the risk 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

2.39   For all programmes, OLC is responsible for developing, implementing and facilitating arrangements and processes that ensure the engagement of students, individually and collectively, in the enhancement and assurance of the educational experience. Student engagement policy is set out in the Student Engagement and Enhancement Plan and in partnership agreements with UCC and Sunderland. Evaluation of student engagement activities and processes is monitored and reviewed by the Director of Academic Affairs to evaluate the student partnership framework to ensure increased student engagement. Students are provided with opportunities to engage in governance and decision-making processes by attending committee meetings and the role of student representatives is a central component to achieve this. All students are asked to give termly feedback on their programme of study and the 'gripe sessions' allow for timely responses to student issues. Students provide feedback on learning resources by completing unit surveys and annual evaluation of student feedback takes place during the APR. These processes allow the Expectation to be met.

2.40   The team met students from a range of subject areas and years from across all three sites (Bolton, Manchester and London), including student representatives. The team read and considered a range of documentary evidence, including the Student Engagement and Enhancement Plan, minutes from several committees and programme level and course team meetings. Examples of end-of-unit surveys were provided to the team and reflection on these is documented in the AMRs for each programme of study.

2.41   OLC is making progress on its commitment to engaging its students individually and collectively as partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of their learning opportunities. The Student Engagement and Enhancement Plan was implemented to formalise and standardise the approach. Further, to improve student representation, enhancement has become an agenda item for TeaL and Academic meetings. Student engagement activities are effectively recorded and documented so that progress can be monitored and enhanced. By inviting students to attend all committees, OLC is proactively prioritising and enhancing student engagement and representation across all levels of the institution.

2.42   Student representatives are selected by democratic election, at least one per cohort. OLC offers training for student representatives which they hope will prove to be successful in gaining a greater level of engagement. Student representatives have meetings each term with the Programme Manager present. Agendas and minutes are produced and distributed to students to share progress reports.

2.43   Student 'gripe sessions' allow them to discuss with the tutors any problem they might be facing and to discuss opportunities. Gripe sessions take place in class groups and act as a record-taking exercise of student issues. The findings of these meetings are fed into academic meetings and are used to inform discussions in student representative meetings. They also allow OLC to take early action where certain issues can be addressed immediately if no further discussion is required. The sessions have proved successful in allowing OLC to deal more promptly with policy and operational issues. In addition, formal

arrangements for representation are frequently supplemented by informal, and more immediate, contact with academic staff, as OLC recognises the importance of listening and responding to the views of students in a timely manner.

2.44   The feedback from students has been collated and analysed and the appropriate actions have been taken. For instance, OLC has installed CCTV in Manchester based on the recommendations from student representatives at Health and Safety meetings, and students are able to use kitchen facilities in both Manchester and Bolton campuses in line with the London campus. In addition, to accommodate the interests of a large proportion of mature students, the reading week has been allocated to the same week as the half-term for most schools in the Greater Manchester Area.

2.45   At the end of each term all students are invited to complete anonymised questionnaires that collect both quantitative and qualitative statistics behind the students' experience of the course and OLC itself. The purpose of these is discussed during class and the findings are reported in academic meetings.

2.46   A social committee has been set up to capture the students' voice and identify further improvement and enhancement opportunities, and arrangements are being made for a summer graduation ceremony. It is hoped that engaging students socially will result in opportunities for students to form new friendships, gain confidence and try a variety of new activities, which will add to their learning experience.

2.47   Informal and formal opportunities that are available to students for providing feedback and engaging with senior staff are sufficient to enable all students to interact on a meaningful level. Overall, the new structure should create more focused and meaningful roles for those students who want to be actively involved, bringing increased responsibility and cultivating a student community with real opportunities to engage as partners in their educational experience. The review team found the arrangements already in place to be effective in practice and that OLC is demonstrably committed to improving and developing its arrangements for student engagement by taking deliberate steps at both an individual and collective level. Therefore, the level of risk is low and the Expectation is met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.48   OLC is responsible for admissions to all the programmes that it provides and it operates processes for recognising prior learning which are laid out in the admissions policy. All students are interviewed by two trained staff using standard and contextualised questions and prior qualifications and experience are addressed so that experiential learning can be considered alongside other qualifications to determine whether an offer of a place can be made. The criteria for experiential learning are provided in a briefing paper to agents and prior experience is recorded at interview using a pro forma.

2.49   For qualifications awarded by Pearson, OLC is required to ensure that students demonstrate that all unit and programme learning outcome have been met by setting assessments that specifically test these attainments.

2.50   The OLC approach to assessment and the assessment regulations are outlined to students in the College Handbook and to staff in the Teaching and Learning Handbook and academic policies. Details of assessments and their relevance to unit learning outcomes are explained to students in course materials available on the VLE.

2.51   Assessments are created by the Unit Lead Tutor before the unit is delivered and in accordance with the learning outcomes and assessment criteria laid down by Pearson and are submitted on the appropriate pro forma. The internal verification policies and procedures establish mechanisms for ensuring that assignment briefs are suitable and that they are appropriately graded. Programme committees meet before each term and consider the content and assessment of forthcoming units in the programme.

2.52   The external examiner appointed by Pearson reports on the outcome of a visit and sampling of graded assessments to establish whether the College conforms to requirements.

2.53   The policies and procedures described would enable OLC to meet the Expectation.

2.54   The review team evaluated the assessment processes by scrutinising documents including internal verification forms, external examiners' reports and annual monitoring as well as discussing the approach to assessment with students and staff.

2.55   External examiner reports and AMR reports confirm that assessment strategy, procedures and management follow the awarding organisation's requirements and that they are clearly articulated to staff and students. They further report that internal verification ensures that assessments are fair and reliable and identify no significant issues with assessment processes. One issue that was raised by an external examiner was the need to instigate mechanisms to identify individual student contributions within group assessments. The team learnt that group work was assessed by individual submissions and during group work, contribution of individual students was identified using video recording, witness statements and observation by staff.

2.56   Students had a clear understanding of the grading criteria and explained that they obtain help and clarification, when required, to improve their learning. External examiners commented positively on feedback provided to students, which is expected to be provided within two weeks. The value of feedback was confirmed by students both in terms of quality and timeliness. The review team was able to see examples of the feedback provided to students and found the feedback to be of high quality, which combined with its timeliness provides a significant contribution to the student learning experience.

2.57   Staff development programmes include workshops on assessment and feedback practices and the use of technology for the management of assessments. Teaching staff spoke positively about the training they had received in setting and grading assessments. The review team also learnt that internal verification is carried out by the exams officer providing consistency and valuable feedback to staff and that internal verification appeared rigorous.

2.58   OLC uses plagiarism-detection software both as a tool for identifying malpractice and as a formative tool to allow students to develop their skills in the use of source materials. OLC has a clear academic malpractice policy including procedures for handling both examination misdemeanours and incidences of plagiarism. The review team was able to discuss its operation with teaching and support staff. Students were aware of the procedures for submitting work and avoiding academic malpractice and submit a signed declaration with their assignments.

2.59   OLC operates a mitigating circumstance policy and procedure, which is set out in the College Handbook and provides an explanation of the grounds for mitigation and the process for claiming. The review team learnt that these claims are discussed initially with a personal or unit tutor and submitted on a standard form. They are considered as soon as possible by a panel with appropriate actions or adjustments taken and the student informed in writing.

2.60   Policies and procedures for the operation and management of assessments are considered by the team to be robust and satisfy the requirements of the awarding organisation and as such the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.61   OLC's partners and Pearson control external examiner appointment and management, and supply OLC with its partner external examiner reports. The role of the external examiners is to ensure that academic standards are met through checking on the appropriateness of assignment briefs and the grading and feedback provided by tutors. The powers provided to external examiners include making recommendations to release or block unit awards and ultimately the award of qualifications themselves. External examiners usually make an annual visit to the provider for each programme and issue a report subsequent to the visit. This report is fed into the Academic and Operations meetings, and any actions arising from this report becomes integrated into the OLC Action Plan. Programmes delivered for UCC and Sunderland College by OLC are scrutinised as part of Pearson's external review of the partner colleges. These arrangements would enable OLC to meet the Expectation.

2.62   The team investigated the arrangements by discussions with students and staff and by review of documentation, including external examiner reports, committee minutes and action plans.

2.63   The Director of Academic Affairs receives the external examiners' reports and reviews these with the Programme Leader and Examinations Officer to propose actions required. The reports are then reviewed at Academic Committee or operational meetings for actions to be resolved. Actions from the Pearson external examiners' reports are integrated into OLC's action plan. The reports are available to students on the VLE. The team found the Expectation to be met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.64   Pearson has responsibility for external monitoring of the programmes through Annual Management Review (AMR) and external examiner reports, which are considered by the Academic Committee along with other reports from external bodies including BAC, QAA and LRQA and used to formulate action plans.

2.65   OLC produces an APR, which consolidates programme monitoring and review processes taking place in a cycle of meetings including assessment boards and Academic Committees held throughout the year.

2.66   Responsibility for monitoring and review of programmes, including reviewing external examiner reports and outcomes of assessment boards lies with the Programme Manager. Unit Lead Tutors are responsible for producing monitoring reports including any recommendations which are first considered by assessment boards. Academic Committee monthly meetings consider a wide range of aspects of current provision including any matters arising from internal and external review. Where review and evaluation of progress is required the matter can be referred to the TeaL, which has assessment board matters as a standard agenda item. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.67   The review team tested the arrangements for monitoring and review of programmes by examining committee remits, minutes and action plans and by reading AMR and APR reports as well as by discussing arrangements for monitoring and review with staff and students.

2.68   OLC has implemented an improved a consistent approach to personal tutoring which is underpinned by use of attendance and submission data and allows effective interventions to be made to address students in danger of failure. This has led to the recognition of good practice identified in section B4. Oversight of the use of interventions has recently been considered in Academic Committee which has the potential to enable the OLC to review the effectiveness of interventions and gain insight into any underlying factors leading to student problems.

2.69   Following previous QAA reports, the College has recognised the need for progress in its use of management information in reviewing its provision and has addressed the issue through an action plan which identifies some progress.

2.70   Management data to improve the quality of learning opportunities is available on the Synopsis student database and OLC has identified the need to develop systems for collation and analysis of the data. The APR presents a summary of the main deliberations within committees during an academic cycle and it is apparent that the OLC has increased its use of data in preparation of these reports in recent years; however, the team considers that these reports could be more quantitative. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken by OLC to improve its practices in the use of data to improve learning opportunities.

2.71   Units are reviewed by the Unit Lead Tutor including the performance of individual students who are underperforming. These students are entered on the At Risk of Not Achieving (ARONA) register and considered at the Internal Progression Board where the

recommendations and actions are recorded. Programmes are also reviewed in the annual Board of Examiners held jointly with UCC where recommendations are discussed.

2.72   The role of students in programme review is linked to the broader involvement of students in assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. Students are invited to Academic Committee and TeaL and the team learnt from students that they value the opportunity and could see the value for themselves and OLC in their involvement with deliberative committees, but they were unaware of processes in existence for programme review. The team learnt that the annual summative APR is not currently shared with students and they have no role in its development although it does contain information from student feedback and evaluations. The review team regarded this as a missed opportunity and **recommends** that OLC share appropriate reports with students to further develop their role as partners in their education.

2.73   Students provide input through unit evaluative questionnaires and OLC has completed a summative evaluation of the unit feedback for discussion at Academic Committee where any recommendations or actions can be determined and communicated to staff.

2.74   OLC does not operate a periodic review, but it is committed to engaging with Pearson during its development of specifications and the team heard that OLC staff have assisted Pearson through direct contact and attending conferences during development of the HND in Business (RQF).

2.75   OLC is actively engaged in developing its use of management information and incorporating the student voice in annual monitoring processes. It has modified the BSM to update terms of reference of committees and wishes to make available to committees qualitative and quantitative data-sets to inform discussion of the programmes and to help identify actions or recommendations that can lead to enhancement. These developments have the potential to make the monitoring and review of programmes more effective and therefore the Expectation is met and the 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

2.76   OLC has developed its own Appeals and Complaints Policy, aligned with the requirements of its awarding organisation and partner colleges. The policy is reviewed annually. The College Handbook provides information to explain to students and staff the procedures for making a complaint or appeal. For all programmes OLC has responsibility for providing information to students on their right to appeal and complain and the process for internal appeal and subsequent external appeal to the Office for the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) or in the case of Higher National programmes to Pearson. All external appeals must be sent to Pearson and Pearson's determination of an appeal is final subject to the involvement of the OIA. OLC abides by Pearson and its partner college's guidelines on the running of its courses, including, but not limited to complaints and appeals. The outcome of academic appeals is fed into TeaL meetings for monitoring and review. Students are provided with advice and guidance on all stages of the appeals process from the Student Welfare Office and Personal Tutors. OLC will issue a completion letter after investigation of a complaint or appeal and students who remain unsatisfied may escalate their complaint to a partner institution, Pearson, the BAC or the OIA for further investigation. The process described would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.77   The review team met senior and academic staff, support staff and students from across the programmes. The review team evaluated the effectiveness of these arrangements by examining student feedback, policies and minutes of committee meetings.

2.78   OLC has not received a formal complaint in over a year. The review team was informed during the visit that OLC had received two formal academic appeals in the previous two weeks, which were currently going through the process. OLC aims to consider all formal complaints and appeals and send an initial response within a week of receipt. As complaints and appeals differ according to the specific circumstances, all complaints and appeals are dealt with impartially, without predetermined decisions and in line with OLC's Equal Opportunities Policy.

2.79   Students are encouraged to raise any concerns informally with their Programme Leader, Personal Tutor, support service staff or with their student representative who may pursue the concern on their behalf. Students understand the process and the team heard examples where issues are dealt with very well informally or through the representative system. Students were aware of complaints and appeal procedures and knew they could find them in the College Handbook and notice boards or on the VLE. Students are provided with clear information during induction and knew the grounds on which an academic appeal can be made.

2.80   Information about the right to appeal an admissions decision was less clear for rejected applicants, therefore, the review team **recommends** that OLC make clear the right of appeal in all communications with unsuccessful applicants.

2.81   The absence of formal complaints provides evidence of the effectiveness of OLC support systems, reflects the excellent working atmosphere, and the sympathetic, symbiotic and constructive responses students have experienced when concerns have been raised

informally, either personally or through their student representatives. This open, positive environment reduces the likelihood of issues escalating into a formal complaint.

2.82   Although the team was unable to comment on the effectiveness of policies or procedures, from reviewing documentary evidence and speaking to students and staff the team considers OLC's values and ethos to be based upon principles of equality and diversity which in turn foster good relations. OLC works hard to safeguard the interests and well-being of students and has designed policies and implemented them in a way that is fair and transparent. OLC's procedures and adherence to the arrangements of its awarding organisation and partner college requirements enable the Expectation to be met and the 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

2.83   OLC has not delegated any aspect of the provision of learning opportunities to other providers. Academic standards are the responsibility of OLC and its partner colleges and awarding organisation, therefore, this Expectation is largely inapplicable. However, the Sunderland HND Health and Social Care requires 200 hours of work-based learning as part of unit 4. OLC has arranged with Nurse Plus, an employment agency, to offer placements for students who require them, but some students already in employment in the care sector can arrange their own placement with their current employers. At the time of the review visit no assessment had been completed for the work-based learning element, which is spread across the two years of the HND programme. Health and Social Care students have had induction and training sessions with Nurse Plus as part of their OLC induction. Notwithstanding the above, there are detailed agreements between OLC and its partner colleges that clarify the responsibilities regarding provision of learning opportunities and responsibility for academic standards of each party to the agreements.

2.84   OLC has a role in producing and delivering learning materials and in setting, marking and moderation of assessments, with the precise role varying according to its partner contracts. Regarding Pearson, the OLC partner colleges' provision is assessed through Pearson's engagement with the partner colleges, which share Pearson feedback with OLC. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.85   The review team met with academic and support staff and students and reviewed documentation concerning student placements. The team considered that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.87   Of the 10 applicable Expectations in this area all were met and all had low levels of associated risk. There are two features of good practice in this area around the quality of staff development opportunities and the data-led intervention process for students potentially at risk. There are two recommendations around making clear the right of appeal to unsuccessful applicants and sharing reports with students. There is one affirmation around the strengthening of practices to use data to improve learning opportunities.

2.88   The review team concludes that as all the Expectations are met, the quality of student learning opportunities at OLC **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   OLC has created a Public Information Policy and Approval Procedures document which are reviewed annually. The purpose of the Public Information Policy is to set out the practices regarding disclosure of information held and to describe the extent and nature of those materials made available to the public. This policy covers information published in electronic or printed form that refers to academic programmes, professional services, student services, strategic planning and policies. It includes the programme specifications, the website, marketing material, external publications, and the VLE. It does not cover letters, verbal communication, presentations, teaching and learning material, and staff recruitment advertisements.

3.2   Editorial control of printed public information lies with the Managing Director who has ultimate responsibility for the content of published materials available to prospective students and other stakeholders. The DoAA conducts twice-yearly audits to test for accuracy of the academic information. The accuracy of corporate information is also checked at least twice yearly by the Senior Directors (MD, DoAA and Operations Director). The OLC website provides information relating to courses, campus, facilities, news and special events. The Operations Director holds responsibility for its accuracy. The OLC website includes a link to all Academic Policies and the Refund Policy. The programme specifications for OLC Higher National courses are available and provide students with admission requirements. Information about learning opportunities for Sunderland students is made available to current students on the OLC site and information for UCC students is available on a UCC website. The IT Lead is responsible for maintaining the OLC VLE. Reporting of student grades to Pearson is the responsibility of the partner college. The design of these systems and arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.3   In its review of the evidence, the review team tested the effectiveness of the process by reviewing the OLC website, OLC VLE, handbooks, programme specifications and minutes of meetings. Monitoring and review processes were explored through discussions with students, senior staff, teaching and support staff.

3.4   Prospective applicants can find information about the application process through marketing publications and through the OLC website. These contain information about entrance requirements, where to find application forms and how to apply, as well as providing details on the relevant programmes. Unsuccessful applicants are sent an email to inform them of the decision. Although the Appeals and Complaints procedure informs prospective students of their right to appeal admissions decisions, the review team has recommended under Section B9 that OLC makes clear the right of appeal in all communications with unsuccessful applicants.

3.5   OLC publishes marketing material that describes the programme, including information on the level, length, mode of study and relevance of the course. These are published as marketing leaflets and flyers as well as being accessible on the OLC or partner college website.

3.6   Public information around charges is less robust or transparent. Prospective students interested in applying for the HND Health and Social Care programme are not made aware of the requirement for and cost associated with obtaining a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) certificate. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that OLC review and update its public information specifically in relation to additional charges.

3.7   Students are presented with comprehensive informative handbooks at the start of their studies and information about the course is given at the start of each individual unit. Information about the units is provided in the form of schedules, learning materials and assignment briefs. Induction material includes introductions to OLC systems, such as attendance requirements, anti-plagiarism assessment submission, and student engagement activities.

3.8   The OLC virtual learning environment contains current and ongoing information in relation to the HND Health and Social Care programme of study to assist students. OLC has explored the means for making this more interactive using podcasts and audio recordings. As it stands the internal virtual learning environment is underutilised and could be broadened out to include more generic information relevant to all students of OLC. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the VLE is developed further to include information about learning opportunities and support services available to all students.

3.9   In response to a previous recommendation, OLC has enhanced its use of management information with data on grades, attendance and submission of work now feeding into the personal tutoring system. This has proved to be valuable in providing students with feedback on their performance and it can help to identify any enhancement opportunities.

3.10   OLC centrally maintains student records, both at unit and programme level, reports from which are used to support decisions at assessment boards, generate student progress transcripts and support personal tutor activities. External examiners comment that assessment records are secure and effective, and that there are appropriate and robust procedures for registration and certification. The minutes of Assessment Boards contain detailed and accurate records of student performance.

3.11   When a student finishes a programme of study, OLC claims any achieved credit or qualification from Pearson, or informs student progress to the relevant partner college who can then claim the qualification. Pearson issue a certificate and a breakdown of units studied with the relevant credit values listed. Assessment boards check the records and data is sent to partner colleges for final submission to Pearson.

3.12   OLC publishes information that is accurate, fit for purpose and informative. The review team concludes that OLC has appropriate systems in place to check the accuracy of its published information. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.14   There are two recommendations: to review and update public information for prospective applicants to ensure it is clear in relation to additional charges; and to ensure the VLE is developed further so that all students have access to information about their learning opportunities and available support services.

3.15   The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at OLC **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   In its teaching learning and assessment policy OLC identifies the need for continuous improvement of learning, teaching and assessment as a key feature of its provision. It identifies a number of requirements including routine evaluation of teaching and taught materials, use of student feedback and satisfaction surveys, effective staff induction processes, continuous professional development including educational technology and annual appraisal of staff performance.

4.2   Responsibility for oversight for the teaching and learning policy rests with the Director of Academic Affairs. The Academic Committee and TeaL meetings chaired by the DoAA provide the main forum for considering improvements to the provision and enhancement has become an agenda item for both committees. Academic Committee meetings discuss and recommend actions on current issues. TeaL meetings are intended to monitor and evaluate progress.

4.3   OLC recognises the need for deliberate steps to improve students' learning opportunities and has in place management and committee structures to enable it to meet the Expectation.

4.4   The review team tested OLC's approach to enhancement by reading policy documents, committee meeting minutes, feedback from students and action plans as well as meeting staff and students. Following previous QAA reviews OLC has formulated and implemented action plans and the review team considered the April 2018 update of the action plan alongside evidence of the actions proposed.

4.5   OLC has increased opportunities for students to become more involved in quality assurance and enhancement and articulated its approach in its Student Engagement and Enhancement Plan 2017-19, which identifies a number of key drivers including student voice activities, student social activities and staff development activities. These drivers will be evaluated against performance indicators such as: increased attendance by students at various meetings; valued contributions from students through surveys; increased number of students engaging in social activities; successful completion by staff of level 5 Education and Training assessments; and observation of knowledge transfer through teaching observations.

4.6   The review team saw evidence of some attendance by students at committee meetings; however, this work is at an early stage and the pattern of student attendance and other factors such as student family responsibilities will continue to make this a challenging aim. Student opinion is formally collected through end-of-unit evaluation questionnaires. This information has been collated and summarised and is considered in APR alongside feedback from face-to-face meetings with students. Responses from OLC to student concerns are provided on notice boards. Staff and students identified good working relationships as important in enabling the student voice to be heard. The team concludes that progress had been made in engaging students in quality assurance and enhancement.

4.7   OLC has undertaken internal reviews and these are summarised in a paper for consideration by committees and provide evidence of the use of management information

including student feedback to drive improvements. One example is the evaluation of the change to the order of unit delivery where a termly pattern of 3:3:2 was replaced by a 2:3:3 arrangement following introduction of the RQF HND in Business to allow students to have greater academic support at the start of the programme. This has resulted in improved outcomes and has led OLC to consider the introduction of further support in the early stages of the course. Similarly OLC has reviewed the provision of numeracy sessions offered to students and plans to make changes to target the support more effectively.

4.8   Personal tutoring arrangements are seen as an important conduit for passing on key information to students as well as supporting their learning. Arrangements have been modified to improve uptake in Bolton and Manchester by enabling scheduling of meetings during term time. The team learnt that the personal tutor system supported by student data has been developed to become a robust and consistent mechanism for identifying students with problems and those in danger of failure enabling OLC to make timely interventions to provide appropriate resolution and thereby enhance student learning opportunities. This has contributed to the recognition of good practice in Section B4.

4.9   OLC uses a variety of CPD activities to enable teaching staff to develop their skills and seven staff have enrolled on the level 5 Diploma in Education. Staff commented very favourably on the opportunities for CPD, particularly the skill-sharing workshops. Peer observations have been used since 2016 to inform ongoing CPD and the programme has been evaluated recently to identify development opportunities and highlight good practice. This has contributed to the recognition of good practice in Section B3.

4.10   A number of initiatives have been taken to improve student social activity and cohesiveness across OLC partly in response to BAC commentary. This has seen an improved social programme, greater use of social media and the formation of a student social committee. Students were particularly appreciative of the social events that had been organised and saw them as very important in improving both student-student and staff-student interactions and student confidence. OLC has worked with its student social committee to implement its own graduation ceremonies

4.11   There is evidence that OLC takes deliberate steps to improve the student experience, some evaluation of these steps and the role of students is also evident. Many of these initiatives have been in place for a short time or have not yet been fully implemented and evidence as to how the deliberations underpinning enhancement of the student learning experience feed through the committee structure is lacking. Overall the review team formed the opinion that enhancement of student learning opportunities is strategic, therefore, the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.13   Two areas of good practice identified in B3 and B4 are also reflected in the judgement of enhancement.

4.14   The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at OLC **meets** UK expectations.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms that may be used in this report.

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

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.

Awarding organisation
An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications

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.

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.

Self-evaluation document
A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

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.