Higher Education Review of Ruskin College, Oxford

March 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Ruskin College, Oxford. The review took place from 15 to 17 March 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Scott Isaacs
- Miss Sarah Riches
- Mr Lyes Bouakaz (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 4. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 9.

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

The themes for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.
[2] Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages:
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Amended judgement - June 2017

Introduction

In March 2016, Ruskin College, Oxford underwent a Higher Education Review, which resulted in the following judgements: the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies meets UK expectations; the quality of student learning opportunities is commended; the quality of the information about learning opportunities requires improvement to meet UK expectations; and the enhancement of student learning opportunities meets UK expectations.

Negative judgements are subject to a formal follow-up by QAA, which involves the monitoring of an action plan produced by the College in response to the report findings.

The College published an action plan in August 2016 describing how it intended to address the recommendations, affirmations and good practice identified in the review, and has been working over the last 11 months to demonstrate how it has implemented that plan.

The follow-up process included three progress updates and culminated in a desk-based analysis of the College's progress reports and the supporting documentary evidence with one reviewer.

The desk-based analysis confirmed that the recommendations relating to information about learning opportunities had been successfully addressed. Actions against affirmations and good practice relating to academic standards, quality of student learning opportunities and enhancement of student learning opportunities had also been completed on schedule and contributed to the progress against information about learning opportunities.

QAA Board decision and amended judgement

The review team concluded that the College had made sufficient progress to recommend that the judgement be amended. The QAA Board accepted the team's recommendation and the judgement is now formally amended. The College's judgements are now as follows.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies **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 **meets** UK expectations.

Findings from the follow-up process

The review team found that the College had made progress against the recommendations as follows.

Recommendation - Ensure academic transcripts issued by the College consistently state the correct awarding and delivery institutions (Expectation C)

The College's Administration Flowchart for Academic Awards sets out clearly the administration process for Open University (OU) academic awards. Clear lines of responsibility are evidenced throughout the flowchart, and internal and external activities are accompanied by systematic review points. A Student Transcript and Diploma Supplement template names the awarding institution as the OU and confirms the name of the institution delivering studies as Ruskin College. Six transcripts for various students from a range of courses, from dates ranging from 2013 to 2017 name the awarding institution as the OU and confirms the name of the institution delivering studies as Ruskin College. The review team concludes that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

Recommendation - Ensure that all media accurately describes qualifications on which students are enrolled (Expectation C)

The College confirms that it has audited its public information, in accordance with its post-review action plan. The Public Information Policy is appropriate, comprehensive and supports the procedure for oversight, control, quality and review of public domain information about the College, which is produced and distributed by the College. A Public Information Schedule of Audit outlines ongoing activities, departmental responsibilities and a timetable to ensure and maintain accuracy of College media. An appropriate audit of the College website has been conducted and actions identified. A sample of programme webpages confirms that a suitable template for reviewing the provision of course information is operational.

Responsibility for the accuracy of College media has been assigned. The Communications Officer post, reporting to the Vice-Principal, now has organisational responsibility for the production, content, review, updating and maintenance of all internal and external public information produced by the College and is responsible, with the Head of Student Experience, who reports to the Principal, for leading the College marketing function. The review team concludes that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

Recommendation - meet the requirements of university partners for the approval of public information on learning opportunities, and reflect these in relevant College policies and procedures (Expectation C)

The College's Public Information Policy and Procedure appropriately details that all course and College marketing materials must meet the guidelines of the relevant awarding bodies. Clear reference to the OU Public Information Process for Partner Institutions, as a document associated with this Policy, is included.

Approval from the OU of the College prospectus is provided, confirming that the College's information management procedures and timelines for production of course information, as featured in the College's Public Information Policy and Procedure, are operational and appropriate. The OU Regulations for Validated Awards are accessible via the College website. The review team concludes that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Ruskin College, Oxford

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Ruskin College, Oxford.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities is **commended**.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Ruskin College, Oxford.

- The extensive use of external expertise in programme design and development (Expectations B1 and A3.4).
- The rigorous admissions processes that enable the College to fulfil its mission to provide educational opportunities to excluded and disadvantaged adults (Expectation B2).
- The comprehensive support for the development of staff, which delivers a high quality learning experience for students (Expectation B3).
- The personalised support provided by the learning development service, which enables student achievement (Expectation B4).
- The effective arrangements to monitor and review the early student experience, which support retention and achievement (Expectation B4).
- The strategic approach to engaging students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectations B5 and Enhancement).
- The strong and effective partnership working that supports the provision of high quality and effective placement opportunities for students (Expectation B10).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Ruskin College, Oxford.

By July 2016:

- ensure academic transcripts issued by the College consistently state the correct awarding and delivery institutions (Expectation C).

By September 2016:

- ensure that all media accurately describes qualifications on which students are enrolled (Expectation C)
- meet the requirements of university partners for the approval of public information on learning opportunities, and reflect these in relevant College policies and procedures (Expectation C).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to ensure the full application of Oxford Brookes University's academic misconduct procedures, including relevant staff development activities (Expectation A3.2).

Theme: Student Employability

Ruskin College, Oxford considered the employability of its students in its recent review of the curriculum offer. Links with employers and external agencies are strong, with effective communications and working relationships evident. Students highly value placement opportunities, which are managed effectively by the Oxford Practice Learning Centre (OPLC) and College staff who focus on professional practice and related skill development. External examiners recognise good professional practice across programmes of study. Links with agencies are enhanced through the engagement of former students employed in the region, who maintain their links with the College as members of Practice Assessment Panels, and on the validation focus groups and academic appeal. Students and employers who met the review team commented very positively on the consultation process and how their views influenced curriculum content. The College's engagement with employers and agencies facilitates the development of employability and associated skills for its students.

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

About Ruskin College, Oxford

Ruskin College, Oxford (the College) was established in 1899 to provide educational opportunities for working-class men who were denied access to university education, and the College has become a symbol of working people's education. The mission of the College is to provide educational opportunities to adults who are excluded and disadvantaged, and to transform the individuals concerned, along with the communities, groups and societies from which they come. This aim is achieved by admitting individuals with few or no formal qualifications to undergraduate courses of study and enabling progression to further study or employment.

The College is an adult residential college offering a mix of higher education courses from levels 4 to 7, and mostly short courses at levels 3 and below. It also offers one long further education course. Higher education accounts for approximately 50 per cent of the College provision. The College has strong historical links with the international labour and trade union movements, the women's movement, and other areas of anti-discriminatory activism, and offers courses in these as well as other curriculum subject areas. It also has strong links with local communities and has effective partnerships with many voluntary and third sector organisations.

The College's higher education strategy seeks to address three key areas: providing accessible progression routes for students with few qualifications and thereby accelerating their achievement; identifying areas of growth in the applied social sciences and health related fields; and developing the skills needed for public service and third sector employment. Its curriculum offer is aimed at transforming individuals and their communities and equipping graduates with the skills and understanding to make a difference in their chosen careers.

Since the QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2011 the College has relocated all its provision from the Oxford city centre site in Walton Street to its present location at Ruskin Hall, Headington. This project was completed for the 2012 academic year. The period immediately after the consolidation of premises was one of significant adjustment for the students, staff and the estate, and this process of change resulted in considerable challenges. The College was inspected by Ofsted in November 2012 and attained an overall grade two (good).

Immediately following the relocation to Ruskin Hall the College underwent a further period of change with the retirement of the Principal in 2013, the appointment of an interim Principal in December 2013, and the appointment of a Vice-Principal in September 2013. This phase of senior management transition was completed with the appointment of a new Principal in May 2014. The period from May 2014 has allowed the new management team to establish themselves and outline priorities, initiate cultural change, redefine strategic priorities and tackle the key challenges facing the institution.

These challenges include an unsatisfactory financial health rating by the Skills Funding Agency in November 2014; the need to modernise the curriculum; changes to funding for Certificate in Higher Education (Cert HE) programmes; recruitment and retention of students; timely completion of qualifications; and reviewing and refining examination board processes.

The unsatisfactory financial health rating resulted in the production of a financial recovery plan. This included actions for the reduction and reconfiguration of staffing across the College and drove an initiative to undertake a full curriculum review to remove poorly recruiting and performing courses. The curriculum review process was undertaken in 2014-15 and addressed the College's strategic aim 'to modernise the higher education curriculum and increase flexibility of delivery through partnerships with universities'. As a result, a new higher education curriculum was proposed and agreed by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) and the Governing Executive. The key outcomes were the discontinuation or substantial revision of some courses in response to prolonged low recruitment and/or retention; the establishment of a new curriculum model; the inclusion of a Critical Skills and Personal Development mandatory level 4 module; and the agreement by the College to move to a semester-based timetable from 2016-17. The curriculum review also took account of changes in funding for the Cert HE programmes. New partnerships are being investigated.

The College is seeking to improve recruitment of students by developing coherent progression routes into and through higher education; the creation of a new website in 2015; using a range of recruitment tools, including online and social media; and engaging the services of a specialist recruitment and marketing consultant to thoroughly review and redesign the marketing strategy. To address the challenge of low retention the College has launched a number of initiatives. These include the development of a College-wide intervention strategy and broadening the remit of the Learning Development Team so that they can work directly with academic colleagues to support students on a referral basis. In addition, the College has invested in the development of a new management information system, which will provide a comprehensive tracking tool for student retention and success. Timely completion of qualifications is being addressed through the establishment of a semester-based academic year (to be implemented in 2016-17) and through the development and implementation of a more robust assessment process for students. Issues around the consistent management and administration of examination boards have been addressed through the adoption of a revised and improved process for 2015. This will be subject to further refinement and clarification with the College's main awarding body partner (The Open University) by 2016-17.

The College's main awarding body partner is The Open University (the OU). It was initially approved as a partner institution of the OU in 1992 and this approval is reviewed at three or five-yearly intervals. The most recent institutional review was undertaken in 2011, the year prior to the consolidation of all College provision on one site at Ruskin Hall, and this resulted in initial approval for a three-year period. However, the review panel offered to extend this to a five-year approval on the resubmission of a more critical and inclusive self-evaluation document, and this was achieved. Approval to continue as a partner institution of the OU for a term of five years from September 2012 was agreed.

The College delivers programmes at levels 4 to 7, including Cert HEs, foundation, bachelor's and master's degrees. A distinctive feature of the College's provision is the availability of a number of level 4 Cert HE programmes, which in some instances operate as the first level of a degree programme. This approach to the structure of programmes was originally designed to provide an affordable route into higher education for students without the usual entry requirements for a degree programme. As discussed above, the change in funding for these one-year full-time programmes has been taken into account as part of the curriculum review, with some being phased out (for example the Cert HE in English Studies: Creative Writing and Critical Practice), some remaining as standalone programmes (for example Cert HE History and Cert HE Law) and some still offered as the first year of a degree programme (for example Cert HE Writing for Performance and Cert HE Social and Political Studies).

The College has recently sought partnerships with universities beyond its established relationship with the OU. This has been on the basis of either a validation agreement for the provision of programmes, or under a memorandum of understanding that serves to facilitate the sharing of practice and ideas. As a result of this work, the College delivers a foundation degree in Business and Social Enterprise validated by Oxford Brookes University, and the College regularly shares practice with Newman University, Birmingham. In May 2015 the College engaged in an enhancement activity looking at student support and progression with Newman University, and in July 2015 a developmental meeting was held to scope the implementation of a new virtual learning platform. The relationship with Newman University is confirmed in a memorandum of understanding signed in 2015.

At the IQER in May 2011 the review team made three advisable and two desirable recommendations to the College, and identified nine areas of good practice. The self-evaluation document submitted for this report notes the IQER report and resultant action plan, which was updated in June 2012 and submitted for final consideration to the AQSC in February 2015, and provides some analysis of actions taken as a result. In particular, there is ongoing work to develop a virtual learning environment (VLE) and the College is working with Newman University on a pilot. In 2012, in response to the advisable recommendation to review the means by which the AQSC assures itself of the effectiveness of the College's arrangements for managing quality and standards, the Quality Officer aligned the submission dates for document drafts to the AQSC, and the committee timetable now includes significant external review events. Programme handbooks are produced using a College-devised template and customised to include specific programme information. With respect to desirable recommendations the College is implementing a bespoke management information system and designing a new student tracking process, which will be fully implemented in 2016. An assessment review process has taken place in each of the last two years and students confirmed that, while there is some variation across modules, feedback on their assessed work is generally received in a timely manner.

The self-evaluation document did not directly address progress made against the good practice identified in the last review, but there is evidence of ongoing good practice in areas such as support for student learning and achievement; the rigorous admissions processes that enable students from non-traditional backgrounds to commit themselves to, and access,

higher education; staff development that supports teaching and learning practice; and strong partnership working that facilitates effective work placement opportunities for students.

Explanation of the findings about Ruskin College, Oxford

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.

Explanation of the findings about Ruskin College, Oxford

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 is responsible for delivering programmes in partnership with the OU and Oxford Brookes University. Ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of the programmes offered by the College rests with the validating universities.

1.2   The College develops its programmes in accordance with the validating universities' handbooks; *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ); Subject Benchmark Statements; SEEC Level Descriptors; and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) national standards. Two of the College's programmes validated by the OU are also accredited by PSRBs in addition to the academic validation from the OU. The BA honours degree in Social Work is endorsed by the College of Social Work and approved by the Health Care Professions Council. The BA honours degree in Youth and Community Work is professionally validated by the National Youth Agency.

1.3   The College's use of validating university and external approval processes ensures engagement with the relevant external reference points. These are consistently monitored in accordance with the appropriate academic frameworks and regulations. The College's processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.4   The review team examined a range of documentation including the validating universities' handbooks, the College Quality Handbook (shared with staff on the College

intranet), validation approval letters, College visit and endorsement reports, and programme specifications, and met senior, academic and support staff.

1.5   Effective processes are in place to ensure that higher education programmes take account of relevant external reference points. The College's policies, procedures and practices ensure that the appropriate level of the FHEQ is adhered to. The College develops programmes with reference to the validating universities' handbooks, the FHEQ, SEEC Level Descriptors, and to Subject Benchmark Statements (where appropriate). In addition, PSRB national standards have been met for relevant courses.

1.6   The College development team for the Foundation Degree Writing for Performance consulted the National Association of Writers in Education when developing the course. One member of College staff has experience of developing Subject Benchmark Statements for Youth and Community Work. Other staff have a reasonable awareness of relevant external reference points and are supported in their use by the College's Quality Officer.

1.7   The College develops its programmes in accordance with validating university requirements. College procedures ensure that external reference points such as the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRB guidance, where appropriate, are used effectively to maintain academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8   The College produces academic regulations in the College Regulatory Framework that govern the award of academic credit and qualifications for higher education programmes validated by the OU. These regulations are approved by the OU at validation and may be re-approved at revalidation events. They are monitored in annual monitoring reviews conducted by the OU Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships (CICP), and at quinquennial OU Institutional Review. They are reviewed annually at the College by the AQSC, which has internal oversight of the assurance of quality and standards. The OU introduced overarching regulations for all of its accredited institutions from 2015 and the College has ensured that its regulations are compliant with these.

1.9   Oxford Brookes University provides foundation degree regulations to Associate Colleges electronically. The College and Oxford Brookes University confirm that compliance with these regulations is in place.

1.10   The College Regulatory Framework, governing the award of academic credit and qualifications for OU awards and compliance with Oxford Brookes University regulations, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.11   The review team considered documentation including: the College's Whole College Approach to Curriculum Design document; the College Regulatory Framework; assessment processes for staff and students; programme specifications; external examiner reports; and Annual Programme Evaluation (OU) and Annual Programme Review reports (Oxford Brookes University). The review team also met senior and academic staff.

1.12   The College's higher education academic regulations are reviewed for currency annually by external examiners and the OU CICP, and may be approved by the OU at each programme (re)validation event, and submitted to the OU for approval at Institutional Review.

1.13   The AQSC is responsible for the internal assurance of academic quality and standards, and for ensuring that validating university requirements are met. The membership of this committee includes three curriculum specialists from the College's Governing Executive. The AQSC reports directly to the College's Governing Executive, which has overall responsibility for managing the business of the College. The current version of the College Regulatory Framework was approved by the AQSC and the OU in September 2015.

1.14   The annual monitoring reviews conducted by the OU CICP, annual programme reviews conducted by Oxford Brookes University, and external examiner reports confirm that the College adheres to its own College Regulatory Framework and those regulations provided electronically by the awarding universities.

1.15   The College's use of academic frameworks and its governance arrangements are effective. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.16   The College produces a programme specification and module specifications for each of its programmes, including for the standalone Cert HEs. These are approved by the awarding bodies at validation, and amendments are considered at revalidation, which takes place at least every five years.

1.17   The College also prepares student handbooks, which contain copies of the programme and module specifications. The College's processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.18   The review team explored the operation of the processes by scrutinising a range of documentation including programme specifications, module specifications and student handbooks, and by meeting with staff and students.

1.19   Students whom the review team met confirmed that they are able to access information about their programmes and modules, making it clear what their programmes comprise and how they are assessed.

1.20   The review team noted that a number of the College's programme specifications indicate that the next revalidation is overdue with respect to the start date. The College confirmed that the revalidations have taken place, but that the dates are not updated following the revalidation event.

1.21   The College maintains the necessary definitive records about its programmes of study, and the content of these is updated following revalidation events to ensure that they reflect changes to provision. 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

1.22   The College does not hold degree awarding powers and therefore ultimate responsibility for approving programmes rests with its partner universities. New programmes are designed by the College and are considered and approved internally before validation by the relevant university. The requirements of validating universities in respect of programme approval are made available to College staff through the quality assurance pages of the staff intranet. In 2014-15 the College undertook a whole College review of its higher education curriculum. The review resulted in a key planning document, the Ruskin College Curriculum Review: A Whole College Approach to Curriculum Design 2015-20, which addresses the strategic aim to modernise its curriculum and sets out the College's approach to curriculum design and development. The curriculum review will be repeated every five years.

1.23   Alignment with UK threshold academic standards is secured by reference to the academic standards specified by the relevant university in its regulations. Programme designers make use of external reference points such as the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements, qualification statements and, where appropriate, PSRB guidance. Module and programme learning outcomes and associated assessment strategies are approved at initial validation, and reviewed and revalidated every five years. Both internal and external (university) approval panels include external academic membership. Alignment with threshold standards between validations is monitored by external examiners. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.24   The review team tested how programme approval processes work in practice by scrutinising College and the validating universities' procedures; documents prepared by the College, including validation submissions, programme and module specifications; and reports of internal and university events; and by meeting with staff and students.

1.25   Staff involved in programme development and design make effective use of external reference points to set and maintain academic standards. Although the College's internal processes for programme approval are not fully documented, they are understood by staff and implemented consistently. Programme teams are supported through the development process by the Quality Officer and the Vice-Principal. Staff make extensive use of employer, professional body and external academic advice and guidance to agree academic standards during the development and approval process, and there is explicit mapping to relevant occupational standards. Scrutiny by internal approval panels, which include external academic membership, is thorough and ensures that well developed proposals are presented to university partners for validation. Academic standards are monitored by the Oxford Brookes University link tutor in respect of the FdA in Business and Social Enterprise programme, and for all programmes by external examiners, who receive details of assessment tasks and a sample of assessed work, enabling them to report on academic standards in their annual report.

1.26   The College operates effective processes for programme approval, which ensure that the academic standards of the programmes it delivers meet UK threshold standards and

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the standards set by the relevant awarding university. 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

1.27   Programme and module learning outcomes and associated assessment strategies are developed by the College and approved by its partner universities at validation events. Programme Coordinators agree assessment plans annually, which are designed to ensure assessment of learning outcomes. Assessment tasks are approved by the Oxford Brookes University link tutor and the external examiner for the FdA Business and Social Enterprise programme, and by external examiners for all OU programmes. Assessed work is internally moderated in accordance with the guidance provided by the validating universities. External examiners receive samples of assessed work and attend examination boards. Their annual reports explicitly address whether academic standards have been set and maintained appropriately. Credit is awarded by boards of examiners in accordance with their terms of reference and by their application of the relevant assessment regulations. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.28   The review team explored how the Expectation is met in practice by considering programme documentation, including programme and module specifications, assessment documentation, academic regulations, minutes of examination boards and external examiner reports, and by meeting with staff and students.

1.29   The College states that it meets the academic standards set for each programme through the operation of 'flexible, dynamic and inclusive assessment practice(s)'. The College reviewed its assessment processes in 2013-14 and 2014-15, resulting in revised approaches to, for example, granting extensions, academic malpractice and consideration of mitigating circumstances, feedback to students and the operation of examination boards. Students whom the review team met reported variability in assessment load between modules and programmes. The College is addressing this concern through its Assessment Parity Policy, which sets out assessment norms for different academic levels; the Policy will be applied progressively to new programmes and to existing programmes as they are revalidated.

1.30   Students on OU programmes receive a guide to assessment, which sets out key information about assessment processes, including submission protocols, and procedures for obtaining an extension and consideration of extenuating circumstances. Oxford Brookes University students receive similar information in their programme handbook. Students confirmed that assessment tasks are clearly specified and that assessment criteria are provided. Students with a self-declared specific learning need receive an automatic extension for coursework and additional time in examinations.

1.31   The College has a Plagiarism Policy, which was revised in 2015 to incorporate the Academic Misconduct Benchmarking Research tariff as guided by the OU. Programme-level annual reports provide information on cases of academic misconduct. The College is also required to evaluate how it has dealt with academic misconduct in its Annual Institutional

Overview report to the OU and to provide similar information in its Annual Programme Review report to Oxford Brookes University. An overarching report on academic misconduct cases is also presented to the AQSC. Students confirmed that they are advised from the outset about academic malpractice and plagiarism, and that plagiarism-detection software is used. However, they are not always clear on the similarity thresholds that might trigger an investigation by staff. The Oxford Brookes University moderator, in his 2014-15 term 1 report on the FdA in Business and Social Enterprise, identified a number of instances of high similarity results, including at level 5. The College was unable to confirm whether all these cases had been investigated at the time, but provided evidence that academic malpractice had been in investigated in term 3 of 2014-15 following a change of programme leader, who also now acts as the Academic Conduct Officer. Staff teaching on the programme attended a workshop on academic integrity led by Oxford Brookes University staff in September 2015. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to ensure the full application of Oxford Brookes University's academic misconduct procedures, including relevant staff development activities. These are aimed at ensuring that instances of suspected malpractice are investigated fully and the outcomes recorded.

1.32   The College's arrangements for the assessment of learning outcomes ensure that UK threshold standards, and its partner university standards, are satisfied. The College and Oxford Brookes University recognised weaknesses in the application of the University's academic malpractice procedures, and staff training has been completed. The revision of the College's Plagiarism Policy, including the adoption of the Academic Misconduct Benchmarking Research tariff, and the presentation of an annual report on academic misconduct cases to the AQSC, provides an opportunity for the College to strengthen its approach to academic malpractice. 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

1.33   The Ruskin College Curriculum Review: A Whole College Approach to Curriculum Design 2015-20 document addresses the strategic aim to modernise the curriculum. The College monitors and reviews programmes in accordance with its programme quality cycle, using the procedures and templates of its validating universities. Annual reports are compiled at programme level and, in the case of OU programmes, accompanied by an Annual Institutional Overview report. Annual programme reports incorporate responses to external examiner reports and analyses of student data. Action plans are monitored by programme boards and the AQSC. The College has recently strengthened its approach to annual monitoring through its annual programme enhancement cycle of meetings. Programmes are periodically reviewed and revalidated on a five-year cycle.

1.34   The College's processes for programme monitoring and review would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.35   The review team tested how effectively the College's processes work in practice by examining the documented procedures for programme monitoring and review; annual monitoring reports and plans; and minutes of the AQSC, programme boards and programme enhancement meetings; and by meeting with staff and students.

1.36   The College's curriculum review of higher education processes ensures a comprehensive approach to the evaluation and review of programmes. It provides an opportunity to examine in detail the effectiveness and appropriateness of its provision in a five-year review cycle. The annual monitoring procedures of the validating universities invite programme teams to reflect on student performance, to report on matters that might impact on academic standards, such as academic malpractice, and to respond to external examiner reports. The completed reports are sufficiently detailed to provide the basis for effective monitoring by the College and its validating universities. External examiner comments and recommendations are addressed fully with responses requiring attention reflected in action plans. During 2014-15 the Oxford Brookes University link tutor reported some concerns relating to undemanding assessment tasks, inconsistent marking and over-generous marking in some modules. The external examiner noted in the following year's report that issues relating to marking standards had been addressed.

1.37   Annual reports and resulting action plans are considered and monitored by programme boards. The introduction of termly programme enhancement meetings incorporate elements of performance review, thereby providing additional assurance that any concerns relating to academic standards are being addressed promptly and systematically. The processes for periodic review and revalidation of OU programmes incorporate an evaluation of the continuing effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment strategies in enabling the achievement of learning outcomes and how feedback from the external examiner has been used.

1.38   The College's processes for monitoring and reviewing programmes address whether UK threshold standards are achieved, and the standards of its partner universities

are being maintained. 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

1.39 External and independent expertise is used in a number of ways at the College. Programme and module learning outcomes are approved through revalidation processes up to every five years. External examiners moderate a sample of summative assessment annually and confirm awards at examination boards. OU programmes are reviewed by a panel containing two external members, one nominated by the College and one by the OU. Oxford Brookes University programme revalidation panels must include one external member. The annual monitoring processes are defined by the validating universities, and academic standards are monitored and reviewed at (re)validation events, and through the OU CICP annual monitoring reviews and Oxford Brookes University annual monitoring reviews. The College also adheres to relevant PSRB national standards.

1.40 The College manages placements for the BA honours Social Work degree through the OPLC. The College-based OPLC team meets with external partners on a regular basis to review practice developments, both regionally and locally, and to evaluate placement provision and take action to improve them where necessary. The College has a Memorandum of Cooperation with Oxfordshire County Council to support the Social Work programme and provide placements, and is a member of the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire Social Work Education Group (Social Work Education Group).

1.41 The arrangements for externality allow the Expectation to be met.

1.42 The review team scrutinised external examiner reports and PSRB approval and accreditation reports, considered arrangements with placement providers and met staff, students and employers.

1.43 Employers and stakeholders are fundamental to the design and development of College vocational programmes. During the development phase, focus groups are conducted with employers, including potential placement providers, and, where appropriate, professional body representatives The College has very strong and productive relationships with employers and agencies, which serve both to enrich and to sustain its programmes.

1.44 Locally within Oxfordshire the Youth and Community Work tutors engage with external agencies, in some cases serving as Trustees or Board members, which enhances the local profile of the programme. The programme team provides training for agency colleagues and, in turn, the agencies provide fieldwork opportunities for Ruskin students. Additionally, the OPLC team delivers continuous professional development refresher events for independent Practice Educators.

1.45 The review team met some former students employed in the region who have maintained their links with the College as members of the Practice Assessment Panels and validation focus groups. Employers who met the review team commented very positively

about the open and supportive working relationship with the College and good ongoing collaborative arrangements, and confirmed that their views had influenced the curriculum content and design. In addition, the Business and Social Enterprise team is nurturing relationships with a variety of social enterprises, cooperative and not-for-profit organisations maximise the vocational relevance of the programme.

1.46   For the BA honours in Social Work external Practice Educators are involved in Practice Assessment Panels that assess students' fitness to practise, and there is a strong focus on including external placement providers in College-based training and development opportunities.

1.47   The OPLC ensures that placement provision is robustly managed and maintains the continuing enhancement of the programme through training, review and benchmarking against the professional standards of the Health Care Professions Council. It delivers a recognised continual professional development programme aimed at Social Work Practice Educators, which outlines the professional standards for students on placement.

1.48   The College is a member of the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire Social Work Education Group, which aims to support and enhance the development, delivery and evaluation of social work education collaboratively at all levels across adult services, services for children and families, and mental health services.

1.49   The College responds effectively to external examiner reports, recommendations and associated action plans. It meets a range of PSRB national standards, including those of the National Youth Agency, the College of Social Work, and the Health Care Professions Council, and consulted the National Association of Writers in Education during the development of the Foundation Degree in Writing for Performance.

1.50   A wide range of collaborative work has been conducted by the College including with Oxford Brookes University and Hillcroft College (the National Residential College for Women) to improve inclusive practice in supporting students; Newman University to improve the College's VLE platform; and Empire State College to share curriculum outlines and develop online learning. This complements the good practice identified in Expectation B1 in the extensive use of external expertise in programme design and development.

1.51   The College makes effective use of external and independent expertise in maintaining academic standards, including the use of and response to external examiners, the relevant university annual monitoring processes, and engagement with national PSRB and local and regional employers and professional bodies. 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/or other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

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

1.53   All Expectations in this judgement area are met and all have a low associated risk. The review team has identified no good practice and makes no recommendations. The College has identified a weakness in its application of Oxford Brookes University processes for the identification, management and reporting of cases of academic malpractice, and is taking steps to address this, which the review team affirms.

1.54   The College has effective mechanisms for maintaining academic standards. It has robust processes and mechanisms to ensure that the requirements of validating universities are met, and uses validating university and its own internal systems appropriately in discharging its duties for the maintenance of standards. These systems are as set out in the OU's Institutional Approval and Validation Agreement and the Oxford Brookes University Learning Partnership Agreement.

1.55   Both validating universities provide academic and regulatory frameworks, which the College uses and makes accessible to staff and students where appropriate. A whole College curriculum review took place in 2014-15 and will be repeated on a five-yearly cycle. The curriculum review resulted in the Ruskin College Curriculum Review: A Whole College Approach to Curriculum Design 2015-20 document, which clearly articulates curriculum development and design principles. The College has undertaken a review of its assessment processes in each of the last two academic years. Effective use is made of externals to maintain standards, especially with regard to programme design and development, which is identified as good practice in Expectation B1 and reflected in the use of externality to maintain standards in A3.4.

1.56   The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies 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 All programmes offered by the College are validated by the OU, with the exception of the Foundation Degree in Business and Social Enterprise, which is validated by Oxford Brookes University. The College is responsible for the development and design of its programmes and follows the relevant guidance of the validating university. The documentation required by each validating university varies but includes as a minimum the programme and module specifications.

2.2 During 2014-15 the College undertook a thorough review of its curriculum. The resulting Ruskin College Curriculum Review: A Whole College Approach to Curriculum Design 2015-20 document incorporates a review of the course portfolio and an articulation of key themes and programme design principles. Agreed structural changes include a move from terms to semesters; the use of 30-credit modules; the development of common modules to be used across different programmes; more varied assessment; and a greater emphasis on facilitation of learning. Internal processes include consideration of resource requirements and consultation with university partners, students and employers. Proposals are scrutinised during the development phase by programme boards and the AQSC, both of which include student representation. Internal processes culminate in a preliminary validation event where the proposal is considered by a panel comprising senior College staff and external academic members. Any recommendations made by the panel must be addressed before the final university approval event.

2.3 These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.4 The review team assessed the operation of the College's processes for programme design, development and approval by reviewing the requirements of its validating universities, and the College's guidance to programme teams; reading reports of internal and university validation events; and by meeting with staff, students and employer representatives.

2.5 The responsibility for programme design and development rests with programme teams. These are led by a Programme Coordinator, who is assisted by the Quality Officer and the Academic Coordinator; the process is overseen by the Vice-Principal. The requirements of the relevant validating university are made available to staff on the intranet. The College's guidance is contained in the Ruskin College Curriculum Review: A Whole College Approach to Curriculum Design 2015-20 document. This includes a typical timeline for the revalidation of a programme by the OU (but not for Oxford Brookes University awards) and a template for planning staff requirements. Although the College documentation does not explicitly set out the College's internal processes for the approval of a new programme, nor does it include planning pro forma to identify all the potential resource requirements, staff assured the review team that there is a clear process for the development of new programmes and that the resource implications of new or revised

programmes are scoped, for example the availability of library and Learning Development staff to support weekend delivery.

2.6 During the development phase focus groups are held with current and former students, employers, including potential placement providers, and, where appropriate, professional body representatives. The notes of the meetings are included in the validation documentation. Students and employers who met the review team commented very positively on the consultation process and how their views had influenced the curriculum content. The reports of internal validation events provide evidence of thorough scrutiny of proposals before submission to the validating university. Internal panels include external academic membership, and from 2015-16 students will be present at internal validation/revalidation events. The extensive use of external expertise in programme design and development is **good practice**.

2.7 The College operates clearly understood and rigorous processes for the design, development and approval of new and revised programmes. 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

2.8   The College has defined procedures for the recruitment, selection and admission of students. These are specified in its Admissions Policy for Higher Education Course Applicants. A supplementary policy is in place for applicants to the BA Social Work programme to ensure consistency with Health Care Professions Council standards and guidance from the College of Social Work. The College carries out reviews of its policies periodically, and maintains a policy review schedule.

2.9   The Admissions Policy is supplemented by a Probationary First Term Policy for attendance monitoring, and a Medical Clearance Policy. All offers are conditional on students receiving medical clearance from the College's Medical Adviser.

2.10   Processes for making complaints and appeals about admissions decisions are outlined in the Admissions Policy, including the timeframes in which a response can be expected. The Policy also details the extent of feedback unsuccessful applicants can expect to receive.

2.11   All students are interviewed by two members of staff, including at least one academic from the relevant subject area. Training and guidance on interviewing applicants is provided to staff. The College is in the process of seeking full matrix accreditation for its higher education provision.

2.12   Students completing a Cert HE at the College and wishing to progress internally to one of its level 5 programmes follow an internal re-application process. This involves completing an application form, providing a written statement and attending an interview.

2.13   The Outreach and Recruitment Committee is responsible for the College's marketing, outreach and recruitment activities. The Committee is open to students.

2.14   The policies and procedures in place for managing the recruitment, selection and admission of students would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.15   The review team tested the operation of these policies and procedures by reading minutes from the Outreach and Recruitment Committee, considering the student written submission and student film submitted for the purposes of this report, and meeting with staff and students to discuss the implementation.

2.16   Students whom the review team met described their experiences with admission, and these are in line with the College's policies. Students found the interviews to be helpful. The College confirmed that it can offer telephone interviews for most programmes to overcome burdensome travel requirements on prospective students.

2.17   The College explained that the Medical Clearance Policy is designed to ensure that it is aware of any pre-existing issues, and is therefore in a position to provide effective additional support to students where required. The Policy and entry requirements support the College in providing inclusive learning opportunities.

2.18   The College also actively seeks to identify specific learning needs early in the application process to allow it to make adjustments where necessary and to support students in applying for Disabled Students' Allowances.

2.19   The admissions processes are clearly designed and operated to support and encourage adults with a limited history of formal education and qualifications in applying to study at the College, and to support the College in selecting and admitting students who are able to develop and succeed on their programme and progress to further study or employment. The rigorous admissions processes that enable the College to fulfil its mission to provide educational opportunities to excluded and disadvantaged adults is **good practice**.

2.20   The College has in place robust policies and processes for the recruitment, selection and admission of students. These allow for the selection of students who are able to complete their programme, while underpinning the inclusive nature of the College's mission and values. 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   Learning and teaching themes are incorporated into the College's strategic aims, values and mission. The College has a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, reviewed by the AQSC and Governing Executive, and a supporting action plan for all College provision. Learning and teaching was considered in the recent curriculum review, with a common course framework developed in the resultant Ruskin College Curriculum Review: A Whole College Approach to Curriculum Design 2015-20 document. The Vice-Principal has responsibility for the observation of teaching, learning and assessment of higher education and produces an annual report that is presented to the AQSC and Governing Executive.

2.22   The College recently moved to an ungraded developmental model of observations for all learning and teaching in line with Ofsted practices, with higher education provision adopting a peer-to-peer model that focuses on the sharing of best practice. The process for the observation of teaching, learning and assessment, including specific higher education standards, is detailed for staff and shared on the College intranet.

2.23   All higher education teaching staff are observed, and key strengths, areas to develop and post-development plans for individual staff are produced. The outcomes of lesson observations are linked to staff appraisal. Student evaluation of learning and teaching is collected and discussed at programme boards, and overseen by the AQSC through its annual schedule of business. Student feedback is also collected through the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Cross-College Survey. Staff development events focus on learning and teaching, and are driven by the Vice-Principal's annual report to the AQSC on the observation of teaching, learning and assessment; external examiners' reports; annual programme monitoring reports; and the OU Annual Institutional Overview.

2.24   The College's processes for monitoring and enhancing learning and teaching would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.25   The review team assessed the effectiveness of these processes by reviewing documentation including external examiner reports, and the College's strategy and documented procedures related to learning, teaching and assessment, and met students and academic and senior staff.

2.26   The College strategy to improve teaching and learning is well understood and implemented.

2.27   The system for the observation of teaching, learning and assessment promotes critical self-reflection and improvement, with a direct link between lesson observations and the personal review and staff appraisal process. The Vice-Principal produces an annual report on the observation of teaching, learning and assessment, which is presented to the AQSC, highlighting strengths and areas to develop. This is used to inform future staff development and action plans for managers to follow up. External support for the observation of teaching, learning and assessment was received from Abingdon and

Witney College. In addition, 12 members of staff have been supported by the College to achieve accreditation from the Higher Education Academy.

2.28   Tutors are well supported prior to the observation process and also in implementing any actions following the observation. Analysis of the areas of improvement is gathered centrally so that cross-curriculum staff development can be designed and implemented. A structured staff development and professional enhancement programme is in place. Good practice sessions are held on topics around learning, teaching and assessment, and good practice identified through lesson observations feeds into the staff development programme. The comprehensive support for the development of staff, which delivers a high quality learning experience for students, is **good practice**.

2.29   The higher education observation graded profile in 2014-15 was 91 per cent good or better (18 per cent at outstanding) with only one observation (seven per cent) requiring improvement. Collated external examiner reports indicate high standards of learning, teaching and assessment across College programmes.

2.30   Academic staff at the College are well qualified to deliver at higher education level: 30 per cent hold doctorates, a further 15 per cent are nearing completion of their doctoral studies and one member of staff is being supported by the College to complete a master's degree in education. Some staff teaching on the FdA Writing for Performance are active members of editorial boards and frequently engage in writing for specific audiences in the national press and for broadcasters.

2.31   Students who contributed to the student submission to this report confirm that staff are qualified, knowledgeable in their subject areas, and many have relevant work experience. They are also confident that staff are fully trained. Student survey results regarding the quality of learning and teaching reflect this: for example, in 2014-15 the NSS recorded 91 per cent satisfaction with teaching and on the Cross-College Survey this figure was 96 per cent.

2.32   Students who attend the learning development service tutorials confirm that the service has improved their marks and the way in which they study. This service is embedded in level 4 delivery and it is a requirement from 2015-16 for all level 4 students to access this - a requirement that was supported by students.

2.33   The review and enhancement of learning and teaching is embedded within the College's strategic aims, values and mission. The College has robust internal mechanisms to monitor learning and teaching, and uses feedback from students and external examiners to inform continued development and enhancement. 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

2.34   The College interviews all higher education students either in person or by telephone in accordance with its Admissions Policy, and requires students to complete a medical clearance form so that support arrangements can be made to meet student needs. All students receive an electronic version of the College handbook, which outlines College support services, regulations, policies and procedures. These are available to students on the College intranet. Students also receive more specific course-related handbooks.

2.35   All new and returning students receive a College induction, which is supported by library and College IT systems, inductions and an introduction to plagiarism-detection software. The College has a learning development service to support students with their academic studies. All new students are required to attend an initial 15-minute meeting with a member of the Learning Development Team to identify their personalised future support needs. The College operates a probationary period defined in the Probationary First Term Policy, which aims to support student transitions to their programme of study.

2.36   A designated member of staff is available to support students with disabilities or specific learning needs. Details of this service are shared with students in the College handbook and on the Students Services section of the intranet. The College has a Single Equality Scheme Policy and an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) group, which monitors student recruitment in terms of disability and other protected characteristics. The EDI group reports to the AQSC.

2.37   A tutorial framework is provided to students to supplement their studies and students complete a personal development portfolio. A counselling service is available to students. The College Counsellor submits a termly report to the Vice-Principal and complies an annual report, which is presented to the ACSC.

2.38   The College policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.39   The review team explored the College's processes and approaches to student development and achievement by scrutinising a range of documentation including policies, induction arrangements and action plans, and student surveys, and by meeting with students and staff.

2.40   Students confirmed to the review team that they found the experience of induction to higher education helpful. Induction surveys are conducted to monitor the student experience and a resultant developmental plan is created. Student feedback regarding induction is positive.

2.41   Students are given the College and course handbooks on a memory stick during induction. Academic support is delivered through the learning development service and in small group academic tutorials.

2.42   All higher education students are assigned an academic personal tutor on commencement of their course and engage in regular reviews with their tutors. The role of the tutor is to guide and support the student academically, to encourage reflection, and to promote personal and professional development. Tutorial reviews are recorded and

monitored, with each student having a minimum of three one-to-one sessions per academic year. An effective course-level tutorial framework supports students to progress and achieve.

2.43   Pastoral support is also provided by personal tutors. Students find the one-to-one tutoring and class discussions very useful. Staff adopt an open door policy for students, and the support and guidance provided is highly valued by students.

2.44   The Learning Development Team provides academic support, including study skills sessions, and works with students and tutors to ensure that students reach their potential. An annual report to the AQSC analyses service use and includes a development plan for the next academic year. The College has recently introduced learning development mini sessions, which are mandatory for all level 4 students in their first weeks at the College, and has extended this service to block release students. Students can also book 50-minute one-to-one appointments, which are also available during holidays and reading weeks. Telephone and email appointments are also offered. Referrals can be made where residential students encounter issues that may affect their academic progress. These initiatives support student engagement with learning development service from the start of their studies, and are considered by the College to be a positive factor in improving student retention and achievement. For example, overall retention on the Cert HE programmes has risen from 82 per cent in 2014 to 86 per cent in 2015. Students comment positively on the support they receive from learning development tutors, including on topics such as the challenges of returning to learning and on the good availability of the Learning Development Team. The personalised support provided by the learning development service, which enables student achievement, is **good practice**.

2.45   In addition to the mandatory learning development mini sessions, the College employs a number of other strategies to support students in the early stages of their academic studies. These include the use of the Probationary First Term Policy to support student transitions into higher education; the Medical Clearance Policy, which enables effective support to be provided early to students with a pre-existing identified need; and the self-declaration process for students with specific learning needs, which provides an automatic extension for coursework and additional time in examinations. The College has also recently introduced a College-wide retention strategy to provide timely intervention for students struggling academically, particularly in the early stages of their course. The effective arrangements to monitor and review the early student experience, which support retention and achievement, is **good practice**.

2.46   Support mechanisms for work placements are effective and are detailed in the placement handbooks.

2.47   The College monitors the student journey effectively in terms of EDI through its annual monitoring processes. The EDI subcommittee, which is chaired by a student, supports the development of inclusive practice in all College activities, and reports to the AQSC.

2.48   From a welfare perspective all students with a disability or support need have access to a designated person for support, as detailed in the College handbook. The progress of these students is monitored and appropriate support is in place as required. The outcomes for these students are considered in programme boards.

2.49   Students note that they have access to the University of Oxford Bodleian Library, as well as resources at the College. Students feel that College library staff are helpful, and report that the small class sizes and the open door policy of staff help them to feel confident in seeking further clarification during classes. Students also appreciate the College counselling service.

2.50   In August 2015 the College adopted an E-Learning Strategy. It is currently developing a new VLE platform and is working with Newman University to enable this. In November 2015 a development plan for the VLE was shared with AQSC members to update them with progress. This development work is ongoing.

2.51   The College operates effective processes for enabling student development and achievement. 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

2.52　　The College has a Student Voice Strategy, which lists strategic themes for the engagement of students. Based on these themes, the College produces action plans. Progress on actions is monitored by the Student Experience Subcommittee of the AQSC, which is chaired by a student and which meets termly.

2.53　　Students and staff are given the opportunity to discuss curriculum design, quality assurance and student experience issues at termly student conference events. Any issues from these are addressed using action plans. The College also involves students in the design and approval of programmes, and student representatives attend validation and revalidation events.

2.54　　Each programme has an elected class representative at each level whom students may approach with any issues or feedback. Representatives are expected to attend the programme board, and are invited to provide comments on proposed changes to their programmes. Representatives receive training and guidance about their role and what is expected of them.

2.55　　The College collects feedback on modules through discussion and surveys. Tutors provide written responses to module surveys, and the College produces a You Said, We Did poster to highlight actions being taken in response to student feedback.

2.56　　Feedback from the module surveys is also considered at the relevant programme board, and student feedback is included in annual monitoring reports sent to the validating universities.

2.57　　The College's policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.58　　The review team considered the College's student engagement strategies, policies and procedures, and met students and staff to discuss the effectiveness of their operation.

2.59　　The College places emphasis on its student engagement processes. To raise awareness of the opportunities available, it provides copies of the '7 Ways to Have Your Say' poster as flyers to new students at enrolment.

2.60　　A number of students whom the review team met confirmed that they had attended a range of committees. These included programme boards, the Student Experience Subcommittee, the AQSC, the student conference, the Governing Executive and Council. Several confirmed that they had been involved in programme design and approval.

2.61　　In addition to module evaluation questionnaires students are invited to discuss the module in groups in the absence of staff, and record majority decisions as feedback. Module staff then prepare responses to this feedback, and post them on the intranet.

2.62　　Staff have an open door policy, and students are welcome to speak to staff with any queries or feedback about their educational experience. Students whom the review team met confirmed that they had provided informal feedback directly to module staff.

2.63   To encourage representation standby class representatives are in place, and can attend meetings and the student conference if the class representatives are unavailable. Class representatives are members of the Student Experience Subcommittee, but any student is welcome to attend the meetings. A student from each programme board is a member of the AQSC.

2.64   The College makes use of focus groups to identify and address particular areas of concern. A site for student representation is being developed as part of the new VLE, which will contain contact details for all class representatives.

2.65   Students whom the review team met were very positive about the range of mechanisms the College uses to engage them as partners, and to allow them to provide feedback both formally and informally with the confidence that it will be taken seriously and acted upon. The College provides an extensive number of opportunities for student engagement at all levels. The strategic approach to engaging students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience is **good practice**.

2.66   The College has, and publicises, a wide range of opportunities for students to engage as partners. Students at the College are aware of, and involved in, many of these 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

2.67   The College states that the purpose of assessment is to measure learning, provide feedback to students, and enable staff to monitor student progress and general quality. Students are assessed in a variety of ways, with most assessments taking the form of coursework. Examinations are not used routinely as a form of assessment except for the Cert HE in Law, where students tend to progress to qualifying law degree programmes where they will normally encounter examinations. Assessment of placement and field work activities form an important element of the Social Work and Youth and Community Work programmes. College staff are responsible for designing assessments, and for marking and internal moderation of students' work. Practice educators are involved in the assessment of students' fitness to practise on the BA Social Work programme and are trained to undertake this role. The assessment process for OU students is set out in the Assessment Process for Students document, which is incorporated in student handbooks along with assessment regulations. Oxford Brookes University students receive a programme handbook that includes equivalent information about assessment processes. There are policies and procedures in place to request an extension and for consideration of mitigating circumstances and, for students with declared special learning needs, adjustments to assessment processes. Students should receive feedback on their work within 15 working days. The College has a policy for the recognition of prior learning.

2.68   Examination boards are held at the College. The examination board for the FdA in Business and Social Enterprise is held termly and chaired by the Executive Faculty Dean of Oxford Brookes University. OU examination boards meet twice a year and are chaired by a member of the College's senior academic staff and attended by the external examiner and academic reviewer. There is a tiered structure for the BA in Social Work, with a Practice Assessment Panel feeding into the examination board.

2.69   The processes for assessment would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.70   The review team tested how the College meets the Expectation in practice by considering the policies and procedures of the College and its validating universities, programme and module specifications, samples of assignment briefs and assessed work, and reports from university links and external examiners, as well as by talking to staff and students.

2.71   The College reviewed its assessment processes in 2013-14 and again in 2014-15, resulting in revised and updated policies and procedures. Students confirmed that assessment tasks are well specified and are clear on what they need to demonstrate to achieve higher marks. The procedures for obtaining an extension or for consideration of mitigating circumstances are accessible and well understood. Students are aware of the deadline for the receipt of feedback but noted variable adherence to the deadline by staff. The College is aware of this variability and of students' concerns and is seeking to improve turnaround times generally through staff development and use of electronic feedback mechanisms, and, on specific courses, through targeted actions attached to the annual monitoring reports. Staff demonstrated limited awareness of the application of the College's

policy for the recognition of prior learning to students who may have achieved higher education credits or equivalent experience prior to admission. It was noted that very few students presented with a profile where the policy would be applicable, but that such learning would be taken into account were this the case. Procedures for marking and internal moderation are operated consistently. The College is addressing issues of the variability in assessment load between modules and programmes through its Assessment Parity Policy. External examiners comment positively about the design of assessment tasks, the thoroughness of marking and the quality of feedback to students. Although communication between the College and external examiners is generally good, instances of poor communication are addressed promptly and effectively. The College has overhauled its examination board practices for OU programmes in response to concerns raised by the OU in 2013-14, and further work is ongoing to ensure the effective operation and timing on boards when semesters are introduced in 2016-17.

2.72   The College operates equitable, valid and reliable assessment processes, which are reviewed and revised in response to internal and external monitoring and review. 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

2.73   The College follows the policies of its validating universities in the nomination and appointment of external examiners.

2.74   For programmes validated by the OU the College is responsible for nominating examiners in accordance with the regulations contained within the OU Handbook for Validated Awards. External examiner nominations are approved by the Quality Officer, at programme boards (attended by students), at the AQSC and by the OU.

2.75   For Oxford Brookes University-validated awards, the University nominates and appoints the external examiner.

2.76   External examiners moderate a sample of summative assessment annually and confirm awards at the examination boards. The names and institutions of the external examiners for each programme are published in the College's programme handbooks. External examiner reports are collated and stored by the Quality Officer on the College intranet for staff and students to access.

2.77   For OU programmes the Programme Coordinator responds to the external examiner report, and correspondence with the examiner includes a summary of actions required, actions taken, and points forwarded. External examiner reports are collated and presented to the AQSC, and OU external examiner reports are summarised in the Annual Institutional Overview.

2.78   For programmes validated by Oxford Brookes University the University compiles the response to the report and provides a copy to the College. This report is collated with those for OU programmes and is presented at the AQSC.

2.79   The processes for external examination would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.80   The review team explored external examining by reviewing documentation including external examiner reports, the College intranet, AQSC minutes and relevant validating university handbooks. The review team also met senior and academic staff and students.

2.81   External examiners are required to attend the examination board that meets twice a year to decide on the progression and completion outcomes of students at the College. Examination board processes and terms of reference are documented and available for staff on the College intranet. Upon completion of the board's deliberations the external examiner signs the standard forms to endorse the outcomes of the assessment processes they have been appointed to scrutinise. External examiner comments, including areas of good practice and areas to develop, are included in annual monitoring reports.

2.82   Following the examination boards external examiners submit comprehensive reports annually. This is done directly to the university concerned, and a copy is provided to the College. The reports are responded to individually by Programme Coordinators, and the Quality Officer collates external examiner reports and presents them to the AQSC annually.

2.83   The College responds effectively to external examiner reports, and College staff, led by the Quality Officer, target issues previously raised by external examiners. The College Vice-Principal considers comments from external examiners for annual programme

enhancement, to develop programmes and College staff through staff development activities. External examiner reports are stored on the College intranet for staff and students to access, although students are unaware of how and where to access them.

2.84   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

2.85   Programmes are monitored annually in accordance with the requirements of the two validating universities, using their templates. Annual monitoring reports are informed by the outcomes of student surveys, reports from university links and external examiner reports. The annual monitoring reports incorporate an action plan for the forthcoming academic year. The reports are considered, and action plans monitored, by programme boards and the AQSC. The College prepares an Annual Institutional Overview report for the OU. The College has recently introduced termly programme enhancement meetings to strengthen management oversight of programmes. The curriculum review carried out in 2014-15 incorporated a review of the College's portfolio. It is intended that the review will be repeated on a five-year cycle. Individual programmes are periodically reviewed every five years by the validating universities.

2.86   The arrangements for programme monitoring and review would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.87   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's monitoring and review processes by reviewing relevant policies and procedures, reading annual monitoring reports, the minutes of programme boards and College committees, and reports of revalidation events, and by talking to staff and students.

2.88   The College's approach to monitoring and review is encapsulated in the Higher Education Programme Quality Cycle. It provides a summary of the key activities and the scrutiny provided by programme boards, the AQSC and programme enhancement meetings. In compiling the annual reports programme teams consider feedback from students, in the form of module evaluations and focus groups, and the results from the Cross-College Survey and the NSS, as well as feedback from the external examiner(s) associated with the programme and university links. The report for BA Social Work also takes into account the outcomes of the Quality Assurance of Practice Learning Survey of students, practice educators and practice supervisors. The annual reports prepared by the College meet the requirements of its partner universities; action plans identify and address issues and are monitored effectively throughout the year by programme boards and the AQSC. The introduction of programme enhancement meetings provides additional assurance that action plans are being progressed. The College draws on programme-level reviews to compile the Annual Institutional Overview report for the OU. The resulting institution-level action plan is considered at the AQSC and key points are used to inform the staff development plan.

2.89   The College's preparations for periodic review and revalidation of programmes are thorough, and involve current and former students and employers. The College's review of its course portfolio in 2014-15 has resulted in the phasing out of a number of courses, primarily because of poor recruitment or retention. When programmes are closed there is an exit strategy developed by the programme team and overseen by College management. Students are given a target deadline by which they should complete their studies.

2.90   The College consistently operates effective processes for the monitoring and review of programmes, which include internal and external stakeholders. 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

2.91   The College Complaints Procedure is published in the College Handbook, which is available on the intranet. The Complaints Procedure encourages students to attempt to resolve complaints informally in the first instance, but details the processes required to make a formal complaint.

2.92   The process for filing an academic appeal for students on programmes validated by the OU is set out in the College Regulatory Framework, copies of which are provided in programme handbooks. Students on Oxford Brookes University programmes follow the University's appeals process.

2.93   The Complaints Procedure sets out timescales in which complainants can expect to receive responses, and how to progress their complaint further, including to the validating University for their programme, if they are not satisfied with the outcome.

2.94   The College monitors complaints and appeals as part of its annual monitoring processes with its validating universities. The College's complaints and appeals processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.95   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's academic appeal and student complaint procedures by reviewing the policies, reading agreements with validating universities, scrutinising committee papers, and holding discussions with College students and staff.

2.96   Students have been made aware of the procedures for complaints and academic appeals, and these can be found on the College website and intranet. Students whom the review team met were aware of the option to progress complaints and academic appeals to the relevant university for their programme.

2.97   Staff handling complaints and academic appeals have access to support from Academic Coordinators and the Vice-Principal where needed. The Principal has the overall responsibility to ensure that complaints are seen through to completion, and an overview report of academic appeals, complaints and misconduct cases is produced and considered at the AQSC.

2.98   The College's procedures do not inform students that they may refer their complaint or academic appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). However, students are referred to the procedures of the relevant university, which do contain reference to the OIA. The College is currently in discussion with its validating universities to clarify the procedures for referring complaints to the OIA under collaborative provision agreements.

2.99   The procedures for making academic appeals and student complaints, which are in place and operated effectively, are fair, accessible and timely. The College's approach to the oversight of appeals and complaints, through its regular consideration of appeals and complaints data at the AQSC, and the production of documentation for review by its validating universities, demonstrates that it enables enhancement. 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

2.100   The BA honours degree Social Work, BA honours degree Youth and Community Work, Foundation Degree Writing for Performance, and Foundation Degree Business and Social Enterprise courses provide placement opportunities for students. As part of the curriculum review the College has decided to include work placements as mandatory on all future new and revalidated programmes.

2.101   Students on the BA honours degree Social Work course undertake mandatory placements at level 5 (70 days) and level 6 (100 days), and are assessed by practice educators with reference to the Professional Capabilities Framework and Standards of Proficiency. All BA honours degree Social Work placements are managed by the OPLC in accordance with the Placement Handbook. The OPLC team meet with external partners on a regular basis to review practice developments both regionally and locally, and to evaluate placement provision and take action to improve it where necessary. The College has a Memorandum of Cooperation with Oxfordshire County Council to support the Social Work programme and provide placements, and is a member of the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire Social Work Education Group (Social Work Education Group). There are formal agreements for all work placement providers.

2.102   Students on the BA honours degree in Youth and Community Work undertake a total of 800 hours' mandatory fieldwork placement across their three-year programme, under the supervision of a College-based fieldwork coordinator as detailed in the BA honours degree in Youth and Community Work Placement Handbook.

2.103   On the Foundation Degree Writing for Performance course students undertake mandatory placement for a term at level 5. The Placement Coordinator is responsible for the management of placements but the onus is on the student to establish these.

2.104   The Foundation Degree Business and Social Enterprise course provides level 5 students with an opportunity to conduct a compulsory work-based project in consultation with an employer.

2.105   A range of the College's programmes are mapped to PSRB national standards. The BA honours degree in Social Work programme is approved by the Health Care Professions Council, and endorsed by the now-disbanded College of Social Work. The BA honours degree in Youth and Community Work programme is validated by the National Youth Agency, with plans to expand with endorsement by the Endorsement and Quality Standards Board. During the development of the Foundation Degree Writing for Performance course the team consulted with the National Association of Writers in Education.

2.106   The processes for managing higher education provision with others would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.107   To test the effectiveness of these processes the review team examined documentation including agreements, handbooks and placement audit reports,

and met staff, employers and students. The team also met employers who engage regularly with the College and the OPLC.

2.108   The College has very strong and productive relationships with employers and agencies, which serve both to enrich and to sustain its programmes.

2.109   The review team met former students employed in the region who have maintained their links with the College as members of the Practice Assessment Panel and validation focus groups. In addition, practice educators are involved in Practice Assessment Panels, which assess professional practice, and there is a strong focus on including external placement providers in College-based training and development opportunities.

2.110   Employers who met the review team commented very positively about open and supportive working relationships with the College, and good ongoing collaborative arrangements.

2.111   The College resources placement provision with dedicated members of staff: two members of staff located in the OPLC for the BA honours degree in Social Work, and a 0.4 full-time equivalent member of staff for the BA honours degree in Youth and Community Work programme. Additionally, the OPLC team delivers continuous professional development refresher events for independent practice educators. To address the needs of local employers the College is validating and developing a professionally endorsed Practice Educator Professional Standards programme, aimed at qualified social workers who wish to act as practice educators for student social workers when on placement.

2.112   The College requires agencies providing placements to complete audit forms prior to placement commencement and in year. In addition, at the end of each placement, students and practice educators are required to complete Quality Assurance in Practice Learning audit forms, which are collated and analysed by the OPLC and reported to the Practice Assessment Panel and BA honours degree in Social Work team.

2.113   The OPLC ensures that placement provision is robustly managed and exists to maintain the continuing enhancement of the programme through training, review and benchmarking against the professional standards of the Health Care Professions Council.

2.114   Programme teams seek placement opportunities for students with suitable organisations. Programmes that offer placements provide students and those who supervise the placement with a specific handbook for that aspect of their programme. All students engaging in work placement, work awareness and fieldwork do so within an ethical framework that takes issues of safeguarding and whistleblowing seriously and professionally.

2.115   The College is a member of the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire Social Work Education Group, which maintains a register of qualified practice educators in the region and which seeks to support and enhance the development, delivery and evaluation of social work education collaboratively at all levels and across all social work services. The BA honours degree in Youth and Community Work tutors engage with local external agencies, for example by serving as trustees or board members. The Business and Social Enterprise Team is seeking to work with a number of local organisations and is developing networks of contacts.

2.116   Links with agencies are enhanced through the engagement of former students employed in the region, who maintain productive links with the College.

2.117   The College manages higher education provision with others effectively. Strong partnerships and highly collaborative working practices exist locally and regionally.

Relationships are open and supportive, with good use made of practice educators to enhance the experience of students on placement. Student, employer and staff feedback is all highly positive. The strong and effective partnership working that supports the provision of high quality and effective placement opportunities for students is **good practice**.

2.118   The effective management of higher education provision with others, and the maintenance of strong local and regional working relationships with professional agencies and bodies, enable the review team to conclude that 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

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

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.121   All Expectations in this judgement area are met and all levels of risk are low. The review team makes no recommendations or affirmations to the College.

2.122   The review team has identified seven areas of good practice in the College's management of the quality of learning opportunities for its higher education students. In summary, these include the use of external expertise in programme design and development; rigorous admissions processes; staff development that supports high quality teaching and learning practice; the personalised support provided by the learning development service and the effective arrangements to support students early in their educational experience; the strategic engagement with students as partners in their learning; and the strong and effective partnership working that supports work placement opportunities.

2.123   The College has as its mission the desire to provide educational opportunities to excluded and disadvantaged adults. It recruits students with often very low or no prior academic qualifications and many with poor previous experiences of education. It offers a range of programmes, with structures that, in some cases, enable students to achieve in bite-sized chunks and leave with a qualification that accredits their learning experience. Staff are well qualified and have vocationally relevant knowledge and skills, and many students have access to vocational placements. These enable the development of students' employability and interpersonal skills, which facilitate their entry to the workplace following completion of their programme of study. Standards of teaching, learning and support are consistently commented on favourably by students and external stakeholders, such as external examiners and employers. A number of strategies have been employed to improve retention and achievement data, and the College is able to achieve its mission through the good practice it demonstrates in managing student learning opportunities.

2.124   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 publishes its mission statement, values and strategies on its website, and on the intranet. It provides information about available courses online, as well as through a printed prospectus.

3.2 Student handbooks are provided digitally to students on enrolment; electronic copies remain available on the intranet and hard copies are provided in the library for students to access. This includes programme handbooks, as well as the general College Handbook.

3.3 The College Charter, which sets out what students can expect from the College, is provided to students as part of the College Handbook. The College reviews information on its website and in its prospectus annually, taking into account feedback from student surveys, complaints and academic appeals.

3.4 The College is responsible for issuing transcripts to completing students; degree certificates are produced separately by the validating university. The Academic Registrar and Quality Officer are responsible for the oversight of transcript production, course specification approval, and developing academic policy and procedure.

3.5 The College has procedures for information management, which include processes for the production of programme information and managing website content. The College's internal Quality Handbook is available to all staff on the intranet. The College's processes allow the Expectation to be met.

3.6 The review team considered the College's documentation, including relevant policies and procedures, programme information and sample transcripts. The team also met staff and students to test the effectiveness of its approach to the management of information.

3.7 The College has produced a template for programme handbooks containing general information, to which specific programme information is added. This enables it to provide more consistent information to students. Students whom the review team met are positive about the amount and quality of information provided to them as current students, and confirmed that the information is accurate and mostly up to date. The College produces a programme specification for each of its programmes; however, the dates of these are not consistently updated following programme revalidation events (see Expectation A2.2).

3.8 Students who contributed to the student submission to this report were not aware of the College Charter. The College intends to publicise it further by attaching a copy of the Charter to offer letters sent to students and by discussing it at induction.

3.9 The College's digital Quality Handbook is available on the intranet and provides information about quality processes, guidelines and requirements from the College's validating universities, and meeting minutes from the AQSC. Staff confirmed that they use the intranet pages and seek advice from the Quality Officer where necessary.

3.10   The College website has been redesigned recently, and students consider the new website to be an improvement on the older version. The College is in the process of implementing a new VLE, with the aim of providing information to students in a more easily accessible format, a change welcomed by students.

3.11   The majority of students whom the review team met stated that they were provided with detailed and helpful information about the programmes on offer prior to applying, and were able to access module specifications, reading lists and videos. Some students indicated that they had applied to a two or three-year programme, but had been informed at interview that they must enrol on a one-year Cert HE, and were required to re-apply if they wished to continue to level 5 of the originally advertised programme. The College confirmed that for some of its programmes students are initially enrolled on a Cert HE and that, where this is the case, the structure of the programme and the process for re-applying to continue to the next level is made clear at interview.

3.12   The College website states this requirement for one of its programmes but not another. The College's UCAS entries list the programmes as a two-year FdA and a three-year BA, making no reference to the requirement to re-apply to progress to level 5 of the programme. The 2016-17 College Prospectus does not consistently include information about the Cert HE or the requirement to re-apply to progress. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure that all media accurately describes qualifications on which students are enrolled.

3.13   The OU Handbook for Validated Awards requires printed public materials referring to the OU produced by the College to be submitted to the OU for approval and sign-off prior to publication. The College had previously provided copies of its prospectus to the OU for approval, but has not done so since March 2014 when the 2014-15 prospectus was copied to the OU. The College stated that this is due to a change in personnel and the fact that the OU has not requested marketing information to be sent to it. The OU confirmed that partners are expected to provide it with publicity materials for approval prior to publication, in order that they may check that the information on validated provision is appropriate. Seeking approval of public information by the validating University is not currently embedded in the College's information management procedures and timelines for production of course information. The review team **recommends** that the College meet the requirements of university partners for the approval of public information on learning opportunities, and reflects these in relevant College policies and procedures.

3.14   The review team noted that a number of the academic transcripts issued by the College on behalf of the OU incorrectly display the College as the awarding institution, with the name and status of the institution delivering studies on page 1 shown as 'n/a'. These same transcripts show on page 2 the institution responsible for programme delivery as the College. The College confirmed that it is responsible for issuing transcripts. These are signed by the College's Academic Registrar and certified by the College, which has responsibility for ensuring their accuracy. Sample copies of transcripts are sent to the validating university as part of annual monitoring documentation, and the College has not been informed of any errors on the transcripts. However, given the importance of the academic transcript in providing a trustworthy record of a student's achievements, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure that academic transcripts issued by the College consistently state the correct awarding and delivery institutions.

3.15   The College has a number of processes in place for the production and management of information for students at each stage in the student lifecycle, as well as internal documentation to support quality assurance. However, due to issues surrounding the trustworthiness of public programme information and transcript production, and the fact that the College provided no plans to address these issues, the review team concludes that

the Expectation is not met. The level of risk is moderate, as the issues are confined to public information provided to prospective and completing students and do not therefore present a serious risk to the overall management of information.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

3.17   The Expectation in this judgement area is not met and the level of risk is moderate. This review team identifies no good practice or affirmations and makes three recommendations to the College on managing the quality of information.

3.18   There are a number of inaccuracies and inconsistencies in public-facing information about the structure of programmes and the qualifications on which prospective students will be enrolled. While information on programmes of study is made clear to students at interview, the marketing publicity on the College website, in its higher education prospectus and on the UCAS website is inconsistent and could be interpreted as misleading. The review team makes a recommendation to ensure that all media accurately describe qualifications on which students are enrolled.

3.19   The College's main validating university (the OU) requires its partners to send all publicity materials to them for approval prior to publication. This has taken place in the past but has not happened since March 2014. The review team recommends that the College meets the requirements of university partners for the approval of public information on learning opportunities, and reflects these in relevant College policies and procedures. Additionally, examples of academic transcripts provided to the review team wrongly identify the College as the awarding institution; the review team recommends that the College ensure that transcripts consistently state the correct awarding and delivery institutions.

3.20   Information for current students and staff is accessible, trustworthy and fit for purpose. Issues with information are confined to two specific audiences - prospective and completing students - and the level of risk to the management of information is therefore moderate.

3.21   The review team concludes that the quality of information about learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** 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 states that its approach to enhancement is 'values-based, strategic, holistic and continuous', which is demonstrated through its strategic plan for 2015-20 and its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. During 2015 the College defined its core values as: Students First; Respect; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Excellence; and Pride, Celebration and Loyalty. Enhancement of student learning opportunities is enabled through the College's strategic and operational planning processes and captured in the strategic action plan. Enhancement initiatives are identified and executed under the strategic leadership of the Principal and Vice-Principal. Enhancement starts with the College's quality assurance procedures; matters requiring improvement are identified through a range of mechanisms. Issues requiring attention and action are reported to the AQSC and the Governing Executive. The College's approach to enhancement would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.2 The review team tested the College's approach to enhancement by reviewing relevant strategies, operational plans, reports to and minutes of the AQSC and the Governing Executive, and annual monitoring reports, and by holding meetings with staff, students and employers.

4.3 The College has effective strategic and operational planning processes, which enable it to take deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The strategic action plan is clearly linked to each strategic aim and identifies the key targets and actions, key performance indicators, responsibilities and target completion dates. Effective monitoring by managers and College committees is facilitated by a traffic light rating and a commentary column in the action plan. The College's quality assurance procedures ensure that opportunities for enhancement are identified and acted upon. The College makes good use of a wide range of evidence to drive its enhancement agenda. This includes student input through module reviews, student surveys and the participation of student representatives at programme boards, the student conference and College committees; the outcomes of teaching, learning and assessment observations; feedback from employers, external examiners and validating university contacts; and the reflections of programme teams at programme boards and through annual monitoring and periodic review. Action plans are monitored effectively by programme boards. The AQSC and the Governing Executive receive regular reports on enhancement activities from the Vice-Principal. In June 2015 the College introduced termly programme enhancement meetings as a means of strengthening the monitoring of programmes through in-year reviews, with the aim of embedding a commitment to continuous review of provision. The Vice-Principal attends all programme boards and chairs AQSC and programme enhancement meetings. This enables him to identify programme-specific and College-wide issues and respond promptly through management action between meetings.

4.4 Good practice is identified through the observation of the teaching, learning and assessment process and annual monitoring reports, and shared by way of continuous professional development events led by College staff. The College has developed effective partnerships with its validating universities and employers, and is making increasing use of external contacts and networks to inform and support key development activities, such as teaching observations, inclusive practice, assessment, student services and the

development of the new VLE. The College has an ongoing partnership with Empire State College in New York for the development of online and blended approaches to the delivery of labour studies programmes.

4.5   The College has demonstrated its capacity to review its strategies, operations and procedures in response to external and internal stimuli, and to engage its staff fully in the process. Notable achievements include the curriculum review, which has resulted in a reshaping of the higher education portfolio, and the development of a new curriculum model; reviews of assessment practices leading to revised policies, procedures and guidance; and a strategic approach to engaging students in quality assurance and enhancement, which the review team identifies as **good practice** (see Expectation B5 for further details). Students express some concerns about information sharing and communication by the College, but acknowledge recent improvements. Student voice initiatives include the introduction of a termly student conference, the use of student focus groups to examine aspects of the student experience, and the use of You Said, We Did feedback mechanisms. Specific improvements to the student experience include an enhanced role for the learning development service and the introduction of 15-minute individual sessions with all new level 4 students; automatic extensions for students with declared dyslexia; the use of electronic mechanisms to improve the timeliness of feedback on assessment to students; and improved social and refreshment facilities.

4.6   The College takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities; the approach is strategic and systematic. 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

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

4.8   The Expectation on the enhancement is met and the level of risk is low. This review team makes no recommendations or affirmations, and identifies no good practice specific to enhancement. There is a link to the good practice in student engagement identified in Expectation B5.

4.9   The College takes deliberate steps to enhance the learning opportunities of its higher education students, through activities such as the curriculum review, reviews of assessments practices and through student feedback mechanisms. Good practice is shared by the observation of teaching, learning and assessment observations and a structured staff development programme. The College also makes effective use of external expertise to enhance learning opportunities.

4.10   The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The College has taken deliberate steps at a strategic level to enhance employability and the development of associated skills for its students.

5.2   The College has strong and productive relationships with employers and agencies, which serve both to enrich and to sustain its programmes. Employers, service users, agency colleagues and the placement experience all contribute to the strengthening and continued relevance of College programmes, and are fundamental in the design and development of the vocational programmes. External stakeholders include representatives from bodies that provide work placements for students. External practice educators are involved with practice assessment panels to assess professional practice, and there is a strong focus on including external placement providers in College-based training and development opportunities.

5.3   Placements are managed effectively by the College-based OPLC. Staff from the OPLC regularly meet with external partners to discuss practice developments both locally and more widely. The College also discusses local and national developments through the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire Social Work Education Group and at local programme meetings.

5.4   The College consults with a range of PSRBs, including the National Association of Writers in Education for the development of the Foundation Degree Writing for Performance programme, and has endorsement and approval from the National Youth Agency, the College of Social Work, and the Health Care Professions Council, which ensures that programmes of study meet relevant professional requirements. The Youth and Community Work tutors engage with local external agencies, for example by serving as trustees or board members.

5.5   Programme teams have formed partnerships in a number of local and regional social enterprises to provide students with experiences within these organisations and their activities first hand. The Business and Social Enterprise Team is seeking to work with a number of local organisations and developing networks of contacts.

5.6   Links with agencies are enhanced through the engagement of former students employed in the region, who maintain their links with the College by being members of the Practice Assessment Panel, and on the validation focus groups and academic appeal panels. Students and employers who met the review team commented very positively on the consultation process and how their views influenced curriculum content.

5.7   The College reports positive comments specific to professional practice from a range of external examiners, including those for the Writing for Performance, Social Work, and Youth and Community Work programmes.

5.8   Student employability was a focus of the recent whole College curriculum review. One of the outcomes of the curriculum review is that all new programmes will be required to include a work placement and a mandatory Critical Skills and Personal Development module to enhance employability. Existing programmes will be subject to these requirements upon revalidation.

5.9   Links with employers and external agencies are strong, with effective communications and working relationships evident. Students highly value placement opportunities, which are managed effectively by the OPLC and College staff. External examiners recognise good professional practice across programmes of study.

The College's engagement with employers and agencies facilitates the development of employability and associated skills for its students.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 30 to 33 of the Higher Education Review handbook.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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