



# Higher Education Review of Salford City College

November 2014

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Salford City College. The review took place from 18-20 November 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Chris Maguire
- Ms Francine Norris
- Ms Laura Seward (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

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

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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

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

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

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

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Salford City College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Salford City College.

- The development of a well considered portfolio of programmes which reflects local employment needs and supports widening participation (Expectation B1).
- The involvement of students in the interview and appointment of teaching staff (Expectation B5).
- The systematic process for responding to external examiners' reports, addressing issues raised, and drawing out good practice (Expectation B7).
- The robust annual process for the monitoring and evaluation of programmes and the comprehensive self-evaluation report and action plan (Expectation B8).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Salford City College.

By June 2015:

- to increase the involvement of students in the formal quality assurance and enhancement processes (Expectation B5, Enhancement)
- to draw together the various improvement activities to provide a more strategic and targeted approach to enhancement (Enhancement).

### Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The actions being taken to support and enhance students' progression which assist in improving retention and achievement (Expectation B4).
- The steps being taken to further develop a specific higher education learning and teaching culture (Expectation B3).
- The plans in place to develop a strategy for work placement learning and employer engagement (Expectation B10).

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

The College involves its higher education students in quality assurance and enhancement through a variety of means. The College's Higher Education Learner Engagement Strategy outlines student representation processes, and methods of gathering feedback. There are opportunities for the student voice to be heard through a range of activities, such as surveys and focus groups, and at programme-level through staff-student committee meetings. Students are given opportunities and encouragement to provide feedback on their experience, and to contribute to change and improvement.

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

## **About Salford City College**

Salford City College was established as a general further education college in January 2009 following the merger of Salford College, Eccles Sixth Form College and Pendleton Sixth Form College. The College has five main delivery sites across Salford and a number of community bases for the delivery of adult and community provision. The College's mission is 'to inspire and empower people to create and take opportunities to enrich lives through learning'. The College has 6,000 full-time and 5,000 part-time students studying across 15 subject centres. It has a contract for employer responsive provision to deliver workplace training and apprenticeships.

Higher education is delivered at FutureSkills, CitySkills and at Walkden and Pendleton Sixth Form Centres through franchise agreements with two awarding bodies, the University of Bolton and the University of Salford. The College also works in partnership with one awarding organisation, Pearson Ltd, offering Higher National Diplomas and Certificates (HNC/D). In 2014-15 there are 301 students enrolled on higher education programmes. The higher education strategy is closely aligned to the College's mission. The strategy aims to offer students flexibility in mode and level of study, to widen participation, to provide value for money and to prepare students for careers in specific vocational areas.

There have been a number of recent changes to the senior management team, with a new executive post of Vice-Principal (Quality) established in Summer 2013 to provide strategic oversight of higher education. As a result of recent growth in provision a new senior management post of Director of Higher Education was introduced in January 2014 to provide operational management oversight. Curriculum management teams are responsible for delivery within each delivery centre.

The College has made good progress in addressing the five areas of good practice and two desirable recommendations from its Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review in 2010.

## Explanation of the findings about Salford City College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.1 The College delivers programmes in partnership with the University of Bolton, the University of Salford, and Pearson. The qualifications provided by the College adhere to the principles laid out in the universities' memorandums of agreement and quality assurance handbooks. These specify the external reference points, including *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) that form the basis of programme approval. In partnership with the universities the College offers franchised and validated programmes. Pearson provides the regulatory framework for Higher National qualifications.

1.2 The College has had a formal affiliation and franchise agreement with the University of Salford since 2013. Foundation degree programmes are written by the College and provide progression to top up honours degree provision offered at the University. Approval processes are in accordance with the University of Salford Academic Handbook which provides guidance to ensure consistency of level in course design. The College also delivers the Level 4 component of the University of Salford business degree programmes, which are designed and assessed by the University.

1.3 The partnership agreement with the University of Bolton was renegotiated in 2012, and all programmes offered are designed and benchmarked by the University and delivered at a number of partner colleges.

1.4 The College also delivers Higher National provision validated by Pearson. The College produces detailed and contextualised programme specifications for Higher National programmes, providing information on how requirements will be met, including the number of units at each level, and specific learning outcomes. The College uses Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ to inform this process.

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

1.6 The arrangements meet Expectation A1. The College ensures that it provides programme specifications for all programmes offered in line with the differing formats required by the awarding bodies, specifying the title, level and type of award. Additionally, specifications set out aims, outcomes, entry criteria, teaching and learning methods and relevant external reference points. From 2014-15 programme specifications have been available on the College intranet.

1.7 The College works effectively with its partners to ensure compliance with delivery, assessment and award requirements. Senior staff understand their responsibilities for maintaining academic standards set by the awarding bodies. Assessment requirements and periodic review processes are specified by the awarding body partners. These ensure that the College fulfils its obligations to provide programmes on their behalf at the appropriate level.

1.8 There is a clear internal managerial structure with oversight of academic standards. The Director of Higher Education role has recently been developed to coordinate higher education across the College. Staff demonstrate a high level of awareness of the external reference points, including the Quality Code, Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark, and the professional standards frameworks for teaching. There is a good understanding of how Subject Benchmark Statements apply to the provision, and the differences between foundation and honours degrees.

1.9 Owing to their recent introduction many programmes validated by the University of Salford have had no completing cohort, external examination or periodic review. The processes described for confirming the level of awards are not yet evidenced in practice, although these are understood by staff. The role of the link tutor has provided valuable external oversight and verification of standards. For more established provision, evidence from periodic review and external examiners' reports confirms that programmes align with the FHEQ, and student assessments demonstrate that learning outcomes have been achieved at an appropriate level.

1.10 The College has limited responsibilities owing to the nature of its partnerships and franchise arrangements. It discharges its responsibilities effectively within the context of its agreements with its awarding bodies and organisation. Where the College has greater responsibility there are sufficiently robust internal processes to ensure that the level of awards is set and maintained appropriately. Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A1 is met and that risk in this area is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

1.11 The College's memorandums of agreement with the University of Bolton and the University of Salford include clear responsibilities for designing and maintaining validated programmes. The College's Corporate Manual sets out governance arrangements for each part of its provision in a single document. This is accessible to staff and reviewed each year by the quality department. Subject Benchmark Statements are used effectively by the College to inform standards and are referenced to the intended learning outcomes. Pearson programmes are managed in accordance with the awarding organisation's quality assurance handbook.

1.12 The University of Bolton provides a link tutor to support the College, and staff attend events and programme committees at the University. Monitoring of programmes is carried out by university staff and covers all provision delivered by collaborative partners. University of Salford programmes are overseen by schools within the University. Link tutors attend meetings at the College, including joint boards of study, and staff-student committees. The College has most autonomy in relation to the Pearson provision, and has developed specific programme design protocols, and assessment board processes and procedures to support this.

1.13 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the College's processes by considering programme documentation, including regulatory frameworks, policies and procedures from awarding partners, and the College's internal documentation, including the institutional self-evaluation reports for 2012-13 and the draft report for 2013-14. The team met a range of staff, including link tutors from the two awarding bodies.

1.14 The team found that the arrangements work well in practice and that the relationships with awarding partners are effective on both a strategic and operational level and their regulations and policies are well embedded and understood. In addition to the awarding partner arrangements, the College has developed its own internal processes for oversight. There is a clear committee structure and reporting lines that specifically deal with higher education matters. A number of policies and procedures have been developed in the last two years to support the development and growth of higher education. These include processes for admissions, assessment and work-based learning.

1.15 Academic frameworks and regulations are in place and understood. The responsibility for regulatory frameworks lies with the awarding bodies and the College has been proactive in developing its own policies and procedures where necessary. The team therefore concludes that Expectation A2.1 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 Responsibilities for producing and maintaining definitive programme records are shared. For University of Bolton programmes the awarding body has the responsibility for programme development and approval and produces the definitive records. For University of Salford programmes the College develops its own programmes, and produces the definitive records, abiding by the University's Programme Design, Review, Approval, Amendment and Withdrawal Policy. For Pearson provision the College develops and approves HNC/D programmes in accordance with the awarding organisation guidelines and is required to maintain the definitive record.

1.17 Definitive records and documentation for each programme and qualification are provided in the College's Corporate Manual. This is accessed by staff through the intranet. Templates are used to ensure each programme handbook has generic information. Example programme handbooks show that these include all relevant matters and are readily available on the virtual learning environment (VLE) for access by students and staff. Students are also provided with paper copies on request.

1.18 The College holds programme specifications for each validated programme. These are included within the student handbooks available on the VLE, alongside information on assessment regulations and academic support. For the University of Bolton programmes there is a link from the Corporate Manual to the University website to provide ready access to the most current version of policies. Definitive documentation for University of Salford and Pearson programmes is retained in the Corporate Manual. These documents are maintained by the Director of Higher Education and are accessible to teaching teams and managers.

1.19 The review team corroborated the evidence by reviewing relevant documentation, including programme handbooks and specifications, and also by viewing a demonstration of the College intranet to assess the effectiveness of the Corporate Manual and the VLE. The review team held meetings with senior staff, delivery staff, those who manage the partnerships, and students.

1.20 Staff are clear where programme information is held, and who has responsibility for updating records. Staff understand their role in the development and review of programmes. Students are satisfied with the information given in the handbooks and in programme specifications, and confirm that these are readily accessible and support their understanding.

1.21 Overall, College staff understand their responsibilities for maintaining a definitive record of each programme. Information about the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected achievement is readily available to students. The team concludes that Expectation A2.2 is met, and that the 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 Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark and Subject Benchmark Statements are used by the College when writing new programmes. Appropriate documentation shows the mapping of modules for each programme to the learning outcomes. These are also benchmarked to the FHEQ. The College's checklists clearly articulate the responsibilities required by the partnership agreements. Programmes are subject to approval and monitoring by the universities and this process is supported by link tutors and engagement with university committees and forums. Under the agreement with the University of Salford the College designs the foundation degree programmes which are then validated by the University. For Pearson programmes responsibilities are understood by staff at all levels.

1.23 The College has also developed its own cross-College quality assurance and enhancement structures and policies. These include the Higher Education Quality Group, the Learner Services Group, and the Higher Education Strategy and Standards Group. Protocols for the monthly Higher Education Group meetings and regular programme team meetings are set out in the Corporate Manual. An internal validation process was introduced in 2013 to ensure the quality and feasibility of programmes and their alignment to the College's strategic plan. Proposals are reviewed by the higher education groups and the Executive Senior Management Team before being presented to the relevant awarding body.

1.24 The review team explored the effectiveness of these procedures and policies by analysing relevant papers and minutes and discussions with senior managers and programme staff. The team found that the universities' and College's policies and procedures are appropriately referenced to the Quality Code, including the FHEQ, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and the Education and Training Foundation Professional Standards requirements. The College observes Pearson's guidance and procedures in relation to its HNC/D provision, and the reports from external examiners are positive.

1.25 Programmes designed and developed by the College are scrutinised by the awarding bodies through appropriately rigorous and well documented systems. These ensure the appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes, and their alignment to assessment instruments and teaching and learning methods. A range of specific higher education staff development activities has enabled the College to embed these mechanisms and to develop a proactive teaching and learning culture.

1.26 Many of the College's programmes have been recently developed, with some programmes having been running for only one year. Consequently there is limited evidence available for review. No periodic reviews have taken place for University of Salford provision. University of Salford programmes in their first year have not been moderated by external examiners at Level 4. However, senior staff at the College and the University confirmed that Level 4 provision will be externally examined with effect from the 2015-16 academic year.

1.27 Overall, the processes for the internal approval of new programmes are in place and understood by staff. The review team concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.28 The responsibility for assuring that academic standards are met rests with the College's awarding bodies. The College applies the standards and criteria of its awarding bodies to all its higher education provision. These are fully set out in the awarding bodies' and the College's documentation.

1.29 Programme outcomes are validated through the awarding bodies' and organisation's processes and a definitive validation document is produced for each programme. Module outcomes are then aligned to the knowledge, understanding, and intellectual, practical and transferable skills in the programme learning outcomes. Assessments are mapped to modules' intended learning outcomes, and detailed within assessment briefs.

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

1.31 For University of Bolton provision, and University of Salford Business School programmes, the assessment methods are set and internally verified by the universities, and approved by external examiners. For University of Salford Arts and Humanities provision the assessments are set by the College and verified by the link tutor. In all cases the College marks assignments and provides feedback to students. Marks are moderated by the universities, and assessment decisions ratified by examination boards.

1.32 For HNC/D provision, assessments are set, marked and internally verified by the College before being reviewed by external examiners. The reports of the external examiners for Pearson programmes are largely positive. Where issues have been raised they have been proactively and effectively addressed by the College.

1.33 The internal verifiers' reports and those of external examiners demonstrate adherence to the Quality Code, and to the College's own specifications of level and credit. Where any issues arise they are addressed formally through the College's cause for concern process and responses are reported to the relevant external examiner. Assessment processes are well documented and supported by effective guidance to staff.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.35 The memorandums of agreement detail how the degree-awarding bodies monitor academic standards. The College is subject to the processes of its awarding partners for annual and periodic review. Owing to their recent introduction, many programmes have not been through periodic review. Teacher training provision and the FdA Early Years and Childhood Studies, in partnership with the University of Bolton, have been subject to successful periodic review. As a Pearson-approved centre, the College follows the procedures and quality assurance processes required. These are well understood by staff delivering Higher National programmes. This approach enables the College to meet Expectation A3.3.

1.36 The College employs a number of its own review mechanisms to ensure that it complies with the Expectations of the Quality Code, the FHEQ and the requirements of its awarding partners. These include an internal validation process for new programmes introduced in 2013, and an annual programme and module monitoring process. This process culminates in the development of an annual self-evaluation report for each programme. Reports are individually reviewed and evaluated by the Higher Education Quality Group. The outcomes of this process are used to inform an institutional self-evaluation, which is considered by the Higher Education Strategy and Standards Group, and reported to the Executive Senior Management Team, and to the Corporation Standards Committee.

1.37 Both the universities and Pearson deploy external examiners who visit the College at least once for each graduating cohort, and produce an annual report for each programme. The College's self-evaluation process includes explicit consideration of external examiners' reports and the development of an action plan in response. Areas of good practice and issues arising are addressed by the staff team and included in the programme self-evaluation documents.

1.38 The Universities designate link tutors from relevant faculties who provide academic support and advice. This is in addition to the support provided by the partnership offices, and regular meetings are held with programme teams who liaise with the Director of Higher Education.

1.39 The review team considers that effective monitoring and review mechanisms are in place. The processes employed by the College and the oversight of its awarding partners are appropriate and robust. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation A3.3 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.40 The use of external input and expertise in the design, operation and review of programmes is specified in the regulatory frameworks of the awarding bodies and organisation. For the University of Salford and the University of Bolton the role of externality in course design is set out in programme approval policies and validation handbooks. Validating panels for all awarding partners require external panel membership. External examiners are appointed by the awarding bodies and organisation and visit the College to confirm the process and standard of assessment. The College intends to further develop its internal processes for external involvement in the development and validation design stage of Pearson programmes. These arrangements meet Expectation A3.4.

1.41 The team reviewed course documentation, minutes of programme development meetings, business case proposals, and validation and external examiners' reports, and met staff and link tutors. Additionally, the team met staff involved in supporting work-based learning through employers and industry links.

1.42 Staff demonstrate a high level of knowledge about industry requirements. They stated how provision is designed to meet emerging and future employment needs. Business case proposals record consultation with external experts. The team heard how College staff also use computer modelling to predict skills gaps. Validation reports confirm the engagement of external experts in the programme approval process.

1.43 Because many of the University of Salford programmes are new there has been limited opportunity for external examiners' input. A single external examiner is responsible for the University of Bolton's teacher training provision delivered at its partner colleges. College staff work actively with link tutors to ensure there is an external perspective, and are clear about their roles and responsibilities.

1.44 Additionally, the College has had a key role in establishing the Greater Manchester HE in FE Forum, which provides support for further education colleges in sharing good practice. This enables the College to benchmark its practices and procedures against the sector.

1.45 Overall, external and independent expertise is appropriately utilised. The College meets the requirements of its validating partners and additionally has identified areas where these can be enhanced. Comments from external examiners and other external sources are responded to appropriately. Therefore the review team finds Expectation A3.4 is met and the level of risk low.

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

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

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

1.47 All of the applicable Expectations in this area have been met and the risk has been identified as low in all areas.

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



## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The design, development and approval of programmes is primarily the responsibility of the College's awarding bodies and organisation. Programmes are formally reviewed through the College's own internal approval processes. These take account of external reference points such as the FHEQ, Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark and Subject Benchmark Statements. The approach the College takes towards programme design and approval enables it to meet Expectation B1 of the Quality Code.

2.2 A consistent internal process is used for all new programme proposals to ensure oversight of key aspects, including programme titles, level and delivery. The Director of Higher Education has responsibility for oversight of programme development, liaison with the awarding bodies/organisation and providing support for programme leaders and others in the preparation of validation documents and specifications.

2.3 The College undertakes programme-specific research, including discussions with employers, students and other stakeholders, such as the local Chamber of Commerce. This process provides a means of identifying opportunities to align programmes with local skills gaps. The College's university partners use student focus groups, industry experts and other external parties on validation panels.

2.4 For Higher National provision, following centre recognition, programme approval is provided by Pearson to run a range of HNC/D programmes. Validation of Pearson programmes follows the procedures outlined in its quality assurance processes. Programmes are developed in line with the specifications provided by the awarding organisation which stipulate core modules at each level for the award, but allow scope for the selection of a range of optional modules to suit student needs.

2.5 The requirements for programme approval are clearly documented, and the processes are well understood by staff. The College uses student forums to receive feedback on programme delivery, and there is evidence of students' views informing amendments, for example in the FdA Creative Music.

2.6 The College continuously reviews its provision and identifies new markets and skill gaps in order to develop an appropriately balanced curriculum. This supports its strategic mission and aims. The review team confirms that the development of a well considered portfolio of programmes which reflects local employment needs and supports widening participation is **good practice**.

2.7 Overall, the College and its partners have effective processes in place for design and approval of programmes and has validated a number of awards in recent years. The team concludes that Expectation B1 is met and the associated risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.8 The College is responsible for the selection, admission and registration of all of its students. The College has a clear admissions policy which is applied to any application made for a directly funded programme. However, for programmes franchised through a partner university, admissions are managed in line with the policy set out by the awarding body.

2.9 The College provides prospective students with sufficient information for them to make an informed decision about their programme of study. Entry criteria are set in line with the admissions policy and the College's Higher Education Strategy, which includes a commitment to widening participation. These criteria are clearly detailed to applicants within programme specifications, through UCAS, the College website and the Higher Education Guide.

2.10 The College has clear standardised information for interview processes which provides core information for applicants and enables a fair and consistent process. Standardised paperwork ensures the information provided is reliable. Applicants' qualifications are checked during enrolment. The College has an effective process for clearing, with revised information for late admissions.

2.11 The review team considered relevant policies and procedures and looked at promotional material, such as the Higher Education Guide and the website. The team also met with teaching and support staff and students to ensure that the operation of the admissions process was effective.

2.12 The team found that the policies and procedures are implemented consistently and fairly. The admissions process is well understood and implemented efficiently by staff. All staff with responsibility for conducting interviews and making offers have been given training in the process.

2.13 The College's own Higher Education Admissions Policy is written with reference to the processes of its awarding partners to ensure consistency in practice. All applicants, regardless of franchising partner or mode of study, go through the same process, to ensure validity. However, the awarding bodies and organisation have different procedures. The College has limited any potential for confusion by producing guidance documents for admission staff. Examples include the recruitment timeline, and flowcharts showing the application process, detailing how it differs for each programme, including the application method and forms of communication. A positive feature of the process is that random applications are checked by the Director of Higher Education to ensure decisions are sound, and processes consistently applied.

2.14 Students consider the information provided to be accurate and useful and they particularly value the face-to-face personalised advice and guidance. The College has highlighted the intention to streamline the interview process by moving towards a group interview model, appropriate to increasing applicant numbers. The College is confident that it



can standardise the approach to make it more efficient, while maintaining the same level of information, and allowing an element of individuality.

2.15 Overall, the College has effective policies in place, the admissions process is well managed and students reflected positively on their experiences. The team therefore concludes that Expectation B2 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**

2.16 The College has a strategic approach to teaching and learning. There is a clear educational mission to provide opportunities for the local community and to meet the needs of employers. The Higher Education Strategy aligns its higher education with its further education offer, and supports the needs of adults returning to education. The new higher education leadership structure and the management groups responsible for ensuring the quality of teaching and learning are regularly monitored and reviewed.

2.17 A specific higher education teaching and learning strategy has been developed with reference to *Chapter B3* of the Quality Code. This replaces a College strategy which was generic and covered all aspects of the provision. There has been significant investment in resources to support increased student numbers, and the needs of higher level learners. This investment includes developing higher education teaching skills, providing access to industry standard technical resources, developing a VLE, and work placement opportunities. These arrangements allow the College to meet Expectation B3 of the Quality Code.

2.18 Programmes are offered at each level of the FHEQ in order to provide flexibility for students. The Teaching and Learning Strategy acknowledges the differences between higher and further education teaching. The College's recruitment policy ensures staff are qualified to the level above which they are teaching. Staff qualifications are checked and approved at validation and periodic review. The lesson observation process is well established and monitors the quality of teaching across the provision. The College has recently introduced minimum content guidelines to ensure consistency across the VLE to support face-to-face teaching delivery.

2.19 The team reviewed documentation that included policies and strategy documents, staff CVs, College and programme-level self-evaluations, and student questionnaire data. The team met students from across the provision as well as senior managers and teaching staff, including those participating in peer observation.

2.20 The team learned that arrangements had been put in place to draw together staff engaged in higher education across the College. There are regular opportunities for staff to meet and share good practice. Feedback from students confirms that teaching quality is good and that where problems are identified the College is responsive.

2.21 An internal review of teaching in March 2014 identified a range of good practice and areas for improvement. This review led to the development of a peer observation model aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework to underpin development of a higher education teaching culture. During the visit the review team heard how staff find this approach to be effective, and that the College is supporting higher education training, higher degrees and pedagogic scholarship. The team **affirms** the steps being taken to further develop a specific higher education learning and teaching culture.

2.22 Physical and digital learning resources are appropriate and effective. There has been a major development of the FutureSkills Centre during 2013-14 to provide an

appropriate higher education environment, and resources to support practice-based programmes. Students' concerns about consistency of provision between sites, and information about access to University resources, are being addressed by the College (see Expectation B4).

2.23 The VLE is highly regarded by students. Students have individual learning plans that can be accessed through the VLE and are able to monitor their own progress. Students are satisfied with feedback and support for independent learning.

2.24 Overall, the College has a clear commitment to supporting its students' development and progression through the structure of its programmes and the team affirms the actions taken to develop higher education teaching skills. The team concludes that Expectation B3 is met and the 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**

2.25 Students are supported to develop their full potential. Students benefit from extensive one-to-one support and small class sizes. The structure of programmes and range of articulation arrangements are intended to support students to progress to Level 6 study. The College provides a range of specific support services for its higher education students. These include learning resource centres at all sites, additional learning support, pastoral care and counselling, and financial and careers advice. At an operational level the Higher Education Learner Services Group reports to the Higher Education Strategy and Steering Group which monitors the effectiveness of this provision. There is support for the transition from further education to higher education, and beyond to university or employment. The frameworks, strategies and guidance that the College has in place enable it to meet Expectation B4 of the Quality Code.

2.26 Personal and professional development is built into all programmes. Students are supported in developing work related skills such as writing CVs and pitching to clients. Most courses have work placement or work related projects. Students are introduced to the progression opportunities at partner universities and are able to access resources and support through these arrangements.

2.27 The team considered documentation, including strategic plans, minutes of meetings, student guidance information and programme specifications, and met a range of support staff and students from across the provision.

2.28 Support services have recently been restructured in order to move from a centre-based model to a centralised structure, enabling improved oversight and parity between delivery sites. Staff involved in providing information, advice and guidance are appropriately qualified and supported. There is a commitment to provide specific continuing professional development to support the recent growth in this area.

2.29 The review team learned that students feel well supported and can access advice and guidance from tutors and support staff in person or by electronic means. Students are asked to declare any additional support needs at interview or application stage. If accepted they are routinely contacted to make sure they are aware of their support entitlements. Students confirm that they are treated with equality and respect. The student induction week has recently been reviewed to address issues arising from feedback, and a checklist is now used to ensure the induction process is comprehensive and consistent.

2.30 Study skills are embedded into programmes, with additional optional sessions available by request. The recent internal review identified the need to develop specific study skills for higher education. Students consider that they would benefit from more advice about developing these, and addressing skills gaps, prior to beginning their programmes.

2.31 Progression rates on some of the newly introduced foundation degrees were low after the first year of operation, and the College has taken direct action to address this matter. Actions include an increase in student support and monitoring during the extended induction phase to identify emerging issues more quickly. Additionally, early introductions to staff and resources at the relevant awarding body have strengthened students' connections. Progression advice events have been introduced to support those students intending to

progress to Level 6 programmes. The team **affirms** the actions being taken to support and enhance students' progression which assist in improving retention and achievement.

2.32 Overall, the review team found sound evidence that there are effective arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Expectation B4 is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement**

**Findings**

2.33 The College provides a wide range of mechanisms for students to give feedback on their learning experience. It has recently developed a specific Higher Education Learner Engagement Strategy to support the implementation of its student engagement ethos. Much of the provision is relatively new and student representation is not yet fully established or embedded. However, the Strategy outlines the College's actions to further enhance student representation from 2014-15.

2.34 The Student Engagement Strategy outlines structures for representation, gathering feedback, and involvement in programme monitoring and review. The development of the strategy was shared with students who spoke positively about their involvement. The College has appropriate meeting structures to ensure the student voice is heard at programme level. Student representatives attend programme committee meetings and attend the University of Bolton steering group. Students on University of Salford provision attend staff-student committees and boards of study. For HND/C programmes termly monitoring meetings occur. In 2013-14 a cross-College survey, modelled on the National Student Survey, was conducted in order to collate feedback from students on all programmes. The College is piloting a student representatives' forum in 2014-15. These arrangements enable the College to meet Expectation B5 of the Quality Code.

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

2.36 There are good examples of student engagement. Students are involved in the programme validation process for University of Salford and University of Bolton provision. Focus groups are held with students, and opportunities for prospective students to meet with validation panels are built into the process. Students were involved in the planning stages for the new centre at MediaCityUK, and FutureSkills. Students are consistently involved with the recruitment process for teaching staff, including being invited to take part in a micro-teaching session and give their feedback on candidates. The review team considers the involvement of students in the interview and appointment of teaching staff to be **good practice**.

2.37 Students stated that they feel their opinions are taken into account by staff, with their needs and suggestions dealt with promptly. The small numbers enrolled on higher education allow for regular feedback from staff at all levels and 'You Said We Did' posters are used to highlight responses to students. There are many examples of the College listening to the student voice, and making changes as a consequence of the feedback. For example, construction students requested improved access to computers within classrooms. This feedback, along with a review of resources available at FutureSkills and the City campus, and discussions with teaching and management teams, led to a move to a different campus with greater computer resources, and access to more dedicated library stock. Design students provided a similar example of the College's responsiveness to their concerns. Following comments from students, action has also been taken to ensure that an induction and tour of resources at the partner University takes place soon after enrolment.

2.38 Feedback from students is fed into the formal structures by the Director of Higher Education through the full range of deliberative committees, including the governing body. However, there is no formalised student membership on these committees, and higher education students are not represented directly at governing body level. Students, in their written submission for the review, highlighted a desire to see more formal opportunities for engagement to ensure a greater involvement in the decision making processes. The College has highlighted areas of student representation, including representative training, as a key area for further development. The team **recommends** that by September 2015 the College increases the involvement of students in the formal quality assurance and enhancement processes.

2.39 Overall, the College actively and effectively seeks feedback from its students and responds appropriately. The team concludes that Expectation B5 is met but, owing to the lack of student representation in the formal deliberative structures, the team considers the level of risk to be moderate.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.40 The College and its awarding bodies have appropriate assessment policies, regulations and procedures in place which are aligned to the Quality Code and the FHEQ. Appropriate mechanisms are used to ensure that relevant criteria and standards are applied and that student performance is given individual and equal consideration. Where the College has the freedom to design and apply assessments, these are developed in line with the College's higher education assessment policy. The University of Salford also provides assessment setting guidance. These policies and procedures enable the College to meet Expectation B6 of the Quality Code.

2.41 The review team examined College documentation relating to assessment, and held meetings with students, teaching staff and link tutors.

2.42 Summative assessment instruments are aligned to the module learning outcomes and supported through formative assessment. Assessment instruments are internally and externally verified. A schedule of assessments is created to provide an overview for students, to allow them to plan, and to ensure a well balanced timetable. Assessment guidance is provided in student handbooks and in the module specifications. This includes assessment criteria, and information on submission, grading, academic malpractice and mitigating circumstances.

2.43 Marking and moderation is overseen by the awarding partners and is subject to their procedures. In each case the awarding partner is responsible for appointing external examiners. Examiners are not yet appointed for Level 4 provision but are being put in place for 2015-16. The awarding partners control the examination board process to which the College sends representatives.

2.44 The College oversees the assessment for HNC/D provision and is responsible for the assessment process. There are internal guidelines for the conduct of assessment boards based on the Pearson requirements. External examiners for HNC/D are invited to the assessment boards and are responsible for confirming standards and approving awards.

2.45 Reviewing and enhancing assessment policies and procedures, and regulations for HNC/D programmes is primarily undertaken through feedback from external examiners. Student feedback is also collected through the higher education survey. The awarding partners employ their own enhancement mechanisms, including programme committees and boards of study, which inform the College's practice. Currently external examiners' reports for University of Bolton provision cover a number of partner colleges, although these are supplemented by individual feedback. Clear procedures exist for the accreditation of prior learning, although these are not currently promoted to students. Staff qualifications are considered by the awarding partners at validation to ensure they are eligible to deliver and assess the curriculum.

2.46 There is a good range and variety of assessment tasks. Assessment and feedback practices are targeted and individualised for students. Students are supported by one-to-one



tutorials and individual learning plans. Students spoke positively about the speed with which helpful feedback is provided and how the effective planning of assessment allowed them time to consider and reflect. The College's Higher Education Assessment Policy requires feedback to be given within three weeks of submission. The application of this policy and effectiveness of feedback is well evidenced.

2.47 External examiners' reports confirm the security of the examination processes and endorse the quality of feedback and support, and the accuracy of marking. Where issues have been raised in external examiners' reports these have been addressed, and actions taken and monitored.

2.48 Overall, the team concludes that the assessment processes and procedures are fit for purpose and effective. External examiners confirm that assessments are at the appropriate level and developmental feedback is provided to students. The team concludes that Expectation B6 is met and the associated 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**

2.49 The College follows the universities' procedures for the appointment and induction of external examiners. For Pearson programmes examiners are appointed by the awarding organisation. The College is responsible for providing external examiners with the information, documentation and evidence they request, and for complying with their recommendations. The use made of external examiners enables the College to meet Expectation B7 of the Quality Code.

2.50 External examiners' reports are received by the College's quality department where they are assessed and graded before distribution to heads of department and delivery teams. Reports are integrated into the programme annual self-evaluation process, and individual responses are made by the head of department to each external examiner.

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

2.52 Staff and students from across the provision engage effectively with external examiners, and have access to their reports which are published on the College's intranet. For University of Bolton programmes all provision delivered in consortium with other partners is sampled by a single examiner. This allows for consistency in monitoring delivery across a range of partners. Staff receive individual feedback on specific issues relating to the College by attending sessions with the external examiner where these are addressed.

2.53 External examiners for the University of Salford foundation degrees have not yet been appointed, although some appointments are in progress. The team heard that the University is intending to change its current external examining policy to include oversight of Level 4 modules. During the first year of operation the link tutor has undertaken verification of assessment briefs, as well as moderation of marking.

2.54 In 2012-13 all external examiners' reports were graded outstanding or good by the College's quality unit. Reports for 2013-14 are more variable, and the reports for HNC Business and HNC Health and Social Care were graded inadequate, and required improvement. The team heard how this outcome triggered an internal 'cause for concern' process overseen by the Director of Higher Education and the College's quality committees. Subsequent to this, appropriate remedial action was taken and improvements monitored. The team considers that the systematic process for responding to external examiners' reports, drawing out good practice and addressing issues raised is **good practice**.

2.55 The College supports staff to act as external examiners at other institutions which assists their understanding of the role. Provision for this is encouraged as part of staff professional development. Currently three higher education teaching staff are undertaking this role.

2.56 Overall, the review team considers that the College's processes for taking actions and monitoring issues arising from external examiners' reports to be good practice. Appropriate consideration is given to reports within the quality assurance process at programme and College level. The team concludes that Expectation B7 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.57 In 2012-13 the College introduced a separate higher education annual review process. Self-evaluation documents (SEDs) are produced for each programme. SEDs are structured to map to the themes set out in the Quality Code. Reports include action plans and a review of the previous year's improvements. A cross-College summary SED is produced on the basis of the programme reports and provides an analysis of common themes and actions. The approach the College takes towards programme monitoring and periodic review enables it to meet Expectation B8 of the Quality Code.

2.58 In testing the College's processes, the review team met senior staff, academic and support staff and students. In addition, it looked at minutes from the Higher Education Quality Group and Higher Education Strategy and Steering Group and the self-evaluation reports.

2.59 The SEDs provide evidence of a thorough and robust review process, although there is limited explicit consideration of student feedback. The Higher Education Quality Group and Higher Education Strategy and Steering Group consider all SEDs and provide effective oversight of issues and good practice, The College-wide SED is also considered by the Executive Senior Management Team and the College corporation. The institutional SED provides an effective approach to capturing and monitoring quality and standards from a College-wide perspective. Ownership of issues is addressed through a responsibilities matrix at module, programme and centre level. The College also effectively uses the review mechanisms required by its University partners to support the review process, such as the joint boards of study with the University of Salford. The team considers the robust annual process for the monitoring and evaluation of programmes and the comprehensive self-evaluation report and action plan to be **good practice**.

2.60 Overall, there are effective processes in place for the routine monitoring and review of individual programmes and for providing cross-College oversight. Actions for improvement are well planned and monitored. The review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.61 The College has a clear complaints policy and students confirm that they can make a complaint or appeal without being disadvantaged. The complaints process is outlined on the VLE, in the student handbooks, and is also available on the College website. For academic appeals, the College follows University of Bolton and University of Salford processes for its franchised provision. The College has its own process for HNC/D programmes validated by Pearson. These arrangements enable the College to meet Expectation B9 of the Quality Code.

2.62 The review team met staff and students to test how well the policies and procedures are understood and implemented. A review of documentation was also conducted specifically with regard to the suggestions, compliments and complaints process.

2.63 The College complaints policy offers opportunities for early informal resolution, and each stage has a clear process of responding to the complainant. Complaints are tracked by Centre Personal Assistants who work with heads of each centre to ensure they are progressed in a timely manner. The College logs the details of all complaints on a central database which highlights actions taken to address concerns. Few formal complaints have been received. Informal complaints are also tracked and monitored at centre level through quality assurance group meetings and the Higher Education Quality Group. The complaints log is considered by the senior management team and a summary report is presented to corporation.

2.64 The complaints and appeals processes are well understood by both staff and students. In most cases, complaints are dealt with informally through discussions with a member of academic or support staff. Information, advice and guidance relating to complaints is available from learner services staff, tutors or managers. Students are positive about this process and the timely responses. Students are confident that they know the formal complaints process.

2.65 The team concludes that the College process for complaints and appeals is fair and effective and therefore Expectation B9 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**

2.66 The College has responsibility for the effective management of its arrangements with employers and placement providers where this constitutes an integral part of the students' programme. The College's Higher Education Strategy sets out a clear objective for closely aligning the provision with the needs of local employers. The College is committed to embedding work-related learning across all of its programmes. The College provides a range of work placements in accordance with the differing requirements of its provision and validating partners. For some programmes, including in health and social care and early years education, students are expected to arrange their own placement which lasts the duration of the course. For University of Salford programmes, work placement takes the form of a module within the second year.

2.67 The College provides handbooks for employers and placement providers designed to ensure that they understand the requirements of the programme. Information is provided on respective roles and responsibilities and how students can be supported. There is a range of standard forms and templates to support the planning and monitoring of placement activity. The institutional approach taken towards the quality assurance of placement learning enables the College to meet Expectation B10 of the Quality Code.

2.68 In considering whether the Expectation is met in practice the review team looked at documentary evidence, including codes of practice from validating partners and handbooks for employers and placement providers. The team discussed with senior managers, staff and students the way in which the College manages its' responsibilities for work-based learning.

2.69 Where ongoing placement is mandatory, proof of employment is required. A due diligence visit is made to the employer in the first term of study. For teacher training the University of Bolton trains mentors at the placement provider to support students and provide a link with the staff at the College. All formal placement observations are undertaken by teaching staff, and no assessment is devolved to placement providers. In order to fulfil its commitment to work-based learning opportunities the College has developed simulated alternatives to placement and provides internal teacher training placements if students are unable to find them externally.

2.70 As the level of placement activity increases, the College has identified the need to further develop its own internal policies and employer engagement strategy. This is identified within the institutional action plan for 2014-15. At present, although there is extensive consultation with employers to identify industry needs, there is no formal system for gathering feedback. The College has created a new Higher Education Coordinator role with responsibility for developing a strategic approach to building employer networks, supporting the growing foundation degree provision, and gathering feedback. The team **affirms** the plans in place to develop a strategy for work placement learning and employer engagement.

2.71 The review team concludes that the College has effective policies and procedures in place to manage work placements and there is robust oversight of the existing provision. The team affirms the action being taken by the College to develop its infrastructure and in

gathering feedback to support placement as foundation degree provision grows. The team therefore concludes that Expectation B10 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**

2.72 The College does not offer research degrees.

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

2.73 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All applicable Expectations have been met and risk is judged low in all cases.

2.74 There are four examples of good practice: in Expectation B1 relating to the development of a well considered portfolio of programmes; in Expectation B5 concerning the involvement of students in staff recruitment; in Expectation B7 about responding to external examiners' reports; and in Expectation B8 relating to the robust process for annual monitoring.

2.75 The team identified one recommendation in Expectation B5 to increase formal student representation processes. The team also affirmed actions being taken to support students' progression, develop a higher education learning and teaching culture and to provide a strategy for work placement and employer engagement.

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



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

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

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

#### **Findings**

3.1 The College provides a wide range of information for stakeholders. These include prospective students, current students, staff and employers. The website provides the main source of information where the College mission is clearly displayed. There is a separate section for higher education. This section provides information on the differing sets of awarding body and organisation regulations and procedures in a logical and coherent manner. Other important sources of information include the Higher Education Course Guide and the College VLE which contains the student handbooks.

3.2 Responsibility for the website, marketing events, promotional literature and press releases rests with the marketing department, where information is centrally managed. Clear marketing guidelines are provided for teaching and support staff. The marketing department is the first point of call for all media enquiries, and any issue relating to marketing is addressed by the team. This eliminates any duplication and ensures that all information is correctly approved. Social media is used by the College to engage with students and is monitored regularly by the marketing team. This also ensures adherence to the social media policy.

3.3 For academic information such as programme specifications or programme descriptions on the website or in the prospectus, the Director of Higher Education has responsibility for factual accuracy. Once approved, text is passed on to marketing to ensure the material follows the College's house style guidelines. Final approval is by the Director of Higher Education. These procedures and protocols enable the College to meet Expectation C of the Quality Code.

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

3.5 The information provided to prospective students is concise and accessible. Information regarding fees is up-to-date and directs students to any necessary external websites, including those for student finance. Students particularly value the face-to-face information provided by staff as initial advice and guidance. With increasing applications and plans for expansion, the College intends to review the extent of information provided. This action is to ensure that course-specific information is fully comprehensive. The standardised approach to the admissions and interview process works well, and is consistent and reliable. It ensures that each student is given the correct information. Students confirm that the information provided to them prior to joining their programme is helpful and supportive.

3.6 The VLE provides an additional effective source of information, and is used extensively by both students and staff. It is easily accessible and provides general information, including policies, study skills resources, learner voice feedback and student representative details. The VLE is easily accessible and used by many students and is

particularly helpful for those studying part-time. The VLE includes programme specifications, external examiners' reports and links to key policies and regulations. The VLE is monitored and updated by the Director of Higher Education. Students are positive about their experience of the VLE and are able to demonstrate examples of where effective use by staff had enhanced their learning experience.

3.7 Staff are aware and understand their responsibilities, and the College's requirements. All internal policies and procedures are updated by the authors, who are reminded by the quality department when revision is due. The Corporate Manual on the staff intranet is the central hub for all the policies and procedures, through which any updates are communicated to staff through the Director of Higher Education.

3.8 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation C is met and the associated risk is low. The College has in place appropriate procedures and lines of responsibility to ensure that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Information is updated and monitored regularly. Students confirm that the information provided to them is helpful, accurate and comprehensive.

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

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

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

3.10 Information published is fit for purpose and trustworthy. Processes for the development and verification of information are understood by staff. Students confirm that information is comprehensive, accessible and helpful to them and provides them with sound information to support their learning.

3.11 The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information produced by the College about its higher education provision **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

- 4.1 The College employs a range of mechanisms that capture and address issues and areas for improvement, and facilitate policy development and the refinement of procedures. At this stage in the College's development, with the recent introduction of many programmes, these mechanisms are primarily focused on compliance and quality assurance.
- 4.2 The Higher Education Strategy applies to the whole College, with continual improvement based on a College-wide model, using the outcomes of the self-assessment process. The strategy sets out priorities to improve and develop provision over time, although it does not explicitly address how deliberate steps are being taken to improve the quality of learning opportunities.
- 4.3 The review team examined key documents, including the Higher Education Strategy, the Teaching, Training and Learning Strategy, SEDs at programme and institutional level, and the lesson observation policy. Meetings were conducted with students and staff at all levels within the College.
- 4.4 The self-evaluation process at programme and institutional level summarises areas for improvement and identifies good practice which can be shared. Student focus groups and surveys, and external examiners' reports are also used to inform enhancements to the quality of learning opportunities.
- 4.5 Enhancement is implicit in many of the aims and priorities. There are good examples of instances of enhancement taking place, including the use of an external consultant to review and report on the higher education provision, the engagement with the Greater Manchester HE in FE Forum, and proactive engagement with employers, and research into regional employment needs. The College has made a significant investment in resources for teaching and learning in recent years, including a higher education centre at FutureSkills.
- 4.6 Good practice is shared at monthly cross-College group meetings. However, the College recognises that with much new provision, and many new staff, there is capacity to improve this process. Consequently, while the Higher Education Strategy does not refer explicitly to how enhancement is deliberately addressed, the mechanisms in place for compliance and assurance provide the foundations for a more strategic approach. This approach is supported by a strong higher education management, teaching and support staff team which demonstrates a commitment to improving quality, and the enhancement of provision. The review team **recommends** that, by June 2015, the College draws together the various improvement activities to provide a more strategic and targeted approach to enhancement.
- 4.7 Overall, the review team concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk low. The College takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of student learning opportunities although it needs to draw together its improvement activities as part of a more strategic approach.

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

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

4.8 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. The team considers the expectation to have been met, based on the extent to which the College has introduced and integrated a set of initiatives to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.9 There are a number of improvement activities and opportunities for sharing good practice. However, the College's strategic approach to the monitoring and review of enhancement activity is at an emerging stage, and is currently focused on compliance and the assurance of quality. Enhancement is driven informally rather than systematically embedded through higher education structures with explicit roles and responsibilities.

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

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

### Findings

5.1 The College involves its higher education students in quality assurance and enhancement through a variety of means. The College's Higher Education Learner Engagement Strategy outlines student representation processes, and methods of gathering feedback. There are opportunities for the student voice to be heard through a range of activities, such as surveys and focus groups, and at programme-level through staff-student committee meetings. The College has also launched a cross-College survey for all students in order to gather feedback of students' experience on their programme. There are many examples of the student voice leading to changes in the College and its processes.

5.2 Students were involved and consulted in the planning stages for the design of the new FutureSkills campus at the College. This has provided students with a direct means of influencing their learning environment and demonstrating how their views are taken into account. The College has also engaged students directly in the teaching staff recruitment process by their participation in a micro-teaching session where they provide feedback on the candidate to the recruitment panel.

5.3 The partnership with the University of Salford is relatively new, and recent work has been undertaken to allow students to engage more fully with the awarding body. The College is working to increase the promotion to students of the resources available for them to access at its partner university. A recently introduced tour of the campus at the University of Salford during students' induction has raised awareness of the services and facilities available. Students feel this to be a very beneficial part of the induction process. The College closes the feedback loop by publishing 'You Said We Did' posters, and giving verbal feedback directly to students.

5.4 The College recognises the increasing importance of the role of student representatives, and from 2014-15 is facilitating formalised student representatives' training. The College has created training materials available online, using a section of the VLE which is specifically accessible to student representatives. These initiatives have been developed in response to student feedback which identified a need for a central hub for all student representative material, and to provide more responsibility for student representatives. In response to student feedback there are plans to trial a higher education student representatives' forum in 2014-15. This will enable students to mix with representatives from different programmes and share experiences.

5.5 Students are given opportunities and encouragement to provide feedback on their experience, and to contribute to change and improvement. Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement is effective at programme level within the College. However, there are limited opportunities for student involvement within the formal structures and processes. Further actions are being taken by the College to improve student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement.

## Glossary

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

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

A published formal structure. See also **Framework for Higher Education Qualifications**.

### **Framework for Higher Education Qualifications**

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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



### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

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

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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