

# Higher Education Review of South Leicestershire College

October 2014

## Contents

<b>About this review .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Amended judgement - March 2016 .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Key findings.....</b>	<b>5</b>
QAA's judgements about South Leicestershire College .....	5
Good practice .....	5
Recommendations .....	5
Affirmation of action being taken .....	6
Theme: Student Employability.....	6
<b>About South Leicestershire College.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Explanation of the findings about South Leicestershire College .....</b>	<b>9</b>
1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations .....	10
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities.....	20
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities .....	36
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities .....	38
5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability.....	40
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>41</b>

## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at South Leicestershire College. The review took place from 28 to 30 October 2014 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Carol Vielba
- Miss Lucy Bannister.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by South Leicestershire 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 5. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 9.

In reviewing South Leicestershire 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/aboutus](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus).

<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 October 2014, South Leicestershire 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 its awarding organisation meets UK expectations; the quality of student learning opportunities does not meet UK expectations; the quality of information about learning opportunities meets UK expectations; and the enhancement of student learning opportunities meets UK expectations.

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

South Leicestershire College published an action plan in March 2015 describing how it intended to address the recommendations, affirmations and good practice identified in the review, and has been working over the last 10 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 11 January 2016 with one reviewer. During the visit, the review team addressed all recommendations, affirmations and good practice in the Higher Education Review report through meetings with the Principal, senior staff, tutors, professional staff and students.

The visit confirmed that the recommendations relating to the quality of student learning opportunities judgement area had been successfully addressed and the good practice appropriately disseminated. Actions against recommendations, affirmations and good practice relating to academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of its awarding organisation, the quality of the provider's information about learning opportunities, and the enhancement of student learning opportunities had also been completed on schedule and contributed to the progress against the quality of student learning opportunities.

### QAA Board decision and amended judgement

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of its 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** - expedite the approval and dissemination of a formal admissions policy appropriate to the admission of higher education students (Expectation B2).

The new admissions policy contains greater detail about what applicants can expect when applying to the College and sets out clearly the basis upon which admissions decisions are made and the rights and obligations of applicants. It distinguishes clearly between those aspects of the policy that apply to further education applicants and those that apply to higher education applicants.

**Recommendation** - develop and implement a set of regulations which clearly define the purpose, membership, powers and mode of operation of examination boards for higher education, and which clearly articulate the processes communicated by the awarding organisation (Expectation B6).

The revised guidance and templates provide greater clarity about the purpose, composition and operation of exam boards.

**Recommendation** - develop a College process for the periodic review of higher education programmes that complements the review processes of the awarding organisation (Expectation B8)

The College's strategic plan encourages programmes to take a longer term and strategic view of their performance and potential. The processes of annual self-evaluation and monitoring, and of curriculum review, that are in place at the College provide the basis for longer term planning and decision making.

**Recommendation** - implement a consistent approach to the design and content of handbooks across all higher education programmes (Expectation C)

Students that met the team confirmed that they had received copies of handbooks and found them helpful. Students also confirmed that they had the means to find information that was not in their handbook from the website or by asking staff.

The review team concluded that the College was making the required progress against each recommendation in the action plan.

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

**Affirmation** - the action being taken to develop and implement a strategy for consistent and enhanced student engagement across higher education programmes (Expectation B5)

The team found that the College was continuing to strengthen and formalise the higher education student voice. Students who met the team indicated that the student governor role was effective and that there was a range of opportunities available to students to express their views and that their views were taken into account.

The review team concluded that the provider was making the required progress against the affirmation in the action plan.

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

**Good practice** - the effective support given by all staff which facilitates the transition to higher education for students, including those with significant learning difficulties (Expectation B4).

The team found that the College had built further on this good practice. Discussion of progression has been integrated into parents' evenings for level 3 students. Further material on the implications of moving from further education to higher education has been incorporated in the revised student induction along with more information on student support through the Disabled Students Allowance. The team heard about opportunities for higher education students to work with students on level 3 programmes and to undertake ambassadorial and outreach activities.

The review team concluded that the provider was building upon good practice in accordance with the action plan.

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about South Leicestershire College

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

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

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **good practice** at South Leicestershire College.

- The effective support given by all staff which facilitates the transition to higher education for students, including those with significant learning difficulties (Expectation B4).

### Recommendations

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

By March 2015:

- expedite the approval and dissemination of a formal admissions policy appropriate to the admission of higher education students (Expectation B2).

By May 2015:

- develop and implement a set of regulations which clearly define the purpose, membership, powers and mode of operation of examination boards for higher education, and which clearly articulate the processes communicated by the awarding organisation (Expectation B6).

By July 2015:

- develop a College process for the periodic review of higher education programmes that complements the review processes of the awarding organisation (Expectation B8)
- implement a consistent approach to the design and content of handbooks across all higher education programmes (Expectation C).

## Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The action being taken to develop and implement a strategy for consistent and enhanced student engagement across higher education programmes (Expectation B5).

## Theme: Student Employability

This theme was determined in consultation between the College and its students.

The College places high emphasis on employability. It is central to its engagements with students and features in the College's mission. The higher education curriculum has been developed to enhance employment and career opportunities across a range of skills and professional programmes.

Staff at the College include live briefs in the design of programmes. This builds student confidence in producing work to an industry standard while progressing their professional development. Students are also supported in finding appropriate work experience placements, although these are not integrated into the design of higher education programmes provided by the College.

The College careers service provides a range of support to students including writing personal statements, progression to higher education, guidance on finance and funding, employment and careers information, and guidance and advice.

The review team met students who had benefited from the volunteering opportunities promoted by the College including the peer mentoring programme. The team also met alumni who currently volunteer at the College to support learning and demonstrate skills.

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

## About South Leicestershire College

South Leicestershire College (the College) is a medium-sized college located on the southern outskirts of the City of Leicester. It makes provision for learners in the south of the city and south Leicestershire. Higher education programmes have been delivered at the College since 1999 when it was known as Wigston College of Further Education. Its main site moved to new buildings in South Wigston in September 2010 and during 2012-13 an engineering training centre, situated in the city centre, was relocated to the South Wigston campus.

The College's mission is to 'provide excellent vocational learning and so improve the life chances, employability, and economic prosperity of our learners'.

The College's higher education provision is directly funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) since securing its own student numbers in 2012. Previously it had made provision through a neighbouring university. The current provision offers progression opportunities for students in eight programme areas leading to the awards of Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND). At the time of the

review visit, six programmes had enrolments with 26 full-time students and 39 part-time Engineering students.

In 2012-14 the College provided programmes in 13 further education routes of study. Two-thirds of the provision is in Health, Public Services and Care, Business and Administration, Construction, and Preparation for Life and Work. Some 8,000 learners were enrolled on 16,000 qualifications. Of these, 80 per cent were adults, two-thirds were sponsored by employers and 80 per cent were part-time.

Since a QAA review of the College in 2010, it has entered into a Federation with North Warwickshire and Hinckley College. Within this Federation each college retains separate governance structures but share a single senior management team and cost structure.

The College's self-evaluation document refers to a number of current key challenges. These include:

- regional unemployment, financial instability and low aspirations in the local population
- securing financial sustainability within the further education sector
- the conclusion of collaborative provision for higher education with a neighbouring university and no current partnership arrangements with higher education institutions
- the impact on the leadership for higher education of changes in senior management
- the change in student number and fee regulations in 2012 and consequent fluctuations in recruitment patterns and funding from HEFCE
- the increasingly competitive nature of recruitment for higher education students in the locality and region
- providing further investment in the development of current and new higher education staff.

The College's HNCs and HNDs are provided through Pearson as its awarding organisation. Currently there is no other provision with partner higher education institutions.

## **Extent to which recommendations from last review have been addressed**

The last QAA review of the College was in June 2010. It made the following recommendations:

It would be advisable for the College to:

- develop the cross-College Higher Education Group to ensure it has oversight of the maintenance and enhancement of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities
- clarify how the quality and standards of higher education provision, and the related reporting, will be given a focus within the new College structure
- assist staff to increase their awareness of, and engagement with, the Academic Infrastructure to ensure it has a positive impact on the delivery and development of the College's higher education provision
- identify and plan for the specific, appropriate staff development requirements of those engaged in the delivery and assessment of higher education programmes
- put in place structures and systems to ensure that information provided to students on programmes, particularly relating to programme specifications and academic regulations, is consistent and clearly signposted.



The College has progressed the first four of these recommendations. However, as is evident under Expectation B6, the review team had significant concerns about the operation of exam boards at the College. In addition, the final advisable recommendation requires further development and this is reflected in the review team's recommendation regarding Expectation C about learning opportunities and consistency in handbooks.

Further, the last QAA review considered that it would be desirable for the College to:

- revise and update its higher education strategy to provide a more up-to-date view of the provision
- ensure that all marketing and recruitment literature is accurate and complete and reflects the precepts of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*.

With regard to the desirable recommendations, the review team's findings indicate that there has been considerable progress in addressing these.

Since the formation of the Federation, the responsiveness of the College to the recommendations of the June 2010 report has been aided by the appointment of the Higher Education Manager and the establishment of the Higher Education Forum. Both have facilitated and accelerated the College's response, particularly with regard to increased awareness of the Quality Code, staff development, strategic review and checking marketing information.

The 2010 review team also identified three areas of good practice:

- the College's close and effective relationships with the University and partnership colleges provide excellent opportunities for staff development related to higher education
- the helpful and timely feedback provided to students following assessment is supported by the accessibility and availability of staff
- the siting of the HND Media course within a working environment provides students with day-to-day exposure to current working practice, industry-standard equipment and local, national and international media companies.

Since the 2010 review the College has ceased the relationship with its partner university. With regard to the other two areas of good practice identified, the evidence of this review visit indicates that they continue to improve the College's provision for its students.

## Explanation of the findings about South Leicestershire 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 (FHEQ)* are met by:**

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

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

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.1 The College has a single collaborative arrangement with Pearson. Pearson is responsible for the approval and review of higher education programmes provided by the College. The College uses the Pearson framework which includes Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) descriptors.

1.2 Evidence scrutinised by the review team demonstrates that the College refers to QCF levels 4 and 5 when developing programmes and associated modules that are then subject to the approval of Pearson. The documents submitted by the College included an example of a planning document outlining both the rationale and business case for a new HNC and HND Sports programme.

1.3 The review team tested this process for the development and design of programmes in meetings with academic staff and documents included in the College's submission.

1.4 The review team concludes that the College, in partnership with its awarding organisation, matches programme outcomes to appropriate levels in the QCF and ensures

that the requirements of the FHEQ are met. Therefore, the Expectation has been met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

1.5 Pearson provides a clear framework that outlines academic standards for awarding academic credit and qualifications. Action is then undertaken by the College to implement these across its higher education programmes.

1.6 The College also uses Subject Benchmark Statements to inform programme design and development, approval and review along with external reference points. In addition to Subject Benchmark Statements, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and Sector Skills Council frameworks are also considered where relevant to the programme design and approval.

1.7 Assignment briefs and marking criteria developed by the College align with the Subject Benchmark Statements and descriptors required by the QCF. In the award of academic credit and qualifications the College ensures that learning outcomes and levels comply with the Pearson framework. Prior to implementation, programme specifications are subject to scrutiny by the College and Pearson.

1.8 The review team scrutinised the documents provided and discussed them in its meetings with the College's staff.

1.9 The review team concludes that the College has in place effective processes and procedures to secure academic standards in accordance with the awarding organisation's framework and regulations. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.10 The College uses Pearson documentation for qualifications and programme specifications. The College's academic staff design module and assignment content to meet the learning outcomes outlined in the Pearson framework. These are subject to internal approval by allocated curriculum personnel and internal verification processes.

1.11 Assessment regulations are provided by Pearson. The College builds upon these regulations in the provision of a Higher Education Assessment Guide to support the work of their academic staff. Programme assessment outcomes are subject to both internal and external examiner monitoring and the awarding organisation's guidance for the marking and completion of awards.

1.12 Any changes to higher education programmes, once approved, are recorded by College Information Services and the Exams Department to ensure student achievement is registered and recorded for the appropriate qualification.

1.13 The review team tested the evidence provided in the documentation by the College in meetings with College staff.

1.14 The review team concludes that the College, with its awarding organisation, maintains definitive records for its higher education programmes that provide the appropriate points for delivery, assessment, monitoring and review. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.**

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

**Findings**

1.15 The College works within a detailed framework for HNC and HND qualifications provided by the awarding organisation, Pearson. This framework is aligned with the QCF. Responsibility for assuring that academic standards are set at an appropriate level involves both the College and Pearson. At the College, programme design is undertaken by curriculum teams using Pearson templates and specifications which cover the structure and learning outcomes of awards at both programme and module level. New programmes are developed through a formal curriculum planning process and final approval is given by the Director of Curriculum Planning and the VP Curriculum and Quality. Following internal College approval, a submission is made to Pearson who check the level and standards embodied in the proposed curriculum and sample assignments on paper or, in some cases, through a visit. These processes are discussed further in section B1.

1.16 The review team finds that the policies and processes in place for programme approval are designed to ensure the alignment of content and assessment with the QCF and thus with UK threshold standards.

1.17 The review team looked at policy and process documents from both the College and Pearson. The team also met staff who are involved in programme design and approval, including the recent approval of a new programme.

1.18 The recent example of approval of a new programme demonstrated that processes operate as intended. However, the team also notes that there is no full formal record of decision-making at the College level regarding the new programme.

1.19 On the basis of the evidence provided, the review team concludes that the College, with the support of its awarding organisation, has appropriate policies in place for approving programmes that ensure they are set at a level that meets UK threshold standards. Staff are aware of these policies and processes and implement them effectively. Expectation A3.1 is therefore met in both design and operation and the risk in this area 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**

1.20 The College works within the assessment framework provided by Pearson which sets out expected learning outcomes, and processes for the internal and external verification of students' achievement. The awarding organisation's programmes are aligned to the QCF. Assessments are approved both internally and externally and Pearson confirms grades before credit and qualifications are awarded. Provision is made for reasonable adjustments to assessment to be made where appropriate. Assessment processes are discussed in greater detail in section B6. Annual reviews of student achievement and standards of assessment by the awarding organisation check whether threshold standards are met and make recommendations for improvement.

1.21 The review team considers that the College has systems, processes, policies and procedures in place designed to ensure that the Pearson framework is used in such a way that the outcomes meet the Expectation.

1.22 The review team examined College policies and guidance and evidence of processes such as verification. The review team met staff involved in the assessment of students and in the management of the assessment process.

1.23 The review team finds that there is an effective system for the assessment of students that requires them to demonstrate that they have met learning outcomes which meet UK threshold standards. This is achieved through a comprehensive system of internal and external verification and confirmation of grades by the awarding organisation. The review team was informed of instances when confirmation of marks had been blocked by the awarding organisation because requirements were not met. In response, the College made necessary changes and the block was lifted.

1.24 The College implements requirements of its awarding organisation designed to ensure that students awarded credit or qualifications have demonstrated their achievement of relevant threshold standards. Procedures to be followed relating to the production of assessment briefs, and to internal and external verification of marks, are clearly documented, and records are kept of their implementation. These are monitored regularly by Pearson and action taken when problems arise. However, as discussed in section B6 on page 24, the College has yet to establish a system of appropriate and effective assessment boards as part of the assessment system. The team was therefore concerned about the management of the delegated assessment processes at the College. Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met.

1.25 The College has been informed by Pearson of deficiencies in the current management of the exam boards. In addition, the comprehensive moderation and review of assessment grades decisions by external verifiers mitigate against the risk to standards.



Consequently, the review team considered the associated level of risk in this area is moderate. Should the shortcomings highlighted in B6 not be fully addressed by the College then risk may increase, particularly if student numbers grow.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

1.26 Responsibility for the monitoring and review of standards is shared between the College and the awarding organisation. The systems for internal and external verification discussed in detail in section B6 on page 24 ensure that programmes are delivered as approved and that the awarding organisation's standards, aligned with the QCF, are met. The College's comprehensive annual monitoring system, discussed in detail in section B7 on page 26, addresses the currency and overall health of academic programmes.

1.27 The review team finds that the policies and processes in place for programme monitoring and review are designed to ensure that the standards are aligned with those of the awarding organisation and, through the Pearson framework, with UK threshold standards. The review team looked at policy and process documents from both the College and Pearson. The team also met staff who are involved in programme assessment and monitoring and review..

1.28 The review team finds that the processes of verification and annual monitoring operate effectively. Monitoring is thorough and conducted on a regular basis using clearly defined criteria that relate to the academic framework and standards set by Pearson and used to approve College higher education programmes. External verification and annual monitoring both result in the identification of opportunities to improve and enhance provision.

1.29 On the basis of the evidence provided, the review team concludes that the College, with the support of its awarding organisation, has appropriate policies in place for ongoing monitoring and review of the standards of approved programmes that ensure that they meet UK threshold standards. Staff are aware of these policies and processes and implement them effectively. Expectation A3.3 of the Quality Code is therefore met in both design and operation and the risk in this area 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**

1.30 The College works within the detailed framework for HNC and HND qualifications provided by the awarding organisation, Pearson. This framework is aligned with the QCF. Responsibility for assuring that academic standards are set and maintained at an appropriate level involves both the College and Pearson. The processes for programme approval, and programme monitoring and review, are discussed in further detail in sections B1 and B8. The awarding organisation appoints an external verifier who undertakes the role of external examiner and is a subject expert to each higher education programme. The College works closely with the external verifiers who provide moderation, advice and support, and makes arrangements for them to undertake their work effectively. The policies and processes in place for the use of external independent expertise in relation to its higher education programmes are designed to ensure that threshold standards are set, delivered and achieved.

1.31 The review team looked at documents setting out the awarding organisation's and the College's systems and procedures for external verification. The team also saw examples of external verifiers' reports, the College's response to such reports, and the minutes of meetings where the reports were discussed.

1.32 The external verification system works effectively in practice. Programme leaders work with their colleagues, faculty and the College's Quality Office to prepare for external verification. External verifiers provide detailed feedback to College staff on the standards of student work. The Quality Office requires action plans to be put in place to follow up on any issues raised by external verifiers.

1.33 On the basis of the evidence provided, the review team concludes that the College, with the support of its awarding organisation, has appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure that independent external expertise is deployed in setting and monitoring academic standards, in particular to advise on whether UK threshold standards are being met. These policies and processes are implemented effectively and Expectation A3.4 is therefore met in both design and operation and the risk in this area is low.

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

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

1.34 To reach judgements about academic standards, the review team matched its findings against criteria for this section in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

1.35 There are seven Expectations in this area and all are met. In all but one, the level of risk is low. The exception is A3.2 in which the risk is moderate.

1.36 The team concludes that higher education provision at the College, in partnership with the awarding organisation Pearson, matches programme outcomes to the appropriate levels in the QCF. In addition, the regulatory framework provided by Pearson is clear.

1.37 The College works within the awarding organisation's documentation for its qualifications and programme specifications. Its staff design module and assignment content to meet the learning outcomes required in the Pearson framework. Responsibility for assuring that academic standards are set at an appropriate level involves both the College and Pearson. The team concludes that the policies and processes for programme approval ensure alignment with the QCF and UK threshold standards.

1.38 The framework for assessment is provided by Pearson. This sets out expected learning outcomes and processes for internal and external verification. The team found that, while the College works within the assessment framework provided, it has not yet established a system of appropriate and effective assessment boards as part of the assessment process. The team therefore concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met but the level of associated level of risk is moderate. This is reported further in section B6.

1.39 The review team finds that the College policies and processes for programme monitoring and review align with the awarding organisation's and UK threshold standards. In addition, the College engages effectively with its external verifiers who provide moderation, advice and support. The policies and processes at the College ensure that threshold standards are set, delivered and achieved.

1.40 The review team concludes that the maintenance of threshold academic standards at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 Responsibility for the design, development and approval of programmes is shared between the College and the awarding organisation, Pearson. Pearson provides detailed programme specifications for its awards. Both the College and Pearson provide guidance related to good programme design available to staff. Formal processes are also in place for programme modification and discontinuation.

2.2 The College has a two-stage process for programme approval: approval in principle by the Head of Faculty and Higher Education Manager; and final internal approval by the Vice Principal as part of the annual curriculum planning process. The College has a set of clear criteria that proposed new programmes should meet including strategic fit, market demand and availability of resources for delivery. Once approved at College level, a full set of course documentation is sent to Pearson for approval.

2.3 The College has appropriate systems, processes, policies and procedures in place for the design, development and approval of programmes and changes to existing programmes. College processes are designed to take account of student opinion and external inputs. Roles and responsibilities are clear. The College processes dovetail with Pearson's policies and procedures.

2.4 The review team examined policies and guidance notes produced by the College and the awarding organisation. The review team also met staff who had been involved in the recent approval of a new higher education award.

2.5 In developing the new award, the College developed a business case for the proposed new programme based on consultation with existing students, employers, academic staff in another college within the Federation, and a review of available physical and human resources. The development of the new award followed the processes defined by the College and Pearson. However, the review team notes that although the process resulted in a set of definitive course documents, there was no coordinated written record of the decision-making leading to approval.

2.6 The College has appropriate policies and procedures in place for the design, development, approval and amendment of programmes. These are set out clearly and tally with the awarding organisation's policies and procedures. Appropriate use is made of student and external views. A recent example of programme approval demonstrated that the policies and procedures operate effectively in practice. The review team concludes that Expectation B1 is met in both design and operation, and the associated level of risk in this area is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.7 The recruitment of prospective students is the responsibility of the College. It conducts interviews with all applicants prior to acceptance to its higher education programmes. The process includes scrutinising entry requirements, formal interviews, progression discussions and, where applicable, portfolios of work.

2.8 The College works through UCAS to recruit to its higher education programmes. It supports students with the application process, in particular the writing of personal statements. The review team tested this in meetings with students and support staff.

2.9 During the recruitment of students, the College provides applicants with information that includes the Disabled Students Allowance, if appropriate, and financial assistance that may be accessed through additional bursary or grant income. The decisions about selection and admissions outcomes are normally communicated informally to prospective students within 24 hours. Should an applicant be unsuccessful for any reason, an alternative programme may be recommended by the College.

2.10 The review team tested the operation of the College's recruitment selection and admissions procedures by scrutinising the relevant documents and in meetings with students, academic staff and support staff.

2.11 The College works within an informal process for the admission of students. At the time of the review visit, a formal admissions policy was in draft form awaiting approval. This draft policy outlines the admission and enrolment process for students including how admissions may be offered and confirmed or not offered, information on how to appeal and exceptional entry of applicants. College policies are made available to stakeholders via the College website; however, due to the draft nature of the policy, it has yet to be published on the website and therefore applicants to the College are unfamiliar with the policy and unaware of how to access it.

2.12 Given that no evidence is available of a previous or current formal admissions policy, the review team concludes that Expectation B2 is not met and **recommends** that, by March 2015, the College should expedite the approval and dissemination of a formal admissions policy appropriate to the admission of higher education students. The associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.13 In 2013-14 the College introduced a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy clearly defining its strategic direction and intentions for improving and enhancing the experience of students.

2.14 Programmes delivered by the College have a designated programme leader whose role includes maintaining all documentation relating to the management, assessment and internal verification process. They also attend the College's Higher Education Forum which is chaired by the Higher Education Manager. Its membership has been extended to ensure representation from non-teaching areas of the College including Student Services, Library and Information Services and the student body.

2.15 The College has developed a new College Observation Strategy and process which although predominantly sympathetic to further education criteria is flexible and contextualised to support higher education staff. All staff delivering on and responsible for higher education programmes at the College also teach on further education courses. These observations are conducted annually and encompass standards, moderation and tutoring practice.

2.16 All full-time programmes use tutorials and associated target setting for students within Individual Learning Plans. This was tested in meetings with students who confirmed feedback on their work was accurate, helpful and timely. In addition, academic staff forward reading lists to the library to ensure resources are relevant for all programmes and are available for students.

2.17 Staff team meetings provide a platform to disseminate specific content and for staff to share information and experience relating to programmes. This includes assuring quality, learning and teaching, assessment and issues raised by students. In addition, the College undertakes standardisation and internal verification meetings to ensure compliance with the awarding organisation's requirements.

2.18 Staff maintain contact with the awarding organisation and employers to remain responsive to the demands within the sector. The annual review processes, including external verifier reports, facilitate academic staff adapting assessment methods and outcomes in response to these sector needs. In addition, staff invite external speakers and industry experts to engage with students. This enhances their work experience, aids employability and promotes the commercial 'briefs' undertaken by students.

2.19 The College provides a comprehensive staff induction process which includes mandatory training in equality and diversity, safeguarding, and staff roles and responsibilities. New staff are allocated a mentor as a 'critical friend' who has the responsibility of ensuring staff are fully conversant with College systems and processes. To promote effective learning, all academic staff are observed teaching annually. The College also provides academic staff engaged on higher education programmes with an Assessment

Guide Handbook. This includes an overview of best practice, arrangements for internal verification and providing feedback to students.

2.20 There is a Continuous Professional Development Policy and staff are encouraged to identify and undertake development and training opportunities in both learning and teaching and their subject specialisms. The team met academic staff who provided examples of recent staff development the College had supported, including teaching College-based higher education programmes at a local university and doctoral studies.

2.21 The College has piloted module evaluations for one higher education programme in the current academic year. There are plans to expand this pilot to all higher education programmes during the course of the year. This is a process that has previously been intermittent and identified by the College for improvement.

2.22 The College has a clear strategic approach to learning and teaching and is committed to improving the student learning experience. The review team concludes that 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**

2.23 The College has developed a range of processes to support and enable student development and achievement supported by a clear strategic commitment. Information, advice and guidance is provided for all higher education students which effectively supports their development and progression. Students were positive about the support available to them including the ease with which they were able to access their tutors, both formally and informally.

2.24 The College analyses a range of data, including retention, achievement and assessment outcomes, which is drawn together to produce a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). This informs changes and improvements in learning and teaching. The College has created a higher education-specific curriculum-level self-assessment pro forma mapped to the Quality Code. This will be used as a pilot for self-assessment in identified programmes during 2014-15 and extended in 2015-16.

2.25 The College is housed in a new building offering state-of-the-art learning facilities. All students have access to extensive and high-quality resources, and this was identified by students as an area of strength during the review visit.

2.26 Programme leaders inform the College's Librarian about required books and journals, and students are also able to make direct requests to library staff. All tutors are encouraged to recommend learning resources, including new titles and e-books, for higher education programmes.

2.27 A virtual learning environment (VLE) provides online resources and further support to students. The content and focus of these resources vary across the curriculum areas. However, evidence gained from monitoring their use reveals that students engage with them and find them useful. This was confirmed in a meeting with support staff who monitor the use of the provision.

2.28 The Information, Advice and Guidance team at the College deliver workshops to students progressing from internal programmes to higher education awards. This includes the UCAS application processes, finance and funding, employability and career opportunities. Complementary support is also delivered through College tutorials. The effective support given by all staff which facilitates the transition to higher education for students, including those with significant learning difficulties, is **good practice**.

2.29 The review team tested the extent of support for students by scrutinising documents provided by the College and having meetings with students, their representatives and staff.

2.30 The review team concludes that the College has a strategic commitment to enabling student development and achievement, which is effectively implemented. Therefore Expectation B4 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.31 The College's framework for student engagement covers all students; in addition the College has developed a Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy. The College has a formally organised students' union. There is a system of elected student representatives and students are represented at all levels of College governance. Student representatives sit as governors on the Corporation and on the Quality and Student Committee. Feedback is collected at module, programme and service level. Surveys are also used to collect student opinion. The College has processes designed to close feedback loops and recognise the role of students in improvement and enhancement.

2.32 The review team finds that the College has appropriate systems, processes, policies and procedures in place to facilitate effective student engagement. The system is currently under development with plans to expand and restructure student representation and introduce greater formality in some areas, without reducing the quality of interaction between staff and students that gives rise to informal feedback.

2.33 Student opinions about their learning experience were made available to the review team through an online tool. The review team examined documentation that described the College's structures, policies and processes for student engagement. The team viewed minutes of meetings involving students. The team asked students, including student representatives, about the ways in which their views were heard and the College's response to their feedback. The review team heard from staff at all levels about the ways in which they receive and use feedback from students and their plans for development and enhancement of the systems and processes involved. The College provided the review team with documented examples of the influence of student feedback.

2.34 The College's systems, processes, policies and procedures for student engagement are effective. The number of higher education students is small compared to the College student body as a whole. This poses challenges to ensure that the higher education student voice is heard at all levels. It has also resulted in the use of informal means of seeking student opinion and involving students in improvement. The College is taking steps to develop its structures and processes for student engagement including actions to strengthen the voice of higher education students and to introduce greater formality. Consideration is being given to appointing a student governor from higher education and introducing a survey targeting higher education students.

2.35 Student representatives are chosen by their fellow students for each programme. Informal training is provided and elected representatives receive a role specification and guidance notes. Representatives act as a communications channel between fellow students and the College. They attend Boards of Studies for their programme or subject area. Consideration is being given to student representatives' attendance at the Higher Education Forum. At College level the Student Council brings together course representatives, committee representatives and the students' union.

2.36 Module feedback is generally collected informally. The College is developing a formal system for collecting module feedback which has been tested with a small number of students and will be piloted with a broader sample before adoption. Feedback is collected

each term from students through focus groups hosted by the Student Experience team as part of the Learner Voice process. This feeds into annual monitoring.

2.37 The College conducts a two-yearly survey of all students, and support services conduct their own user surveys. Higher education students complete the National Student Survey and the College has taken steps to achieve effective levels of participation.

2.38 Students who met the review team indicated that they had ample opportunity to give feedback and to voice opinions and suggestions. The College listened to their views and had taken action to solve problems and make improvements. Professional and academic staff who met the review team demonstrated a desire to involve students in planning and enhancing their learning and to receive feedback on their teaching and service provision. The review team was made aware of examples of positive changes that had been made as a result of student feedback. Posters are used to highlight improvements that have resulted from student feedback.

2.39 The team **affirms** the action being taken to develop and implement a strategy for consistent and enhanced student engagement across higher education programmes.

2.40 The College has systems, processes, policies and procedures in place that ensure effective engagement by higher education students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. Students confirm that they have multiple ways through which they can make their views known and that change occurs as a result. The review team concludes that Expectation B5 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk in this area is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.41 Assessment is conducted within a framework provided by Pearson.

2.42 The framework details the College's responsibilities including the planning and design of assessments, grading, internal verification and holding of assessment boards. The College has developed a number of guidance notes, policies and handbooks to assist staff to implement the Pearson framework. College policies set out general principles and guides to good assessment practice in such documents as the Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy, the Assessment Policy, and the Assessment Guide for Staff. Other documents set out the policies and procedures associated with internal and external verification and examination boards. In addition, the College has documented policies and procedures relating to the conduct of examinations, the accreditation of prior learning and academic misconduct. There is no separate mitigating circumstances procedure. Individual cases are dealt with by reference to the general principles embodied in the College's and the awarding organisation's assessment policies. Similarly, individual reasonable adjustments are made with reference to Pearson's guidance.

2.43 Policies, processes and procedures are made available to staff through a dedicated shared drive; students can access them through the College web pages and, in part, through student handbooks.

2.44 The review team considers that the College has put in place helpful guidance for staff involved in assessment. The guidance reflects the requirements of the awarding organisation. However, as discussed in paragraph 2.49, the review team notes that some policies lack the specificity necessary to ensure consistent and fair practice across the College's higher education provision to meet the Expectation.

2.45 The review team examined documents which set out Pearson's policies for assessment and policies and procedures published by the College. The team read reports and minutes and viewed examples of assessment briefs and grading schedules. The team talked to students about their views on assessment and feedback and to staff about assessment processes including verification and the conduct of exam boards.

2.46 Assessments are designed by staff as a means of allowing students to demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes for their award. All assignment briefs are internally modified before they are distributed to students and lecturers are able to obtain advice on constructing their assessments from the external verifier. In its monitoring reports the awarding organisation affirms that assessments at the College are designed and implemented effectively and makes suggestions for improvements and enhancement. There are effective procedures in place for the internal and external verification of marking.

2.47 Students who met the review team and who had undertaken assessments stated that they were well informed about what was required of them and found that the feedback they received was helpful and timely. They were well informed about plagiarism and how to

avoid it. Students considered the assessment process to be fair. Staff and students confirmed that mitigating circumstances were taken into account by tutors on an individual basis. The resulting flexibility is intended to assist students but lacks transparency.

2.48 Pearson expects providers to establish exam boards which have a published set of regulations covering such matters as membership, independent chairing, terms of reference and operations. Boards are expected to make recommendations on grades, awards and progression, and to deal with individual cases involving mitigating circumstances or academic misconduct. The College has exam board guidance in place which is available on the staff intranet. The review team notes that parts of the guidance are written in a general way and do not make clear the required arrangements for membership, chairing, quorums and scheduling. There is also a lack of alignment between the College exam boards' terms of reference, the purposes of exam boards stated by the awarding organisation and the College pro forma for exam board agendas.

2.49 Exam boards do not operate effectively across all awards in line with the expectations of the College or the awarding organisation. Practice at exam boards varies between awards. Minutes of exam boards lack requisite detail of attendance, chairing and decisions made. In discussion with staff it was stated that programme leaders chair their own boards, a practice that lacks independence. The minutes of a recent exam board revealed that students were present during the discussions. An external verifier recently recommended that exam boards should be chaired by an independent chair and minutes kept in a professional manner. However, neither recommendation was put in place for the subsequent exam board held for this award. Staff who met the review team were unclear about expected exam board practice. The review team finds that the College's exam boards do not follow its approved policies and guidance, or the requirements of the awarding organisation. It is **recommended** that the College develop and implement a set of regulations which clearly define the purpose, membership, powers and mode of operation of examination boards for higher education, which clearly articulate the processes of the awarding organisation, by May 2015.

2.50 Overall, the review team concludes that the College does not operate fully equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment. While the setting, marking and verification of assessment is effective, aspects of the assessment regime, such as managing mitigating circumstances, lack transparency. Furthermore, there is no effective system of College assessment boards for its higher education awards. The conduct of exam boards does not provide sufficient evidence of the clarity of membership, procedures, powers and responsibility consistent with the Quality Code. As a result, Expectation B6 is not met in design or practice.

2.51 In addition, the lack of understanding by College staff of Pearson's policies, College guidance and related sections of the Quality Code contributes to insufficient awareness and responsiveness by the College. The associated risk in this area is considered by the review team to be serious.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.52 The awarding organisation, in consultation with the College, appoints external verifiers who undertake a role similar to that of an external examiner. External verifiers usually visit the College annually to sample student work and evaluate it against Pearson's standards; they may also meet students and provide feedback and advice to staff delivering programmes. The awarding organisation also appoints a Centre Quality Reviewer who reports annually on the College's quality assurance policies and practices. The College briefs external verifiers and manages the external moderation process. The College has procedures for the receipt of external verifiers' reports, responding formally to them, and ensuring that they are made available to staff and students on the relevant programme.

2.53 The review team finds that the College has appropriate systems, processes, policies and procedures in place to facilitate the effective input of external verifiers appointed by the awarding organisation into its higher education provision. College roles and responsibilities in relation to the external verification process are clearly defined, as are processes for handling reports from external examiners and quality reviewers.

2.54 The review team examined policies and guidance notes produced by the College and the awarding organisation, and read reports from external reviewers and quality reviewers and the College's responses. The team looked at minutes of meetings where these reports were discussed. The team also discussed the processes involved with members of College staff.

2.55 The College's systems, processes, policies and procedures relating to external verifiers operate effectively. Programme leaders are responsible for preparing for, and managing, the visits of external verifiers and for providing feedback after a visit to colleagues, staff responsible for quality and heads of faculty. The Quality Office manages the receipt and response to reports. The College produces action plans to address recommendations and suggestions made by external verifiers. Their reports feed into annual monitoring and planning. Reports are discussed at programme and College meetings, including those where students are present. Students have access to the summary reports of external verifiers through the VLE. The College recognises the benefit of its staff acting as external examiners and one member of staff is an external examiner at a university within the region.

2.56 The College makes scrupulous use of external examiners through the robust system of external verification operated by the awarding organisation. There are appropriate systems and processes in place for interaction with external verifiers and to respond to their recommendations: these are operated effectively. The review team concludes that Expectation B7 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk in this area is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.57 The College has a comprehensive system of annual monitoring which operates at teaching team, programme area, faculty, service and College levels. Each level produces self-assessment reviews and improvement plans. Roles and procedures are identified together with a schedule that culminates in the submission of a College review and improvement plan at the end of the first term following the year under review. Additional monitoring, audit and review activities then take place until the beginning of the next cycle. The annual monitoring cycle employs defined evaluation criteria and key performance indicators (KPIs). The Quality Office coordinates the process. Annual monitoring feeds into College plans. Updating and issuing new programme specifications and regulations is the responsibility of the awarding organisation. The College does not routinely operate a formal periodic review process at programme level.

2.58 In addition, the College has robust systems, processes, policies and procedures in place for the annual monitoring of its higher education provision. College annual monitoring processes are designed to take account of student opinion and external inputs; roles and responsibilities are clear.

2.59 The review team examined documents which set out the processes and procedures for annual monitoring and examples of annual self-assessment reviews, improvement plans and strategies. The team read documents relating to the full-curriculum review taking place as part of the development of the Federation, and a summary of the actions taken to safeguard the interests of students during a planned course closure. The review team discussed the College's approach to programme monitoring and review with senior staff.

2.60 The College's systems, processes, policies and procedures relating to annual monitoring operate effectively. Monitoring of higher education programmes takes place against clear criteria relating to course delivery, teaching and student achievement. A new pro forma derived from the Quality Code is being piloted. At faculty level, detailed statistical information is drawn together regarding student performance. All reviews draw upon a broad range of evidence including student record statistics, internal verification and teaching observations, external reviews such as external verifiers' reports, student feedback and surveys, and employer surveys. Annual monitoring reviews identify programme strengths and weaknesses and include plans to address weaknesses and enhance provision attached to them.

2.61 Where a programme no longer appears to be viable, closure may be proposed. The review team saw evidence that where this was the case, careful consideration was given to the situation of students registered on the programme.

2.62 The awarding organisation uses Centre Quality reviewers to report annually on quality processes applied across the College's higher education provision. Reports include recommendations for development and improvement. The awarding organisation also makes periodic changes to its programme specifications and regulations to which the College must adapt. However, within the review processes operated at the College, there is currently no formal cycle of periodic review of programmes which looks at performance over a longer period in a developmental context. The review team **recommends** that, by July

2015, the College develop a process for the periodic review of its higher education programmes that complements the review processes of the awarding organisation.

2.63 The College has appropriate policies and procedures in place for the annual monitoring of its academic provision. These are set out clearly and implemented effectively. The College's approach to periodic monitoring is less developed. The review team concludes that, overall, Expectation B8 is met in both design and operation, and the associated level of risk in this area is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

2.64 Pearson requires that the College has mechanisms in place to ensure that staff and students are aware of the circumstances under which an assessment decision may be appealed and the processes and procedures for doing this. Guidance is provided for the design of appropriate policies and procedures. The College has a written appeals policy in place which Pearson has signed off as appropriate. The College also has a written policy for making complaints. The policies relating to appeals and complaints are available on the College website and reference is made to them in student handbooks.

2.65 The review team considers that the College has put appropriate systems, processes, policies and procedures in place to meet the Expectation. In designing the policies the College has been mindful of the need for its appeal and complaint processes to be accessible, fair, timely and responsive. Processes are also designed to facilitate learning from both appeals and complaints and thus promote enhancement. As discussed in section B2 on page 17, while an appeals process has been incorporated into the draft admissions policy, no complaints procedure has been included.

2.66 The review team examined documents which set out the College's policies and processes for appeals and complaints, and looked at how they are publicised in handbooks and elsewhere. The team talked to students about their knowledge and understanding of the processes for making appeals and complaints.

2.67 No appeals, and only one complaint, have been received by the College in the recent past from higher education students, so it is not possible to comment fully on the effectiveness of the operation of the policies. Although the Student Handbook contains details of how to make an appeal or complaint, appeals and complaints policies are not referred to in all programme handbooks. Appeals and complaints are not covered specifically in induction but students who met the review team were aware of their ability to appeal or complain and where to find relevant information about how to do so.

2.68 The College, with the support of its awarding organisation, has appropriate policies in place for appeals and complaints. These are set out clearly and made available to staff and students through the website and in the Student Handbook. Students confirmed that they were aware of the policies and how they could use them.

2.69 The review team concludes that Expectation B9 is met in design and operation, and the associated level of risk in this area is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.70 The College's responsibilities in respect of this Expectation include supporting arrangements for work placements and collaborating with local businesses to deliver live briefs to students. These live briefs underpin the curriculum design and provide students with experiences of working with clients and opportunities to develop their portfolios. The College careers service equips students with skills to gain work experience and placements, but does not actively seek out placements for students.

2.71 The College does not currently deliver a programme where work placements are a mandatory element. However, HNC Sport students take up work experience placements on an extracurricular basis which contributes to their professional development.

2.72 Many part-time higher education students at the College are industry-based. When the review team met them, they reported the College was well resourced for their purposes and staff listened to their feedback and took appropriate action.

2.73 Staff in Creative Media work with local businesses to provide students with live briefs that enable them to gain experience of working with a client in an industry simulation. This aids their professional development, strengthens their portfolios and provides relevant experience. The review team conducted a telephone meeting with an employer, who confirmed the value of his relationship with the College. He referred to the positive outcomes for his business and students. These arose from the work conducted on client briefs, formative feedback at the end of the projects and the ongoing dialogue with students throughout the projects. He described interaction with the College and its students as professional and mutually beneficial.

2.74 The review team explored the opportunities to engage with local businesses through the evidence provided by the College, meetings with staff and students, and a telephone discussion with an employer. Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B10 is met and the associated risk level is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.75 South Leicestershire College does not deliver research degrees.

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

2.76 In reaching its judgements about the quality of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

2.77 Of the 10 applicable Expectations in this area, eight are met and two are not met. In the two Expectations not met, the review team judged the level of risk to be moderate in B2 and serious in B6.

2.78 There are three recommendations in this area which relate to the above two Expectations, B2 and B6, and in addition B8.

2.79 In its recruitment, selection and admission procedures, the review team was unable to secure evidence of either current or previous policy appropriate to the admission of higher education students, although there was evidence of an informal policy. The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate. Accordingly the team has made a recommendation.

2.80 The work of the College in enabling student development and achievement was regarded by the review team as very effective in securing their transition to higher education and, in particular, for those learners with significant learning difficulties. The review team considers this aspect of the College's provision to be good practice.

2.81 In its consideration of the assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning, the review team concludes that the College does not have in place fully equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment. The team has concerns with aspects of the assessment procedures in relation to a lack of transparency and managing mitigating circumstances. The team is also concerned by the absence of an effective system of College assessment boards for its higher education awards and the response to advice from Pearson. Consequently the Expectation is not met and the associated risk is considered serious. The review team makes its second recommendation in this area.

2.82 When undertaking programme monitoring and review, the team noted the role of the awarding organisation's Centre Quality reviewers who report annually. Their reports include recommendations for development and improvement. However, currently the review processes at the College have no provision for a cycle of periodic review of programmes which reflect on performance and enhancement opportunities over longer periods of time. The team recommends that the College develop a process for the periodic review of its higher education programmes that complements the review processes of the awarding organisation.

2.83 The review team notes the progress made in developing policies and procedures for higher education provision at the College, including those highlighted in the recommendations of the last QAA review in June 2010. However, there are important policies and processes relating to this section of the Quality Code that are either not in place or insufficiently developed.

2.84 Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **does not meet** UK expectations.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

3.1 Information about the College's programmes, policies and procedures is made available to applicants, students, staff and external stakeholders through the College website, the VLE and printed materials including prospectuses and handbooks.

3.2 The College has processes in place to ensure that published information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.3 Students are given handbooks after they have enrolled on their programmes. The marketing team is effective in securing feedback from students on these and other published information including the College strategy.

3.4 Marketing materials are checked before publication by the marketing team who regularly receive information from academic staff about their courses. All information is subject to annual review to ensure it is up to date, accurate and complete.

3.5 The College acknowledges that the small cohorts of students on higher education programmes impact on the viability of national surveys and the resulting minimum threshold required for non-aggregated data publication; that is, the National Student Survey and Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education.

3.6 The review team examined documentation that describes the College's policies and processes for the production of information for internal and external stakeholders, and asked staff about the operation of these policies. The review team examined examples of information produced for applicants and students, including the general public, that were provided both electronically and on paper. The review team discussed with students the information they received, and heard from academic staff and support staff about how the information is produced and checked for accuracy.

3.7 Although the College provides a Programme Handbook for all students when their studies commence, the team noted inconsistencies across the handbooks in both design and content. The review team **recommends** that, by July 2015, the College implements a consistent approach to the design and content of handbooks across all higher education programmes.

3.8 The College has effective processes in place to ensure the accuracy of public information regarding its higher education provision. Students confirm they are able to access information about their programmes and the resources available and that the information is helpful. The review team concludes that Expectation C is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

3.9 In reaching its judgement on information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

3.10 The College provides a prospectus and information about courses in both electronic and paper format. Students are provided with handbooks at their enrolment. However, the review team notes inconsistencies with programme handbooks and recommends a consistent approach to handbooks for higher education programmes.

3.11 Oversight of the publication of information is undertaken by the marketing team and the information is subject to annual review to ensure validity and accuracy. This includes information from academic staff about their programmes.

3.12 The College acknowledges that small cohorts of higher education students impact upon the viability of national surveys.

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

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College places the student experience at the heart of its strategies and policies. Strategic plans have been developed at College level as well as for the Federation of which the College is now a member. Within these overarching strategies there are substrategies, for example for learning, teaching and assessment and employability. An overarching Higher Education Enhancement Strategy has been developed at College level.

4.2 The College's quality assurance structures and processes facilitate the identification and dissemination of good practice. Student feedback and engagement are seen as opportunities for enhancement. Processes such as teaching observation, verification and annual monitoring foster a culture of self-assessment and continuous improvement. Roles such as Quality Lead and groups such as the Higher Education Forum facilitate the dissemination of good practice.

4.3 The systems, processes, policies and procedures in place at the College are designed to support deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.4 The review team read documents relating to the College's strategic plans and the College structures and processes that support enhancement. The team heard from academic and professional staff about the College's approach to enhancement. The College also provided the review team with an evidence trail demonstrating the dissemination of good practice stemming from the College's quality assurance procedures.

4.5 The structure of the Federation is still under development and enhancement is driven strategically at College level. Enhancement is promoted strategically through the College's quality improvement plans. The Higher Education Enhancement Strategy has not yet been disseminated to all staff, or fully implemented.

4.6 Staff who met the review team noted many processes by which good practice was disseminated across the College and between the different higher education programmes. Many of these were informal, for example informal peer observation and mentoring. The Higher Education Forum played an important role in bringing staff who teach on higher education programmes together and exchanging ideas. The role of the Higher Education Manager is pivotal in facilitating such interactions. Good practice was also shared as a result of identification through formal College processes. The review team saw an example of this which began with comments made by an external verifier that led to a presentation to other staff on the subject of ways to engage employers.

4.7 The College adopts a strategic approach to enhancement. The student experience is central to the College's strategic planning and its approach to management. A culture of continuous improvement is evident among staff. On the basis of the evidence, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

4.8 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

4.9 The student experience is central to the College's strategies and policies and procedures are designed to support deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. A Higher Education Enhancement Strategy has been developed and the quality assurance processes facilitate the identification and dissemination of good practice.

4.10 The review team considered that a range of processes contribute to enhancement, including student feedback and engagement, teaching observations, verification and annual monitoring. Further, the dissemination of good practice is facilitated through the role of the Quality Leads and the Higher Education Forum. In particular, the work of the Higher Education Manager is considered pivotal in disseminating good practice and taking forward the College's Enhancement Strategy.

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



## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The College's mission is 'to provide excellent vocational learning and so improve the life chances, employability and economic prosperity of our students'. Consequently, it places much emphasis on the employability of students and higher education programmes are developed to enhance employment and career opportunities for a range of career pathways.

5.2 Staff include live projects in the higher education provision. This enables students to develop confidence in producing industry-standard work for clients while meeting the requirements of their programmes. It also adds to their portfolios, professional development and experience. Clients are involved in the presentation of the associated briefs and informal feedback during the project.

5.3 The College makes provision to support students in finding placements and work experience although none of the higher education programmes currently delivered at the College have them integrated in their programme design. In addition, the College careers service provides support to students including advice on writing personal statements, information about finance, providing employability tips, information about accessing higher education and careers advice.

5.4 The College promotes opportunities for students to volunteer including a successful example of a peer mentoring programme. In addition, the review team met alumni who were volunteering at the College to support learning and demonstrating skills.

5.5 There are plans for the College to further develop the involvement of employers in the design of higher education programmes. This is intended to add value and relevance to programme content and raise student awareness and aspirations. Initial steps are underway and include the formation of a strategic Employer Forum. The College is also seeking to broaden the employability skills of students through engagement with the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR).

## 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 to 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*.

### **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 standards**

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 for higher education qualifications** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**. See also **academic standards**.

**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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