

# Higher Education Review of South Downs 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 South Downs College. The review took place from 11 to 13 November 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Caroline Mills
- Mr Kevin Kendall
- Mr Craig Best (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 6. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 10.

In reviewing South Downs 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/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/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)

## Amended judgement - March 2016

### Introduction

In November 2014, South Downs College underwent a Higher Education Review, which resulted in the following judgements: the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies meets UK expectations; the quality of learning opportunities requires improvement to meet UK expectations; the quality of information about learning opportunities meets UK expectations; the enhancement of student learning opportunities requires improvement to meet UK expectations.

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

The College published an action plan in June 2015 describing how it intended to address the recommendations, affirmations and good practice identified in the review, and has been working over the last nine months to demonstrate how it has implemented that plan.

The follow-up process included three progress updates and culminated in the review team's scrutiny of the College's progress reports and the supporting documentary evidence, along with a one-day visit on 19 January 2016 with two reviewers. During the visit the team met senior staff and students to discuss progress and triangulate the evidence base received over the preceding months.

The visit confirmed that the recommendations and the affirmation relating to the quality of learning opportunities and enhancement had been successfully addressed and the good practice appropriately disseminated. Actions against the recommendation relating to information about higher education provision had also been completed on schedule and contributed to the progress against the quality of learning opportunities and enhancement.

### QAA Board decision and amended judgements

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body 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.

The review can be considered to be signed off as complete.

### Findings from the follow-up process

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

#### Recommendation - Expectation B1

The College has put in place formal procedures for internal approval of new course design, and the establishment of the HE Development and Course Modification Group has provided the necessary oversight of course development and approval. Membership of this group

ensures all levels and areas of the provider are represented, although it does not currently include student representation. The College provided evidence of the effectiveness of the procedure through the recent validation and approval of the Early Childhood programme, offered through a franchise agreement with a new awarding body partner, and the modification of the existing Pearson HND Engineering programme. The review team concluded that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

**Recommendation - Expectation B3**

The College was requested to ensure arrangements for staff development and the observation of teaching address the needs of higher education courses. The HE Quality Review Group now has a standard agenda item on teaching and learning which includes lesson observations and staff development. The Director of Teaching, Learning and Quality produces an analysis of higher education specific lesson observations. Peer observations are taking place and there are plans to engage with University partners to instigate reciprocal peer observation sessions. An annual subscription to the Higher Education Academy has been initiated and a separate staff development budget for higher education has been allocated. The review team concluded that sufficient progress has been made with the recommendation.

**Recommendation - Expectation B5 and Enhancement**

To ensure higher education students are treated as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience, the College has reviewed how higher education student engagement feeds into the new governance structure. While students the review team met had limited knowledge of the opportunities available to them and were unsure about the committees where they are represented, they expressed positive views on the responsiveness of College in addressing issues they raise. Staff confirmed that students would in future be members of the newly established HE Standards and Quality Standards Monitoring Group. The development of a partnership approach between the provider and higher education student body is ongoing but the review team concluded that overall the provider is making sufficient progress in addressing the recommendation.

**Recommendation - Expectations B6 and B9**

The College has developed an HE Assessment policy and HE Assessment Malpractice policy that provide detailed information on the process for assessment, malpractice and late submission. The HE Assessment policy also includes terms of reference for the Academic Board. The College's newly established committee structure has ratified both policies. The virtual learning environment and all student handbooks have been updated and provide clear reference to both key documents. There is now a standard student handbook template to ensure required information is provided to all students, including those on Pearson courses. Staff and students were familiar with the assessment policies and processes. The review team concluded that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

**Recommendation - Expectations B8, B7 and Enhancement**

With regard to arrangements to ensure regular and systematic monitoring and review of courses, the College has established an HE Standards and Quality Monitoring Group. All the findings, recommendations and actions from this group are reported to the Senior Leadership Team and the Board of Governors as appropriate, and a summary report is produced annually. An effective HE Quality Cycle has been produced which details procedures, practices and timescales, and which has a formal reporting mechanism through the relevant College structures. All HE courses are now a discrete element of both the department and College Self-Assessment Reports and Quality Improvement Plans, and these are much more focused towards treating higher education as a distinct layer of provision. Staff have a good understanding of the processes of monitoring and review.

The review team concluded that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

**Recommendation - Expectations B8, B7 and Enhancement**

To clarify the grounds and possible outcomes for appeals, and informal and formal procedures for appeals and complaints, the College has developed an HE Academic Appeals policy and revised the Suggestions, Compliment and Complaints policy. These now provide detailed information on the process, timeframe and procedure for making an appeal, suggestion, compliment and complaint. All student handbooks provide suitable reference to both policy documents and information on the new procedures, outcomes and timeframe has been disseminated to all academic staff. The review team therefore concluded that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

**Recommendation - Expectation B10**

The College is committed to providing relevant work-related learning to its students through the support provided by teaching staff and their knowledge, experience and industry links that inform teaching, learning and assessment practice. This was previously identified as a feature of good practice and continues to be thoroughly endorsed by students. The College has formalised some of its other processes through the Work Related Learning Policy, the Table of Work Related Responsibilities, the Work Related Agreement and other course specific documents, and the External Facility Review documents. These provide clearly documented processes in each case. New programmes, such as the Foundation Degree in Early Childhood, although governed by awarding body procedures and employer requirements, will also come under the overarching policy of the College. The review team concluded that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

**Recommendation - Enhancement**

In terms of enabling deliberate steps to be taken at provider level to enhance learning opportunities of all higher education students, the College has developed a new HE Quality Cycle and established the HE Standards and Quality Group with course monitoring and review in its terms of reference. The HE Quality Cycle is facilitated by the new higher education committee structure and leads to the production of course, department and College Self-Assessment Reports and Quality Improvement Plans. Findings, recommendations and actions are reported to the Senior Leadership Team and the Standards and Quality Committee of the Board of Governors. HE student outcomes are now also reported separately. In addition there is an employer engagement initiative called 'Working Knowledge' which enables teaching staff and managers to build links and relationships with employers to enhance the learning opportunities for students. These processes enable a top-down approach to enhancement at a strategic level. Senior managers have made effective use of information from these processes, plus guidance from the overall College strategy for higher education, to drive enhancement initiatives. The 'Working Knowledge' initiative is an effective method of engaging with employers to enhance and develop provision to meet the needs of students and employers. The review team therefore concluded that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

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

**Affirmation - Expectation B5**

The College has continued to deliver on their actions and initiatives to strengthen the student voice. There is a student representative structure, which feeds into the provider's governance structure. Students have the opportunity to contribute to programme review through module surveys and an informal feedback system where academic staff and students work closely together. Students also have opportunities to feed into the College

deliberative structures, although they are not always familiar with how this is done. The Students' Union, led by a member of College staff, holds learner voice meetings where feedback is gathered and disseminated to course areas for consideration. The review team considers that the College has taken significant steps to strengthen the student voice and concluded that the provider is progressing the affirmation effectively.

The team found that the College had made progress against the good practice as follows.

**Good Practice - Expectation B3**

The College has built on the support provided by teaching staff and their knowledge, experience and industry links by instigating an annual membership to the Higher Education Academy. In addition, a separate HE staff development budget has been allocated and is monitored by the HE Quality Review Group. The College is sharing good practice in teaching and learning effectively through peer observations and hopes to extend this through reciprocal observations with the partner universities. It is also continuing to ensure that the curriculum is relevant to students and employers through the 'Working Knowledge' initiative. Teaching staff confirmed that their knowledge, experience and industry links are still a priority for the College and students spoke very highly of the quality of staff expertise which informs their vocational teaching, learning and assessment. The review team concluded that the provider is effectively disseminating this feature of good practice.

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about South Downs College

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

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

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at South Downs College.

- The support provided by teaching staff and their knowledge, experience and industry links that inform teaching, learning and assessment practice (Expectation B3).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to South Downs College.

By May 2015:

- develop, disseminate and implement a definitive version of assessment regulations, procedures and associated processes, for all Pearson courses (Expectations B6 and B9)
- review the policies on appeals and complaints to clarify the grounds and possible outcomes for appeals, and informal and formal procedures for appeals and complaints (Expectation B9).

By July 2015:

- put in place formal procedures for internal approval of new course design, the oversight of course development, and the approval of course modification (Expectation B1)
- establish arrangements to ensure regular and systematic monitoring and review of courses (Expectations B8, B7 and Enhancement)
- ensure all student handbooks for Pearson courses follow a standard template and are checked and approved annually (Expectation C)
- establish structures which will allow effective oversight of all higher education courses to enable deliberate steps to be taken at provider level to enhance learning opportunities of all higher education students (Enhancement).

By September 2015:

- ensure arrangements for staff development and the observation of teaching address the needs of higher education courses (Expectation B3)

- consider the distinctiveness of higher education student engagement to ensure higher education students are treated as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5 and Enhancement)
- document and implement the College's role and responsibilities in relation to work-related learning (Expectation B10).

### **Affirmation of action being taken**

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

- The steps being taken to strengthen the learner voice (Expectation B5).

### **Theme: Student Employability**

The College strategy for higher education is largely driven by the need to meet local employer needs. It is committed to developing courses that are industry relevant and that provide a range of industry standard learning opportunities and a high quality learning experience for students. All courses are vocational, focus on career progression, and aim to work with employers to ensure that strong links with employability skills are reflected within the curriculum. A number of courses require applicants to be in relevant employment to ensure that students have the opportunity to apply the learning outcomes in a practical setting. Students undertake a range of employability opportunities while studying at the College and have opportunities to develop their employability skills and industry links through interaction with staff at the College and employers in a wider context. This is facilitated through employer visits, project days and work-based learning activities. In addition, the Careers and Employability department at the College provides employability support as well as independent and impartial advice on progression.

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

### **About South Downs College**

The South Downs College is the largest further education college in Hampshire and occupies a single site just north of Portsmouth. It was established in 1974 and has grown significantly since then. Building programmes to extend and improve the College's accommodation have taken place annually for the past 19 years. The College offers an extensive range of courses from pre-entry and level 1 to levels 4 and 5 and these attract students from a wide geographical area. In 2013-14 there were 5,372 full-time and 2,518 part-time students at the College and in 2014-15, 65 full-time and 188 part-time students enrolled on higher education courses.

The College takes strategic direction from three key factors: its mission, vision and values. The mission is for 'a community of excellence delivering outstanding opportunities, inspiring and enabling all to fulfil their potential'; the vision is for South Downs College to be the first choice for all; and the values are excellence, inspiration, integrity, inclusivity and passion. Following significant change in senior management roles, responsibilities and personnel, the College is undertaking a major periodic review of all of its operational strategies. Thirteen strategies covering all key areas of responsibility are being developed in a coherent and consistent format. The College has taken the strategic decision to embed higher education in all college-wide strategies and policies.

Since the last QAA review in March 2010, there have been significant structural changes at the College. A new Principal and two vice principals were appointed (although one has recently retired) and several other roles have been subsumed or realigned, for example the position of Quality Manager was subsumed into the Vice Principal (Curriculum and Quality) and Head of Teaching & Learning roles. The College currently follows a three-tier management structure led by the Principal and the Senior Leadership Team. The second tier consists of heads of departments and two heads of studies, who report to the Vice Principal. Departmental heads manage curriculum areas and are responsible for all staff within their department. The cross-college Head of Studies role was established in August 2013 to oversee the student experience and manage pastoral provision. Higher education students are under the pastoral care of the Head of Level 3 & 4 Vocational Studies in this context. The Head of Studies has also taken over the chair of the Higher Education Quality Review Group (HEQRG), which meets termly, and the chair of the 'Disinterested Party' surveys. The final tier of management consists of course managers, who oversee the day-to-day running and logistics of their allocated course.

Another major change since the last review is that the Higher National Diploma (HND) Sport & Exercise Sciences and the Foundation Degree in Working with Children are no longer offered at the College. The HND was withdrawn due to a restriction in Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funding, with the last cohort completing in 2010. The degree-awarding body for the Foundation Degree in Working with Children withdrew the course in 2011 as a result of rationalisation of its own provision. The College now works with two awarding partners: the University of Portsmouth and Pearson. It offers three courses franchised from the University of Portsmouth: HND Business; Foundation Degree Business and Management and a Professional and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Post-Compulsory Education - PCE). In addition, the College offers courses in music and engineering which are directly validated by Pearson: HNC/HND Electrical & Electronic Engineering; HNC/HND Manufacturing Engineering; HND Music Performance; and HND Music Production.

The last review in March 2010 made six desirable recommendations, one of which was to continue to progress the developmental engagement action plan from the previous year, and identified seven items of good practice.

The recommendations were wide reaching and included: reviewing and evaluating the new management structure; monitoring and evaluating the uptake of higher education staff development; reviewing course profiles on the UCAS website; improving the consistency of programme handbooks and module/unit guides; and ensuring there is clear communication to students of the process of confirming academic results. The recommendations from the developmental engagement also included: clarification of the procedures for dealing with student appeals and academic malpractice; exploration of opportunities for online feedback on assessment; the development of mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice in assessment; and monitoring the quality and comprehensiveness of assessment regulation information in student handbooks. The review team found that some of these recommendations have been superseded by recent developments, for example the significant changes in management structures within the College. While some action has been taken there is in many cases no clear evidence of the monitoring and impact assessment of such actions. In some cases the review team identified matters that continue to require attention, for example the consistency of handbooks, the clarification of procedures for dealing with appeals and academic malpractice, the clarity and accessibility of information for students on assessment regulations, and ensuring staff development addresses the needs of higher education courses. Overall, the review team found that there has been insufficient monitoring and evaluation of recommendations identified by previous QAA reviews and this has led to possibilities to enhance student learning opportunities being missed.

Good practice identified in the last review included: the close and effective working relationships with awarding partners; the use of Information Learning Technology champions, the virtual learning environment (VLE) and learning resource centres to support teaching and learning; the effective management of high quality resources; and the use of the website to provide comprehensive information. It also noted as good practice the significant contribution of the HEQRG to the maintenance of academic standards and the enhancement of learning opportunities. The College states that this good practice has been sustained and developed and confirms that the HEQRG holds regular, termly meetings; resources including the library, VLE, teaching rooms and equipment have maintained their high quality status and the College continues to provide comprehensive information on its website. While the review team found some evidence of some good practice continuing it found no clear evidence of this being built on systematically to enhance learning opportunities for students. In addition, review of the notes of meetings of the HEQRG does not indicate that there is systematic and formal monitoring or review of quality issues across higher education courses. The review team considers that currently, opportunities to consolidate good practice, identify approaches for enhancement and address issues are being missed.

## Explanation of the findings about South Downs 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 courses in partnership with the University of Portsmouth, and Pearson. The qualifications provided by the College adhere to the principles laid out in the University's Franchise Agreement, the Collaborative Provision Policy, the Approval, Modification and Closure of Academic Provision and the Programme Monitoring and Review Operational Handbook. 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. Pearson provides the regulatory framework for Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) qualifications.

1.2 Qualifications franchised from the University of Portsmouth are allocated the appropriate level on the FHEQ during the course approval process. The University also conducts a programme specification approval every year where an Associate Dean validates the level. Pearson courses are pre-validated and the College applies for centre and course approval to offer them.

1.3 Pearson courses are linked to industry organisations for example: JAMES (Joint Audio Media Education Support) the industry organisation which represents education

matters for the Association of Professional Recording Services (APRS); and the Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies Alliance (SEMTA). Programme specifications are aligned to the FHEQ, the appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements, National Occupational Standards and the requirements of national qualifications and credit frameworks .

1.4 The College has an appointed Head of Study, who along with the Vice Principal, Curriculum and Quality, has responsibility for higher education and for liaising with the University and Pearson . External examiners and University staff allocated to support the College provide guidance on the use of academic frameworks and external reference points in the maintenance of academic standards .

1.5 The use of the University and Pearson approval and regulatory frameworks, and the internal College processes enable Expectation A1 to be met.

1.6 The review team reviewed relevant University documentation for programme approval , including quality assurance policies and procedures , and tested the approach taken by the College by reviewing documentary evidence and meeting University representatives , senior College staff and academic staff .

1.7 The College works effectively with the University and Pearson to ensure adherence to delivery, assessment and the requirements of the awards. Senior staff and academic staff understand the importance of maintaining standards set by the University and Pearson and are clear about their responsibilities. Academic staff the review team met demonstrated a knowledge of the FHEQ and the writing of course documentation for approval, including the relationship between assessment and programme learning outcomes .

1.8 The College discharges its responsibilities effectively within the context of its agreements with the University and Pearson and the review team concludes that Expectation A1 is met and the associated level of 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**

1.9 The College and University have a franchise agreement which details quality assurance processes including external examiners, annual reports and periodic reviews. The University also produces the 'Examination and Assessment Regulations for UK and Overseas Collaborative Programmes' which was updated in September 2013 and 'External Examiners Regulations and Procedures' which the College should adhere to. There are clear University procedures for the use of external examiners and external examiner reports state that there are no concerns relating to academic standards. Pearson courses use off-the-shelf, previously approved modules and follow standard Pearson guidelines such as the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment and the BTEC Standards Verification document .

1.10 The College is developing a strategic plan and this is being executed through a defined management structure through heads of departments and the Head of Level 3 & 4 Vocational Studies. Information is discussed and disseminated informally to course managers and formally through the HEQRG which enables the policies and procedures of the University and Pearson to be followed. These processes enable the College to meet Expectation A2.1.

1.11 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the College's processes by scrutinising documents detailing course approval and review processes, reading reports of approval and review, and by talking to senior staff, academic staff, and students.

1.12 Awarding partner regulations and policies are well embedded and understood. The procedures relating to University courses are working well. The College has Boards of Examiners for each subject area which consider the award of qualifications; external examiners usually attend to confirm the awards given.

1.13 Academic frameworks and regulations are in place and effective. The review team 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**

1.14 The responsibility for maintaining the definitive record for each programme and qualification lies with the University and Pearson. All qualifications are outlined in programme specifications which detail the course profile, aims, intended learning outcomes, awards, course structure and assessment. The definitive records are used by the College as the key point of reference for course information used to construct appropriate schemes of delivery (referred to as learning planners) and assessment schedules. Programme specifications are reviewed and maintained by the University or Pearson. Definitive programme specifications for the University are stored on the University Electronic Document Management (EDM) system and within course management files and on the Pearson website for Pearson courses. The approach to maintaining definitive records enables the College to meet Expectation A2.2.

1.15 The review team examined the Franchise Agreement with the University, programme specifications, schemes of delivery, course handbooks, student unit handbooks, student guides, course information sheets, and assessment schedules and briefs. In addition the review team reviewed course information provided through the VLE and marketing materials and spoke to staff during the visit about the course approval processes in place at the College.

1.16 The review team confirms that College staff are aware of the requirements set out in the programme specifications and ensure information provided regarding courses is aligned with the approved documentation. The review team considers that appropriate mechanisms are in place for maintaining definitive programme information and that these are used appropriately by College staff. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A2.2 is met and the associated level of risk in this area 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**

1.17 The College delivers courses under franchise which are developed, designed and approved through the procedures of the University and Pearson to ensure alignment with the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements .

1.18 The University Franchise Agreement states that initial validation and subsequent review of programmes, and the academic standards of the awards granted in its name, are the responsibility of the University. The University publishes procedures for the approval, modification and closure of academic provision. Approval follows a four stage process which makes use of external input. In the case of Pearson awards, the College applies for Centre and course approval to deliver pre-validated courses aligned with UK academic standards. The procedural frameworks within which the College operates allow Expectation A3.1 to be met.

1.19 To test this, the review team considered the College's self-evaluation document, the University's procedures, validation documentation and minutes of teaching team meetings. In addition, the team met representatives from the University of Portsmouth, and senior, academic and support staff within the College.

1.20 The review team confirms that the College complies with the procedures of the University and Pearson in delivering awards approved through their frameworks and regulations. The College has the opportunity to shape the character of its Pearson awards by selecting from a range of validated option modules suited to local needs, student interest and the College's own resources. In the case of introduction of a new Pearson award, the review team did not see evidence of a formal procedure beyond discussion at departmental level, but was assured that approval from the Senior Leadership Team would be required.

1.21 The review team considers that the College operates effectively within the frameworks for programme approval of the University and Pearson and therefore concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met and that 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**

1.22 The College works within the regulatory and quality assurance frameworks of the University and Pearson. Programme specifications set out the intended learning outcomes that are demonstrated through assessment, and align these with UK academic standards. The procedures for setting, marking and moderating assessment, including the use of external examiners, are designed to ensure that students have achieved the standards set for the award of credit and qualifications. Together these approaches enable Expectation 3.2 to be met.

1.23 The review team tested the effectiveness of assessment in demonstrating the achievement of learning outcomes and appropriate academic standards by reading documentary evidence including relevant policies, external examiners' reports and minutes of Boards of Examiners, and by meeting senior staff, academic staff, and representatives from University of Portsmouth.

1.24 The University is responsible for the setting of assessment for its awards, and the process of assessment is guided by the University's Marking and Feedback Policy. The College conducts first marking of student work and the University conducts moderation which involves cross-moderation with other colleges also delivering the same franchised awards. In the case of Pearson awards, the College sets its own assessment which is checked by the external examiner to ensure that it is at the appropriate level. The College's Internal Verification policy and procedures operate effectively to ensure the assessment tasks are suitable and marking is robust.

1.25 External examiners are employed by the University and Pearson. Their reports confirm that assessments are appropriate to qualifications and national standards are being met.

1.26 The review team confirms that several different terms are used for Boards of Examiners, and that the University employs a two-tier system of Boards. External examiners normally attend boards run by the University. In the case of Pearson awards, boards are run by the College; external examiners do not attend these boards but feed in comments from visits during the year. External examiners' reports and the annual Quality Review and Development Report prepared by a Pearson-appointed reviewer confirm the Pearson's satisfaction with assessment arrangements.

1.27 The review team confirms that procedures are followed which ensure learning outcomes are demonstrated and standards satisfied, and thus considered Expectation A3.2 to be met with a low associated level of risk.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing academic standards and an outcomes-based approach to academic awards**

## **Findings**

1.28 Responsibility for the monitoring and review of courses delivered under franchise arrangements by the College rests with the University and Pearson. University of Portsmouth procedures for programme monitoring and for annual and periodic review are published in an Operational Handbook. Pearson does not require or undertake annual or periodic review of its higher education courses although a Pearson-appointed reviewer prepares an annual Quality Review and Development Report on the College as an approved centre to offer Pearson Higher National courses. Alignment with the requirements of the University and Pearson enable the College to meet Expectation A3.3.

1.29 The review team investigated the College's engagement with the processes of the University and Pearson by reading policy and operational documents provided by the University, Pearson and the College, reading examples of review reports, and conducting meetings with senior and academic staff, and representatives from the University.

1.30 The review team established that the procedures and processes of the University are followed. The College teaching team is represented at twice-yearly Boards of Studies organised by the University, and College students have the opportunity to contribute to monitoring through attendance at Staff Student Consultative committees. The College prepares course Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review reports for the University and contributes to the University's periodic review processes of its programmes delivered in partner institutions.

1.31 Ongoing monitoring of Pearson courses takes place in teaching team meetings . The annual Quality Review and Development Report prepared by a Pearson-appointed reviewer confirms that the College operates appropriate quality processes and procedures for managing assessment.

1.32 The University and Pearson appoint external examiners for the College's courses . Reports from external examiners confirm that the standards of awards meet UK academic standards and those of the University and Pearson.

1.33 The College engages effectively with the requirements of the University and Pearson and the review team therefore concludes that 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**

1.34 The College states that external agencies are involved in curriculum planning and development, with consultation leading to improved practice in teaching, learning and assessment. Pearson develop Higher National engineering courses to meet the needs of industry and these are informed by the Engineering Council UK and the Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies Alliance (SEMTA). Higher National music courses are informed by JAMES, the industry organisation which represents education matters for the Association of Professional Recording Services (APRS), the Music Producers' Guild and the UK Screen Association. Both Higher National courses are written to meet the appropriate National Occupational Standards. The College has selected these courses to run in part because of their industrial relevance and their significance to the employment potential of their students.

1.35 External examiners are appointed by the University and Pearson to oversee the academic standards of their programmes. Pearson appoint a standards verifier who is the external examiner, and also a senior standards verifier and a Regional Quality Manager who check that the College is operating quality assurance and assessing to national standards. These frameworks and associated guidance enable the College to meet Expectation A3.4.

1.36 The review team tested the use of external expertise by reading validation documents and external examiners' reports and through meetings with senior and academic staff.

1.37 When programmes are validated by the University, the validation panel members include an external academic as well as faculty and non-faculty University members. External input into the quality assurance of these programmes is through the annual and periodic review processes which are fully supported and implemented by the College.

1.38 There is also evidence of some external input to curriculum design and delivery through the use of other stakeholders in, for example, employer visits, guest speakers and projects.

1.39 Recommendations and good practice arising from external examiner reports enter the course review system and are reported through the College Self-Assessment Report (SAR) process and also, if appropriate, through the University Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review (ASQER). External examiner reports are received by the Head of Teaching and Learning for recording and dissemination to course managers for discussion with their head of department. This is an effective way of capturing recommendations and good practice, and ensuring actions are carried out. The external examiners confirm that academic standards for each award are met and external examiner reports are available to students on the VLE.

1.40 Overall, the review team is satisfied that external and independent expertise is appropriately used by the College. The review team concludes that Expectation 3.4 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

1.41 In reaching its positive judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

1.42 The College works effectively with the University and Pearson to maintain academic standards. Portsmouth University's and Pearson's regulatory and quality assurance frameworks are used appropriately. The College is aware of and takes into consideration external reference points in the maintenance of standards and uses external and independent expertise where possible. All Expectations in this area are met with low levels of associated risk. The review team therefore concludes that the College **meets** UK expectations in the maintenance of academic standards of awards it offers on behalf of the University and Pearson.

## 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 Programme design, development and approval take place within the procedural frameworks of the College's awarding body and Pearson with the College responsible for the maintenance of academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities in the courses it delivers. The procedural frameworks enable the College to meet Expectation B1.

2.2 The review team examined documentary evidence including terms of reference and minutes of the HEQRG and course team meeting minutes, and discussed with College senior management and academic staff its approach to developing its higher education provision and approving courses for delivery .

2.3 The College has no formally documented strategy specifically for higher education development. The review team found no evidence of any formal procedure for initially approving the introduction of courses, overseeing course development, or approving modifications to existing courses. Senior staff outlined to the review team the strategic considerations supporting current provision and potential development of further higher education provision, in particular meeting the needs of the local community and employers .

2.4 The College contributes to the ongoing monitoring and development of existing programmes franchised from the University of Portsmouth through participation in scheduled Partnership Forum meetings and Boards of Studies meetings, which bring together staff from the University and its partner colleges delivering its programmes under franchise. The University's processes of Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative reviews, and periodic review, also provide scope to feed in to programme design and enhancement of learning opportunities .

2.5 The review team notes the introduction of a new Pearson HND in Music Production in 2012 to run alongside the HND Music Performance, the proposed content of which was discussed at a teaching team meeting . The review team was assured that the teaching team and the Head of Department had given due consideration to potential demand and to the staff expertise and other resources required to deliver the award . The review team was also assured that further discussion had taken place between the Head of the Department and the Vice Principal (now retired), and that the Vice Principal had secured the support of the senior leadership team prior to the start of the course .

2.6 The College can shape the awards it offers through Pearson by selecting the optional units to be delivered. An intention to change the choice of units offered is initiated by the relevant teaching team and agreed by the Head of Department. Decisions to change units are informed by student requests, employer needs, and the resources available . The HEQRG includes some discussion of units to be delivered but formal approval of changes is not part of its terms of reference . Where a change to units has been made, this is notified to and recorded by the examinations office.

2.7 There are no formal processes to ensure effective management oversight of modifications to courses, and new course design and development has been undertaken and agreed through informal mechanisms. Especially in light of its interest in expanding higher education provision, the review team **recommends** that the College puts in place formal procedures for internal approval of new course design, the oversight of course development, and the approval of course modification.

2.8 The College's processes align with those of its awarding institutions which have ultimate responsibility for programme design, development and approval. The current small scale of higher education provision allows key staff to share an understanding of the strategy and plans for higher education. The review team therefore considers that Expectation B1 is met. However, the operational weaknesses in the current arrangements present a moderate level of risk as the lack of formal procedures for the approval of course design, development and modification does not enable effective management oversight of these processes.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

2.9 The College adheres to an overarching admissions policy, which sets out clear principles for the recruitment and admission of students. The admission process differs between each course offered at the College. Courses franchised by the University follow the University admissions policy in conjunction with the College admissions policy. All full-time University and Pearson HND music students are admitted through UCAS and part-time students through the College online application system. Some courses require applicants to have an interview and/or an audition.

2.10 The College runs a bespoke application and enrolment process for each course, to cater for both the individual students needs and the selection needs of the College. The HNC/HND Engineering students are part-time, on day release from employers; they apply directly through the College's standard, generic part-time course application process on the College website.

2.11 Departmental teaching teams, under the management of the Head of the Department, select applicants onto Pearson courses by vetting the applications and interviewing and/or auditioning if required. They pass enrolment forms to the Examinations Office for entering into a College database and the Pearson online registration system. For full-time courses, UCAS notifies successful applicants and they are sent an enrolment letter by the College. The Examinations Office sends successful Pearson and part-time applicants an acknowledgement letter.

2.12 The College website and prospectus contain information on admissions for all courses, and for franchised courses the University website and prospectus also provide this information. Prospective students are invited to a series of open days which provide additional information regarding study at the College. The College provides training to admissions staff and monitors the application of the admissions process, the recruitment position and feedback from new entrants. The approach to recruitment and admissions enables the College to meet Expectation B2.

2.13 The review team scrutinised the admissions policy in conjunction with the linked procedural documentation and reviewed the operation of the process by talking to staff and current full and part-time students.

2.14 Information on admissions provided to prospective students is clear and designed to ensure all prospective students are informed of course details and requirements prior to application. Prospectuses are of a high standard and the content is informative, well ordered and accessible. Students confirmed that the admissions process was straightforward and information provided by the College and University was clear.

2.15 The College makes effective use of its admissions processes to identify prospective students with particular learning and support needs. These processes are carried out as part of the induction process and referrals are made to the Student Services and Support department for individual student follow up.

2.16 Overall, the review team considers that the College has a clear and comprehensive admissions policy, which is appropriately applied and monitored. The College's approach to admissions is inclusive and is accessible to students through guidance made available on the College's website. The review team concludes that Expectation B2 is met and the risk in this area is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching***

#### **Findings**

2.17 The College has a draft Teaching and Learning Strategy which is College-wide and sets out the aims, priorities and enablers to provide an outstanding teaching and learning experience which is effectively quality assured. The College has recently introduced a learning planner which is used by teaching staff and has replaced the previous scheme of work and lesson plan system and contains all the previous information in a single document. The learning planners show a range of teaching methods to cater for all learning styles and educational needs. Assessment schedules are also produced and provided to students to ensure they are aware of the requirements of assessed elements of each course.

2.18 The learning and teaching activities have the appropriate learning environments which comprise both physical and virtual facilities. Some courses such as music use local performance venues. All permanent rooms and facilities are fully accessible to all students. It is clear that there has been extensive investment in physical learning environments and a range of industry-specific software is accessible to students. The College has no dedicated higher education physical resources as it believes in full integration of all of students throughout all facilities. Business and teacher training students on franchised courses have reciprocal rights and open access to the University's facilities including the library and the student support services.

2.19 The College uses a VLE and students on University courses can also access the University portal. In the 2013-14 academic year the College introduced a gold, silver and bronze medal system for the use of its own VLE.

2.20 The College has a teaching and learning observation policy and guidelines which is based on Ofsted and further education policies. The criteria for the grades are taken from the Ofsted Handbook and lessons are graded as outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate. Staff who teach on University courses have to be approved by the University and become 'Partner Associate Lecturers'.

2.21 The procedure for the appointment of new staff is set out in the recruitment policy. Staff have a probationary year in which to complete an induction to the College and its systems based on a comprehensive checklist. The College organises four College-wide staff development events each year known as 'Learning Circles'. College staff who teach higher education are eligible to attend the University of Portsmouth 'Learning and Teaching Events' although few are able to do so because of teaching commitments. While primary research is not a priority at the College, teaching staff are well qualified in their subject area and have relevant and current industry experience. The systems that are in place enable the College to meet Expectation B3.

2.22 The review team tested and evaluated the effectiveness of the policies and procedures for learning and teaching by scrutinising relevant policies, procedures and records of teaching observations, reviewing staff curricula vitae, and through meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

2.23 Every teacher is observed each year and the Head of Teaching and Learning produces a lesson observation report on the grades for formal lesson observations and details of informal and peer observations. This enables senior managers to monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning in Senior Leadership Team Quality and Curriculum meetings. The College produces a Teaching and Learning Strategy Action Plan to address any identified areas for improvement. In 2013-14 the results showed 94 per cent outstanding and good observations in higher education. Students' views on their teaching and learning support this and the students value the knowledge and experience of their tutors. The review team considers the support provided by teaching staff and their knowledge, experience and industry links that inform teaching, learning and assessment practice to be **good practice**. The College also reports very good destination results for higher education students in 2013-14.

2.24 Following lesson observations, teachers use observer forms and self-evaluation forms to reflect on their own performance. Mentor support is assigned to any lecturer graded as 'requires improvement' or 'unsatisfactory'. The lecturer is re-observed after four weeks and if there is no measurable improvement they will be supported through an individual improvement process. Staff are also encouraged to undertake at least one peer observation per year. The College considers this approach, alongside formal observations, central to the enhancement of teaching and learning practice. Good practice is discussed at the HEQRG although no clear reference is made to observations informing good practice. The College states that good practice and areas for improvement identified in lesson observations are shared during 'Learning Circles' events. However, the review team saw no clear evidence of this process or of good practice and areas for development specific to the needs of higher education teaching and learning being identified and addressed through this process. Staff development events are largely College-wide although the College has identified the need for training days specific to higher education staff. The review team **recommends** that the College ensures arrangements for staff development and the observation of teaching address the needs of higher education courses.

2.25 The College monitors retention, achievement and success rates for all courses and any with low results take part in a 'Support for Success' process. These courses are assigned a group of teaching mentors to facilitate change and an action plan is developed, monitored and reported back to the Head of Teaching and Learning. The HND Business course has taken part in this process and the evidence supplied is reflective and useful in the development of the course.

2.26 Overall, the review team concludes that comprehensive planning for teaching and learning takes place and that effective monitoring occurs through the lesson observation process. Expectation B3 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.27 The College has a Student Services and Support structure which includes roles in additional support, health and well-being and learning resources under an Assistant Principal Student Services and Support. There is also a Teaching and Learning Strategy detailing how the staff of the College strive to offer all students a learning experience of high quality and relevance. Student Services and Support offers help for students including counselling, financial advice, travel, accommodation and safeguarding.

2.28 All courses have lessons on research techniques and incorporate study skills sessions; this is supported by a College Study Centre which students can refer to for support.

2.29 The Higher Education Student Handbook is a useful guide to accessing the various support services available at the College, for example, the library, additional support, study skills and the Career Zone. The College VLE also contains information on careers, employability, referencing and Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) applications. Students undertake a library induction at the beginning of the course and are also able to access online research tools and a library intranet page which has links to higher education specific e-books, referencing guides and external links. The policies, structures, resources and guidance that the College has in place enable it to meet Expectation B4.

2.30 In order to test the operation of these policies and processes, the review team met staff and students and examined staffing structures, course information and the Student Handbook.

2.31 The College Equality and Diversity Policy shows how the College provides students with a fair, equal and excellent experience regardless of background and this is confirmed by students.

2.32 Students access additional support through declaring a need at application, by self-referral after the start of the course or organised through the Course Manager. All College students have access to the Study Centre, which provides bespoke one-to-one educational assistance to learners with a variety of academic needs. Students on courses franchised from the University of Portsmouth also have the opportunity to use the University's Academic Skills Unit which offers a range of handouts and workbooks which can be downloaded from the intranet.

2.33 While the review team found no evidence of resource planning at course team level, students have full access to the library, music practice rooms and engineering workshops and the quality of these is highlighted in an external examiner report. Teacher training students have workplace mentors to help develop their practical skills and engineering students commonly have someone in their place of employment who monitors and supports their academic progress .

2.34 Overall, the review team found evidence that there are effective processes to 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**

2.35 The College has undertaken significant work on the development of the learner voice for all students. The Assistant Principal (Student Services and Support) is leading the development of a Learner Voice Strategy, Learner Voice Policy and Learner Voice Action Plan. The Learner Voice Strategy, approved in October 2014, sets out the College's approach to meaningfully involving learners and identifies key strategic priorities for achieving this. The Learner Voice Policy sets out the College's plan to translate the strategy into operational learner outcomes and the Learner Voice Action Plan sets out the actions the College believes need to be taken to deliver the strategic aims, with set timescales. The continued development and application of these strategies and initiatives should, in principle, enable the College to meet Expectation B5. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to strengthen the learner voice.

2.36 The review team scrutinised a range of documentation supporting the College's approach to engaging all students, individually and collectively, as partners in quality assurance and enhancement including the Learner Voice Policy, the Learner Voice Action Plan and minutes of meetings. The review team also met students and staff to test the documentation supplied and gain views on the effectiveness of the mechanisms applied.

2.37 The College has a process for the appointment of student representatives but higher education student representatives are not routinely involved as members of the College's decision-making committees. Class representatives for University courses are invited to attend the two annual Staff Student Consultative meetings (SSCC) required under the franchise agreement. Outcomes of the SSCC meetings are reported at each Board of Studies (BoS). The HND Music handbooks state that student representatives attend staff meetings termly to discuss any issues, but this is not carried out in practice due to the informal mechanisms of feedback.

2.38 All higher education students are invited to attend a 'disinterested' party meeting that broadly follows the agenda of the prescribed SSCC meetings. It is chaired by an independent member of College staff and allows students the opportunity to raise issues confidentially. The evidence provided to the review team demonstrates that students attend and raise their concerns which are dealt with by senior management.

2.39 The College does not systematically undertake course or unit evaluation relating specifically to their franchised courses beyond the requirements set out by the University. There is an informal approach to gathering student feedback due to small student numbers. Regular informal discussions take place between staff and students, and suggestions and requests are discussed and action taken by course teams. Although effective in addressing immediate issues, the review team is not assured that the College can systematically reflect on or evaluate student perceptions of their Pearson courses or higher education provision as a whole. The review team **recommends** the College considers the distinctiveness of higher education student engagement to ensure higher education students are treated as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience, in line with Expectation B5.

2.40 Students confirmed that the informal approach works well and commented positively on the approach the College has taken to address issues raised. There are

effective informal channels between committed academic staff and their students which ensure positive student satisfaction at course level.

2.41 Students have the opportunity to be elected as the higher education representative on the college-wide student union. However, there is no formal student representation on any committee to enable students to engage as partners in quality assurance and enhancement of the higher education provision; student engagement is localised to course level which facilitates course related issues.

2.42 The review team concludes that the informal mechanisms in place work well for responding to feedback or concerns from individual students, but do not effectively capture the collective student voice or ensure effective student representation at decision-making committees. Staff the review team met are aware of the challenges of engaging with higher education students and the development of the Learning Voice Strategy is a key step towards the College demonstrating it meets the Expectation. However this Strategy and related initiatives have yet to be fully implemented and embedded and it is too early for any impact to be assessed. In reaching its conclusion, the review team gave appropriate consideration to the size and nature of the higher education provision at the College and acknowledges the current developments and the significant reliance on informal relationships and University procedures. The review team, however, concludes that Expectation B5 is not met. The risk in this area is moderate as students are not currently engaged as partners in the enhancement and assurance of their educational experience and there are limited opportunities to ensure effective student voice at any College-level committee.

**Expectation: Not met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

2.43 The College's Assessment Policy lays out general principles guiding assessment for all of its courses. Other policies which apply to Pearson courses are published on internal verification, academic malpractice, and accreditation of prior learning. For courses validated by the University, its policies, regulations and procedures apply. Responsibility for policies and practices of assessment lies with the Head of Teaching and Learning, who reports to the Vice Principal. These policies and procedures enable the College to meet Expectation B6.

2.44 The review team considered the nature and operation of the College's approaches to assessment by examining its published policies and other documentation, and by meeting with academic staff and students.

2.45 An Internal Verification Policy sets out requirements of verification to ensure that assessment instruments are fit for purpose, assessment decisions are valid and assessors are trained, supported and monitored. The review team viewed examples of how the policy is applied and found that procedures for setting assessment, marking and moderating are clearly articulated and consistently followed. It is therefore able to conclude that assessment is a valid measure of achievement of learning outcomes.

2.46 Assessment tasks are set according to the requirements of the University and Pearson, and where appropriate make connections to professional contexts; assessments in engineering, for instance, are mapped against the Institute of Engineering Technology competences. In discussion with staff the review team confirmed that employers' perspectives are used to enrich students' experience of some assessment tasks but they are not involved in the marking process itself. Students are provided with assessment calendars which allow them to plan their work. The College policy is to have marked work and assessment grades returned within four weeks. Students confirm that they are given clear information on assessment requirements and that feedback is timely and constructive.

2.47 The College's Academic Malpractice Policy defines learner malpractice and outlines the College's approach to developing students' assessment literacy, and for addressing allegations of malpractice. It does not specify the penalties for committing academic malpractice in Pearson-awarded courses as recommended in the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment (level 4 to 7). The student submission and HE Student Survey indicate that most students agree they have been given information on how to avoid academic malpractice, and what the penalties are. The review team noted that the policy is published on the general higher education page of the College's VLE. There is, however, inconsistency in the way in which information on malpractice is provided to students in course handbooks, and the policy could not be accessed directly from all courses' VLE pages. College staff commented that very few incidents come to the attention of markers. Although the HND Music Student Handbook 2013 states that anti-plagiarism software may be used to check student work, the College does not currently make use of specialised software to help identify plagiarism and staff consider their personal knowledge of students would allow them to identify any anomalies.

2.48 The College follows the University's policy on extenuating circumstances for all its higher education courses. With respect to the treatment of work submitted late without valid extenuating circumstances, courses awarded by Portsmouth follow the University's procedures which are clearly laid out in the University's Examination and Assessment Regulations. Arrangements for late submission within Pearson courses are not published in any formal regulatory or procedural document, although for the HND Music courses an informal working document on capping marks is available to students online with penalties specified on assignment briefs. The review team found no written statement for engineering courses on treatment of work submitted late. The review team also found that students had limited or unclear understanding of the rules and staff recognition of the issue was not consistent.

2.49 Results are confirmed at Boards of Examiners, operating under several different titles. For courses validated by the University, the College is represented at University-convened Boards. Boards for Pearson courses are run by the College. The review team viewed minutes of boards and found that those for Pearson qualifications were of variable quality and were generally not a thorough record of the business of the board; the College acknowledged this, but assured the review team that the procedural requirements of Pearson are followed and that the recording and notification of results is in accordance with Pearson's expectations. The College has published a document called Guidance Notes on Higher Education Assessment Boards which includes guidance on planning for and following up after the meeting, and specifies membership and agenda items. Although the procedures for the confirmation of marks meet the requirements of Pearson, the minutes do not follow the guidance notes and are not a satisfactory record of the business conducted at the boards.

2.50 By not following its own guidance on Boards of Examiners, the College does not possess a satisfactory record of the confirmation stage of the assessment process for Pearson courses. Moreover, assessment regulations, policies, and procedures are not in all cases explicit, complete, transparent or accessible to students studying on Pearson qualifications. The review team noted a similar issue with the accessibility and consistency of information available to students on the procedures for appeals and complaints (see paragraph 2.77). The review team **recommends** that the College develop, disseminate and implement a definitive version of assessment regulations, procedures and associated processes, for all Pearson courses.

2.51 The review team recognises that the close relationship between College teaching teams and student groups, and effective student induction, help to ensure that students feel confident that they are treated fairly in assessment. Assessment processes are conducted as required by the University and Pearson and verification and moderation processes ensure that assessment is a valid measure of the achievement of learning outcomes. The review team concludes that Expectation B6 is met. The associated level of risk in this area is moderate as the lack of a clear and definitive set of assessment regulations, procedures and associated processes for Pearson courses poses a risk for the equitable and reliable application of processes to students.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.52 External examiners are appointed by the University of Portsmouth and Pearson to oversee the academic standards of their courses. Pearson appoint a Standards Verifier, who is the external examiner, and also a Senior Standards Verifier and a Regional Quality Manager who check that the College is operating quality assurance and assessing to national standards. The College Internal Verification Policy requires all courses to have an internal verification schedule which is linked to the assessment plan. All marked work is internally verified prior to being submitted to the external examiner. During their visits external examiners sample assessed work, attend Boards of Studies, Exam Boards and Unit Accreditation Boards, and visit students in staff-student meetings, where appropriate, and this was confirmed during meetings with College staff.

2.53 The external examiner reports follow formats dictated by the University and Pearson and are used by course teams in developing and enhancing their courses. Recommendations from external examiner reports feed into the department Self-Assessment Reports and Quality Improvement Plans and ultimately into the College Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan. For University courses issues from the external examiner reports also feed into the Annual Standards and Quality Review Reports.

2.54 External examiner reports are sent to the Head of Teaching and Learning and any recommendations or good practice are logged before dissemination to course managers for discussion with their head of department. External examiners report that academic standards for the awards are met and they check on progress against actions arising from their reports at their next visit. These processes enable the College to meet Expectation B7.

2.55 The review team scrutinised external examiners reports, relevant policies produced by the University and Pearson, department and College Self-Assessment Reports and Quality Improvement Plans, plus the Annual Standards and Quality Review Reports produced for the University. The review team also spoke to senior staff, academic staff and students.

2.56 External examiner reports are sent to the Head of Teaching and Learning for recording before dissemination to course managers for discussion with their head of department. This is an effective way of capturing recommendations and good practice, and ensuring actions are carried out. There is, however, no committee which formally receives all external examiners' reports and oversees responses to them.

2.57 Recommendations and good practice arising from external examiner reports enter the course review system at course level and are then reported through self-assessment processes. However, these processes are college-wide and do not make specific reference to higher education. Relatively minor points from external examiner reports are unlikely to appear in the department or College self-assessment reports and it therefore unlikely that this system can inform higher education teaching, learning and assessment practice. For University courses the Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review reports consider external examiner reports routinely as part of annual monitoring. There is, however, no comparable process for Pearson awards and no mechanism for drawing out common themes or issues across the whole higher education provision. The **recommendation** in Expectation B8 to establish arrangements to ensure regular and systematic monitoring and

review of all higher education courses would facilitate the process of oversight and review of external examiners' reports at a whole-College level.

2.58 The review team considers that the College's processes for monitoring and acting on issues arising from external examiners' reports is effective. Appropriate consideration is given to reports in the quality assurance process at course and department level and the review 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**

2.59 The College operates according to the requirements for monitoring and review of its University and Pearson. University of Portsmouth procedures are published in an Operational Handbook. Monitoring of Pearson awards follows Pearson's standard procedures.

2.60 Internal to the College, academic courses are monitored and reviewed in various ways, although there is no formal documentation describing the quality cycle for higher education provision. The College's primary vehicle for formal quality review of all its courses is the annual Self-Assessment Report (SAR), which is built up from departmental SARs. These feed into a college-wide SAR and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). There is no requirement for these documents to include formal comment on every award offered.

2.61 The College's HEQRG was identified in the previous review in March 2010 as an emerging example of good practice. The group continues to meet, and its terms of reference include championing higher education provision at the College; discussing, developing and reinforcing policies and practices; providing a forum for higher educational matters; and sharing collaboration and good practice. However, it does not have a formal responsibility for systematic monitoring and review of higher education courses.

2.62 The College's approach to monitoring and review does not require a documented, formal annual or periodic review of every higher education course. On this basis its policies and processes do not allow Expectation B8 to be met.

2.63 To investigate the College's approach to monitoring and review of its higher education provision, the review team analysed the self-evaluation document and associated documentary evidence including self-assessment reports, management information data, and minutes of the HEQRG. The review team tested its understanding of the processes in meetings with senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students.

2.64 Continuous monitoring of the quality of learning opportunities is undertaken by teaching teams via formal and informal processes. The University organises teaching team meetings and formal Boards of Studies at which the College is represented; the Boards of Studies include consideration of student feedback received at Staff Student Consultative Committee meetings. Staff teaching team meetings take place for Pearson courses but there are no formal Boards of Studies. The review team noted that these teaching team meetings were informally minuted and that, since the minutes occasionally included information on individual students, could not be considered appropriate as a public record.

2.65 Following the example of the Staff Student Consultative Committee meetings organised by the University, the College has introduced Disinterested Party meetings to obtain student feedback on its higher education courses. Students also confirmed to the review team that they felt confident in being able to raise issues informally with staff.

2.66 External examiners reports are received by the College's quality office and distributed to Heads of Departments and course managers. Processes for receiving and responding to external examiners' reports at course level vary, but all are read by the Head

of Teaching and Learning. There is no committee which formally receives or oversees responses to all external examiners' reports.

2.67 The College prepares Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review reports reviewing its delivery of University awards, including evaluation of effectiveness of the curriculum, issues raised by the external examiner and by students and the steps being taken to address them, progression and achievement statistics, enhancement plans, and the relationship between the College and the University. The College has contributed to the University's periodic review processes of its courses delivered in partner institutions.

2.68 There is no equivalent course-level review or periodic review process required by Pearson for its awards and as discussed in paragraph 2.57 there is no mechanism for drawing out common themes or issues across the whole higher education provision.

2.69 The College produces data on key performance indicators of student attendance and retention, and some data on success, which are available to course managers for continuous monitoring. The information provided through key performance indicators is discussed further in paragraph 3.7. The College recognises that the information system is designed around the requirements of further education reporting, and is working to produce tailored reports for monitoring of higher education. Currently routine data are not provided for overall higher education review purposes on, for instance, grades by unit or final awards, although departments have access to information that would allow them to review this themselves. The standard data which are provided are monitored routinely by Quality and Curriculum meetings of the Senior Leadership Team, which include a standing item on level 4 and higher education provision. Monitoring of key performance indicators led to the selection of HND Business for the 'Support for Success' process to improve student retention and success.

2.70 The College's primary vehicle for formal quality review is the annual Self-Assessment Report (SAR), which feeds into a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). The SAR is prepared by the Vice Principal, and is built up from departmental SARs which cover all levels of the College's provision, drawing upon a range of evidence including the data on key performance indicators. The College SAR is received by the Standards and Quality Committee, which is a subcommittee of, and reports to, the Board of Governors. The Standards and Quality Committee also receives a Student Outcomes report from the Vice Principal which includes a section on starts and success data for level 4 provision and above.

2.71 The College considers that the SAR process allows a rigorous review of its courses on an annual cycle. However, the review team confirms that not all higher education awards are necessarily mentioned in departmental SARs and thus the College's SAR. The review team also considers that, due to the small scale of higher education provision relative to other provision within the College, and the format which is determined by other requirements, the SAR does not provide a clear picture of the overall health of higher education courses as a distinct layer of provision.

2.72 Regular meetings of the HEQRG bring together course managers, heads of departments and senior staff responsible for aspects of higher education. Terms of reference for this group do not include any formal responsibility for systematic monitoring and review of higher education courses, for instance formally receiving reports from external examiners, and this is confirmed by examination of the minutes. The review team confirms that the HEQRG provides a useful forum for discussing higher education issues and for sharing information including examples of good practice. It does not, however, have delegated authority for, and is not conducting, a systematic overview of higher education courses.

2.73 The College meets the expectations of its awarding body and organisation for course monitoring and review, and there are opportunities internally for informal exchange of information and good practice between those responsible for higher education courses. However, the review team concludes that the College's own processes are not designed to ensure that higher education, as a defined layer of provision with specific expectations and challenges distinct from those of other provision, has appropriate formal oversight. The current arrangements give rise to the risk that any weaknesses in its approach to higher education as a whole could be overlooked, and also do not support the agenda for enhancement of higher education provision in its entirety. For this reason the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is not met, with a moderate level of associated risk, and **recommends** that the College establishes arrangements to ensure regular and systematic monitoring and review of its higher education courses.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.74 The College follows dual procedures for dealing with academic appeals. All courses franchised through the University adhere to the University's policy. Details of how to appeal, advice to obtain prior to an appeal and the process to follow are made available via the College VLE and during induction. Pearson courses follow the College's Appeals policy, which is drawn from the BTEC Centre Guide to Managing Quality; this is made available on the College higher education VLE page. The College's Appeals Policy sets out a four-stage process with a set timeframe. Complaints and suggestions of a non-academic nature follow the College's Suggestions, Compliments and Complaints Procedure and are dealt with in the first instance by Customer Services. The policies on appeals and complaints enable Expectation B9 to be met.

2.75 The review team tested the College's approach to dealing with complaints and appeals by reviewing the relevant procedures and policy documents. The review team also spoke to students and staff to ascertain their understanding of the processes and their view of the effectiveness of arrangements.

2.76 The University sets out in its franchise agreement that appeals will be referred to the University. Complaints relating to the operation of the course are dealt with under the College complaints procedures although this is not made explicit in student handbooks.

2.77 The College does not clearly inform students of the possible outcomes, timeframe and procedures for appeals and complaints. In this respect, the review team drew similar conclusions to those for Expectation B6 (see paragraph 2.50), and considers that the College would benefit from reviewing its procedures to ensure clarity and transparency of the processes. The HND Music student handbook sets out the process for appeals but does not refer to the College Appeals Policy, does not set out any formal timeframes for the procedure, and does not direct students to the academic regulations or policies ensuring the quality and standards of the course. The HND Engineering Student Handbook does not refer to information or guidance relating to appeals and complaints. While not all handbooks contain direct reference to academic appeals and complaints policies, this information is available to students on the VLE. The review team **recommends** that the College reviews the policies on appeals and complaints to clarify the grounds and possible outcomes for appeals, and informal and formal procedures for appeals and complaints.

2.78 The review team concludes that the College has suitable procedures for handling appeals relating to Pearson courses and complaints relating to course operational delivery and that Expectation B9 is therefore met. The risk in this area is moderate as the policies and information dealing with complaints and appeals do not have clearly set out timeframes and outcomes.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.79 The College states that it is the sole provider of the delivery of the courses and other parties, including employers, are not involved in the construction of courses or the setting and grading of assessments and that it does not devolve any responsibility for learning opportunities to other organisations.

2.80 Higher National and foundation degree courses are vocational courses at levels 4 and 5 which have the support of industry and are written to take account of National Occupational Standards, the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* and industry requirements with work-related learning as an integral part of the courses. This is articulated clearly in the aims, reference points and learning outcomes in the programme specifications for the courses offered at the College.

2.81 The FdA Business and Management programme specification states that 'it is an admissions requirement that students be in appropriate employment when they start the course' and 'students are expected to be in part-time or full-time, paid or unpaid employment of a kind that will allow access to appropriate work-related learning opportunities'. The student handbook states that students would normally be expected to have a workplace mentor. This course also includes work-based core modules that relate directly to work experience.

2.82 The Professional Graduate Certificate in Education programme specification requires teaching placement as an integral part of the course. In addition most Higher National Engineering students are in employment and sponsored by their employer, and all learning outcomes on the course are related to employment.

2.83 Courses offered by the College are focused on employability and a number of courses offer part-time routes which facilitate students to be in employment and apply learning within their employment. Staff confirmed that employers attend events at the College and are used for visits and practical projects. An outside studio is used by students on the HND Music Production course to supplement resources that they have at the College. Although the College does not make work placements compulsory, it uses work placements and resources to facilitate the achievement of learning outcomes. The College has no policies and procedures for ensuring oversight of its arrangements for managing the delivery of learning opportunities with employers, and on that basis is unable to meet Expectation B10 which requires providers to ensure secure implementation and effective management of such arrangements. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College documents and implements its role and responsibilities in relation to work-related learning.

2.84 In considering how the College manages its relationships with others the review team looked at documentary evidence provided in the self-evaluation document and discussed the details with senior staff, academic staff and students.

2.85 The College states that work placements and work experience do not have any influence on assessment grading and are therefore not governed by any agreement or

quality assurance process. Potential work placements and employment can be organised with assistance from the College but are not a compulsory part of any of the courses.

2.86 However, teacher training students are allocated a mentor during their work placements; the mentor would normally be from the employer sponsoring the student. Part of the mentoring role is to conduct teaching reviews and give feedback and support. The mentors are given a Mentor Handbook detailing their responsibilities and the responsibilities of the College and the University and were also provided with mentor training in October 2014. Students have two teaching observations with their mentor and two with the course manager each year and to ensure the quality and accuracy of mentor observations, joint observations take place between the Teacher Training course manager and the mentor.

2.87 As explained in paragraphs 2.80 to 2.82, work-related learning is an integral part of all courses. This includes the use of an external studio for one module of the HND Music course, which is undertaken by all students and is a compulsory part of the course. While alternative arrangements could be made were this resource not available, at present all students make use of the studio to achieve their learning outcomes. In addition, the engineering courses, the Foundation Degree in Business and Management and the Professional Graduate Certificate in Education are work-related in nature and require students to be in work or to access work-related opportunities to achieve their learning outcomes.

2.88 The review team concludes that Expectation B10 is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate. There is no management oversight of work-related and work-based learning across a number of courses with differing but nonetheless relevant needs in the context of working with others. The lack of any formal documentation relating to the College's role and responsibility in this respect is a moderate risk and if something unexpected were to occur then the College may have some responsibility and could be held liable. Documenting and implementing its role and responsibilities in relation to work-related learning, as recommended in paragraph 2.83, should enable the College to securely implement and effectively manage its relationships with others involved in delivering learning, primarily employers with whom it has good connections, and this should enable Expectation B10 to be met in the future.

**Expectation: Not met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

2.89 In reaching its judgement on the quality of student learning opportunities at the College the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Of the 10 relevant Expectations in this section, three are not met with a moderate risk and with recommendations relating to the risks identified. These are B5, B8 and B10. Expectations B1, B6 and B9 are met, but the review team has identified areas that pose a moderate threat in each of these and has made further recommendations to address these operational weaknesses. Expectations B2, B3, B4 and B7 are met with a low risk and with one recommendation in B3 regarding the distinctive nature of higher education staff development.

2.90 The unmet Expectations are considered to pose moderate risks to student engagement, monitoring and review of courses and the College's role and responsibility for work-related learning. With regard to student engagement the review team affirms the steps taken by the College to strengthen the learner voice, but considers that the College has not understood fully the distinctive nature of higher education student engagement and has yet to take steps to engage higher education students as partners in quality assurance and enhancement. On that basis, notwithstanding the affirmation, the review team concludes that this Expectation is not met with a moderate level of associated risk.

2.91 The review team makes further recommendations related to course design, development and modification (B1), assessment regulations, procedures and associated processes (B6), and clarification of the grounds and outcomes for appeals and informal and formal procedures for complaints and appeals (B9).

2.92 The review team has identified one item of good practice related to staff knowledge, experience and industry links (B3).

2.93 In reaching its conclusion, the review team gave appropriate consideration to the size, nature and context of the higher education provision at the College. However, the review team considers that the three Expectations not met, combined with (in total) six moderate risks, could lead to serious problems over time with the management of this area should appropriate mitigating action not be taken in the timeframes specified. Further, the seven recommendations reflect weaknesses in the operation of parts of the College's governance structure, as it relates to quality assurance, and some shortcomings in the rigour with which quality assurance processes are applied. On that basis the review team concludes that the College **requires improvement** to meet UK expectations in its management of the quality of student learning opportunities.

### 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 website is the main source of information for the College's external audience, including prospective students and its VLE is used for communication of information to enrolled students and staff. The College is responsible for ensuring information on the website is kept up to date and accessible. The VLE is maintained at course level throughout the academic year.

3.2 For university-franchised courses the University is responsible for the production of student handbooks and programme specifications. The College is required to adhere to the University Collaborative Programme Promotion Materials Policy and to submit all draft promotional materials to the University for approval prior to publication. Student handbooks are prescribed by the University and modified in specific areas by the College to ensure relevance. Teacher training students also receive unit handbooks to provide in-depth information relating to specific units. Pearson is responsible for the programme specifications of all Higher National courses and the College develops course handbooks. The approach to the production of information enables the College to meet Expectation C of the Quality Code.

3.3 The review team tested the approach to the production and management of information by exploring with staff and students the accuracy of information, reviewing external websites and the VLE. The review team also looked at available promotional publications during the review visit.

3.4 The College VLE is used as a repository of information relating to all aspects of College life and course information, and provides a one-stop portal. The dedicated higher education page provides links to a number of policy and strategic documents relevant to students, though it is not clear which policy relates to each specific course. However, students commented positively on the information provided online and in College publications prior to application.

3.5 The College does not have a systematic process in place to ensure handbooks are standardised and reviewed annually and relies on the University to monitor and update franchised course handbooks. There is no standard template for course handbooks for Pearson courses. The HND Music Handbook follows closely the template for the University student handbooks. It does not however refer to Pearson regulations for academic standards and the information relating to appeals and complaints does not refer to the College Appeals Policy or the Suggestions, Compliments and Complaints Policy. The HND Engineering Handbook sets out the course summary, its aims, learning outcomes, course structure, teaching, learning and assessment strategies. The Handbook, however, does not set out the appeals or complaints procedure or regulations for academic standards. The review team **recommends** that the College ensures all student handbooks for Pearson courses follow a standard template and are checked and approved annually.

3.6 University courses are managed by the College team and guided by the Collaborative Operational Handbook and programme specification provided by the University.

3.7 The review team identified the use of management data in the form of key performance indicators in the College quality cycle. These key performance indicators are limited to achievement, retention and success and not disaggregated from the wider data for all courses at the College. Attempts have been made to ensure appropriate oversight of management data of higher education with the recent investment in a number of software packages although these are primarily focused at further education data management. Information was provided to the review team to demonstrate that higher education management reports are produced and maintained centrally by the Management Information Manager but this is a recent development.

3.8 Information was provided to demonstrate the use of data in identifying areas requiring development and the use of the 'Support for Success' process to ensure that these areas are developed through the assigned group of teaching coaches to facilitate change.

3.9 Career information is available to higher education students through the student services team. Students the review team met said they seek advice and guidance primarily from the experienced academic staff and seek additional support through the student services team if required. Students commented positively on the career relevance of the course curriculum and the experience of the academic staff. Employability skills and industry standards are embedded within their courses.

3.10 Staff the review team met confirmed that information provided by the College to assist them in the delivery of the courses and the understanding of their responsibilities is clear and readily available. Staff are aware of the documentation required in relation to quality processes.

3.11 The review team considers that the College has a clear understanding of the expectations placed upon it with respect to publishing information, and has clearly engaged with ensuring that prospective students are able to make an informed decision prior to applying. Processes for approval and assurance of public information are delegated to the department level and reviewed by the University and Pearson annually. The Marketing department is responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the external webpages and prospectuses through annual updates received from course managers and the Senior Management Team. This process ensures the appropriate level of approval.

3.12 The review team concludes that Part C is met. The risk in this area is considered moderate as there is no collective College oversight of public information and the Pearson course handbooks do not contain all relevant information for each student relating to definitive policies.

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

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

3.13 In reaching its judgement on the quality of information about learning opportunities at the College the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.14 Information is provided to students, other stakeholders and staff primarily through the external website, the College VLE and in handbooks and policy documents. Staff and students the review team met confirmed their satisfaction with information they are provided with and have access to. The College is considering differentiated ways of using higher education information to inform quality assurance processes and has successfully used key performance indicators to identify courses in need of additional support through its 'Support for Success' programme.

3.15 While the VLE provides comprehensive information, student handbooks are inconsistent and do not always signpost students to relevant policy documents. The review team makes a recommendation regarding Pearson student handbooks to address this weakness, which was also identified in previous QAA reviews.

3.16 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met but with a moderate risk relating to the inconsistency of information in handbooks and the lack of annual review and approval to address this issue. Overall, the review team judges that the College **meets** UK expectations in respect of the quality of the information produced about its provision.

## 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 does not have a strategy specifically for the development and enhancement of higher education provision, but states that its approach to higher education is embedded in all 13 of the college-wide strategies. The self-evaluation document draws particular attention to the vision expressed in the Teaching and Learning Strategy of a staff ethos where ongoing review and questioning leads to the enhancement of learning opportunities. The College's approach to maintaining a 'culture of integration' of higher education with other parts of its provision, manifest in its decision not to provide any separate facilities for its higher education students, is carried through in its approach to strategic planning and the development of key policies and processes.

4.2 The College considers that it delivers enhancement through the core quality review and development processes including Self-Assessment Reports, Quality Improvement Plans, 'Support for Success', Quality Review Groups, Disinterested Party discussions and Periodic Review of Strategic Priorities. The College's self-evaluation document also notes a range of initiatives within individual departments that enhance learning opportunities and experiences of students.

4.3 The review team tested this Expectation in meetings with the Principal and senior staff, and by reviewing documentation including committee minutes, Self-Assessment Reports and Quality Improvement Plans.

4.4 The review team found that there are a number of examples of good practice within courses and departments which enhance student learning opportunities. These include the alignment of courses with the needs of local employers and industry standards, which is facilitated by the professional experience and engagement of teaching staff. For instance, the project day display of work by final year engineering students to employers and other students brings benefits for students' employability and for the learning of later cohorts.

4.5 The attention paid across the College to the development of staff teaching skills and their professional development is understood by senior staff as the basis for enhancement. Opportunities are provided for sharing good practice during Learning Circles events; these are largely aimed at further education teaching, although one higher education-specific training day was delivered in July 2014. Ongoing monitoring of key performance indicators on student retention and course completion is effective and has led to the identification of one higher education course as suitable for the 'Support for Success' programme.

4.6 The production and consideration of annual department and College Self-Assessment Reports is the formal mechanism by which the College takes an overview of provision and develops plans for improvement. The review team found limited consideration of higher education courses within these reports, which require reporting against headings driven primarily by the further education agenda. The review team did not see in these documents evidence of explicit consideration of higher education as a distinctive layer of provision in a manner that could drive the enhancement of higher education.

4.7 The terms of reference of the HEQRG include the sharing of good practice, and the minutes confirm that discussion takes place on approaches being used by individual courses, as well as general issues relevant to higher education provision as a whole.

However, the Group does not have a formal remit or devolved responsibility within the College's annual or periodic review cycles. For Expectation B8 (see paragraph 2.73) the review team has recommended that the College establish arrangements to ensure regular and systematic monitoring and review of courses, which could then support a more specific and targeted approach to higher education enhancement.

4.8 Overall, the review team considers that the lack of explicit and formal consideration of higher education as a distinctive level of provision within the College means that mechanisms which would facilitate a systematic approach to enhancement are not present. It **recommends** that the College establishes structures which will allow effective oversight of all higher education courses to enable deliberate steps to be taken at provider level to enhance learning opportunities of all higher education students. For Expectation B5 (see paragraph 2.39) the review team has recommended that further work is done to engage higher education students as partners in assurance and enhancement of their educational experience, and there would be scope to involve students in structures established to enable effective higher education oversight and to drive enhancement.

4.9 The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Not met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

4.10 In reaching its judgement on the enhancement of student learning opportunities the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team considers that the Expectation in this area is not met and that the risk to student learning opportunities is moderate.

4.11 The College's strategy of full integration across all levels of its provision does not take into account the distinctiveness of higher education and does not facilitate management oversight of higher education as a discreet layer of provision. The enhancement opportunities for higher education student learning are therefore difficult to identify and evaluate, and there is limited evidence that the needs of higher education students are considered and monitored holistically. The review team **recommends** that the College establishes structures which will allow effective oversight of all higher education courses to enable deliberate steps to be taken at provider level to enhance learning opportunities of all higher education students.

4.12 Overall the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement** to meet UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

5.1 The College's strategy for higher education is driven largely by the desire to meet employer needs. All courses are vocational, focus on career progression, and aim to work with employers to ensure that strong links with employability skills are reflected within the courses. A number of courses require applicants to be in relevant employment to ensure that students have the opportunity to apply the learning outcomes in a practical setting.

5.2 Courses encourage the development and application of professional skills with a variety of opportunities through liaison with employers and industry, and subsequent opportunities for students to use industry standard resources. The HND Engineering course aligns course assignments to The Institute of Engineering and Technology competencies to ensure students are able to demonstrate an understanding of engineering knowledge as well as being able to apply technical and practical skills.

5.3 HND Music courses are specifically designed to support students who will often become self-employed, offering units in business and events management. In addition, students have the opportunity to use an off-site industry standard studio to ensure they are familiar with industry equipment.

5.4 A number of courses invite employers to the College on an annual basis to attend presentation events where employers have the opportunity to meet students, discuss projects and advise staff of industry developments to best support students. Students have the opportunity to provide feedback on areas that could be developed in relation to employability and industry relevance.

5.5 The College has a Careers and Employability Department that provides employability support in terms of curriculum vitae guidance, mock interviews and networking as well as independent and impartial advice on courses and progression. This service is open to all students at the College. Students commented favourably on the support given to them by their lecturers in relation to careers advice. They consider the knowledge and experience of academic staff to be relevant and current and that staff are experienced within their subject area.

5.6 The College has a commitment to developing courses that are industry relevant and that provide a range of learning opportunities that are industry standard and which provide a high quality learning experience for students. The College ensures that staff are appropriately skilled by providing opportunities for staff development.

## 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 27-29 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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