



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Portsmouth International College Ltd

August 2016

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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 Portsmouth International College Ltd. The review took place from 17 to 19 August 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Peter Hymans
- Dr Anne Miller.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Portsmouth International College Ltd 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
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

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

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

² QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

³ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/RSCD.aspx.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Portsmouth International College Ltd

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Portsmouth International College Ltd.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **does not meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **does not meet** UK expectations.

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Portsmouth International College Ltd.

By January 2017:

- contextualise programme information and describe the manner in which the programme is delivered (Expectation C)
- strengthen the procedure for handling academic appeals and appeals against admissions decisions in order to ensure that it is fair, accessible and timely. (Expectations B9 and B2).

By June 2017:

- establish and implement a process for internal approval of new programmes and changes to programmes that incorporates reference to independent external expertise (Expectations B1, A3.1 and A3.4)
- ensure that the breadth of experience and expertise of teaching staff enables students to study their subject in depth and to enhance their capacity for critical and creative thinking (Expectation B3)
- strengthen and formalise the engagement of students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5)
- establish effective, regular and systematic processes for the monitoring and review of programmes (Expectations B8 and A3.3)
- develop and implement a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action that Portsmouth International College Ltd is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- the steps being taken to review and amend all internal policies and to implement a procedure for version control (Expectation C).

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

About Portsmouth International College Ltd

Portsmouth International College Ltd (the College) is a privately-financed college, established in 2010 and operating from a city-centre site in Portsmouth. Its goal is to support students to reach their full potential, building on a culture of respect and celebrating diversity to enable sustainable growth and success.

The College offers programmes leading to the award of diplomas in management from Awards for Training and Higher Education (ATHE), and is also an approved centre for programmes from Pearson. At the time of the review, the College's provision consisted of a single programme, the ATHE level 7 Diploma in Strategic Management, on which five students were enrolled. The College employs three members of academic staff, all on a part-time basis.

The most recent QAA review was a Review for Educational Oversight, which took place in 2014 and which resulted in positive judgements. Since that review the College has gained approval from Pearson to deliver the level 5 Diploma in Education and Training, has implemented careers advice workshops for its students, and has established a new safeguarding policy.

The College has addressed all of the eight recommendations in the action plan arising from the previous review. Although some have been completed, others remain ongoing. In particular, the advisable recommendation relating to the need to extend the range of books available to students and to provide access to e-journals, and the desirable recommendation relating to the use of the virtual learning environment, remain incomplete. The QAA monitoring visit in 2015 found that the College was making acceptable progress towards implementing the action plan.

Current challenges for the College include managing the shift in its primary focus from international recruitment to national and local recruitment, particularly mature students. The College also intends to assure and enhance its students' employability and to create routes that enable progression to higher levels of study.

Explanation of the findings about Portsmouth International College Ltd

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College relies on its awarding organisations to ensure that the programmes it offers are positioned correctly within *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and that the learning outcomes align with the qualification descriptors. This arrangement would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.2 The review team tested the Expectation by means of the scrutiny of the awarding organisations' letters of approval, and the ATHE handbook and programme specifications, and by meeting staff in order to confirm their understanding of ATHE's role in meeting this Expectation.

1.3 The College recognises its responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards in the delivery of its programmes and exercises oversight of this responsibility through its Quality Assurance Committee (QAC).

1.4 The review team concludes that the Expectation and the associated level of risk is low, as the awarding organisation has responsibility for ensuring the academic standards of its qualifications.

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

1.5 The programmes delivered by the College are governed by the academic frameworks and regulations of ATHE. The College has created its own policies and procedures to ensure compliance with ATHE's frameworks and regulations. These include a Quality Assurance Policy and an Assessment and Verification Policy, which include requirements for internal verification and standardisation, the implementation of which takes place under the oversight of the QAC. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.6 The review team tested the Expectation through discussion with senior staff and teaching staff and through scrutiny of documentation, including the remit and minutes of the QAC as well as the Quality Assurance Policy, the Assessment and Verification Policy and the external verifier report.

1.7 The QAC has responsibility for ensuring adherence to the ATHE's policies and regulations and for defining the processes required for marking, internal verification and standardisation.

1.8 The ATHE Health Check carried out in 2013 confirmed that the College met the requirements contained within the ATHE handbook for centres delivering its qualifications. However, the associated report notes that the College's academic appeals procedure should be made more specific to include clear guidance for appellants and that it must include processes for standardisation in its internal verification policy. Standardisation has been included in the Assessment and Verification Policy but the academic appeals process has not yet been amended to include ATHE's suggested improvement.

1.9 The most recent visits by the ATHE external verifier took place in 2014. The report of each of the three visits draws attention to a requirement for the internal verification process to include a process for standardisation. This has since been addressed and standardisation meetings have taken place. Internal verification samples indicate that assessment and verification is rigorous and meets awarding organisation requirements.

1.10 Every element of the College's academic framework is either set by ATHE or is aligned with its requirements. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (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

1.11 ATHE is responsible for creating the definitive record of its programmes and for providing programme specifications. Approval of changes to awards is the responsibility of ATHE, which ensures that the definitive programme documentation is revised and that the College is informed. This arrangement would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.12 The review team tested the Expectation by means of scrutiny of documentation, including that of ATHE, and by meeting senior staff and teaching staff.

1.13 ATHE ensures that College staff are familiarised with changes to programme documentation, for instance through the training session attended by College staff prior to the forthcoming inclusion of merit and distinction grades in assessment.

1.14 The awarding organisation fulfils the responsibility for the maintenance of definitive programme records. 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

1.15 The College's awarding organisations hold responsibility for ensuring that qualifications meet national academic standards, and delegate the selection of optional units and the initial assessment of learning outcomes for all units to the College. At the time of the review there had as yet been no students enrolled in any programmes leading to awards from Pearson; therefore, the review team tested the operational arrangements for management of standards only in respect of ATHE programmes.

1.16 The ATHE external verifier checks that national standards are met in the assessments conducted by the College and can make recommendations to ATHE if these are not set at the right level.

1.17 The processes for programme design and ensuring that academic standards are appropriately set rest with ATHE. As the programmes and their component units are obtained from ATHE, the College relies on ATHE to ensure that academic standards are set at a level that meets UK threshold standards. To ensure that it has the capacity to deliver the programme(s) the College seeks to employ tutors who are well-qualified and who are already employed by other local higher education providers (see Expectation B3).

1.18 The College has an executive structure and committee structure appropriate to the scale of its provision. The Principal is responsible for the management of quality, while the Vice-Principal/Director of Studies is responsible for the maintenance of academic standards. The QAC is responsible for the oversight of academic standards and quality: its terms of reference indicate that the QAC maintains oversight by reviewing reports on aspects of management and implementation of policy and regulation. As such, it is responsible for approving new programme proposals.

1.19 The processes described above, if securely implemented, would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

1.20 The review team considered the effectiveness of these practices by examining a range of documentation, including ATHE's approval documentation, the external verifiers' reports, the College action plan, ATHE programme and unit specifications, and minutes of meetings. The team held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, current students and alumni.

1.21 The College decided to apply for accreditation with ATHE in 2013. The decision was taken during a meeting of the QAC, to meet an operational need. The College did not at the time evaluate its capacity to deliver the chosen programmes to appropriate academic standards, nor was the choice of awarding organisation informed by student views or independent expertise. The lack of a process to evaluate the College's capacity to deliver to a specific academic standard supports the recommendation in Expectation B1 relating to the process for internal approval of programmes.

1.22 Within the context of the centre approval granted by ATHE, the only programme approval process for which the College is responsible is the selection of three optional units designed by ATHE. Evidence from documentation and meetings shows that the College has adequately fulfilled this responsibility.

1.23 The College relies on its awarding organisations to ensure that academic standards are met in the design and approval of programmes. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met. The lack of a process to evaluate its capacity to deliver to a specific academic standard, however, is indicative of a weakness in the College's governance structure and therefore the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.24 The College's awarding organisations set the academic standards for qualifications and ensure the achievement of learning outcomes and alignment with national standards through sampling by external verifiers.

1.25 ATHE provides the unit specifications that state the learning outcomes to be assessed. Although the College could choose to develop its own assessment tasks it has chosen to use assignments supplied by ATHE, as recommended by the external verifier. The assignment briefs describe the task requirements and marking criteria and are referenced to the learning outcomes. The first-marking of student work is verified by an internal verifier, before being submitted for external verification by ATHE.

1.26 The College carries out assessment of learning outcomes in accordance with ATHE policies. The terms of reference of the QAC indicate that it monitors and reviews assessment processes and compliance with ATHE's requirements. The Assessment and Verification Policy provides for the internal verification of assessment decisions. Under this Policy, students' marks and grades are confirmed by the external verifier for ATHE. Assessment decisions are noted at meetings of the QAC, which monitors the results and awards conferred. The procedures described above would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

1.27 The review team considered the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining relevant documentation, including internal policy documents and committee minutes, ATHE guidelines and samples of marked student work. The team also held meetings with senior staff, students, former students and teaching staff.

1.28 The evidence reviewed showed that policies and procedures are effective in practice. Assignment briefs are those provided by ATHE, which are clear, comprehensive and contain assessment criteria referenced to the learning outcomes specified by ATHE. The College has internal processes to ensure that assessment is fair, appropriate and enables achievement of learning outcomes. This has included participation by College staff in training provided by ATHE on assessment and internal verification. In common with teaching, all assessment is conducted by one tutor and moderated by the internal verifier without a need for standardisation meetings; nevertheless, a standardisation process is in place should there be more than one assessor. Assessment decisions are externally verified by ATHE.

1.29 There are suitable processes in place at the College for ensuring reliable assessment of learning outcomes, and for alignment with ATHE's requirements. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.30 The College's Quality Assurance Policy states that it monitors standards and quality through checks on all College activity, allowing for continuous locally-driven improvement. The terms of reference of the QAC specify that it is responsible for reviewing a variety of reports concerning achievement of academic standards and for preparing action plans on matters that arise from such reports. In this way the College seeks to monitor that the academic standards required by ATHE are achieved and maintained.

1.31 The College does not have a formalised system for annual monitoring at programme level that would assure that academic standards are being maintained. Its arrangements do not allow the College to meet the Expectation.

1.32 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's practices by examining relevant documentation, including the College's action plan and minutes of QAC meetings. The team also held meetings with senior staff, students, former students and teaching staff.

1.33 The evidence from documentation and meetings shows that the College is operating in accordance with the requirements of its awarding organisation. QAC meetings are informed by reports on internal and external verification, and by data on overall pass grades: however, there is no process for gathering or considering progression data beyond this. ATHE's processes for programme review will, from September 2016, for the first time include an Annual Academic Management Review.

1.34 The College's action plan consists of a comprehensive document through which the QAC seeks to monitor progress in completion of agreed actions. Nevertheless, the lack of a formalised system for annual monitoring and the lack of a thorough process for gathering and considering data on student progression and achievement mean that the College is unable to assure itself that it is maintaining appropriate standards. This supports the recommendation under Expectation B8 in respect of the need to establish regular processes for monitoring and review at programme level.

1.35 The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met. The lack of a formalised system for annual monitoring is indicative of insufficient priority given to assuring standards in the College's planning processes; therefore, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.36 The responsibility for engaging external and independent expertise largely rests with ATHE, which undertakes external examination in the form of external verification to check that College assessment decisions meet national standards. An external verifier, who is a subject expert, is allocated to conduct sampling of assessed student work, and provide verbal feedback and a formal report. Through this process the external verifier identifies good practice and areas for development and gives guidance on how to improve delivery. The College uses the guidance of the external verifier in internal processes for assessment and verification.

1.37 The College has processes for engaging with the external verifier by review of the external verifier's report, and monitoring of the completion of actions arising from the report. The College responds to issues raised in the reports, and the resultant actions are noted by the appropriate committee. The College draws on external expertise in other higher education institutions through employing a senior member of staff and a part-time tutor, who works in other institutions. These links assist in setting and maintaining academic standards. The processes to use external and independent expertise would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

1.38 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's arrangements by considering the external verifier's report, minutes of committee meetings, and the College's action plan. The team also held meetings with senior staff, students, former students and teaching staff.

1.39 The College makes use of external expertise by delivering programmes and units developed by ATHE and taking action in response to the external verifier's report. The College's action plan is developed from sources including the external verifier's report, and is reviewed and monitored by the QAC.

1.40 The College does not design and develop its own programmes and it has not found a need to engage independent external expertise in this area. It uses the expertise of part-time employees who are academic staff in other higher education institutions. While these links provide a broader perspective on academic standards, they do not provide independent external expertise. The use of further independent external expertise would assist in the College's future academic planning of programme developments. This lack of independent external advice in relation to internal processes for programme approval supports the recommendation under Expectation B1.

1.41 While the College makes some use of external expertise by delivering programmes and units developed by ATHE, and taking action in response to the external verifier's report, the review team found that overall insufficient emphasis or priority is given to assuring the standards and quality of the student experience in the College's planning processes in

respect of the use of external and independent expertise. Hence, while the Expectation is met, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

1.43 One Expectation (A3.3) is not met with a moderate level of associated risk. All other Expectations are met with a low level of associated risk, with the exceptions of Expectations A3.1 and A3.4, for which the level of associated risk is moderate.

1.44 There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area.

1.45 The College has secure frameworks to ensure that standards are maintained at appropriate levels and that the definitive record of each programme is used to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications.

1.46 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of awarding organisations at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College's programmes are designed and developed by its awarding organisations, which set aims and learning outcomes for programmes and units, credit values, curriculum content and assessment tasks. The College undertakes the selection of appropriate optional units relevant to students' needs and the local context.

2.2 The College is responsible for determining its capacity to deliver a programme to a satisfactory quality through selection of the programme, selection of its optional units, decisions on the order in which units are delivered, and on the provision of resources, including staff resources, to support programme delivery.

2.3 The lack of an internal programme approval process means that the College's arrangements do not meet the Expectation.

2.4 The review team considered the effectiveness of the College's processes and procedures by examining ATHE's approval and programme documentation, programme specifications, committee terms of reference and minutes of meetings. The team also held meetings with senior staff, students, former students and teaching staff.

2.5 The College obtains programme units and assessments from the awarding organisation. The process of programme design and development is satisfactory, as this relies significantly on ATHE's arrangements.

2.6 While the QAC has the responsibility for selection of programmes and optional modules on the advice of senior staff and students, the College does not have a formal approval process to evaluate its own capacity to deliver its chosen programme. The review team **recommends** that the College establish and implement a process for internal approval of new programmes and changes to programmes that incorporates reference to independent external expertise.

2.7 The lack of an internal process for the approval of programmes is indicative of insufficient priority given to assuring quality in the College's own processes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.8 The College's Procedure for Student Recruitment, Selection and Admission describes the manner in which it ensures that students are recruited to appropriate programmes. Appeals against admissions decisions can be made through the College's Complaints and Appeals Procedure.

2.9 These arrangements, if securely implemented, would allow Expectation to be met.

2.10 The review team tested the Expectation through meetings with students and admissions staff and by the scrutiny of the recruitment and admissions procedure, including completed application forms and the Complaints and Appeals Policy.

2.11 The Procedure for Student Recruitment, Selection and Admission states that students will be given access to information relating to the provision and completion of an application. Although the Procedure is published on the College website, the site contains no further information on the academic requirements for admission to a programme. Nevertheless, students confirmed that they had been given sufficient information to make an informed decision about their choice of programme.

2.12 On application, previous qualifications are checked using UK NARIC where required and an assessment of the student's aspirations and intention to study is made. Prospective students are interviewed by a member of staff, and an internal test may be required if a student cannot supply sufficient evidence of prior qualifications or if there are concerns regarding English language competency.

2.13 Advice and guidance is given to applicants by College staff, who, in considering the limited range of programmes offered by the College, confirmed that they would direct applicants to other providers if the College's provision does not fit their needs.

2.14 Although at present there are no students with additional learning needs, College staff confirmed that any additional needs that applicants may have can be determined either by declaration at the recruitment stage or when meeting the College's Welfare Officer.

2.15 The Procedure for Student Recruitment, Selection and Admission does not specify clearly who is responsible for making the final decision on whether to admit an applicant. While a completed application form indicated that the applicant should be admitted, it contained no authorising officer signature. The review team heard that admissions decisions are made by the Principal or Vice-Principal: the Procedure would be further improved if this responsibility was made explicit.

2.16 The Procedure for Student Recruitment, Selection and Admission does not describe how an applicant can appeal against a decision to refuse admission to the College, and the College's Complaints and Appeals Procedure does not make clear that it can be used for such appeals. The College's public information contains no reference to an appeals process.

This weakness supports the recommendation under Expectation B9 concerning the procedure for handling appeals.

2.17 The College has effective arrangements for recruitment, selection and admission. Weaknesses in its arrangements relate to a need to amend details in documentation and will not require major structural, operational or procedural change. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.18 The College's Teaching and Learning Policy provides the framework within which teaching takes place. The Teaching and Staff Recruitment Policy and the Staff Development and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Policy describe the general principles by which the College recruits and supports teaching staff. The quality of teaching is monitored by means of the peer observation process and the views of students. Implementation of these policies is overseen by the QAC.

2.19 The College's policies and procedures, if securely implemented, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.20 The review team tested the evidence through meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students; and through scrutiny of policies and procedures, including the Teaching and Learning Policy, the Teaching and Staff Recruitment Policy, the peer observation process, and the Staff Development and CPD Policy.

2.21 The Teaching and Staff Recruitment Policy does not differentiate between teachers and other staff. However, it does contain an example of a teaching post job description where the selection criteria included: a first degree and experience of facilitating teaching as essential requirements; and a higher degree, a teaching qualification and experience in higher education as desirable. CVs of teaching staff confirm that all current staff have teaching experience in other higher education institutions and that all have higher degrees.

2.22 The Staff Handbook is intended for all College staff, and except for a section on staff development does not distinguish between academic and support staff. Although there is no separate induction process for new teaching staff in respect of teaching and assessment, teaching staff confirmed that they were appropriately made aware of their responsibilities by being given a copy of all policies and procedures, including those of the awarding organisation at the start of their employment, and that they were also observed in their teaching practice by the Principal several times in their first weeks of teaching.

2.23 The Staff Development and CPD Policy has a separate section relating to academic staff, which clearly outlines the circumstances in which the College will support teaching staff development. Records show that most staff development activity relates to general employment training but that all academic staff have attended training at ATHE. The Staff Development and CPD Policy states that the QAC is responsible for the oversight of teaching staff development; although this responsibility is reflected in the QAC's remit, reviewers failed to find evidence in its minutes of the QAC fulfilling this responsibility apart from a single reference to the need to update training records.

2.24 The College's staff appraisal process makes provision for annual appraisal of all staff, including teaching staff. Although the process includes no explicit link with the teaching observation process, it does contain opportunities for professional development needs to be identified, and teaching staff confirmed instances of training needs being identified in staff appraisals.

2.25 The College has implemented peer review of teaching with its Assessor Observations of Teaching Process contained within the Guidelines for Peer Observation of Teaching. The observations take place at least once each year, with new staff being observed by the end of their first month of employment. Within the process the assessor is chosen by the teacher with coordination by the Vice-Principal. However, in 2015-16 all observations were carried out by the Vice-Principal due to the low numbers of teaching staff employed. A record of an assessor observation showed a rigorous approach to scrutiny and recording: teaching staff confirmed that verbal feedback takes place following an observation.

2.26 Student views on teaching are collected at the end of each module and the results aggregated into a report, which is considered by the QAC. In the most recent report, relating to 2013-14, all students rated the quality of teaching as good or very good; in discussion with the review team, students expressed positive views about the quality of teaching at the College.

2.27 In 2015-16 all units on the level 7 programme were taught by a single tutor, with a second tutor available to cover any absences. Although the College accepted that this arrangement poses risks, its analysis failed both to recognise any risks to quality and standards and to articulate an approach to mitigating them. While students expressed satisfaction that the teaching they had received was of good quality, the review team is of the view that reliance on a single teacher placed at risk the development of conceptual understanding, which enables students to critically evaluate current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline, and to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure that the breadth of experience and expertise of teaching staff enables students to study their subject in depth and to enhance their capacity for critical and creative thinking.

2.28 The College has clear arrangements for the support of learning opportunities. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. However, the reliance on a single tutor for the delivery of the level 7 programme is indicative of insufficient emphasis on assuring standards in the College's planning processes; therefore, the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.29 The Student Development and Achievement Strategy states that the College will support students' academic and professional development as well as providing pastoral support. The QAC is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Strategy, which, if securely implemented, is sufficient to allow the Expectation to be met.

2.30 The review team tested the Expectation by meeting students, teachers and support staff, and through scrutiny of the College's policies, including the Teaching and Learning Policy, the Welfare and Wellbeing Policy, and minutes of the QAC and tutorial records.

2.31 Pastoral support and the provision of employability workshops are helpful to the students in their progression, but there is no formal individual academic tutorial system for monitoring progress. Within the Teaching and Learning Policy tutorials are defined as formal mandatory sessions held twice per unit with teaching staff and the whole group. At the time of the visit students and staff stated that only one group tutorial per unit took place, shortly before the assessment period. The College does not have a formal individual academic tutorial policy, but the Welfare and Wellbeing Policy states that for concerns relating to study students should talk to their tutor or teacher. Records of tutorial meetings show that in the last year the course tutor has held informal individual academic tutorials with students as requested by them.

2.32 Support for students takes place in accordance with the Welfare and Wellbeing Policy, which states that the College provides a Student Support Worker and a Welfare Officer. At present, however, student numbers are insufficient to justify the appointment of a Student Support Worker; the Welfare Officer assumes the duties of that role and reports verbally to the QAC on matters relating to student support. Students confirmed that the Welfare Officer offers one-to-one support for pastoral matters, including student accommodation.

2.33 The College monitors the progression and achievement of its students by a variety of means, including teaching activities and tutorials, formative feedback and the provision of additional workshops. The College tracks progress of individual students by means of tracking sheets, which are considered at the QAC. Given the current low student numbers this is an effective way of monitoring student progress. All students in the cohort for 2015-16 have successfully completed their programme of study. Students value the workshops relating to careers guidance and employability, which the College provides through an external agency.

2.34 The College has arrangements for enabling students to develop their potential, which are effective for the current size of the student body, and is aware that it may be desirable to establish a greater degree of formality and a higher level of resource in these arrangements if student numbers increase. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.35 The College has mechanisms for engaging students in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience both formally and informally. There is a Students and Student Representatives Meeting where students are invited to provide the designated student representative, with comments on their experience. Subsequently, the student representative attends formal and informal meetings with senior staff to present students' views. There are examples of responses to student feedback arising from these meetings such as the provision of a microwave oven, breaks during classes, and access to careers advice.

2.36 Feedback arrangements entail student completion of a survey questionnaire up to three times a year. In addition, there is student representation on the QAC and opportunities for students to provide feedback through informal means via discussion with College staff.

2.37 These processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.38 The review team considered the organisational structure and terms of reference of relevant committees, and the documentation provided on student feedback questionnaire surveys. In meetings with staff and students the review team discussed the implementation of student engagement in terms of the roles of various staff and committees.

2.39 The review team heard from students that the College operates arrangements for student representation, and that a student representative had been identified and given training through a handout of slides. Students confirmed also that they may provide feedback through informal means in discussion with College staff. The Students and Student Representatives Meetings are intended to form part of the process for involving students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The terms of reference of the Students and Student Representatives Meetings show that its membership includes students and the student representative. The meetings are not formally recorded, but the student representative attends the part of QAC meetings that is open to students in order to escalate matters raised by students.

2.40 Both students and staff confirmed that student feedback questionnaires are conducted, although there was some confusion about whether the frequency was three times per year or after completion of each unit of study. Following collation and analysis, the findings are reviewed by the QAC. While there was no evidence of direct feedback to students on actions resulting from this review, the review team heard that the College took action when possible. However, the College has provided only partial responses to students' requests for improved learning resources: there had been an improvement in library book stock at the College but no provision of requested online learning resources. In considering the process by which the College reached a decision on the selection of optional units to be offered, the review team heard from students that they had not been consulted on this matter.

2.41 The College has not undertaken evaluation of the effectiveness of its approach to engaging students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their education. While its largely informal approach has been effective in hearing and responding to the views of a small student body, the College's plans to expand its provision to include

programmes at levels 4 to 6 are likely to mean that this approach is less effective as student numbers increase. In light of these plans, and the current informal nature of much of its approach to student engagement, the review team **recommends** that the College strengthen and formalise the engagement of students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

2.42 The College's arrangements for student engagement are currently effective in enabling it to hear and respond to the student voice. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. The largely informal nature of these arrangements is indicative of a shortcoming in the rigour with which its procedures are applied and of insufficient emphasis to assuring quality in the College's planning processes; therefore, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.43 The College is required to comply with ATHE's assessment policies and procedures. ATHE undertakes external verification in order to ensure that the College is maintaining the standards set out in programme specifications. The initial assessment of learning outcomes for all units is delegated to the College. This entails responsibility for the design of assessment tasks, first-marking of student work, second-marking by internal verification, and giving feedback to students on their work. The College can elect to use the assignment briefs and internal verification forms provided by ATHE.

2.44 The College's Assessment and Verification Policy covers its arrangements for assessment, internal verification, provision of assessment feedback to students, procedures for dealing with malpractice, plagiarism, appeals, and the recognition of prior learning.

2.45 The College's tutors uses formative and summative assessments designed by ATHE, with assignment briefs being supplied by ATHE and distributed to students at the start of each unit.

2.46 The College's policies and procedures for assessment and its approach to complying with ATHE requirements would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.47 The review team reviewed the effectiveness of the processes by examining documentation, including the Assessment and Verification Policy, ATHE external verifier's reports, the College's evaluation and response to the external verifier's reports, the assessed student work from all units in 2015-16 prior to external verification, the ATHE programme specification, the Student Handbook, and committee minutes. The team also held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, students and former students.

2.48 The College has effective processes in place to conduct assessment and to meet the requirements of ATHE. The Principal, and in his absence the Vice-Principal, has overall responsibility for the management of assessment. The assignment briefs provided by ATHE are clear and comprehensive, and refer directly to the learning outcomes they are designed to meet. There is a full internal verification and a standardisation process available for use, should there be more than one assessor. The review team saw evidence of effective external verification in 2014. However, students expressed disappointment in the lack of explanation by the College for its delay in commissioning external verification in 2016: the delay had led to students awaiting confirmed results and diploma certificates since April 2016.

2.49 The Student Handbook and assignment briefs clearly specify the intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The Student Handbook indicates the requirements for submission of assessments, as well as the Academic Misconduct Policy. The College draws the attention of students to the penalties for academic malpractice and plagiarism. Students submit their assignments to ATHE for external verification through a secure portal incorporating plagiarism-detection software. Students expressed satisfaction with the

constructive and developmental feedback received on both formative and summative assessments, and with the speed with which feedback was received after submission.

2.50 The ATHE external verifier's reports from 2014 recommended substantial improvement to ensure that the College has effective mechanisms in place for the assessment of programmes, including training for staff on assessment and internal verification, and the use of assignment briefs and internal verification forms from the awarding organisation. The College has taken steps to address all of the recommendations in these reports: it responded fully to the recommendations and intends to monitor progress on subsequent actions through the College's action plan.

2.51 The recognition of prior learning is guided by ATHE requirements. The College has not yet used its Recognition of Prior Learning Policy, as it has not yet admitted students who were eligible for consideration under this Policy.

2.52 The assessment processes in use at the College are valid and reliable. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.53 ATHE is responsible for defining the role of external verifiers and for their appointment, training and recognition. External verifiers undertake standards verification through sampling of assessed work, and check that timely and effective internal verification has been carried out on assessment decisions and that there is appropriate feedback to students. The College's Assessment and Verification Policy sets out its arrangements for supporting the work of the verifier.

2.54 The College is responsible for commissioning a visit of an external verifier from the awarding organisation. It is then responsible for communicating with external verifiers regarding the samples of assessed work to be provided and arrangements for their visits, and for responding to external verifiers' reports. During a visit to the College, the external verifier meets teaching staff to provide feedback on the sampling process, and can meet students.

2.55 The College has limited internal systems for receiving and responding to external verifiers' reports, which are considered at meetings of the QAC. For reasons of student confidentiality, the College does not intend to make external verifiers' reports available to students; the review team accepted that the nature of external verifiers' reports is such that the redaction of comments about identifiable individuals would result in the report losing meaning.

2.56 The College summarises the feedback and recommendations received from the external verifier and provides an action plan with responsibilities and timelines. The QAC receives the external verifiers' reports, and makes recommendations for action. The terms of reference of the QAC include taking an overview of external examiners' reports and advising teaching staff on any actions relating to assessment processes.

2.57 The arrangements to engage with external verifiers, if securely implemented, would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

2.58 The review team reviewed the effectiveness of these procedures in practice through consideration of ATHE guidance, the external verifier's report, the College action plan, and minutes of QAC meetings. The team also held meetings with senior staff, students, former students and teaching staff.

2.59 The lack of a student cohort in 2014-15 meant that the most recent external verifier's report dated from 2014. The College has made use of this report by implementing its recommendations in respect of staff attendance at required training sessions on assessment and internal verification, and in respect of the use of assignment briefs and internal verification forms generated by ATHE.

2.60 The review team found that in 2016 the external examiner will not visit until 22 September, although the programme was completed in April 2016. A more scrupulous approach to the management of standards and to the quality of the student experience would have included a visit from the external verifier to confirm the suitability of standards at a point before the completion of the programme. Nevertheless, the College makes use of external verification in line with the requirements of ATHE.

2.61 The College has satisfactory processes to engage with external verification. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. However, the lack of timeliness in securing external verification is indicative of a shortcoming in the rigour with which its processes are applied and of insufficient priority given to assuring standards in its planning processes; therefore, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.62 The College has some internal processes for the partial monitoring of its programmes, consisting of responses to student surveys and annual reporting by the ATHE external verifier. There is no internal annual monitoring report at programme level, but the external verifier's report and findings from student surveys are received by the QAC. The College uses an action plan to monitor responses to student feedback, comments from the external verifier, and QAA review. QAC maintains oversight of the progress of the plan.

2.63 The College's processes for systematic internal monitoring and review of programmes are reactive and partial, and do not allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.64 The effectiveness of the College's processes and practices was examined through relevant documentation, including the College's action plan, completed student feedback forms, committee terms of reference and minutes. The review team also held meetings with senior staff, students, former students and teaching staff.

2.65 The terms of reference for the QAC include responsibility for reviewing reports and action plans and for making recommendations for action in response to the outcomes of external inspections and accreditation visits.

2.66 The College does not systematically review its approaches to learning, teaching and assessment, to internal verification or to management of learning resources, other than in respect of matters raised through student feedback. This shortcoming has allowed inadequacies to accumulate, including the absence of e-journals to support level 7 study, a failure to support subject-specific scholarly activity by academic staff, and the failure to recognise the risks posed by reliance on a limited number of tutors alluded to under Expectation B3. The College has no systematic means of tracking student progress and there is no evidence that College committees have reviewed student attainment beyond noting overall pass grades.

2.67 The College does not have a policy for the periodic review of programmes but regards this as part of the remit of external agencies and awarding organisations. The review team heard that ATHE is introducing an Annual Academic Management Review to be undertaken by the external verifier alongside the planned visit and report for 2015-16.

2.68 The lack of adequate processes for systematic internal monitoring and review of programmes constitutes a significant gap in policy and structures relating to the College's quality assurance and the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities. The review team **recommends** that the College establish effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review of programmes.

2.69 The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is serious. The College's lack of systematic regular review of its provision, and the absence of a policy for periodic review, mean that only limited controls are in place to mitigate this risk.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Serious

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

2.70 The College's Complaints and Appeals Procedure sets out the formal processes for making complaints to the College. The procedure for making appeals is also contained within the Complaints and Appeals Procedure and is supplemented by ATHE's appeals procedures. The College also has a suggestion box through which students can make complaints anonymously.

2.71 While the design of these processes aligns with some of the indicators within the Expectation, it does not allow the Expectation to be met. Although it allows for complaints to be handled internally, there is no process by which it can monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its procedure, nor by which it can reflect on their outcomes for supporting enhancement. The guidance on making appeals against assessment decisions does not make clear under what circumstances an appeal can be made or how it can be evidenced; nor does it offer a clear description of the process by which an appeal will be considered.

2.72 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutiny of the Complaints and Appeals Procedure, the awarding organisation's documentation, and the remit of the QAC, and by meeting students and academic staff.

2.73 The Complaints and Appeals Procedure is made available to students in the Student Handbook but is not available on the website. The remit of the QAC includes no reference to oversight of the Complaints and Appeals Procedure.

2.74 The complaints process is a three-stage process with the Principal as final arbiter. There is no provision for escalating the complaint outside the College. The appeals procedure does not state what decisions might be the subject of an appeal nor in what circumstances a student can appeal. The Principal acts as the final arbiter for appeals within the College, but the awarding organisation makes provision for academic appeals to be considered once the College's processes have been completed without resolution.

2.75 The ATHE Health Check in 2013 identified aspects of the appeals procedure that the College may wish to enhance, with a view to including 'areas such as grounds for appeal; clear appeal stages, the appeals panel and recourse for learners not satisfied with internal decisions'. The College has not yet taken action in respect of this further work.

2.76 In light of weaknesses in the procedure for handling appeals and the lack of response to the ATHE Health Check, alongside the weakness referred to under Expectation B2 in relation to the availability of a process by which an applicant can appeal against a decision to refuse admission to the College, the review team **recommends** that the College strengthen the procedure for handling academic appeals and appeals against admissions decisions in order to ensure that it is fair, accessible and timely.

2.77 The College stated it has not received any formal complaints, and staff and students confirmed that complaints are usually dealt with on an informal basis during learning activities. Students confirmed that informal methods and student feedback are effective in enabling the College to be aware of their views. The review team did not form a view about the effectiveness of the procedure for resolving complaints. There is no formal

procedure for enabling plans for enhancements to provision to be informed by outcomes of complaints.

2.78 The College's policies and procedure for handling academic appeals and appeals against admissions decisions contain shortcomings, including a lack of clarity about responsibility for oversight of the procedure and lack of clarity about the circumstances in which an appeal may be made. The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met. These shortcomings constitute significant gaps in procedures relating to the College's quality assurance and are exacerbated by the College's failure to respond to weaknesses in its procedure for assessment appeals identified in the course of the ATHE Health Check in 2013. The associated level of risk is serious.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Serious

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

2.79 The College has no arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with other organisations, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

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

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.82 Three Expectations (B1, B8 and B9) are not met: Expectation B1 with a moderate level of associated risk; Expectations B8 and B9 with a serious level of associated risk. The level of risk was judged to be low for all other Expectations with the exceptions of Expectations B3 and B5 and B7 for which the level of risk is moderate.

2.83 The review team made five recommendations in respect of the quality of student learning opportunities. The first relates to the establishment of a secure process for internal programme approval. The second follows from the need to ensure a breadth of experience and expertise of teaching staff. The third arises from the need to strengthen arrangements for the engagements of students as partners in their learning. The fourth recommendation is that the College should establish effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review of programmes. The fifth relates to the need to ensure that the College's procedures for handling appeals are fair, accessible and timely.

2.84 There are no features of good practice or affirmations in this judgement area.

2.85 The shortcomings in Expectation B8 constitute a major gap in the College's quality assurance arrangements and present a serious risk to the management of the quality of learning opportunities. The College has only limited controls in place to mitigate this risk and has a limited understanding of its responsibilities in relation to this Expectation.

2.86 The shortcomings in Expectation B9 present a serious risk to the management of the quality of learning opportunities. Although these shortcomings were identified in an external review in 2013, the College has failed to take appropriate action to address them.

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

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

- 3.1 The College's Information Management Policy details the range of information that the College offers, and affirms that the responsibility for its accuracy and completeness lies with the Principal and the QAC.
- 3.2 The design of the process for the management of information would allow the Expectation to be met.
- 3.3 The review team tested the Expectation through consideration of the College's policies on information management and of internal and publicly available information. Meetings were held with staff and students to test their awareness of the procedures and to ascertain their views with regard to the accuracy and completeness of the information.
- 3.4 The procedure for the production of information contained within the Information Management Policy requires that information should be clear, current, and accurate, and that draft documents are discussed at team meetings and approved by the Principal and the QAC. The remit of the QAC confirms it has the responsibility to monitor the College's policies, procedures, handbooks and all information. Minutes of the QAC confirm that it considers new policies and other information as a regular agenda item.
- 3.5 The College states that it reviews and revises its policies and procedures on a regular basis to ensure accuracy. It has begun a review with a view to updating procedures, to establishing a standard format for all documentation, and to resolving issues relating to version control. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to review and amend all internal policies and to implement a procedure for version control.
- 3.6 The Information Management Policy states that all staff and students are responsible for checking that any information they provide to the College in connection with their role is accurate and up to date, and for informing the College of any changes to, or errors in, the information. Students were unaware that the College makes this requirement of them formally but stated that the information they had been given by the College had been accurate and met their needs.
- 3.7 The College has an internet and social media policy, which is mainly concerned with their use by students and staff. However, it does state that the College manages its own website and that the QAC makes decisions as to whether to join social networking sites. QAC minutes confirm that it considers matters relating to the website and social media. All changes to the website are signed off by the Principal and are recorded in a logbook.
- 3.8 The College provides information to students by means of a Student Handbook, which contains general information about studying at the College. It also gives access to programme-related information from ATHE through the virtual learning environment, but has not developed programme-specific information of its own. However, the ATHE material relates to the entire qualification, including those optional modules not offered to students, and contains no information on the way in which the course will be taught and assessed at

the College. The review team **recommends** that the College contextualise programme information and describe the manner in which the programme is delivered.

3.9 The process for information management works effectively in practice. The information supplied for the review was accurate and records of its discussion and approval by the QAC exist. The website is accurate and helps students to understand the nature of the College and its requirements. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.11 The College manages its responsibilities for the production of information for its various audiences effectively. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

3.12 There are no features of good practice or recommendations in this judgement area. The single affirmation relates to the review of internal policies being conducted by the College.

3.13 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College's strategic leadership is exercised through a committee structure within which the QAC reviews reports on the management of standards and quality of the provision. The Quality Assurance Policy defines quality enhancement as monitoring all academic processes, and the identification of areas of innovation or improvement in teaching and the student learning experience. It indicates that the processes are measured through monthly staff supervision and staff-student meetings, annual staff appraisals, peer observations, continuous development of personal learning plans, and detailed lists of learning outcomes and content within each learning session. The College states that it makes operational enhancement through the QAC, the terms of reference of which indicate that it reviews reports on a range of internal and external processes, including the College action plan. The processes reviewed by the QAC include standards verification by the awarding organisation, ATHE, and the College action plan.

4.2 The Quality Assurance Policy identifies enhancement as a key element within quality assurance. The design of College's quality assurance framework would enable the Expectation to be met.

4.3 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the processes and procedures by examining the draft Strategic Plan, the Teaching and Learning Policy, committee terms of reference and minutes, and evidence of teaching observation, and through appraisal of tutors and student feedback. The team also held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, students and former students.

4.4 The College's approach to enhancement is expressed through its Strategic Plan (2016-20), which is currently incomplete but is to be considered in draft form by the QAC in September 2016. The draft plan indicates that the College intends to shift its focus from international to local students, expand its higher education provision, and expand provision at levels 4 and 5. While the draft Strategic Plan recognises the need for enhancement it does not indicate how the College plans to secure enhancement.

4.5 The College's action plan provides a framework for monitoring the completion of actions identified through review and analysis of reports about external verification, external quality assurance and student feedback. Nevertheless, the College lacks comprehensive and accurate evaluation and systematic monitoring sufficient to ensure that enhancement is informed by programme monitoring.

4.6 Although teaching staff regarded teaching observations as a useful developmental process, there is no formal process for the enhancement of student learning through the identification and sharing of good practice. The QAC is not proactive in identifying and disseminating good practice.

4.7 There are a number of activities in place that benefit the student learning experience. Staff cited the development of strategies to improve student performance, support for the development of students' non-academic skills, and strengthening of pedagogic techniques as examples of enhancement activities. Although the College has introduced a virtual learning environment and increased its library stock, it does not take a

strategic approach to the development of its learning resources. Improvements to the student learning experience are at an operational rather than a strategic level.

4.8 The College's strategic approach to enhancement is underdeveloped and there is only weak management of its quality assurance framework in respect of enhancement. The review team **recommends** that the College develop and implement a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities.

4.9 The weaknesses in the implementation of the College's policy constitute a breach in its quality management procedures. The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is serious.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Serious

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.11 The single Expectation for this judgement area is not met and the associated level of risk is serious.

4.12 The single recommendation relates to the need to adopt a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities.

4.13 There are no features of good practice or affirmations in this judgement area.

4.14 The weaknesses in this judgement area constitute a breach in the College's quality management procedures and present a serious risk to the management of this area. The College has only a limited understanding of its responsibilities in relation to this Expectation.

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

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 22-25 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

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* (FQHEIS).

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

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.

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