



# Higher Education Review of Runshaw College

December 2015

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Runshaw College. The review took place from 8 to 10 December 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Jonathan Doney
- Dr Fiona Tolmie
- Mr Matthew Kearns (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

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

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2013-15 are Digital Literacy and Enhancement and Student Employability,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)<sup>4</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code).

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

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

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

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Runshaw College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities is **commended**.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Runshaw College:

- the thorough and effective way in which the College integrates its own practices with those of the awarding body (Expectation A2.1)
- the systematic approach by course teams to support students in becoming independent learners (Expectation B3)
- the strategic approach to enabling students to develop their academic potential through initiatives such as the Transition Strategy (Expectation B4)
- the holistic approach to enabling students to develop employability skills (Expectation B4)
- the focus on the development of students' assessment literacy, particularly as exemplified by the use of peer and self-assessment (Expectation B6)
- the outward-facing approach that enables staff at all levels to identify opportunities for enhancement and share them with colleagues (Enhancement and Expectation B10)
- the shared focus of College staff on developing and implementing strategies of continuous improvement (Enhancement).

### Theme: Student Employability

Runshaw College actively seeks to engage employers in its curriculum as expressed in its Employers Charter, the Higher Education Employer Engagement Strategy, the early Training Quality Standard, accreditation for an employer-focused curriculum, and through broad-ranging employer engagement in its foundation degree provision. Employers are engaged in a wide and diverse manner in the development, delivery, assessment and review of all higher education courses, but with specific focus on foundation degrees. Employers are also actively engaged in the provision of placements, technical presentations and visits; input to student placement performance evaluation; and case studies/live briefs for assessment. Students receive excellent support, for example through specialist careers advisers, including a Higher Education Careers Adviser.

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

## About Runshaw College

Runshaw College (the College) is a highly successful large provider of general further and higher education, serving the communities of South Ribble and Chorley in central Lancashire. The College was established in 1974 as a sixth-form centre. Since that time, the College has developed significantly in scale, scope and quality of provision.

In 2014-15, 7,615 learners were enrolled, of whom 513 were studying on the higher education programmes. The College has a track record of high-quality provision and has been judged outstanding in three successive Ofsted inspections. The College has had Beacon status since 2001. In September 2014 the College was designated a National Teaching School by the National College for Teaching and Leadership.

The College operates on three campuses in Leyland, Chorley and Euxton, where higher education programmes are largely based. In April 2015 the construction of a new Science, Engineering and Innovation Centre began at the Euxton campus. This will focus on science and engineering to meet the College's response to demand for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduates.

The College's Higher Education Strategic Plan 2015-19 details strategic aims and priorities, summarised as follows.

- Developing a portfolio of part-time and full-time courses that prepare students for future careers or higher levels of study.
- All foundation degrees will include the elements of, and thus become, Career Degrees - all other university courses offered by the College will embrace the ethos of employability inherent in this offer to enrich higher education programmes of learning.
- Employer links will be expanded and enhanced across all curriculum areas.
- New and innovative models of degree-level learning will be explored.
- An expanded range of science and engineering courses will be developed to meet the employment needs now and in the future, as articulated and envisioned in the Economic Plan for Lancashire.
- Provide an outstanding learning environment where all students are given the opportunity to reach their full potential.
- Continue to build on the College's Transition Strategy to teaching and learning, which has been specifically developed to develop students' independency in learning a competence that will enable them to be successful in future learning and in work.
- Harness innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, further developing the College's information learning technologies to support learning both inside and outside the classroom.
- Continue to provide outstanding levels of individual student support through regular personal tutoring, learner mentor support and excellent service from the library, Student Services and Study Support Teams.
- Further develop the College's programmes of enrichment and course enhancement, such that learning is fun and relevant, and that opportunities to participate in, and contribute to, the lives of others both inside and outside Runshaw are encouraged.
- Promote and achieve academic excellence, raising aspiration and enabling students to add value to and be prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- Ensure excellence in teaching and learning through a continued strong focus on the professional development of all staff aligned to the College's higher education provision, and its mission and strategy.

- Close collaboration with the University of Central Lancashire to maximise the learning and progression opportunities of College students, and the academic development of staff.
- Setting clear targets for specified key performance indicators by which standards and progress can be driven and measured.

The College's higher education offer is broad and of strategic importance to the College, particularly in respect of providing opportunities for widening participation to its own advanced vocational students and to the local community. Extensive internal progression strategies, combined with strong liaison between further and higher education managers, have led to the development of new programmes of study based upon need and demand.

A range of honours degrees, foundation degrees and pathways to higher education for internal progressing students, adults and employed students have been developed. In addition, the College offers a range of Initial Teacher Education courses. As a consequence, higher education provision has grown from 173 students in 2005 to 513 in September 2014.

At the time of the review, the College was delivering the following courses:

- FdA Business
- HNC\* Business (part time)
- FdA Children, Young People and Their Services
- BA (Hons) Community and Social Care
- BA (Hons) Community and Social Care Foundation Entry
- FdEng Computer Aided Engineering
- BEng (Hons) Engineering Foundation Entry
- HNC\* Mechanical Engineering (part time)
- HND\* Mechanical Engineering (full time/part time)
- FdSc Computing
- FdSc Computer Technology
- FdA Criminology and Criminal Justice
- FdA Graphic Design
- FdA Public Service, Prisons and Law Enforcement
- BSc (Hons) Psychology and Criminology
- BSc (Hons) Science Foundation Entry
- FdA Sports Coaching
- FdA Tourism and Events Management
- Postgraduate Certificate in Education (full time/part time)
- Certificate in Education (full time/part time)
- Preparatory Certificate in Education and Training
- Introductory Certificate in Teaching, Learning and Assessment
- Intermediate Certificate in Education (Education and Training).

(\*offered through UCLan's licence with Pearson)

The College's sole degree-awarding body is the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). The College has had a working partnership with UCLan since 1994 and offers awards validated by UCLan, including Higher National awards in collaboration with Pearson.

The key challenges identified by the College include:

- maintaining levels of recruitment in the short/medium term, and seeking further growth in the longer term

- strategic changes to recruitment and provision at UCLan
- increasing internal competition for vocational students
- the removal of student number controls and potential changes to student loans.

Responses to these key challenges include:

- College listing on UCAS - distinct from UCLan
- the launch of the Career Degree package
- continued innovation in provision
- the construction of a new Science, Engineering and Innovation Centre
- the development of a suite of Access to HE courses
- focus on the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and support for students.

The College had a successful Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) by QAA in 2011. The response to that review has been effective. The action plan, which was drawn up after the IQER at the College, is highly detailed and clearly demonstrates that all the recommendations have been addressed, setting out the dates by which actions were addressed and how they are monitored. Additionally, the action plan clearly demonstrates how good practice has been built upon.

## Explanation of the findings about Runshaw College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Findings**

1.1 The College has a strong and well-established relationship with its sole degree-awarding body, UCLan. The responsibility for ensuring that threshold academic standards for degree-level programmes are set and maintained at the appropriate level within *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) lies with the awarding body. Higher National Certificates and Diplomas are also offered by the College, and these fall under the UCLan license agreement with the awarding organisation Pearson.

1.2 All higher education courses delivered by the College are subject to a comprehensive range of both internal and external quality and enhancement policies and procedures.

1.3 The processes in place ensure that awards are correctly positioned at the relevant level of the FHEQ, and aligned with Subject Benchmark Statements, which would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.4 The review team scrutinised a range of documents relating to the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered by the College. The review team met awarding body representatives, senior College staff, course managers and teaching staff.

1.5 The College's responsibilities for the maintenance of higher education standards are clearly detailed in the Institutional Agreement and the Memorandum of Cooperation with the awarding body. These are supplemented by the highly detailed Collaborative Provision Quality Assurance Grid, which more closely defines the responsibilities of the College and its awarding body in respect of quality assurance. The College prides itself in its meticulous and robust approach to maintaining academic standards, and its procedures for higher education align with those articulated in UCLan's Academic Quality Assurance Manual. Staff at all levels showed a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the maintenance of academic standards, both within the College and to the awarding organisation.

1.6 All module and programme specifications clearly state the FHEQ level of the module or qualification. In accordance with UCLan's academic framework and regulations, the College makes full use of external reference points, against which its higher education provision is mapped. Qualification and Subject Benchmark Statements are also used. Staff cited many examples of how they use external reference points to inform their practice. External examiners, external advisers, external verifiers and subject specialists further confirmed that assessment meets threshold standards.

1.7 UCLan quality procedures have been mapped against the Quality Code, against which the College has mapped its own provision. The College's Annual Higher Education Quality Assurance Schedule provides a comprehensive and detailed list of key dates and actions in the quality calendar. The College sets four key performance indicators (success, retention, results and progression) each academic year for its higher education programmes. Additionally, student satisfaction has now been included.

1.8 The College maintains a large and developing number of collaborative links with employers, sector bodies and local enterprise partnerships. These help to inform the College that its provision meets the needs of local and regional imperatives, thereby enhancing the employability of its students.

1.9 The review team confirmed that the College fulfils its obligations and requirements in ensuring the maintenance of academic standards by compliance with awarding body regulations, policies and procedures, and, where appropriate, other external reference points. The review team concludes that this Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.10 The College adheres closely to the academic and assessment regulations of the awarding body that governs its awards and quality monitoring procedures. Governance arrangements are detailed in the awarding body's Institutional Agreement and the Memorandum of Cooperation.

1.11 Programme specifications and module descriptors become definitive and approved course documents following course approval. These documents set academic standards and form the basis for course delivery, teaching and assessment; a set of these is held by the Academic Quality and Awards Department at UCLan.

1.12 The College does not have any direct association with the awarding organisation and any matters relating to it are handled by the awarding body. Responsibility in the College for monitoring and ensuring that all awarding body and organisation requirements are met lies with the Head of Studies for Higher Education.

1.13 The design of the academic regulations process would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.14 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining the documentation presented, and in discussions with staff and students. The meetings also involved staff from the awarding body.

1.15 The College engages with UCLan at a range of levels, including assessment boards and subcommittees of the academic council. The Academic Board of UCLan is ultimately responsible for academic standards and the frameworks by which they are governed, with Heads of School at UCLan responsible for quality assurance at programme level. The College possesses clear and transparent academic frameworks that govern the alignment of its higher education provision appropriately to the academic standards set by UCLan, the Higher Education Quality Committee, the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.16 Comprehensive programme specifications, course module records and programme handbooks show Qualifications and Credit Framework levels, credit values and intended learning outcomes. Programme specifications are available to all students through the College website, the virtual learning environment (VLE), and in course handbooks, which are available in both hard copy and electronic formats.

1.17 Chaired by the Deputy Principal, the Higher Education Strategy and Quality Assurance Group meets regularly to address strategic quality assurance matters and ensure the maintenance of academic standards. Course teams, module leaders, subject tutors and personal tutors comprise Curriculum Improvement Teams, responsible for the maintenance of academic standards at programme level along with UCLan Head of Schools. Strategic matters are reported to the College Governing Body, which meets at scheduled points throughout the year. Annual course reviews and writing self-evaluation reports are standard practices for all programmes and these are submitted consistently to the awarding

body. Additionally, Periodic Course Reviews are conducted by UCLan. Course teams are required to attend and participate in assessment boards, regular partnership meetings and staff development days with the awarding body.

1.18 UCLan Module Boards, attended by representatives from partner colleges, are convened twice per year. These ensure parity of assignments and assessment. Additionally, an annual 'summary' conference is held to discuss areas of commonality within the multi-provider partnership. These Boards and conferences are highly valued by staff.

1.19 UCLan and Pearson are responsible for the appointment of external examiners and verifiers to all award-bearing programmes, ensuring that academic standards are maintained.

1.20 The thorough and effective way in which the College integrates its own practices with those of the awarding body is **good practice**.

1.21 The review team concludes that this 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**

1.22 The College maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification it delivers through programme specifications and module descriptors. The College works with UCLan's Academic Quality and Awards Department to maintain a definitive record of all programmes and modules, and ensure that it acts as a key reference point for the design, development and delivery of a programme.

1.23 Comprehensive programme specifications act as a critical reference point for the delivery of a programme and its subsequent monitoring and review. Programme specifications clearly outline intended learning outcomes and assessment methods, and there is a standard template for both programme specifications and module descriptors. These documents form part of the definitive documentation required at Course Approval Panels, which consider how they are used as reference points in the delivery and review of a programme and how they are mapped to relevant external benchmarks. A final approval event report confirms the course title, programme specification and module descriptors. Once a programme is approved, a formal approval letter is issued to the course leader confirming the programme specification and its online location. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.24 The review team tested the operation of these processes by examining documentary evidence including programme specifications and module descriptors, programme handbooks and Course Approval Panel reports. The team also met senior and teaching staff responsible for the management of academic standards, as well as full and part-time students.

1.25 The review team confirmed that these processes operate effectively, and that programme specifications and module descriptors function as critical reference points for the College's provision. Programme specifications and module descriptors are accessible to students through course handbooks and are also uploaded to the VLE. The programme handbook template clearly specifies that course handbooks must contain learning aims drawn from the programme specification.

1.26 UCLan's Course Developers Handbook clearly sets out the minor change procedure and what constitutes a minor change. Any changes are mapped against the existing programme specification to ensure they align with intended learning objectives. Minor changes to programmes, for example changes to learning objectives or individual modules, must be commented upon and approved by an external examiner; the UCLan Review Panel has final approval of such changes.

1.27 Programme specifications and module descriptors are effective critical reference points for a course's delivery, monitoring and the provision of information to students. 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

1.28 The College offers programmes that are validated and approved through UCLan. The College has its own internal course approval process, which must be completed before courses are moved forward to the approval process of UCLan. This is designed to ensure the acceptability, feasibility and quality assurance of the new curriculum.

1.29 The review team tested the Expectation through reading documentation evidencing the processes and their implementation, and discussing the processes with senior and teaching staff, students and employers.

1.30 Both College and UCLan processes draw upon the Quality Code and respond to external points of reference such as the FHEQ, subject and qualification benchmarks, and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements. The proposal, once approved by the College, is presented in outline to UCLan, followed by the presentation of a more detailed academic case to the UCLan Collaborative Subcommittee, and then by a formal approval event. The Course Approval Panel is chaired by a trained UCLan representative, and comprises an academic external adviser, a sector/industry external adviser, a member of the UCLan review panel and a representative from the host school at UCLan. Students or their representatives are invited to be full members of the Course Approval Panel.

1.31 Any conditions set by the Course Approval Panel must be met before a course can operate.

1.32 Course teams may make minor changes, for example changes of summative assessment, learning outcomes or modules to courses within UCLan's regulations. The external examiner for the course is required to comment on and approve any proposed minor change, and UCLan gives final approval.

1.33 Continued approval is through the Periodic Course Review process, which includes the participation of independent external subject specialists as members of the panel. External subject specialists are asked specifically to comment against external reference points, including Subject Benchmark Statements, when providing written feedback in advance of the event.

1.34 These processes allow the College to ensure that academic standards are set at a level that meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification, and that they are in accordance with the College's own academic frameworks, and the academic frameworks and regulations of UCLan.

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

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

**Expectation (A3.2): 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**

1.36 UCLan retains ultimate responsibility for securing academic standards through assessment and the College delivers programmes in accordance with its Institutional Agreement, following UCLan's regulations and procedures.

1.37 UCLan's course approval process requires course proposals to show that assessment methods enable learners to demonstrate achievement of intended learning outcomes and that learning outcomes are set at an appropriate level. Details of intended learning outcomes and their assessment are set out in the programme specification and module descriptors.

1.38 Assessment is subject to verification and moderation as determined both by the processes laid down by the awarding body and by the College's own processes.

1.39 All marks that contribute to the conferment of credit and awards are considered at formal assessment boards, which are chaired by UCLan. An annual briefing session is provided by UCLan for staff involved in the assessment of students to give guidance on the application of assessment regulations and operation of assessment boards. External examiner reports consider whether courses are operating at the appropriate academic level.

1.40 These processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.41 The review team examined relevant documentation, including programme specifications, module specifications and reports of course approval events. The team also considered the College's policies for assessment verification and moderation, and a range of external examiner reports, and met students and staff involved in setting and marking assessment.

1.42 The review team found that the College operates robust processes for assessment, which ensure that both UK standards and the standards laid down by UCLan are satisfied, and that credit and qualifications are awarded only where achievement of the learning outcomes has been demonstrated.

1.43 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**

1.44 UCLan retains ultimate responsibility for programme monitoring and review to ensure the maintenance of academic standards. The College manages its responsibility through a process of annual monitoring, action planning and reporting.

1.45 Module and course Annual Monitoring Reports inform both College school Self-Assessment Reports, which contain quality improvement plans, and the Annual Monitoring Report for the College's higher education provision as a whole.

1.46 In the first course Annual Monitoring Report post approval (or re-approval), any recommendations set at the event must be addressed or responded to. The action plans in course Annual Monitoring Reports are required to be updated at the end of each College term. The course-level and higher education programme-level Annual Monitoring Reports are required to be submitted to UCLan and form part of the awarding body's oversight of the maintenance of standards at the College.

1.47 External examiner reports are required to consider the achievement and maintenance of standards, and any issues raised by them will be reported on and addressed through the College quality monitoring processes.

1.48 UCLan implements a scheduled process of Periodic Course Review, which includes consideration of external examiners' reports for the previous years and scrutiny of course documentation by external advisers from the subject specialism and the sector.

1.49 These processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.50 The review team considered a range of annual monitoring documentation, external examiner reports and periodic course review outcomes, and discussed aspects of the monitoring and review of provision with senior and teaching staff members.

1.51 The review team found that the College implements processes for the monitoring and review of programmes that explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by UCLan are being maintained.

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

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

**Expectation (A3.4): 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**

1.53 The College recognises and highly values the input that external examiners and external advisers have in assuring academic standards, course development and the quality of learning opportunities. Their participation in approval and review panels ensures that courses meet relevant benchmark standards, the FHEQ, sector needs and comparability across networked institutions.

1.54 It is a requirement that external examiner and external verifier reports are responded to in course Annual Monitoring Reports and arising action plans, with formal responses undertaken by the Dean of the host school at UCLan. The College's Head of Studies for Higher Education collates report outcomes for inclusion in the programme Annual Monitoring Report and action plan.

1.55 Awarding body and College-led processes are in place that would enable this Expectation to be met.

1.56 The review team considered a range of documents relating to external advisers, examiners and verifiers, and held meetings with staff and students.

1.57 Use of the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements is a key requirement of UCLan's course approval process. The College employs its own three-stage process for the approval of new programmes. An initial evaluation by the proposed programme leader and the senior manager of the teaching school is undertaken. This is followed by aligning the new curriculum to the awarding body, awarding organisation and the College's own quality assurance processes. The final approval for new programmes rests with the Deputy Principal (Adult/Higher Education/Business) before being submitted to the awarding body.

1.58 Proposed new programmes are subject to UCLan's rigorous course approval process. Formal proposals are considered by both the Course Planning Committee and the Collaborative Subcommittee before a final approval event is held. External advisers are required to participate in the approval of all programmes and review documentation, such as programme specifications, to confirm they align with the FHEQ. They are also required to participate in the approval event itself. The final approval report confirms the new programme aligns with the FHEQ and relevant qualification and Subject Benchmark Statements, and sets any conditions to be met before the programme can commence. Staff cited a number of examples where, through these formal processes, they had engaged external advisers in the development, approval and improvement of the course design and curriculum.

1.59 The College's programmes are subject to Periodic Course Review, which takes place on a four-yearly cycle, with the most recent being in March 2015 where all current programmes were approved. Review panels include two external members, one from an independent higher education institution and another from industry. The panel must affirm

that all programme specifications, module descriptors and Annual Monitoring Reports align with the FHEQ, and relevant qualification and Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.60 UCLan and the awarding organisation are responsible for the appointment of external examiners and verifiers. External examiners and verifiers engage in the moderation of assessment and attend assessment boards. External examiner reports are formally responded to by the Dean of the host school at UCLan and within Annual Monitoring Reports by the College. The College Quality, Exams and Student Tracking team reviews all external examiner reports and issues a summary to the College's Governing Body.

1.61 The review team found evidence that the College makes use of a consistent and robustly applied set of practices for employing external and independent expertise to ensure the setting and maintaining of academic standards of its programmes. The use of external expertise is a key part of UCLan's quality assurance procedures, as set out in its Academic Quality and Awards Manual. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

1.62 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.

1.63 The College is effective in managing its responsibilities, in conjunction with the degree-awarding body and organisation, and is effective in maintaining academic standards. The review team identified the thorough and effective way in which the College integrates its own practices with those of the awarding body as good practice.

1.64 From its scrutiny of a wide range of evidence, and through meetings with staff and students, the review team found that effective use is made of relevant subject and qualification benchmarks and external expertise in the development of programmes and their subsequent approval and monitoring, with qualifications being set at an appropriate academic level. Furthermore, the review team confirms that effective use is made of input from external examiners and link tutors from the degree-awarding partner.

1.65 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body 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 has processes for new course proposals that must be completed before moving into the approval processes of UCLan. These processes address issues of alignment with strategy, feasibility and quality assurance. In considering feasibility, the College requires the proposal to address staff, library and other resource requirements.

2.2 The College then works with UCLan to take forward the course approval. This process draws upon the Quality Code and responds to external points of reference such as the FHEQ, qualification and Subject Benchmark Statements, and PSRB requirements. College course developers are supported by the host school at UCLan and by a Course Developers Handbook produced by UCLan. Once the outline proposal has been accepted by UCLan, a more detailed academic case has to be made. This process draws on supporting evidence from employers and students as appropriate. Student input to the process is facilitated through the use of focus groups.

2.3 Library and Learning Resource Centre staff at the College are engaged with the process from the outset and receive draft module descriptors and programme specifications to appraise the resources required. The College library is subject to external review by UCLan and this is used to support course approvals. Additionally, for each approval, UCLan requires a Library and Information Services self-assessment and a Course Resource Audit Form. Staff CVs are required to be submitted as part of the approval process, and module tutors and course teams are required to be identified to ensure a match between subject expertise and course content.

2.4 The UCLan approval event requires the pre-submission of the proposed programme specification and module descriptors, a draft course handbook, outline teaching schedules, and documentation relating to staff and library resources. The panel is chaired by a trained representative from UCLan, and comprises an academic external adviser, a sector/industry external adviser, a member of UCLan's review panel and a representative from the host school. Students or their representatives are invited to be full members of the Course Approval Panel. A Panel may approve or not approve a course, and may, if approved, set conditions and/or recommendations. Conditions must be met before a course can operate. Recommendations must be responded to in the course Annual Monitoring Report. Where conditions are set, a Fulfilment of Conditions Form (along with any amended documentations) must be submitted to the Academic Quality and Awards Department by a specified deadline.

2.5 UCLan has a process under which revisions of a minor nature can be made to existing provision.

2.6 The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.7 The review team tested the processes by considering a range of documentation connected with course approval and by discussing the processes of course design and approval in meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, students and employers.

2.8 The review team noted that while UCLan has a process that allows a Course Approval Panel to require review after the first year of operation in addition to the normal annual monitoring procedures, to date no College course has been subject to such interim review, which speaks to the robustness of the College design processes. The team also noted the clear understanding of staff of both the principles and processes relevant to amending the existing curriculum. The team heard from both staff and students that, in common with UCLan, the College often struggles to obtain student participation in course design and approval events, but noted College use of both poster-based initiatives and the involvement of former students in encouraging greater student participation.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.10 The College applies transparent and fair recruitment and admission policies, which enable the selection of students who can achieve the intended learning outcomes of their programme. The College has responsibility for recruitment to the programmes it delivers, and outlines the processes by which this takes place within its comprehensive Adult Admissions Policy.

2.11 The admissions process is managed by the Adult and Higher Education Admissions Team, with the Head of Studies for Higher Education working with the Head of Marketing and Admissions to maintain oversight of admissions processes and outcomes. The Admissions Team works independently of course teams, while the enrolment process is managed by the Head of Studies for Higher Education, with detailed planning meetings taking place in January prior to enrolment in September. All the College's programmes are listed on UCAS, with the College working with UCLan to confirm these listings.

2.12 Once an admissions decision is made, students are advised through UCAS of the conditions of their offer and any related deadlines. The Head of Marketing and Admissions, and the Head of Studies for Higher Education, work with the office of the Faculty for Adult and Higher Education to provide prospective students with enrolment information.

2.13 The College operates to UCLan's Admissions Policy and Applicant Complaints Procedure. If an applicant wishes to appeal an admissions decision they must write to the Head of Marketing and Admissions, who undertakes an investigation and makes a decision. If the applicant is unsatisfied, they can embark upon UCLan's complaint and appeals process. The operation of these processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.14 The review team tested the effectiveness of these processes by examining a range of documentary evidence, including the College's Adult Admissions Policy, minutes of meetings planning enrolment and information provided to students during the admissions and induction process. The team also met senior staff responsible for the admissions and induction process, course leaders, professional support staff and a selection of students.

2.15 The review team confirmed the effective operation of these processes. The Adult and Higher Education Admissions Team provide extensive information to prospective students, and unsuccessful applicants are given feedback from the College and signposted to alternative courses where possible. Successful applicants are provided with a formal offer letter; a 'warm-up activity', which is intended to ease the transition to higher education; and a higher education newsletter. Induction and welcome events take place both at the College and UCLan, with course teams required to complete an induction checklist that must be signed off by a student representative.

2.16 Applicants are well informed of the College's relationship to the awarding body, and this is supported by regular visits from UCLan during the enrolment process.

2.17 Prospective students who do not meet stipulated entry requirements have their applications considered by the Head of Studies for Higher Education, who consults with course teams to make an admissions decision.

2.18 Student Services make early contact with disabled students in advance of enrolment to offer them additional support and signpost them to services such as the Learning Resource Centre and Study Support Team.

2.19 The College takes deliberate steps to enhance the admissions and enrolment process through the Curriculum Observation and Review process. Staff-Student Liaison Committees also collect feedback from students. A key enhancement made this academic year is the creation of programme-wide induction events for higher education students.

2.20 The College uses recruitment and admissions processes that are fair, inclusive and transparent, and allow students to be recruited who possess the ability to successfully complete their course. 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**

2.21 The College's Strategic Plan 2015-16 and the Higher Education Strategic Plan 2015-19 place teaching and learning as one of its key objectives for the improvement and enhancement of its provision. The Deputy Principal (Adult/Higher Education/Business) is responsible for teaching and learning across the College, including its higher education provision. The Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Support Strategy articulates the day-to-day operational framework that underpins all teaching and learning activities at the College.

2.22 Internal and external annual and periodic review and self-assessment processes contribute to quality improvement planning for enhancing the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices.

2.23 The policies, procedures and mechanisms in place, providing a basis for effective learning and teaching, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.24 The review team examined a range of documents, particularly the Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Support Strategy. This was supported by meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, in addition to students and employers.

2.25 Learning and teaching is monitored through a series of strong and comprehensive mechanisms, the reviews of which aim to continually enhance the College's higher education provision. Periodic Course Reviews conducted by the awarding body ensure that learning outcomes are clearly articulated, relevant and achievable.

2.26 Actions plans derived from course Annual Monitoring Reports are updated at the end of each College term. These also inform the College school Self-Assessment Reports and the quality improvement plans in those schools with higher education provision. The College-level higher education programme Annual Monitoring Report, scrutinised by the Strategic Review Group and members of the senior leadership team, is used to monitor and review the higher education provision as a whole, and to determine that the action plan is fit for purpose. The action plan from the higher education programme Annual Monitoring Report is updated at the end of each College term by programme leaders. Course-level and higher education programme Annual Monitoring Reports are submitted to UCLan. They are considered by the host school, where they inform the Dean of schools' annual report, and at a partnership level, where common themes of good practice and/or areas for improvement can be identified, shared and addressed.

2.27 Feedback from students about their learning and teaching is gathered in a number of ways, including course representative forums, many of which are attended by the Principal. These are held twice a year with course teams, and consider matters relating to teaching and learning over and above those concerned with individual courses. Additionally, the College's VLE platform provides all students with the opportunity to contribute to these meetings. Other formal mechanisms for gathering student feedback include the Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings and Module Evaluation Questionnaires, which are distributed once per semester. Results from these feed into Annual Monitoring Reports.

Annually, the Higher Education Module Evaluation Questionnaire Summary Report collates the responses from all Module Evaluation Questionnaires, providing an overview of the higher education student experience of teaching and learning. Students noted the importance of informal feedback between students and staff regarding teaching and learning issues, and that any matters arising are dealt with promptly. Complementary to these processes, the College engages with the UCLan Students' Union to participate in the student-led Golden Rose Teaching Awards, which recognises excellence in learning and teaching.

2.28 All staff are required to participate in an annual observation of their teaching as part of the Curriculum Observation and Review (COR) process. Observations are based on the Lesson Observation Manual, but more specifically the Lesson Observation Guidelines for Higher Education Tutors. Led by the Assistant Principal Vocational Quality and Curriculum, the College Observation Team, comprising curriculum managers, conducts standardisation exercises to ensure and identify good practice. This forms part of the cyclical COR process, which also reviews a wider range of activities and resources related to teaching, learning, assessment and student support. These include curriculum planning, tracking grades, verification and moderation of marked work, course team meetings and coordination, and the use of the VLE. Learner voice activities, through focus groups, are also carried out during COR weeks. Observation reports are shared with the manager of the school or team under review, and the Head of Teaching and Learning ensures that key themes emerging are addressed effectively through the continuing professional development system.

2.29 This formally graded process of observation identifies emerging strengths and areas for improvement. The results are collated in a summary report presented to the Senior Management Team and Governing Body. Informal observations are also carried out by College managers to support improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. These may take the form of 'themed walk-throughs', which address issues identified via the COR process.

2.30 The College operates a peer observation system, which it sees as an emerging strength. All teaching, and some support, staff are required to carry out at least one peer observation per year. In some cases College staff have benefitted from the opportunity to observe colleagues at UCLan on a reciprocal basis. This process is intended to further support and encourage the sharing of good practice across the College. An e-peer observation system was developed by the College in 2013-14 and fully implemented in 2014-15. This provides staff with the opportunity to observe each other as peers outside their own department. Experiences and good practice are shared online; overall, the staff reaction to this has been very positive. This initiative complements the peer support for teaching and learning through observation systems used by UCLan. Online reports have been developed to monitor activity and identify key themes emerging as strengths in different curriculum areas, to further support sharing good practice across the College.

2.31 The College views the professional development of its staff as a key strength. A dedicated staff development budget provides an extensive schedule and appropriate opportunities for both internal and external developmental activities specific to higher education teaching, learning and assessment. Staff delivering higher education undertake a bespoke programme of development. The College has a dedicated Professional Development Department, which identifies individual and collective training needs. These are informed by an individual's annual performance monitoring review, which now includes student feedback from Module Evaluation Questionnaires and COR results. Staff are supported by the College, provided that the need meets the strategic plans of the College, school or programme, or as identified in annual monitoring and self-assessment. Apart from the delegated staff development budget, the College has enabled the provision of a higher education-specific budget, which can support development or training needs

outside of the general College budget for staff development. Support is available for staff to use expertise from employers and other external sources by way of, for example, short industrial placements. Staff are very positive about the support they receive from the College, and cited many examples of how this has benefitted them and how they have brought newly acquired knowledge and expertise into their curriculum. Students also expressed appreciation of their tutors' professional development and how this is affecting their teaching and the way in which lessons are subsequently delivered.

2.32 The College holds a regular series of College Improvement Days, many of which are specifically for teachers on higher education courses. Information about these is published in the termly Professional Development Brochure. The annual Teaching and Learning Conference promotes the sharing of best practice, and invited speakers provide an external perspective to the event.

2.33 The College operates a robust staff recruitment, selection and development process, which supports teaching and learning. The College states that students are part of the interview process for all new teaching staff, but when asked, students were unable to confirm their involvement in this. Recruitment is planned alongside annual business plans, which are guided by the Strategic Plan. New appointments are also approved by UCLan, and, if not previously qualified, are required to gain a formal teaching qualification within two years of their appointment, and also encouraged to seek Higher Education Academy recognition. Following a formal induction process, new staff are supported by a mentor and their line manager, and may, for those appointed to higher-level posts, include attending workshops at UCLan.

2.34 The College is based on three sites, with the majority of its higher education courses being delivered at the Euxton Lane campus. This campus has dedicated higher education-only facilities, which include a study room and a laboratory. The College is investing heavily in a building programme, which will see a new Science, Engineering and Innovation Centre opening in 2016.

2.35 Resources for new courses are agreed through the course approval process, supported by the Course Resource Audit Form, which details the resources required for learning and teaching and forms an integral part of the application. Module descriptors for new courses are also submitted and these are consolidated on a pro forma for new library resources. The Library Manager receives these and evaluates the extent of the resources required. Annually, tutors update reading lists, which are forwarded to the Library Manager for consideration. Equally, any resource requirements as a result of changes to modules are sent to Learning Resource Centre staff for procurement. All applications for resources for existing courses are considered against annual business and strategic plans. Employers stated they were involved during the course planning stage, assessing the fitness of purpose of course material and advising on the appropriate level of resources.

2.36 Higher education students at the College are enrolled as students at UCLan and have full access rights to UCLan's study resources, and the VLEs at both the College and UCLan. Students affirm they find the VLE at the College easy to navigate and that it is tailored to them and the course they are studying, but also note that UCLan's is more challenging to use. Students access and make use of the Virtual Academic Library of the North West. This initiative between UCLan's library and its partner colleges provides remote catalogue access to approximately 250,000 items, as well as book loans, reservations and renewals, journal article photocopies, access to library support services, subject-specific material and various electronic resources.

2.37 Course approval processes ensure that all intended learning outcomes are clearly defined. The College's Equality and Diversity Policy also supports this. The College monitors

the retention of all students, and the Study Support Team contacts all students prior to enrolment to encourage early disclosure of any additional support they may require. Academic study skills support is branded under the 'wise-up' logo. Overall, study support is comprehensive and very well regarded by students.

2.38 The systematic approach by course teams to support students in becoming independent learners is **good practice**.

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

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement**

**Findings**

2.40 Enabling student development and achievement is a key strategic priority for the College. Extensive processes are in place to evaluate student development and achievement. Other key priorities include providing high-quality student support and student employability, and maintaining the College's status as a provider of high-quality provision.

2.41 The availability of resources and support mechanisms for students would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.42 The review team considered a wide range of documentation relating to student development and achievement. These were complemented by meetings senior, teaching and support staff, and students.

2.43 The College's commitment to the role of employers in its provision is demonstrated through the launch of its Career Degrees. Existing courses have been remodelled to reflect the embedded strategic priority of employability. Additional subject-specific qualifications and enhanced personal professional planning have been integrated into the curriculum of a typical foundation degree. This enhancement has enabled the College to further align its programmes with industry by offering crucial employability elements over and above that already inherent in a foundation degree.

2.44 The College has recognised the importance of helping students in their transition to and beyond higher education. The recently launched Transition Strategy enhances the provision at all levels to make the transition of students as successful as possible. Building on good practice and staff development, the Transition Strategy focuses on and underpins the development of independent learning and is articulated through both a generic and course-specific framework. The Strategy is not documented and relies on schools within the College to incorporate transition initiatives into their day-to-day operations, which are articulated, for example, by a displayed poster-style presentation. Each programme area uses the Transition Strategy in a way that best suits the subject, and this is continually underpinned by the College's broad approach to enhancement and in supporting its students. If required, learning mentors provide progression interviews to ensure students understand the expectations and challenges facing them. Students stated that they have been made aware by staff of the College's approach to transition. They also stated that they recognised the very definite move from dependent to independent learning and the difference between further and higher education course delivery. Students are very appreciative of the transition process and the support they receive from the College towards being independent learners.

2.45 Support for students on higher education courses is managed by the Higher Education Support Coordinator. A dedicated budget is in place and this helps to fund specialist study support services and the appointment of any additional staffing in the College library.

2.46 The College sets annual performance indicators to monitor the effectiveness of its processes to enable student development and achievement, and these are evaluated within programme Annual Monitoring Reports and the higher education Annual Monitoring Report.

Student voice mechanisms, such as Module Evaluation Questionnaires, allow students to feed back on their experience of learning mentors and personal tutors.

2.47 In 2015 the College initiated its Learning Futures programme to further enhance students' use of assistive technology. A dedicated Assistive Technologist works within the Study Support Team to support students directly, and to help staff develop their use of technologies to support learning, teaching and assessment. This initiative has been widely praised and recognised nationally.

2.48 A Study Skills week is held at the start of a new academic year, which all students attend. Guidance is given on a range of specific study skills, including academic writing and referencing, numeracy and literacy skills, and self-organisation. The Study Skills week also provides an opportunity for students to discuss any further support they feel they need with specialist support staff. Induction sessions are also held at both College and UCLan libraries, the latter of which students found to be particularly helpful. Students confirmed that the support they receive from the College is excellent.

2.49 Chaired by the Head of Studies for Higher Education, Student Review Boards are held each semester. These are attended by Heads of Schools, course leaders and learning mentors. The purpose of these is to identify students who require additional learning support, which may include study support, careers advice or referral to a learning mentor.

2.50 The effectiveness of student support for learning is measured against key performance indicators, including an analysis of retention data from students who have received support from learning mentors and the College's Study Support Team. Supported by the professional development coordinator, learning mentors are independent and responsive to changing incidences of student problems. Learning mentors enjoy a range of professional development opportunities and share best practice with each other. Students stated that the learning mentors were effective, proactive, accessible and friendly. Additional support and guidance can be provided by UCLan if required.

2.51 Students are well informed of the College's relationship with the awarding body and the fact they can access all the resources at UCLan, articulated through the notion that students receive the 'best of both worlds' by becoming UCLan students studying at the College.

2.52 The College operates a strong personal tutorial system, which is formally linked to students' personal development plans. All students are allocated a personal tutor with a fixed entitlement for tutorials in years 1 and 2 of their course. These are formally recorded and conducted on a one-to-one basis or in groups. The role of the personal tutor in helping students develop a personal development plan is clearly explained to students within their course handbooks and higher education diary. The structure of tutorials is somewhat standardised, with the use of an outline scheme of work for personal tutorials that offers the basic structure of the meeting. Personal tutors are provided with a Personal Tutor Guide by UCLan, and can access a number of professional development opportunities. The tutorial system can be supported by learning mentors and the careers advisers, both from the College and UCLan.

2.53 Student attendance is monitored, with intervention by a personal tutor and/or learning mentor being made should it become a matter of concern. Chaired by the Head of Studies for Higher Education, the Student Review Board considers retention matters and agrees any necessary action in relation to individual student performance.

2.54 Pre-entry and guidance information is sent to new students prior to enrolment to promote early engagement with the College and the course teaching team. All new students undertake an induction programme at the College and at UCLan to ease their transition to

higher education, and are provided with a highly informative higher education newsletter. Course teams follow the higher education induction checklist, adding course-specific content as required. This must be signed off by a student representative as confirmation of completion. Bespoke events reinforce the ethos of higher education at the College and emphasise subject-specific needs. Returning students undertake a module-related exercise, which is designed to introduce and familiarise them to the requirements of their next level of study.

2.55 Students have access to an array of employability support and careers advice, including work-based learning, work placements and a dedicated Higher Education Careers Adviser. Students are very positive about this, stating these opportunities are clearly communicated to them, and how they recognise such opportunities enhance their employment prospects.

2.56 The strategic approach to enabling students to develop their academic potential through initiatives such as the Transition Strategy is **good practice**.

2.57 The holistic approach to enabling students to develop employability skills is also **good practice**.

2.58 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**

2.59 The College takes deliberate steps to engage all students as partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of their learning opportunities. The College promotes an array of opportunities for this purpose, which are clearly articulated within its Student Engagement Policy and Student Charter. These are communicated to students through programme handbooks, the VLE and posters located throughout the College.

2.60 Students participate in key quality assurance processes, including Periodic Course Review and course approval, and sit on the Higher Education Quality Assurance and Strategy Group, the College Governing Body and the Student Council. A minimum of two course representatives are either nominated or elected for each programme and attend Staff-Student Liaison Committees, which meet once per semester.

2.61 On the completion of a module a Module Evaluation Questionnaire is completed by students; or, if a module is over two semesters, an interim one is completed. This is used to gain feedback from students on all aspects of a module, and if student satisfaction falls below 80 per cent a formal action plan is required from the module leader. Programme leaders are required to reflect upon the feedback acquired from Module Evaluation Questionnaires and formally respond to it within the Module Evaluation Reports and Annual Monitoring Reports. This is also considered at mid-semester Student Review Boards. These student engagement processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.62 The review team tested the operation of these processes by examining a range of documentary evidence, including the College's Student Engagement Policy, Staff-Student Liaison Committee minutes, Annual Monitoring Reports and Course Approval Panel minutes. The team also met a range of students, senior staff and teaching staff.

2.63 The review team affirmed the effective operation of the College's student engagement processes. Students receive appropriate training to support their participation in forums such as Periodic Course Reviews, Course Approval Panels and Staff-Student Liaison Committees, and receive support from UCLan's Students' Union. The College recognises that the participation of students in Periodic Course Reviews and Course Approval Panels is a developing process, and is encouraging participation through the use of peer-to-peer communication by inviting students from UCLan to discuss such opportunities and through a poster campaign.

2.64 The College also employs an effective 'You Said We Did' policy to close the feedback loop, for example reconvening focus groups to inform them of action taken in response to students' feedback and communicating changes made to course representatives through the VLE. Students confirm that Staff-Student Liaison Committees are effective in making improvements, and that staff communicate changes taken in response to feedback or explain why such action cannot be taken.

2.65 Student engagement is sought at the programme design stage, often through more informal contact between students and staff, and some students have been involved in focus groups regarding the design and development of new modules.

2.66 The College has successfully developed an ethos of open and friendly communication, which is recognised and valued by students and staff, and enables effective

student engagement and feedback outside formal processes such as Staff-Student Liaison Committees.

2.67 The College takes deliberate steps, both formally and informally, to engage students in the assurance and enhancement of their learning opportunities. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.68 The College adopts the assessment policies and regulations of UCLan. These include provision for the award of credit based on the accreditation of prior certificated and/or experiential learning; policies and procedures for the consideration of extenuating circumstances; and guidelines for moderation and marking expectations, which are overseen by UCLan link tutors. The course approval and review process of UCLan requires that assessment strategies are articulated at the outset at both module and course level.

2.69 In the case of franchised or networked provision, College tutors receive verified assessments from UCLan, or from the module leads within the partnership where the module is not delivered at UCLan. College tutors may design assessments in the capacity of network module lead or where the provision is validated by UCLan. In all cases, College tutors are required by the College's Higher Education Internal Verification and Moderation Policy and procedure to ensure that assessments are fit for purpose for College students. Staff development activities on the processes of assessment, marking and moderation are provided at College and UCLan level.

2.70 The assessment arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.71 The review team considered a variety of documentation (including course approval documentation, College policies in relation to assessment, external examiner reports and student-facing material) and discussed assessment strategies and processes with a range of staff and students. The review team noted the generally high levels of student satisfaction with assessment processes.

2.72 Assignment briefs include the submission deadlines and detail the arrangements for the secure submission of work. Students are required to complete a coversheet, 'Feedback on Assessed Work', that includes a declaration that their own work is being submitted. The use of plagiarism-detection software, while not required by either the College or UCLan, is promoted as both an education and anti-plagiarism tool. Students commented that where plagiarism-detection software is not used extensively, they would like it to be. Feedback is expected on all written assessments within 15 working days following the submission deadline and this is generally met.

2.73 The College provides staff new to higher education with a mentor, and all their marking is double-marked.

2.74 Student assessment literacy is facilitated by a range of staff, including course teams, library support staff, the Study Support Team and learning mentors. The College's Transition Strategy seeks to further enhance students' assessment literacy by articulating and implementing how assessment changes over the course of their studies as they move towards becoming more independent learners. The WiseUp and WISER study skills support services, at the College and UCLan respectively, provide academic support to students on their assessment skills. A Study Skills week, held early in each academic year, highlights the importance of these generic skills to students and showcases the staff and resources

available throughout the year to support students in their development of these skills. In 2014-15 the College introduced its Pass First Time campaign to support and develop students in their assessment capabilities through a series of resources, released to tutors and students alike, at strategic points in the academic year. Posters and material on the VLE seek to provide students with guidance on how best to approach different forms of assessment. Module and personal tutors then use these resources, which can be supplemented with their own, to support students in their assessment practice. The review team heard from students that the use of self and peer-assessment helps them understand what is expected of them.

2.75 UCLan academic regulations are made available through the College higher education programme VLE. Additionally, students are provided with further guidance on assessment and useful links in the Higher Education Handbook and Diary, and in course and module handbooks/module information packs. Module learning outcomes and their means of assessment are set out in the individual module descriptors.

2.76 The College is kept informed of any changes to the regulations by the Head of Studies for Higher Education, who attends a UCLan annual briefing on academic regulations and is a member of the UCLan Student Experience Committee and Partnership Forum. Higher education course tutor meetings provide a scheduled formal forum at which higher education teams can be advised on assessment.

2.77 Assessment boards are conducted in line with UCLan regulations, and while the Head of Studies for Higher Education at the College is a trained UCLan assessment board chair, in practice all assessment boards that relate to College courses are held at UCLan and chaired by UCLan staff.

2.78 External examiners provide an independent external perspective on student performance in assessment and in the conduct of the assessment process. They support the College and awarding body in assuring that fairness is achieved in the application of the assessment process. They also attend course and subject assessment boards, and provide evaluative comments on the operation of assessment processes in their annual reports.

2.79 Students are advised of the outcomes of assessment boards through access to the UCLan student portal on the day results are released. The College also publishes finalist results, and course teams are on hand on the day of publication to provide information, advice and guidance to students where resubmissions/resits are required. A transcript of results is generated by UCLan's 'Banner' student record system and distributed to students by UCLan.

2.80 The review team heard from students about the steps taken to assist them in understanding the assessment process. The focus on the development of students' assessment literacy, particularly as exemplified by the use of peer and self-assessment, is **good practice**.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.82 External examiners are appointed and trained by the awarding body and organisation to ensure academic standards are maintained. The College can also nominate an external examiner should it choose to do so. Subject specialists and external advisers are used at periodic review and validation. UCLan and Pearson receive and respond to external examiner reports, which are forwarded to partner institutions. The College adheres to UCLan and Pearson procedures when dealing with external examiner reports.

2.83 The processes in place at the College would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.84 The review team considered a range of documentation relating to external examining and also met awarding body representatives, senior and teaching staff, and students.

2.85 UCLan and Pearson give clear guidance to the College regarding their roles and responsibilities in the external examining process, and the College is fully compliant with these.

2.86 External examiners are appointed to a course that may be delivered at more than one institution across the partnership. Differentiation across partner colleges is achieved through clear articulation in the examiner's report. External examiners' annual reports confirm threshold academic standards are being met and that these also align with key external benchmarks.

2.87 External examiners are provided with timely information to help them in their role, including samples of assessment, programme specifications and module descriptors to aid their evaluation of academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities. External examiners also attend UCLan assessment boards, where final grades are confirmed. External examiners' reports are used by the College to identify areas of good practice and enhancement.

2.88 The Head of Studies for Higher Education receives all external examiner reports from the awarding body and organisation. These are passed to course teams for scrutiny. Action points are centrally logged by the Quality, Exams and Student Tracking (QUEST) team, which allows emerging themes to be identified. The QUEST team compiles a report that comments on all external examiner and verifier reports, and is included in the higher education programme Annual Monitoring Report; the resultant action plan is submitted to the College Senior Management Team.

2.89 The Dean of the host school at UCLan is responsible for formally replying to external examiners' and verifiers' reports. Course leaders at the College may be asked to contribute to these responses should College and/or subject-specific information be required. Internally, programme leaders respond to external examiner reports in departmental Annual Monitoring Reports. Reports can identify areas of concern by grading them desirable, advisable or essential. Essential recommendations are, in the view of the external examiner, putting quality and standards at risk. Any essential recommendations raised are dealt with by the appropriate Dean of school at UCLan, and responses are monitored by the Academic Quality and Awards Department at UCLan.

2.90 The role and purpose of external examiners is very clearly explained to students in course handbooks, and they are also informed verbally by teaching staff. Students confirmed that they have access to external examiner reports via the VLE platform and that staff make them aware of a report's content pertinent to them. However, when asked, students were not aware of the role of the external examiner in assessment. The College has acknowledged this and is working with student representatives and course teams to promote better understanding of the role of the external examiner by students. External examiner reports are also considered by Staff-Student Liaison Committees.

2.91 There is clear evidence that the College makes robust use of external examiners and their reports. External examiner reports for the College are consistently positive, confirming that academic standards are appropriate. They also confirm that the quality of feedback is good, that internal verification and moderation systems are used effectively, and that the strength of the relationship between the College and UCLan positively affects the student experience. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.92 The College operates in accordance with the processes of UCLan for the monitoring and review of its courses. All College courses are reviewed each year, as part of the annual monitoring process, and annual monitoring informs Periodic Course Review.

2.93 On completion of all modules - and for those that run across both semesters, also at the end of the first semester - a Module Evaluation Questionnaire is completed and used to inform the completion of a module report.

2.94 Annual monitoring reporting at course level includes scrutiny and analysis of statistical data and feedback received from a range of sources, including external examiner reports, minutes of Staff-Student Liaison Committees and module evaluations. A written report is produced by the course leader, with the support of more senior colleagues, using a standard template, which includes updating of progress made on the previous action plan and provision of a new action plan to address issues arising from the current review year.

2.95 Within the College, course-level reports inform school Self-Assessment Reports (SARs) and their associated action plan. An institutional-level report for the College is developed by the Head of Studies for Higher Education, and is informed by, among other things, course-level Annual Monitoring Reports. A SAR and quality improvement plan, aligned to elements of the Quality Code, are also developed for the higher education programme. Both reports, together with school SARs, are subject to scrutiny by the Strategic Review Group, which comprises the Principal and members of the Senior Management Team, to ensure that it fully reflects the quality of provision and that the action plan is fit for purpose.

2.96 The College Annual Monitoring Report is submitted to UCLan, where it is used to inform the awarding body of the quality of provision in its partners.

2.97 The College is also subject to UCLan monitoring and review through the Periodic Course Review process.

2.98 Where a course is withdrawn, the course team is required to produce an Annual Monitoring Report while students remain actively enrolled on the course to ensure that adequate standards are maintained until existing students have completed their target award.

2.99 The arrangements for monitoring and review would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.100 In testing the Expectation, the review team considered key documentation relating to programme monitoring, and discussed the annual monitoring process with senior and teaching staff. The team noted that the quality of the College's annual reporting in 2013-14 was commended by UCLan, and that the College has been asked to share its best practice in relation to annual monitoring for the last three years at the UCLan Partnership Forum.

2.101 In addition to annual monitoring within UCLan's processes, an overview of a wide range of key performance indicators is taken by the Head of Studies for Higher Education

throughout the year. These include attendance, retention, Pass First Time and other data sets and reports, which are used to identify areas of concern and to bring about in-year actions for improvement. Monitoring and review at the College also takes place through mid-semester Student Review Boards; in-year updating of course, school and programme action plans takes place on a scheduled basis, with reviews at the end of each term.

2.102 The higher education data dashboard, which is updated daily, is available on a shared drive to all managers and serves as the definitive central data source for in-year and annual monitoring of starters (enrolments), withdrawals, achievement, success and high grades.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.104 The College has robust and transparent procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities. The processes by which complaints and appeals are responded to and managed are clearly articulated within the College's Complaints Policy.

2.105 To make a complaint, students must submit a complaint form to the Student Services team or their programme office. This must be acknowledged within two working days, and a trained manager provides the student with written details of the outcome. The Director of Finance/Management Information Systems is responsible for logging the complaint, and recording the outcome and any action taken, and the complaint goes to the Head of Studies for Higher Education for resolution. If the complaint is not resolved, it is referred to the Principal's office for investigation. This is the final stage of the College's internal complaints process.

2.106 Students who have exhausted the internal process are entitled to enter stage three of UCLan's Complaints and Appeals Procedure. Academic appeals operate in accordance with UCLan's Procedure, as all assessment decisions are confirmed at UCLan assessment boards. These Complaints and Appeals Procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.107 The review team tested this by examining relevant documentary evidence such as the College's Complaints Policy and programme handbooks. The team also met a range of students, senior staff, teaching staff and professional support staff.

2.108 UCLan receives an annual report of all formal complaints, which is discussed at the Student Experience Committee, on which the Head of Studies for Higher Education sits; complaints are discussed at meetings of the College's Senior Management Team and Governors' meetings to identify any areas for potential enhancement. The College notes it has been difficult to identify trends due to the few complaints received.

2.109 The College is a member of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), and students are clearly informed of how to take their complaint to the OIA for review.

2.110 Students are made aware of the complaints and appeals process through course handbooks, higher education handbooks and diaries, and additional documentation available through UCLan, which clearly explains how to take a complaint forward and the support available. The College notes that students often only become aware of these processes when they need them, and thus offers support from the Student Services team at the time a complaint is made. Students and staff affirm that complaints are dealt with in a timely fashion, and recognise many student concerns are successfully addressed through informal means outside the formal complaints procedure.

2.111 The College's complaints and appeals process ensures that complaints and appeals are responded to in a way that is fair, accessible and timely, and clearly communicated to students. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.112 The College has a long-standing and productive collaborative relationship with UCLan. This provides a strong basis for maintaining academic standards and ensuring the quality of learning opportunities for its students. Employability is a key strategic objective for its higher education provision. The College works extensively with employers, and the College Employer Engagement Strategy details how employers can engage with higher education at the College.

2.113 UCLan is the College's sole awarding body, and the responsibilities of both the College and UCLan are clearly articulated within the Institutional Agreement and Memorandum of Cooperation.

2.114 The policies and procedures in place at the College would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.115 The review team considered a range of documents and information relating to working with other organisations and employers. The team met students, employers (many of whom have a long-standing relationship with the College), staff responsible for employer engagement and students.

2.116 The College has extensive engagement with employers in the design, planning, approval and delivery of programmes, and the provision of work-based learning. This is set out in the College's Employer Engagement Strategy. Employers do not make formal assessment decisions themselves but do help to inform the process. Guidance for undertaking this role is given by course teams. Information regarding intended learning outcomes, programme aims and modes of assessment is distributed to employers taking part, who are subsequently invited to comment to what extent students have met the stated learning outcomes. The UCLan Guide for Structured Work Experience informs best practice and provides College staff with the opportunity to develop their own work placement handbooks appropriate to College and student needs.

2.117 The College's Work Placement Policy puts procedures in place to ensure that all work-based learning providers meet a minimum expectation in terms of health and safety and the quality of the learning experience provided. The Work Placement Unit at the College retains a cross-College focus and is responsible for organising and coordinating work placements, and ensuring that students and placement providers have the completed prerequisite documentation in place.

2.118 Students are provided with a work placement handbook specific to the type of placement and confirmed that they are able to feed back on their placement routinely in Module Evaluation Questionnaires and during visits from teaching staff. Where there is a specific work-based learning module on a course, a named module tutor takes responsibility for the module and for working with employers and students to ensure that the work-based learning requirements are met. Where work-based learning does not sit within a given module, but may for example contribute to a range of learning outcomes on different

modules, designated tutors within the team are allocated to named students and support them in their work-based learning, working closely with employers to do so.

2.119 Students confirmed that work placements are a major component of many programmes, and recognise that the collaboration between the College and employers enhances the quality of their learning opportunities and their employability.

2.120 The College has taken the strategic decision to embed the Runshaw Business Centre within the Adult Higher Education and Business Faculty. This has further enabled employer links to be realised across the higher education provision.

2.121 The College has effective policies and procedures that underpin the management of work placements and learning experiences facilitated by external parties. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

### **Findings**

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

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

2.123 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.

2.124 All the Expectations in this area are met with low levels of associated risk.

2.125 The review team identified significant good practice in the approach taken by the College to managing the quality of student learning opportunities. In particular, the team identified as good practice the systematic approach by course teams to support students in becoming independent learners; the strategic approach to enabling students to develop their academic potential through initiatives such as the Transition Strategy; the holistic approach to enabling students to develop employability skills; and the focus on the development of students' assessment literacy, particularly as exemplified by the use of peer and self-assessment.

2.126 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College is **commended**.

### **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 operates robust processes to ensure that the information it provides is accessible, trustworthy and fit for purpose. The Public Information in Learning and Teaching and Public Information flow charts specify the processes by which different types of information are approved and how they are reviewed. UCLan retains oversight of the quality and accuracy of the information the College provides through established monitoring processes and its Collaborative Marketing Guidelines.

3.2 The College produces clear public information about its mission, values and overall strategy. Marketing teams provide guidance to staff, in the form of print and electronic information, concerning programmes, services and policies, and the Head of Marketing and Admissions is responsible for managing the College website. Communication of public information is authorised within schools and services by line managers.

3.3 UCLan's Collaborative Marketing Guidelines ensure it is clear that UCLan is the College's awarding body, and establishes clear parameters over the use of College and UCLan logos. UCLan's partnership team requires proofs from the College to confirm the accuracy of information, and that it has been agreed with the relevant academic school at UCLan. The Head of Studies for Higher Education also sits on UCLan's Partnership Forum, which considers matters pertaining to the quality of information, and the Head of Marketing and Admissions sits on the Partnership Marketing Group, which meets yearly.

3.4 As part of the programme approval process, programme teams must provide a set of definitive documentation, including course handbooks, programme specifications and module descriptors, which are considered by the Course Approval Panel. Annual Monitoring Reports, Module Evaluation Questionnaires, Periodic Course Review, and Curriculum Observation and Review also ensure the information provided to students and other audiences is fit for purpose. The design of these processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.5 The review team tested the operation of these processes by examining the College's Public Information in Learning and Teaching Flow Chart, Public Information Flow Chart, Collaborative Marketing Guidelines, and the print and electronic information it provides to prospective and current students. The team also met the professional support staff responsible for the management of information, senior staff, teaching staff and a selection of students.

3.6 The review team affirmed that these processes function effectively in practice. The College provides accurate and accessible information on its application, admissions and enrolment process to prospective students, with the Head of Studies for Higher Education responsible for the quality of information, working in coordination with the Head of Marketing and Admissions. Students receive clear and accurate information concerning their programme and support services, for example through their course handbooks, higher education handbook and diary, the VLE and the student bulletin.

3.7 The College was subject to a Key Information Set audit by the Higher Education Funding Council in 2014, and subsequently produced an action plan in line with the recommendations made.

3.8 The College meets the accredited matrix Standard for the quality of information it provides, and ensures its information is accessible by making it available in a range of formats and offering assistive technologies to students if needed.

3.9 The College operates clear and effective processes to ensure the information it provides is accessible, accurate and fit for purpose for all intended audiences. 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 about the quality of the information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.11 The review team scrutinised a range of documentation (both published in hard copy and electronic versions) made available to prospective, current and former students, and other stakeholders.

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

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 Plan states that it has a goal of continual improvement of the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and support; its Higher Education Strategic Plan contains an aim of promoting a culture of continuous improvement.

4.2 The College has clear and direct lines of management and reporting, which enable the dissemination and consideration of information relating to enhancement to be considered at all levels. The monitoring and review processes described under Expectation B8 allow for the identification of opportunities for enhancement and good practice to be disseminated. The Head of Studies for Higher Education plays a pivotal role across the College in having oversight of all matters relating to the quality of higher education provision, and in actively promoting initiatives to enhance provision. The Head of Studies for Higher Education reports directly to the Deputy Principal for the faculty, who sits on the College Senior Management Team and reports to the Principal and Governing Body.

4.3 The Higher Education Strategy and Quality Assurance Group, which includes two student representatives, meets on a regular and scheduled basis to address strategic, operational, quality assurance and enhancement matters. The course leaders, working with module and personal tutors (collectively referred to as the Curriculum Improvement Team), are charged with monitoring course performance and working to enhance the student experience. The College Quality, Exams and Student Tracking team is an independent unit within the College with responsibility for data and information management to provide accurate and reliable information on which to base enhancement decisions. There are a number of ways in which students can be involved in the enhancement of provision, as set out in a poster displayed around the College - although both students and staff agreed that students would ideally engage with these opportunities more frequently than they do.

4.4 Examples of deliberate and strategic approaches to enhancement include the Pass First Time initiative, the Transition Strategy and the introduction of the Career Degrees. The review team was told that the Transition Strategy was a response to feedback from UCLan about weaknesses in the academic skills of some groups of students who progressed to UCLan. The Strategy is designed to develop students from being dependent learners to becoming independent learners; the main features of the Strategy are set out in a framework document against which each course designs its own Transition Strategy. For students progressing from further education at the College, implementation of the Strategy starts in the year before they commence their higher education studies. The team saw evidence of the Strategy being monitored and reviewed, and of the impact it has had on student progression and success.

4.5 The Pass First Time initiative, described in relation to Expectation B6, was introduced during the 2013-14 academic year to focus course teams and students on the skills and attributes needed to pass assessment first time and avoid reassessment. The introduction of this was prompted initially by data suggesting much lower retention and progression among those not passing assessments at the first attempt.

4.6 Each year all staff are asked to undertake a 'Best in Class' placement so that they can experience new practice and reflect on and improve their own practice. These visits are

agreed with line managers and recorded centrally, which enables dissemination of observations.

4.7 The structures and processes that the College has in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

4.8 The review team considered a range of evidence relating to annual monitoring and to the various enhancement initiatives that were drawn to the team's attention. The team also met the Principal, senior staff, teaching staff, learning support staff, employers and students, and discussed enhancement with all these groups.

4.9 The review team noted both the pride that College staff at all levels take in the quality of their provision and their clear commitment to continually looking for ways of improving what they do. The review team was also told about this ethos of continuous improvement by both students and employers, who cited numerous examples of enhancement.

4.10 The review team heard that the Best in Class external activities with, for example, local authorities, employer groups and educational bodies provide insights that enable the College to act strategically to enhance provision. The outward-facing approach that enables staff at all levels to identify opportunities for enhancement and share them with colleagues is **good practice**.

4.11 The shared focus of College staff on developing and implementing strategies of continual improvement is **good practice**.

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

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

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

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

4.14 The review team found that the College is particularly effective in the deliberate steps it takes to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. These deliberate steps are reflected in the approach of all higher education staff to the systematic enhancement of student learning opportunities. In particular, the team identified the outward-facing approach, which enables staff at all levels to identify opportunities for enhancement and share them with colleagues, as good practice. This is also referred to under Expectation B10. Additionally, the team identified the shared focus of College staff on developing and implementing strategies of continual improvement as good practice.

4.15 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College is **commended**.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The College recognises the central importance of employers and professional bodies in enhancing the employability of its students and the quality of their learning opportunities. To support this, there is a continual thematic element of employability running through all the College's higher education provision, which is underpinned by its Career Degree initiative and the Transitions Strategy.

5.2 The College's Higher Education Employer Engagement Strategy sets out a range of ways in which employers can engage with the College, and this is also clearly visible within its Strategic Plan. To reinforce this, the College's Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Support Policy has employability as one of its three main strands. As an enhancement to the existing foundation degree offer, Career Degrees provide a package of additional benefits, such as professional qualifications, and enhance a student's personal professional planning for employment.

5.3 Data from leavers' surveys confirms that the number of students gaining employment immediately after College continues to rise (currently at 83 per cent); the College anticipates that the introduction of Career Degrees will prompt a further increase.

5.4 Course teams are required to identify where they are embedding the employability theme in their practice and quality systems, and all higher education courses have a work-based element, and/or the opportunity to undertake live briefs, attached to them. Evidence from lesson observation feedback, their associated reports and learner feedback suggests that employability skills have been enhanced and improved in recent years. Students stated that they recognise the importance of gaining employability skills and that this is a constant theme throughout the delivery of their courses. They also commented that work placements are useful and interesting, and that work placements, if not a compulsory part of a programme, are clearly advertised to them.

5.5 Students receive excellent support relating to employability from the College's Student Services team, which employs specialist careers advisers including a Higher Education Careers Adviser. Students can access careers information on the College's VLE and also have access to UCLan's career service. An annual careers fair attracts a large number of local and national employers from both the public and private sectors. These are carefully chosen to match the College's higher education provision. Students strongly praise the College for the employability support it offers, and clearly recognise the considerable value this adds to their learning experience.

5.6 Employers participate in all Course Approval Panels, to ensure the programme team has considered the needs of employers. They commented that the employability skills of the students they work with from the College are excellent and that the College continually involves and engages them, listens to what they say, and acts appropriately, thereby maintaining a strong continuing relationship.

5.7 The College was awarded the Training Quality Standard by the then Learning and Skills Council for the quality of its employer engagement.

5.8 The College's curriculum offer is strategically based around vocational areas, and reports from external examiners and stakeholders confirm there is a strong and continuous record of good practice in relation to employability. This is confirmed by employers.

## Glossary

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

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered higher education 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.

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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