Higher Education Review of South Staffordshire College

November 2015

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at South Staffordshire College. The review took place from 17 to 19 November 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Jethro Newton
- Dr Hayley Randle
- Ms Elizabeth Houghton (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by South Staffordshire 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)[1] setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 6. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

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

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

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

Amended judgement - June 2017

Introduction

In November 2015, South Staffordshire College underwent a Higher Education Review, which resulted in the following judgements: the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies meets UK expectations; the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of Pearson Education does not meet UK expectations; the quality of student learning opportunities meets UK expectations for provision validated by degree-awarding bodies; the quality of student learning opportunities does not meet UK expectations for Pearson Education provision; the quality of the information about learning opportunities meets UK expectations for provision validated by degree-awarding bodies; the quality of the information about learning opportunities requires improvement to meet UK expectations for Pearson Education provision; and the enhancement of student learning opportunities meets UK expectations.

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

The College published an action plan in June 2016 describing how it intended to address the recommendations identified in the review, and has been working over the last 12 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 15 February 2017 with two reviewers. During the visit the team met students; senior staff; and academic, professional and support staff to discuss progress and triangulate the evidence base received over the preceding months.

The visit confirmed that the recommendations relating to academic standards, the quality of student learning opportunities and the quality of the information about learning opportunities had been successfully addressed.

QAA Board decision and amended judgement

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

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

Findings from the follow-up process

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

Recommendation - Put in place and implement a procedure for the conduct of examination boards for validated programmes (Expectations A2.1, A3.2 and B6)
Examination boards are now in place for Pearson provision. The terms of reference for Higher Education Assessment Boards state the requirement for termly meetings. The review team noted that an examination board for the now discontinued HND Electrical Engineering

programme had been properly constituted but that it was unclear whether the external verifier had been present or invited to attend. Assessment board minutes confirmed that a cycle of boards was in place for the HNC Manufacturing in Engineering, and that that programme had been formally approved by Pearson/Edexcel. Annual monitoring records confirmed the progress made in implementing a procedure for assessment boards, as did the external verifier. The review team also noted that minutes and proceedings of Pearson Team Quality Meetings provide a clear audit trail confirming how the 2015 recommendation was being addressed.

Senior staff stated that assessment board issues were considered by the recently re-constituted Higher Education Academic Board and this is confirmed in the Board's terms of reference, minutes, and proceedings. Senior staff also advised that assessment board terms of reference and the meetings cycle had been communicated to staff, but academic and professional support staff whom the review team met were unaware of arrangements for assessment or award boards for Pearson provision. Students confirmed their awareness of the assessment board cycle and the purposes of these boards. The review team concludes that, on balance, the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

Recommendation - Discharge their responsibilities by operating effective processes for the design development and approval of programmes (Expectations A3.1, A3.3, B1 and B8)

The College now has processes for the design, development and approval of programmes and the review team confirmed that progress is being made with implementation. Documentation is now in place for internal course approval and validation. Senior staff advised that these procedures, which also apply to Pearson provision, were approved by the College's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and will be reviewed every two years. They now form part of the College's Quality Improvement Process.

The review team also noted a good range of evidence at programme team level of steps being taken to ensure effective design, development and monitoring of programmes and units. Documentation such as Higher National programme Quality Improvement Plans, minutes of regular Pearson Quality Team meetings, and annual monitoring reports for Pearson provision, all illustrate how curriculum design and development is prioritised in action plans and how use is made of updated programme specifications and assessment strategies, and internal verification procedures. Emphasis is also placed at programme team level on ensuring that enrolment does not commence before all approval processes are completed.

A documented internal periodic review and revalidation procedure is in place, based on a quinquennial review cycle. Senior staff advised that although no Pearson programme is due for review in the near future, the College's annual Department Review process could trigger such a review if there were concerns on either quality or standards prior to the scheduled review date. The review team concludes that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

Recommendation - Implement effective external verification processes (Expectations A3.4 and B7)

The College now has an external examiner in place for its Pearson provision and has undergone an external examiner's visit. The external examiner report identified issues raised in the HER, but commented that the College has made 'good progress' since the HER visit. There are now termly Pearson Quality Review meetings. The College has established Higher Education Assessment Boards for its Pearson provision, receives external examiner reports and acts on recommendations. Pearson Annual Monitoring Reports include external

examiner reports and actions taken in light of these reports. Annual Monitoring Reports are presented to the new Academic Board Group.

The Higher Education Manager has responsibility for monitoring emergent issues from external examiner reports. Teaching staff are aware of the internal quality processes that external examiner reports go through. Students confirmed that they are aware of external verification processes and that student representatives can access external examiner reports if they request them. The review team concludes that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

Recommendation - Establish a deliberative committee that has strategic oversight for academic standards quality and enhancement (Expectations A3.3, B8 and Enhancement)

The terms of reference and minutes of the Higher Education Academic Board illustrate how quality assurance and academic standards are being addressed, and that there is evidence that each is being covered in the deliberations of that body. Though not chaired by a member of the College's SLT, the SLT is represented in the membership of the Board. Senior staff confirmed that strategic oversight is further strengthened through the link between the Academic Board and the College Operations Group, since the latter includes membership from senior staff represented on the former group. From their reading of the proceedings of the Academic Board the review team saw evidence that its business includes consideration of applications for new awards, and that quality and standards matters are a standing agenda item, as are academic matters relating to Pearson provision.

The review team noted that an appropriate quinquennial periodic review procedure has been introduced for the College's Pearson provision, although no programmes are scheduled for review in the near future. The review team concludes that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

Recommendation - Strengthen student engagement at all levels and support with training for student representatives (Expectation B5)

The Learner Engagement Procedure clearly sets out that student representatives will have access to training and support from College staff. The College has put in place a new timetable for the appointment of student representatives, and a rolling programme of training for students in representative roles. The new information and training programme for student representatives is appropriate; student representatives stated that they feel well supported in their role and are confident that the College takes student engagement seriously. Student representatives who could not attend training sessions still receive training materials.

Senior staff confirmed that student representatives are now included in a broader range of higher education committees and boards. Student representatives reported that they feel their input is valued by the College, and that they have regular meetings with the Higher Education Manager as well as attending departmental meetings. Students are aware of the Annual Monitoring Review and new programme validation processes and feel that they have appropriate channels to input to this. The review team concludes that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

Recommendation - Devise and implement an assessment policy for its Pearson provision (Expectations A3.2 and B6)
Documentation made available to the review team provided evidence that College policies are being brought in line with all higher education processes and regulatory requirements. The Assessment Procedure, which falls within the scope of the College's Teaching and Learning Policy, sets out clearly the requirements for assessment boards, internal and external verification, and other regulatory matters such as mitigating circumstances, and submission of assessed work. In the view of the team this policy, which is available on the intranet and virtual learning environment (VLE), is appropriate and fit for purpose. The review team concludes that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

Recommendation - Devise and implement an appeals policy for its Pearson provision (Expectation B9)
The College's new Higher Education Academic Appeal Procedure clearly sets out a process for students to launch an appeal, and the ground that appeal may be based on. There have been no appeals since the procedure has been in place, but senior staff were confident that the new process would be implemented appropriately. Students reported being aware of the grounds on which they could appeal, and stated that the appeals procedure is available on the VLE, which was confirmed by senior staff. The review team concludes that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

Recommendation - strengthen formal processes to ensure that information for its Pearson provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (Expectation C)
Following the HER visit the College has developed sufficient procedures for monitoring and approving its Pearson provision. There is now an approved timetable for monitoring Pearson provision, which includes termly Pearson quality review meetings and Pearson Annual Monitoring Reports. These reports are discussed at the new Academic Board, which has responsibility for ensuring that 'confidence' can be placed in the College's management of higher education teaching quality and in the 'soundness of the College's management of the academic standards of its awards'. Senior staff explained that the Academic Board has a particular focus on Pearson provision, and monitors elements of its quality and standards, including information. Teaching staff confirmed that information and programme handbooks are monitored by the Academic Board. Pearson teaching staff did not confirm this specifically for the College's Pearson provision; however, the overall quality monitoring processes in place, including the Academic Board, ensure that Pearson quality and standards are maintained.

Following the strengthening of the College external verification for its Pearson provision, there is now external verification of information that complements the College's own internal processes. The review team concludes that the provider is making the required progress in addressing the recommendation.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about South Staffordshire College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies **meets** UK expectations.
- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of Pearson Education **does not meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations for provision validated by degree-awarding bodies.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **does not meet** UK expectations for Pearson Education provision.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations for provision validated by degree-awarding bodies.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations for Pearson Education provision.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Recommendations

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

By the end of April 2016:

- put in place and implement a procedure for the conduct of examination boards for validated programmes (Expectations A2.1, A3.2, B6)
- discharge its responsibilities by operating effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes (Expectations A3.1, A3.3, B1, B8)
- implement effective external verification processes (Expectations A3.4, B7).

By June 2016:

- establish a deliberative committee that has strategic oversight for academic standards, quality and enhancement (Expectations A3.3, B8, Enhancement).

By September 2016:

- strengthen student engagement at all levels and support with training for student representatives (Expectation B5)
- devise and implement an assessment policy for its Pearson provision (Expectations A3.2, B6)
- devise and implement an appeals policy for its Pearson provision (Expectation B9)
- strengthen formal processes to ensure that information for its Pearson provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (Expectation C).

Theme: Student Employability

Employability is considered central to the College's ethos and underpins the strategic development of its higher education provision. The College is well placed to develop employability-related life skills in its students due to the onsite commercial businesses that align with three of the main curriculum areas.

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

About South Staffordshire College

South Staffordshire College is a large general further education college with four main campuses in Lichfield, Tamworth, Rodbaston and Cannock serving more than 6,000 learners, 279 of whom are higher education students. The College's vision is as follows: 'Our communities are the custodians of our heritage and are its advocates for the future. Our courage, belief, ambition, purpose, principles and values will help secure the wellbeing and happiness of our communities for future generations. The College supports this vision with four values: togetherness, standards, sustainability and customer care'.

The College's 279 higher education students study a range of programmes, which are mainly vocational in nature and focused on employability. Most of the College's programmes are foundation degrees and Higher National awards, with a smaller number of BSc and BA (Hons) degrees, one BA (Hons) top-up in Business and both full-time and part-time PGCEs.

Programmes are offered in the following subject areas: Film and Television; Health and Social Care; Applied Computing; Business; Musical Theatre; Childhood Studies; Education; Leadership and Management; Photography; Event Management; Electrical Engineering; Animal Science and Behaviour; and Equine Behaviour.

The College has undergone several restructures since the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review conducted by QAA in April 2011, with staff and roles realigned to fit the needs of the emerging local economy. To help meet the financial and operational challenges faced by the wider further education sector, the College has launched a two-year Transformational Change Programme.

The key challenges identified by the College include the effect of recent Government education policies; the establishment of effective collaborative arrangements with higher education institutions; and maintaining and developing taught courses in the light of increasing competition and an increasingly global marketplace.

The College works mainly with its local university, Staffordshire University. It also offers one Pearson award and has recently rekindled a previous partnership with the University of Wolverhampton, with whom one new award has been developed and validated for the future.

The College has made progress in addressing the recommendations from its last review. It has clarified the formal roles and responsibilities of College and University staff for programmes validated by Staffordshire University and has improved the gathering of student feedback from higher education students.

The last review recommended that the College should further strengthen the ownership of higher education provision. The team did not find evidence that this had happened despite the use of the Higher Education Manager role, and this contributed to issues with academic governance and scrutiny.

Explanation of the findings about South Staffordshire 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 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 majority of the College's higher education provision is awarded by either Staffordshire University or the University of Wolverhampton. The academic regulations of each awarding body stipulate the requirements of the design and implementation of higher education awards. These ensure that programmes align with the requirements of the FHEQ, take into account QAA-defined qualification characteristics, align with the national credit framework and take into account relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.2 Guidance on programme and module design is provided by the awarding body. Specific assessment-related guidance is also provided by the awarding bodies. Updating of modules and programmes is subject to the same rigorous procedure.

1.3 Programme quality assurance procedures based on a process of annual monitoring are implemented in accordance with the awarding bodies' academic regulations. External examiners are appointed by the awarding bodies to ensure that programme subject specificity is maintained and that assessment is conducted at an appropriate level.

1.4 The College has one HND programme (HND Electrical Engineering) that it has developed directly with Pearson. Pearson provision is operated in accordance with the awarding organisation's handbook. The College does not currently have formal College-based quality assurance procedures in place for the Pearson programme. In the absence of

these the College applies the quality assurance procedures in place for the awarding body provision. Pearson is responsible for the appointment of an external examiner.

1.5 The College uses the regulatory guidance provided by the awarding bodies and awarding organisation effectively, to ensure that its programmes are positioned at the appropriate level of the FHEQ and that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor. The College has processes in place that enable it to meet Expectation A1.

1.6 The team examined a range of documentation to test how the College secures threshold academic standards for its provision. Documentation included Memoranda of Agreement, quality assurance handbooks, student handbooks, external examiner reports and annual monitoring reports. The team also met the head of the College, senior staff and teaching staff.

1.7 The College makes rigorous use of the programme approval processes of its awarding bodies to ensure that threshold academic standards are secured for its programmes during the design process. The threshold academic standards of the HND Electrical Engineering programme are determined by Pearson and operationalised by the College as the provider, in accordance with the awarding organisation's handbook and guide to assessment.

1.8 For the College's University provision the programmes are designed in strict accordance with the academic regulations of the awarding bodies, ensuring that appropriate threshold academic standards are secured. The Pearson provision comprises existing modules at Levels 4 and 5, meaning that threshold academic standards are secured at validation. Through compliance with awarding body and awarding organisation regulatory frameworks, threshold academic standards are secured for the College's higher education provision. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation A1 is met in both design and operation and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.9 The College has a management structure in place to ensure the appropriate governance of the higher education provision; however, higher education is largely managed within overarching curriculum and subject areas serviced by processes largely based on, and derived from, those for further education.

1.10 The academic regulations of the College's awarding bodies provide the College with regulatory frameworks and guidance on the rigorous and consistent award of academic credit and qualifications. Awarding bodies provide templates for programme specifications, which are required to be approved during the validation process. Academic Link Tutors and Programme Advisors for the awarding body, along with external examiners, assist with ensuring that the appropriate academic standards are met throughout teaching, learning and assessment.

1.11 Guidance supporting the achievement and maintenance of appropriate academic standards, and award of academic credit and qualifications, for the College's direct Pearson provision is provided in the BTEC handbook and guidance to assessment. A specification for the HND Electrical Engineering programme is not available. The College's own Teaching and Learning Policy refers to Teaching, Learning and Assessment processes but it is currently out of date.

1.12 Academic credit and progression, or award of qualification, are ratified and awarded at Assessment Boards that take place at the end of the academic year and which are chaired by the awarding body. There is no Award Assessment Board equivalent at the College for the Pearson programme.

1.13 The College uses the regulatory guidance and processes of its awarding bodies to ensure that academic credit and qualifications are awarded correctly for its University programmes. The absence of an appointed external examiner and a formal equivalent of an Assessment Board within the College for the Pearson programme raises some concerns over the award of credit and qualification for this part of the College's higher education provision, but the processes in place, including an informally constituted assessment board, would enable it to meet Expectation A2.1.

1.14 The team examined a range of documentation to test how the College awards credit and qualifications for its higher education provision. Documentation included Memoranda of Agreement, quality assurance handbooks, student handbooks, external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports, the College's out-of-date Teaching and Learning (T and L) Policy, Programme Advisor Reports and Assessment Board minutes. The team met senior and teaching staff to discuss the award and achievement of academic credit.

1.15 College staff confirm their implementation of the academic frameworks and regulations within which the higher education programmes operate. Staff have a clear understanding of how academic credit is awarded and the criteria that must be met for progression between academic levels or the award of exit qualifications. Staff use the College's own T and L Policy and associated assessment-related documentation.

1.16 Delivery of credit at the appropriate level through College staff teaching and assessment practice, and correct application of the awarding bodies' academic frameworks and regulations, are confirmed by University-based Programme Advisors and Link Tutors as well as University-appointed external examiners. Students confirm the increase in academic expectations as they progress through their programme of study.

1.17 For University programmes, academic credit at module and programme level is formally awarded at the Assessment Boards which take place at the end of the academic year. Award Assessment Boards are conducted in accordance with the awarding bodies' academic regulations and chaired by an awarding body representative. University-appointed external examiners confirm that the appropriate academic standards have been achieved before credit can be awarded.

1.18 For the Pearson HND Electrical Engineering provision, the College does not have a parallel process in place. There is currently no Pearson-appointed external examiner so marks achieved by students to date have only been considered at College level at an informal meeting chaired by the Higher Education Manager, and conducted in a similar way to the University Award Assessment Boards.

1.19 For the College's University provision the College makes stringent use of the awarding bodies' academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications. Academic credit confirmed by external examiners is awarded, and progression or achievement of qualifications is ratified, by Award Assessment Boards chaired by University representatives. However, for the College's own Pearson provision, there is no external examiner in post and therefore no external verification. Given the operation of a College-based assessment meeting conducted by the Higher Education Manager in the same way as the University Award Assessment Boards to formalise/ratify the marks, the team **recommends** that the College puts in place and implements a procedure for the conduct of examination boards for validated programmes. (See also A3.2, B6.)

1.20 The team concludes that Expectation A2.1 is met and the associated risk is moderate due to weaknesses in the operation of part of the provider's academic governance structure.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.21 The College delivers degree programmes on behalf of its awarding body, Staffordshire University, and will begin delivery of University of Wolverhampton programmes in the next academic year. HND and HNC awards are provided by Pearson.

1.22 The College states that all of the programmes delivered have programme handbooks. Records are approved by the relevant awarding University at validation and re-approved at revalidation. Information about programme specifications and assessment is contained within programme handbooks and on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Approval of higher education programmes takes place through processes arranged by the partner University. Because of these arrangements, the College meets the Expectation.

1.23 The review team tested the Expectation by looking at a range of documentation including a sample of programme handbooks across the full range of provision, and the College website. Meetings were held with staff and students.

1.24 The College delivers its provision in partnership with its awarding bodies and operates under their policies and procedures. There are processes in place for the delivery, assessment, monitoring and review of its programmes of study, and the provision of records for programmes delivered on behalf of the awarding Universities. In meetings with senior staff there was an admission that the internal validation and design of the Pearson provision lacks rigour; this has been addressed in the findings of other Expectations.

1.25 There is evidence of the College managing its responsibilities for the review and monitoring of programmes and keeping definitive records for its higher education provision, though in the case of the Pearson provision there is again an acknowledgement that the process lacks rigour.

1.26 The team concludes that the College meets the Expectation through provision of programme specifications available to staff and students, as required by its awarding bodies. The management of programme specification for its awards is appropriate; therefore, Expectation A2.2 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

1.27 The Deputy Principal has senior leadership responsibility for the strategic development of higher education at the College. Strategic and operational oversight of the curriculum is exercised by the Director of Curriculum and Support, with local-level curriculum leadership being provided by Heads of Curriculum. A Higher Education Manager holds responsibility for operational coordination and liaison of higher education provision. The Director of Quality manages the quality processes. In the committee structure, the Higher Education Working Group, which has replaced the Higher Education Development Group, provides strategic direction on curriculum growth and employer engagement, while the Higher Education Award Tutors Working Group addresses developmental and operational matters relating to enrolment, curriculum delivery, student achievement and quality. A new Academic Board is being established during 2015-16 to replace the Higher Education Working Group. Its responsibilities will include portfolio planning and general higher education matters.

1.28 The College uses a two-stage process for the approval of a new programme. The first stage is an internal academic planning process for the business case approval of programmes. This is informed by market, financial and resourcing information and by consideration of the rationale for the proposed provision. Following completion of this internal academic planning stage, academic approval is subject to the procedures and regulations of the awarding bodies through processes that are wholly owned by them. Staffordshire University and the University of Wolverhampton are responsible for curriculum design for University awards, while programme design for non-University provision is the responsibility of Pearson as the awarding organisation.

1.29 There is a comprehensive set of documents illustrating the development and approval process for Staffordshire University, University of Wolverhampton and Pearson provision. Validation and approval events take place, which ensure that regulations are complied with and which focus on learning outcomes, assessment and module specifications, and the quality of learning opportunities for prospective students. In addition to faculty and University-level scrutiny, events and processes also incorporate the use of externality. External advisers (academic and industry) complete reports on programme approval. These include comments on comparability of standards with similar provision elsewhere and other standards-related matters.

1.30 The College has a set of processes in place, supported by those of the awarding bodies, that would enable it to meet the Expectation.

1.31 The review team tested the operation and effectiveness of the programme design and approval guidance, regulations and frameworks through scrutiny of documentation and meetings with staff and students, partnership managers and employers.

1.32 The evidence showed that the College has recently and successfully gained approval for a number of programmes with its University partners, including under the renewed partnership arrangement with the University of Wolverhampton. Programme

modifications are also carried out following awarding body procedures. When an approved course comes to the end of its term, it is revalidated through the formal periodic review procedures laid down in the regulations of the appropriate awarding body. An example of this is the academic review and approval of the BSc (Hons) Health and Social Care with Foundation Year programme, undertaken by Staffordshire University.

1.33 Staff understand the validation processes of these awarding bodies and the expectations of higher education, and this enables them to make a positive contribution to the process. However, while there is a robust system of academic planning in place for the first-stage internal approval of the business case for new programmes, during the approval of its HND Electrical Engineering programme the College recognised that it does not have a sufficiently full and rigorous programme approval process in place for internal validation of the units and modules for its client-led Pearson provision. The College also acknowledges that it needs to strengthen awareness of programme design among teaching teams and managers. Moreover, the review team could find no evidence that Pearson has approved the HND Electrical Engineering programme, which has been delivered since September 2014. This is reflected in the recommendation under Expectation B1.

1.34 Overall, the regulations and processes for programme design and approval for University awards are in place and are understood by staff, which leads the team to conclude that Expectation A3.1 is met in respect of University provision. However, in view of the absence of effective procedures for the internal validation and academic approval of its Pearson provision overall, Expectation A3.1 is not met, and the associated risk is serious due to significant gaps in procedures relating to the College's quality assurance.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

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

1.35 The academic regulations of each awarding body set out the principles and regulations governing assessment. They document the processes and frameworks that address the management of assessment, including extenuating circumstances and the operation of Assessment Boards. These regulations define the responsibilities of a partner institution in relation to oversight of academic standards for each module. They specify the maximum number of summative assessments for each module, and provide guidance on the timing of assessment.

1.36 The appropriateness of assessment methods to be used in taught programmes for testing the achievement of relevant learning outcomes is scrutinised in programme approval procedures, and through periodic review by University partners if there are amendments to assessment. There is a defined process for minor modifications to a programme. A definitive programme specification is available for each programme, with the exception of HND Electrical Engineering. The mapping of assessment tasks to learning outcomes at module and programme level is outlined in these documents and in student handbooks. Assessment is also reviewed as part of the Staffordshire University internal module monitoring process and annual programme monitoring process.

1.37 The College has processes in place that would enable it to meet the Expectation.

1.38 The review team examined a range of documentation to test how effectively processes relating to the award of qualification and credit operate in practice. This included academic regulations, Assessment Board minutes, module and programme specifications, programme and module handbooks, external examiners' reports and programme annual monitoring review. The team also met a wide range of staff and students to discuss the assessment of academic standards.

1.39 Through the programme approval process, for 'bespoke' and 'off-the-shelf' awards respectively, the awarding body seeks assurance that assessment is closely aligned to the academic standards of the awards, and that the design of assessment is sufficiently robust in testing the achievement of relevant learning outcomes. Course handbooks and programme specifications map assessment to learning outcomes at appropriate levels. Module outcomes are mapped to the programme learning outcomes and assessments are used to demonstrate evidence of achievement of the module outcomes.

1.40 The College operates an internal verification procedure for both assessment briefs and the marking of student work. For University programmes, assessments are checked through the involvement of Link Tutors and Programme Advisors, through standardisation and through internal and external moderation activities. Taken together, these procedures assure consistency and fairness in marking. The team formed the view that assessments are appropriately mapped against learning outcomes and that, for University provision, there are

effective standardisation and verification procedures in place, as described above, to monitor that this happens.

1.41 Assessments for University awards are also subject to external examination through the external examiner system. A review of external examiners' reports confirms the appropriateness of assessment in maintaining academic standards and comparability with UK threshold standards. Staff demonstrate awareness of the processes for assessment and the importance of their proper application in upholding standards. However, the team notes that since delivery of the HND Electrical Engineering programme commenced in 2014, no external examiner has been appointed. The programme is now in its second year of delivery.

1.42 Records of Assessment Boards for University awards confirm that decisions for the award of credit at module and course level are made in accordance with awarding bodies' defined processes. Appropriate externality is achieved through the participation of external examiners, who are invited to Assessment Boards. For University-validated programmes, Assessment Boards are chaired by a representative from the University, while for the Pearson programme, they are informal meetings, chaired by the Higher Education Manager. However, for the College's own Pearson provision, in the absence of an external examiner there has been no external verification of assessment results for the HND Electrical Engineering programme at any stage to date.

1.43 There are clearly defined learning outcomes at course and module level with appropriate alignment to assessment. Measures are in place to ensure that learning outcomes are appropriately assessed and that results are moderated.

1.44 For the College's University provision, external examiners are involved in the assessment processes and in confirming the setting and achievement of learning outcomes. For these awards, the College has systems in place to ensure that the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable, and that the award of qualifications and credit is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Therefore, the review team concludes that in this regard the Expectation is met. However, for the College's own Pearson provision, there has been no appointment to the position of external examiner, and no external verification. The team therefore concludes that, overall, Expectation A3.2 is not met and the associated risk is moderate due to weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's academic governance.

Expectation: Not 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

1.45 The awarding bodies and organisation have systems in place, as detailed in their regulations, which provide for processes for the monitoring and review of programmes. These processes address whether or not academic standards are being maintained.

1.46 The College has an appropriate quality monitoring cycle. An Annual Monitoring Report is produced for each programme and the performance of programmes is monitored at in-year Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) monitoring meetings and on a regular basis at Higher Education Award Tutor meetings, with emerging issues considered at Senior Leadership meetings.

1.47 The awarding body and awarding organisation requirements, combined with the College systems for programme monitoring and review, would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

1.48 The team examined documentary evidence showing University, Pearson and College systems for programme monitoring and review, and also recommendations in external examiners' reports. The team tested the operation and effectiveness of these quality assurance procedures, and the regulations and guidance on monitoring and review, by meeting staff and students and University partner representatives involved in the various processes.

1.49 The team found that the College implements review and monitoring procedures for each University-approved programme that meets the requirements of the awarding body. These include procedures for the annual management of modules, for programme monitoring and review, and for end-of-module evaluation. Procedures are informed by external examiners' reports and student feedback. However, during the academic year 2014-15, for the College's own Pearson provision (the HND in Electrical Engineering programme), termly course monitoring meetings required by College procedures did not always take place as scheduled and the annual monitoring report was not completed.

1.50 The periodic review of programmes for University provision takes place according to their regulations and guidance on periodic programme review. Review documents and external examiner reports from the College are considered through the Universities' committee structures. The focus of periodic review is on the continued academic health of an award or group of subjects. An example of this is the periodic academic review and approval of the BSc (Hons) Health and Social Care with Foundation Year programme, recently undertaken by Staffordshire University. However, the team noted that, for its own Pearson provision, the College does not have a process for periodic review. The team was informed by the College that it is working towards the development of a periodic review process based on that used by Staffordshire University. At the time of the visit, in exploring matters relating to strategic oversight for academic standards, no evidence was made available to the team to confirm and illustrate such a development. This contributes to the recommendation under Expectation B1 that the College should discharge its responsibilities by operating effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.

1.51 The awarding bodies and awarding organisation have procedures in place to ensure the maintenance of academic standards. Externality is required in the Universities' review and validation processes, and standards set or being achieved are appropriately reviewed at this stage. However, evidence requested by the team to confirm external input to the College's own approval, review and monitoring processes in relation to securing appropriate academic standards was not available.

1.52 Both awarding bodies appoint external examiners who produce an annual report on academic standards for each programme, based largely on the scrutiny of assessments and assessment practice. However, for the College's Pearson provision, no external examiner appointment has been made since delivery commenced in 2014.

1.53 For University-approved provision, staff at the College share a common understanding of how programme monitoring works and follow procedures effectively. External examiners confirm that academic standards are met. However, for Pearson provision, monitoring and review have been ineffective.

1.54 Overall, there are processes in place for the monitoring and review of academic standards for University awards and these are understood by staff. This leads the team to conclude that Expectation A3.3 is met in respect of University provision. However, in view of the absence of periodic review procedures for the Pearson provision, the absence of external input to review and monitoring processes, and deficiencies in programme monitoring, overall the Expectation is not met, and the associated risk is serious due to significant gaps in procedures relating to the College's quality assurance.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

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

1.55 The College delivers programmes awarded by Staffordshire University, the University of Wolverhampton and Pearson Education. Setting appropriate academic standards is the responsibility of awarding bodies and the awarding organisation through the programme validation process. External academic and industry professionals are contracted by the awarding body to inform the content of the programmes that it awards. Programme content for the Pearson provision is determined by the awarding organisation.

1.56 External examiners are employed and trained by the awarding body and play a critical role in ensuring a relevant and current curriculum is delivered, to allow the validated programme learning outcomes to be met. External examiners also determine whether the assessment of learning outcomes is appropriate and whether it aligns with the UK threshold academic standards and the degree-awarding bodies' own standards. External examiner reports are submitted directly to the awarding body, scrutinised and forwarded to the College for response. The content of external examiner reports is used in annual programme monitoring and review.

1.57 Ordinarily, external examiners are appointed by Pearson to examine the Higher National provision. External examiners are expected to report on the level of delivery and the academic standards achieved.

1.58 The College uses the validation and programme monitoring processes of its awarding bodies to ensure that external and independent expertise is used at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards, which would allow the Expectation to be met. However, the absence of an appointed external examiner and a formal equivalent of an Assessment Board within the College for the HND Electrical Engineering programme is a cause for concern regarding the College's ability to meet the Expectation for its Pearson provision.

1.59 The team examined a range of documentation to test how the College ensures that external and independent expertise is used in setting, delivering and maintaining the academic standards of its provision. Documentation included Memoranda of Agreement, regulations relating to the appointment and role of external examiners, external examiner reports, and documents outlining teaching, learning and assessment processes and end-of-year Award Examination Board minutes. The team met senior and teaching staff to discuss the use of external and independent expertise in the setting, delivery and maintenance of academic standards.

1.60 For its University provision the College relies heavily upon the academic framework and regulatory validation processes of its awarding bodies in setting and maintaining the academic standards of its programmes. This ensures that externality is achieved through the involvement of independent and professional individuals. Owing to the dependence upon the processes of the awarding body, the College does not appear to make explicit use of

industry personnel during the programme design process and particularly with setting academic standards. Although professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) are not directly involved in any of the College's higher education provision, independent academics and employers with whom the College has established a working relationship are used on occasion to inform programme content and level.

1.61 The College makes comprehensive use of external examiner input once programmes are running. A well-organised process is in place for dealing with the feedback provided in annual external examiner reports.

1.62 For the University provision the external examiner report forms a key component of annual programme monitoring. College staff make effective use of external examiner feedback in annual programme monitoring.

1.63 For the Staffordshire University provision in particular a coherent process is in place. External examiners take an active role at the annual end-of-year Award Examination Boards, providing feedback on modules, the achievement of assessed learning outcomes and academic standards.

1.64 For the Pearson provision there is little evidence of how programmes are validated, how module content is determined and the extent, if any, of external input to the design of modules and the programme. There has been no external examiner visit and therefore no external verification.

1.65 For University provision the College makes comprehensive use of the awarding bodies' academic frameworks and regulations to govern how external and independent expertise is used in setting and maintaining academic standards. Achievement of the appropriate level is confirmed by external examiners and this is formally recorded at Award Assessment Boards. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met for the College's University provision. However, for the College's own Pearson provision, there is no external examiner in post and therefore no external examination or externality. The College has delivered the HND programme without an external examiner, and has run its own informal and internal verification procedure, which does not include any externality. The team therefore **recommends** that the College implements effective external verification processes (see also Expectation B7). The team therefore concludes that due to these issues, overall Expectation A3.4 is not met and the associated risk is serious due to significant gaps in procedures relating to the College's quality assurance.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

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

1.66 In reaching its judgement, the team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the level of risk is low with regard to awards offered by degree-awarding bodies.

1.67 For provision offered on behalf of Pearson, Expectations A1 and A2.2 are met and the level of risk is low. Expectation A2.1 is met and the associated level of risk is moderate. Expectations A3.1, A3.3 and A3.4 are not met and the associated level of risk is serious. Expectation A3.2 is not met, with a moderate level of risk.

1.68 There is one recommendation in section 1, which relates to putting in place and implementing a procedure for the conduct of examination boards for validated programmes. A number of recommendations that sit primarily in section 2 are also applicable to section 1, and these relate to operating effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes; implementing effective external verification processes; establishing a deliberative committee that has strategic oversight for academic standards, quality and enhancement; and devising and implementing an assessment process for the College's Pearson provision.

1.69 The review team found that the discrepancies it identified between the maintenance of standards for programmes leading to awards of UK degree-awarding bodies and those for the College's own Higher National programmes justified a differential judgement between these two types of provision. The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies **meets** UK expectations. The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of Pearson **does not meet** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College does not award higher education qualifications. Responsibility for final academic approval rests with the relevant awarding partner. All awards are made through partnership arrangements. Programmes are designed, approved and reviewed through the quality assurance processes of either a University partner or Pearson. These awarding body and awarding organisation partners are responsible for the alignment of their awards with the FHEQ and other external reference points. New programmes or revalidations of existing programmes are subject to the regulations of the relevant awarding body. A revalidation and approval was recently completed by Staffordshire University for the BSc (Hons) Health and Social Care with Foundation Year programme.

2.2 The College has implemented a first-stage approval process that focuses on the rationale, business case and resourcing of new programme proposals, prior to submission of a proposal to a university awarding body. Programmes are marketed as 'subject to approval' after the first stage. The College either delivers programmes on offer at a partner University or develops awards in conjunction with them. Programmes are either selected by the College on an 'off-the-shelf' basis where a programme has been designed and validated by the University, or on a 'bespoke' basis. The latter provision is more prominent in the College's higher education offer. In this case, the College works with a University programme adviser to amend an existing qualification. In this process, the College's Higher Education Manager, in liaison with Heads of Curriculum, takes the lead in working with programme teams in the design of new modules for the University-approved programmes. The College has also developed a Higher National programme in response to particular learner and employer needs, making use of Pearson design and approval procedures. The development, design and approval of programmes through University and Pearson processes, and the use made of an internal business case approval stage, would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.3 The team tested the operation and effectiveness of programme development, design and approval procedures in the context of the College's own systems and procedures in a number of ways. The team examined documents relating to strategic and curriculum planning at the College, the relevant College staffing and organisational structures at the University, and Pearson regulations on programme development. The team also held meetings with staff at all levels within the College, with employers and with representatives of partner awarding bodies.

2.4 Under the College's higher education strategic portfolio planning process, prior to the formal consideration of the rationale and business case, curriculum plans for new programmes are initially discussed at an operational level at Higher Education Award Tutor meetings, and are then fed into Heads of Curriculum meetings. The Higher Education Manager liaises with the University partner regarding academic approval and validation requirements. This is then followed by consideration of first-stage business proposals by the Senior Leadership Team. The review team notes that, from 2015-16, oversight of these

processes will be exercised by a newly formed Academic Board, which will discuss higher education matters in a designated Higher Education meeting at which strategic development and portfolio planning will be considered.

2.5 The team noted the documentation showing the development and approval process for Staffordshire University, for the University of Wolverhampton and for Pearson provision. The awarding University is responsible for curriculum design, and programmes are written by awarding bodies with reference to the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and the *Foundation Degree Qualifications Benchmark*. Research into programme design and sector skills and labour market information requirements is undertaken by the College where required. The College supports the development of University-designed programme and validation documents where necessary, but involvement in University approval is largely limited to matters such as physical resources and staffing information. The College's role in programme design includes attendance at planning meetings with University programme advisers and University subject teams to discuss proposed revisions to 'bespoke' programmes. College management and teaching teams are also represented at validation and review events. Module specifications are provided by the University partner for pre-validated 'off-the-shelf' programmes, but for 'bespoke' awards, the College works with partner staff to modify an existing qualification and revise module criteria accordingly. Programme modifications are carried out following awarding body procedures. Where new modules are developed, or where modules are reviewed or revised, the process is initiated by College teaching staff and finalised by the University programme adviser using University processes. Module descriptors are created on the Strategic Information Technology Service (SITS) and are set at 'initial' until formally approved under University procedures. The College has recently successfully gained approval for a number of programmes with its University partners, including under the renewed partnership arrangement with the University of Wolverhampton.

2.6 The College understands its delegated responsibilities and operates appropriate procedures to comply with academic regulations set out by its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Staff whom the team met understand the validation processes of awarding bodies and expectations relevant to higher education, and this enables them to make a positive contribution to these processes. However, while College staff also work closely with the Higher Education Manager and University programme adviser on programme development matters, the College does not itself provide training or staff development on validation, approval and design. This is undertaken by a partner university through its continuing professional development (CPD) programmes. Moreover, the team also noted that the College does not make available any training for panel members or representatives at validations, either for University processes or for internal validation, such as for its Pearson HND in Electrical Engineering.

2.7 Furthermore, while there is a robust system of academic and resource planning in place for the first-stage internal resource-related approval of new programme proposals, during the approval of its HND Electrical Engineering programme the College recognised that it does not have a sufficiently full and rigorous programme approval process in place for internal validation of the units and modules for its client-led Pearson provision. The College also acknowledges that it needs to strengthen awareness of programme design among teaching teams and managers.

2.8 In pursuing its enquiries, the review team could find no evidence that the agreement with Pearson for the final approval of the HND Electrical Engineering programme, which has been delivered at the College since September 2014, has been received. The team therefore **recommends** that the College discharges its responsibilities by operating effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes (see also Expectations A3.1 and A3.3).

2.9 Overall, the College is effective at discharging its responsibilities for the design and approval of programmes in respect of University awards, and these responsibilities are understood by staff. This leads the team to conclude that Expectation B1 is met in respect of University provision. However, in view of the absence of formal approval of its Pearson provision, overall the Expectation is not met, and the associated risk is serious due to a breach by the College of its own quality assurance management procedures.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

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

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

Findings

2.10 The College states that it has a transparent and fair recruitment, selection and admission procedure for its higher education provision that is informed by the principle of equal opportunities and a commitment to social inclusion.

2.11 Applications from higher education learners are processed through both the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and direct application to the College. The College states that it has an inclusive process that supports widening participation. Entry criteria are published on the College website. The College uses a variety of application methods, but once an application has been accepted all applicants are invited to interview at the College. There is a team of admissions staff with responsibility for processing applications alongside course leaders, and provision for students to appeal the admissions decision process. The processes that the College have in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.12 The team looked at a number of documents including policies relating to admissions such as the College's Admissions policy, the partner Universities' admissions policies, and a selection of completed application forms. Meetings were held with senior staff and staff involved in the application and admission processes. Induction was discussed during two meetings held with students.

2.13 Applicants are able to appeal admissions decisions. In meetings held with staff and students, the team was satisfied that both parties were aware of the process and would be able to access the procedure if needed. During these meetings the College clarified that admissions staff received training and updates from the partner Universities to maintain fair standards across their programmes. Students and prospective students receive suitable information before application and throughout the admissions process; this information is also tailored towards students who may need additional support with their application, such as those eligible for Disabled Students Allowance or those from a widening participation background. In such cases applicants are supported in their various student finance applications by the College. The College's marketing plan outlines appropriate admissions content in publicity materials.

2.14 The College has appropriate admissions processes in place. Staff are suitably trained. The review team concludes that Expectation B2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.15 The College's Strategic Plan focuses on the provision of learning opportunities delivered through the Teaching and Learning Strategy. Staff appointed to deliver on the higher education programmes are required by the awarding bodies to be, or to become, appropriately qualified to teach in addition to being subject specialists. Resources and learning opportunities are reviewed as part of annual programme monitoring.

2.16 New College staff undergo an induction and are provided with a mentor. They also work with Academic Link Tutors from the awarding body. Staff are approved by the awarding body before they deliver on a higher education programme. All staff undergo an induction, which clearly outlines the requirements and expectations of staff delivering on and supporting higher education programmes at the College. Some staff have come from a further education teaching background and are expected to undertake a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) as a condition of their probation.

2.17 A Learning Observation procedure is in operation, based on the principles of individual development and professionalism. Learning Observation outcomes contribute to the individual staff Annual Performance Review process. Learning Walks, which are snapshot observations of teaching and learning undertaken by senior staff, have been implemented and can be operated on a needs-led basis.

2.18 Staff training opportunities are provided by the College, including mandatory training and courses provided by the awarding bodies. Application for self-developed CPD opportunities are encouraged, provided they align with the College's strategy for higher education development.

2.19 The College employs a range of information technology to support and enhance learning resources and their accessibility to students. Additionally, a number of in-College businesses exist that can be used to support the practice element of programmes, for example the media production company and the animal collection.

2.20 College students have access to book resources via the College and the awarding bodies, and systems are in place to allow students to order, reserve and collect hard copy material from the College's Learning Centre. The College has provided dedicated areas for higher education students to study and relax, but these appear to be contracting.

2.21 The College has processes in place that would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.22 The team examined a range of documentation to test how the College systematically reviews and enhances the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. This included annual monitoring reports, staff induction and mentoring-related documentation, and the College's Teaching and Learning policy. The team met the head of the College, senior staff, teaching staff, and professional and support staff.

2.23 In 2014 the College developed a specific higher education Teaching and Learning Strategy, which aligns to Expectation B3 of the Quality Code. Although it has not yet been updated, essential components exist that emphasise key factors underpinning the provision of appropriate learning resources.

2.24 The College has a robust recruitment strategy, ensuring that appropriately qualified staff are appointed to deliver the higher education programmes under the auspices of the relevant awarding body. Staff are appointed at an appropriate level and are approved by the awarding body prior to commencing delivery on the programme. The College makes effective use of a staff induction programme and supports its new staff through mentors, with whom they work during their probationary period.

2.25 The College implements a supportive approach to staff development, allowing staff to undertake training in educational pedagogy, professional practice and furthering subject specialism. A comprehensive higher education-specific Learning Observation procedure is in operation and is based on the principles of individual development and progression. This approach more closely reflects key challenges in the delivery of higher education that may not occur in further education delivery. The College recognises that the outcomes of Learning Observations and Learning Walks can be used to identify emerging themes that may influence the quality of the learning experience for students at the College.

2.26 The College ensures that the resources for all programmes are made available to the students via the VLE. Staff for some programmes are experimenting with delivery via other more intuitive interactive platforms, which are being very well received by students.

2.27 The College's physical resources are not higher education-specific and students report that some resources, including IT rooms and dedicated library space, have been reduced for a number of subject areas. All students, however, comment favourably on the provision of subject-specific resources such as the onsite film company, the animal centre and links with local organisations such as the Garrick Theatre. There are shortcomings with the process for ordering and collecting hard copy resources through the library services. However, many resources are being made available electronically.

2.28 The College provides an acceptable level of resources, which are reviewed and maintained to support individual students studying on higher education programmes. Physical resources are provided that allow programme learning outcomes to be met. Therefore the team concludes that Expectation B3 is met in both design and operation 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

2.29 The College Higher Education Strategy focuses on providing a suite of higher education programmes for existing students as well as the wider population of mature and/or returning learners through partnership with local universities. The provision comprises HND and foundation degree programmes with a small number of related BA and BSc (Hons) degrees and BSc (Hons) Top-Up programmes. The College's aim is to produce graduates who are ready for employment or further study.

2.30 Advice, information and guidance is provided to individuals at all stages, including enquiry, application, prior to application/enrolment, enrolment and induction. All students are invited to an enrolment and support day and undertake a detailed induction once they are enrolled. A series of tasks must be completed to ensure that they are sufficiently prepared to commence their programme of study and that they understand what is expected of them, particularly in terms of academic attributes and academic misconduct and plagiarism. They are issued with key documents such as their student handbooks. The College runs an induction programme for returning students.

2.31 The majority of the College's higher education programmes include professional development and work-based learning modules. Its professional development curriculum is intended to encourage students to think about professional practice and career aims and goals throughout their programme of study, through engagement in activities such as CV writing and mock interviews. While on programme students are supported through individual tutorials and the use of Individual Learning Plans and study skills materials.

2.32 The College has processes in place that would enable it to meet the Expectation.

2.33 The team examined a range of documentation including advice, information and guidance publications, induction and assessment-related materials, progression data, annual monitoring reports and a student submission to this review. The team also met senior staff, teaching staff, professional and support staff, student representatives and students.

2.34 The College systematically monitors and evaluates the arrangements and resources in place to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential mainly through its awarding body-driven quality assurance processes.

2.35 The programmes that comprise the College's higher education portfolio have been carefully selected to provide higher education opportunities for the local community and the College's existing Level 3 learners. The success of the College's programmes is assessed through Key Performance Indicators. Retention, achievement and success are used as measures of performance. The College has recently identified problems with retention which it is currently addressing through closer monitoring of student attendance. Although destination data post completion of study at the College has not been formally recorded, the College maintains that according to internally captured information, progression to further study and employment is reasonable.

2.36 The College provides students with supportive advice, information and guidance at all stages of the application and enrolment process. All students undergo a useful induction programme. Once on programme students receive planned support in terms of personal and professional development, enabling them to develop skills necessary for employment.

Programme curricula are carefully planned and developed to expose students to increasingly autonomous learning.

2.37 The success of enabling students to feel supported in moving from Level 4 to Level 5 (and Level 6) as they progress through their programme of study is variable. Although student performance is subject to external scrutiny and ratified according to awarding body procedures, the experience of academic stretch differs between Level 3 vocational and A Level entrants to the programme. Students who undertook Level 3 study at the College do not feel that Level 4 is sufficiently different, and this is coupled with a perceived lack of differentiation in access to resources for some programmes. Similarly, while almost 75 per cent of students recognise an increase in academic expectations as they progress through their programme of study, 25 per cent do not.

2.38 The College takes a coherent approach to student support through tutorials and targeted assessment feedback. Students were generally complimentary regarding the tutorial support provided by staff, although only around two thirds of students consider assessment feedback helpful.

2.39 The College has processes in place to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. This is achieved through well-managed use of professional development curricula and appropriate assessment modes and criteria. Therefore the team concludes that 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

2.40 The College attempts to engage with students, both as individuals and as part of course groups. It does this through internal surveys, the National Student Survey (NSS), higher education forums and an email feedback system. Students are able to select course representatives who attend department meetings to voice students' concerns and comments. Most higher education students have their views represented through their representative's attendance at course team meetings. The College does not have a Students' Union.

2.41 The practices in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.42 In testing this Expectation, the review team considered a range of documents including minutes from the various course team meetings, College surveys, Student Representative Meetings and communication with the Higher Education Manager. Meetings were held with senior, support and academic staff, students and employers. The team also looked for evidence of training and support provided for student representatives, along with other sources to identify evidence of the student voice.

2.43 There are examples of issues being raised by students with the Higher Education Manager, and action being taken by the College to address these is evident through meetings with students. Further exploration revealed a reliance on the Higher Education Manager when students were raising issues, either individually or as part of a course representative role. Correspondence between the Higher Education Manager and course representatives was provided to show student concerns being acted on: a notable example was around staffing provision on the HND programme, which was resolved through the Higher Education Manager. Higher education students are not represented on College committees, and there is no guaranteed place for a higher education student representative on the College's Board of Governors. The College noted that it had been some years since a higher education learner acted as the student representative on the Board of Governors.

2.44 Change had occurred as a result of student comment, though this was not always lasting change. Meetings with students revealed that learners had previously been given a higher education-specific space, but this had been replaced during the summer with a smaller, under-resourced space. The College provided multiple examples of 'You Said We Did' documentation from previous years, which demonstrated other examples of change brought about as a result of consultation with students. This initiative has ceased across the College, but is being reinstated for higher education.

2.45 There was little evidence to show that students receive formal training or documentation to support them in their representative role. Student representatives confirmed that they had received no formal training or information about their role. Students on the HND programme did not have an appointed student representative until a week before the review visit. Higher education students lack guaranteed representation at the College's highest body, the Board of Governors.

2.46 In light of little formal student representation above course level and the lack of sufficient support materials or training, the team **recommends** that the College strengthens student engagement at all levels and supports this with training for student representatives.

2.47 The team concludes that Expectation B5 is met but the associated level of risk is moderate due to weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's academic governance structure.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.48 The assessment practices for higher education programmes in the College are governed by awarding body regulations. Assessments for University awards are prepared in the first instance by College staff and checked and moderated in consultation with the University programme team, and this is managed in line with University policy. For Pearson provision, assessments are prepared in line with BTEC guidance on assessment, as well as the principles of the College's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

2.49 The College also has its own internal verification procedure, which applies to all College programmes and which has the stated intention of ensuring that assessment practice meets national standards. This is intended to provide a continuous check on the consistency, quality and fairness of marking, grading and overall assessment of students' work. Standardisation meetings take place at the University.

2.50 Assessment practices and processes are articulated through Award Handbooks and Module Guides. All awards, with the exception of the HND Electrical Engineering programme, have an assessment strategy, which is set out in the programme specification, to ensure that programme learning outcomes are tested through a variety of methods. Module specifications outline the learning outcomes, assessment requirements and tasks, weighting, duration, and assessment criteria.

2.51 Assessment tasks for 'off-the-shelf' University awards are consistent. For 'bespoke' awards, the College drafts assignment briefs and examination papers. These are verified through the Programme Advisor and Link Tutor arrangement (Level 4 assessments) to ensure that the tasks address the relevant learning outcomes, or referred to the external examiner for verification, to ensure that they are fit for purpose and meet the relevant FHEQ or *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* requirements for learning outcomes. Pearson assessments are subject to internal verification in accordance with Pearson policy. These arrangements are monitored through the annual monitoring process.

2.52 For University awards, processes are in place to ensure that assessment is reliable, and external examiners' reports confirm that assessments are appropriate and meet relevant academic standards. Pearson provides information to the College on the role of its external examiners. The policies and procedures in place would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.53 The review team tested the operation and effectiveness of these and other arrangements by examining relevant College and awarding body documentation relating to assessment, and through meetings held with students, senior staff and academic staff, and University representatives.

2.54 There is a good range and variety of assessment tasks, which address relevant learning outcomes. The review team noted that, for example, for the Pearson HND Electrical Engineering programme, assessment schedules are used to avoid bunching in summative assessment and to ensure cross-referencing across units. Students are provided with an

assessment schedule at the start of the year, with deadlines for submissions stated. Students confirmed that assessments are for the most part well timetabled, allowing them to plan their workload, and that timely and developmental feedback on performance is usually provided. The team concludes that students are generally well informed, and understand the process of assessment both through written material and through briefings by staff.

2.55 Information on how assessment criteria are used, types of assessment, late submission of work, and academic integrity and plagiarism, including penalties, is provided in award and module handbooks. Tutors also signpost the availability of this information on the College VLE. Academic misconduct is taken seriously by the College, and is defined, along with procedures, in University academic award regulations and in the College's Learner Misconduct Policy. Guidance on these matters is shared with students during induction. Procedures on extenuating or personal mitigating circumstances for University provision are set out in the relevant University document, and the College's Information Hubs act as a one-stop shop for advice on matters such as mitigating circumstances. Procedures are available to students who wish to seek Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and information is made available in programme handbooks. However, the team was advised by the College that no student had sought to use this procedure.

2.56 Pearson assessment is undertaken in accordance with BTEC guidance, and marking is done according to set pass criteria and merit and distinction criteria used during the internal verification process. Tutors are required to be approved by Pearson. These internal verification, moderation and standardisation activities and procedures are understood by the College staff whom the review team met. Some students are able to submit University assessments through plagiarism-detection software, though this varies between faculties and programmes and is not supported on the College's VLE. The team also considered the assessment of work-based learning, and noted that a number of programmes either had work-based learning modules or enabled students to gain experience in work-based situations. Students and employers whom the team met confirmed that students receive appropriate information in advance of placements and receive feedback from College staff on an individual and group basis, as appropriate to the type of assessment.

2.57 The turnaround time for marking on University provision is 20 working days. If this cannot be met, the requirement is for the feedback return period not to exceed 25 days. For Pearson provision, the Edexcel Assessment Policy states that feedback should be given within three weeks of the hand-in date, using a standard Edexcel pro forma. The team noted that, in some cases, these deadlines were not met, but that College monitoring and student feedback survey procedures had identified this issue and that actions were in place to address this. It was noted by the team that students receive feedback on their performance along with the grade, and that this is provided in a variety of forms, including oral, written and electronic, to individuals or to groups of students, with the intention of informing future learning and development. Assessments are also subject to external examination. External examiner reports for University awards confirm that academic standards have been met. However, during its enquiries, the team noted that there is no external verification of student assessment or of assessment processes for the College's Pearson provision at any stage, and that no appointment has been made to the position of external examiner.

2.58 For University awards, examination boards are managed and chaired by the University, and are held at the College in accordance with University regulations and policies. For Pearson provision, the College states that internal College Award Boards, which are chaired by the Higher Education Manager, include the attendance of the curriculum team, the Head of Curriculum and the Quality Assurance Manager, with proceedings being conducted in accordance with the Edexcel Assessment Policy. However, during its enquiries, the team was unable to locate any College policy on assessment, or any

documented College procedure for the conduct of its examination boards. The team **recommends** that the College devises and implements an assessment policy for its Pearson provision (see also Expectations A2.1 and A3.2).

2.59 The team explored whether the College reviews assessment processes. The College takes a coherent approach to student support through tutorials and targeted assessment feedback. Students were generally complimentary regarding the tutorial support provided by staff, although only around two thirds of students consider assessment feedback helpful. The team learned that various aspects of assessment processes are considered during the development of self-assessment documents and annual monitoring reports, and also noted that module reviews are completed, but it was not apparent to the team whether or how College-level oversight is exercised anywhere in the College's internal deliberative committee structures.

2.60 For the College's University provision, policies and procedures for the assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning are in place and are effective, and the Expectation is met. In the absence of an implemented assessment policy for its Pearson provision, however, the team concludes that overall the Expectation is not met, and that the associated level of risk is moderate due to weaknesses in the operation of part of the provider's academic governance structure.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.61 The College defines the role of the external examiner as set out in Expectation B7 of the Quality Code. External examiners are nominated according to criteria outlined by awarding bodies and are approved by University-based scrutiny panels.

2.62 Awarding bodies expect external examiners to visit the College, speak to students and staff and review the academic standards and learning opportunities for the programmes. External examiners undertake moderation of assessment briefs prior to issue, examination questions and assessed work, throughout the academic year. External examiners are expected to confirm that programmes are taught to the appropriate level and that teaching, learning and assessment at module level allow the programme learning outcomes to be met. They are required to provide regular feedback about programmes during the academic year as well as more formally in their annual report. They are also expected to attend the end-of-year Award Assessment Boards, at which marks are ratified.

2.63 External examiner reports are submitted directly to the awarding body and undergo scrutiny prior to dissemination to the College-based team. The outcomes of external examiner reports contribute substantially to the Annual Programme Monitoring and Self-Assessment quality processes.

2.64 For Pearson provision, external examiners (if in role) are required to submit annual reports directly to the College. The majority of the College's higher education provision is quality assured through implementation of the stringent processes of the awarding body; however, no explicit College-based processes exist for considering and dealing with external reports for the Pearson provision should they have been produced.

2.65 The College uses the regulatory guidance and processes of its awarding bodies to ensure that scrupulous use is made of external examiners. This would enable it to meet Expectation B7 for its degree-awarding body provision. However, the absence of an appointed external examiner for the Pearson programme is a concern for the assurance and enhancement of academic quality for this proportion of the College's higher education provision, and leads to doubt over the meeting of the Expectation for its Pearson provision.

2.66 The team examined a range of documentation to ascertain how the College makes scrupulous use of external examiners to assure and enhance the academic quality of its higher education provision. Documentation included quality assurance handbooks, external examiner reports and responses to external examiners, Annual Monitoring Reports, Self-Assessment Reports and Quality Improvement Plans, minutes of Award Tutor Meetings, and meetings of Assessment Boards. The team met with senior and teaching staff to discuss the award and achievement of academic credit.

2.67 For the University provision the external examiner report forms a key component of annual programme monitoring. College staff make effective use of external examiner feedback in annual programme monitoring.

2.68 For the Staffordshire University-awarded provision external examiners take an active role at the annual end-of-year Award Examination Boards by providing feedback on modules, the achievement of assessed learning outcomes and academic standards.

2.69 For the Pearson provision there is little evidence of how programmes are validated, how module content is determined and the extent, if any, of external input to the design of modules and the programme. There has been no external examiner visit and therefore no external examination. There is no formal Award Assessment Board to which Pearson achievement can be submitted, ratified, or at present, formally audited. The College Higher Education Manager has implemented an Award Assessment Board on an informal basis, explicitly for the Pearson provision, based on Staffordshire University processes.

2.70 For the College's University provision the College makes comprehensive use of the awarding body academic frameworks and regulation; therefore, the team concludes that Expectation B7 is met. However, for the College's own Pearson provision the absence of an appointed external examiner means that there is no external verification or externality. This is likely to have a negative impact on the standards of the programme. The team **recommends** that the College implements effective external verification processes (see also Expectation A3.4).

2.71 The College has delivered the HND programme without an external examiner and runs its own internal verification procedure, which does not incorporate any externality. The team therefore concludes that overall, Expectation B7 is not met and the associated risk is serious due to significant gaps in procedures relating to the College's quality assurance.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

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

2.72 The College is required to implement review and monitoring procedures for each programme in accordance with the expectations of the relevant awarding body or awarding organisation. The College has a Quality Improvement Policy, the requirements of which inform monitoring and review processes as well as the self-assessment cycle. The policy is due to be updated, and this process has commenced.

2.73 The College's annual quality monitoring cycle includes the production of a programme annual monitoring report and action plan. Issues arising are reviewed regularly at Higher Education Award Tutor meetings. Outstanding matters feed into the Quality Improvement Plan and to QIP panels that meet intermittently to review progress against the plan, or are taken forward to the Senior Leadership Team. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.74 The team tested the operation and effectiveness of these arrangements by examining University and Pearson quality assurance policies and procedures, by scrutinising College annual monitoring and external examiners' reports, and by discussing the processes during meetings with staff, students and partner University representatives.

2.75 Procedures are used for the annual management of modules, and for end-of-module evaluation. The team noted that University-approved programmes are reviewed through the annual monitoring process to identify areas for improvement. This is informed by external examiners' reports and student feedback. This stage of the annual monitoring cycle is followed by completion of an annual College-level Higher Education Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and, subsequently, a Quality Improvement Plan. Annual monitoring of University-approved provision covers all partner colleges involved in delivery of a given programme. The team noted various examples of reports highlighting areas for action and improvement.

2.76 Following completion by the College's programme teams, self-evaluations enter the University's quality processes. At this stage, College reports are scrutinised by a University faculty panel for onward reporting to a Faculty Quality Committee, chaired by an Associate Dean. The team noted that involvement in this process enables College staff to access networking opportunities and to learn from good practice in other providers' processes and delivery methods. Programme monitoring reports for the College's University-approved programmes are consequently embedded within Staffordshire University's quality cycles as well as being part of the College quality processes. Here, the University's Programme Advisor plays an important liaison role between the University and College Programme Managers. The Programme Advisor produces an annual report on each partner. The College's Pearson programme is expected to use internal quality monitoring procedures in accordance with the requirements of the awarding organisation.

2.77 The review team noted that the performance of programmes is also monitored through in-year SAR panels and that meetings of QIP panels are effective and robust. In the latter, external examiner feedback, student survey results, and student retention and achievement are considered. In the former process, where the main focus is on sector subject areas (SSAs), a higher education-specific SAR panel is convened. A degree of

externality is provided through the involvement of members of the governing body in addition to senior College staff. Issues arising from the SAR process are considered at strategic meetings of the governing body.

2.78 The team learned that the College makes use of its annual programme monitoring to raise causes for concern that might arise either with learners or with provision more generally, and noted that such matters can be fed through the monitoring process. Use is made of a special measures procedure, involving meetings for scrutinising programmes for 'poor performance'. Such programmes are then monitored through scheduled course monitoring meetings, and through the QIP process. The team noted that such scrutiny has recently been complemented by the establishment of a Retention Task and Finish Group, chaired by the Deputy Principal and reporting to the governing body during the period April to July 2015. The purpose of this initiative was to identify factors affecting student withdrawal, including on higher education programmes.

2.79 Matters relating to programme withdrawal were also considered. The team heard that the College attached importance to course viability in terms of student numbers, and that the Deputy Principal and Head of Finance kept such matters under review through monitoring applications and targeted enrolment, historical under-recruitment, and student retention. The team noted that one programme had been withdrawn for 2015-16 as a result of such monitoring and that the College had worked closely with its University partner to protect student interests and support them in finding alternatives. In concluding their enquiries they were satisfied that the College had procedures in place to manage such cases of programme withdrawal or closure effectively.

2.80 Operationally, monitoring and review processes for University provision are understood by College staff. University representatives, including Programme Advisors, confirmed that programme-level processes are effective. The team noted that, in its documentation, the College states that in respect of its own Pearson provision it is responsible for ensuring that appropriate processes are in place to monitor the programme routinely and to keep under review all aspects of standards and quality. However, through meetings and scrutiny of documentation provided by the College, the team learned that, during the academic year 2014-15, for the College's HND in Electrical Engineering programme, termly course monitoring meetings required by College procedures did not always take place as scheduled and the annual monitoring report was not completed.

2.81 For University-approved provision, the periodic review of programmes takes place according to the awarding body regulations and guidance on periodic programme review. The focus of these periodic reviews is on the continued academic health of an award or group of subjects. The review team saw an example of this in documentation for the periodic academic review and approval of the BSc (Hons) Health and Social Care with Foundation Year programme, undertaken recently by Staffordshire University. However, during enquiries and through scrutiny of documentation, the team noted that, for Pearson provision, the College does not have a process for the periodic review of its HND Electrical Engineering programme. The team was informed that work is in progress to address this situation and that the College is working towards the development of a process based on that used by Staffordshire University. At the time of the visit, in exploring matters relating to strategic oversight for quality and academic standards, the College was unable to provide evidence to the team to confirm or illustrate the existence of such a process.

2.82 Meetings and scrutiny of documentation relating to monitoring and review enabled the review team to explore matters relating to strategic oversight of quality, standards and enhancement. The team noted that performance across higher education provision is discussed at fortnightly Head of Curriculum operational meetings, and at cross-College meetings; that QIP panel meetings through the year monitor targeted actions relating to

survey outputs, recruitment and retention, and staffing and resources; and that emerging issues are taken to meetings of the Senior Leadership Team and Governing Body where necessary. In furthering its enquiries, the team noted that there are two principal academic committees for higher education provision, the Higher Education Award Tutor Meetings and the Higher Education Working Group. Neither of these bodies has formal terms of reference, nor is there a documented procedure of an annual review of academic committees. Meetings of Higher Education Award Tutors convene regularly to consider matters such as student surveys, annual monitoring reports and issues arising from SARs. These meetings also feed issues up to Heads of Curriculum and Senior Leadership Team meetings. The Higher Education Working Group, which has replaced the Higher Education Development Group, focuses primarily on portfolio matters and curriculum provision.

2.83 The College states that all monitoring and review documentation is used for strategic oversight purposes and for monitoring and improvement. However, in testing the effectiveness of the College's arrangements for monitoring and review, the review team formed the judgement that there is no higher-level deliberative committee within the College's committee structures that exercises strategic oversight of matters relating to quality, standards and enhancement. The team therefore **recommends** that the College should establish a deliberative committee that has strategic oversight for academic standards, quality and enhancement (see also Expectations A3.3 and Enhancement).

2.84 The team concludes that Expectation B8 is met for the College's University provision but, overall, due to the lack of effective monitoring, the absence of a College procedure for periodic review and the lack of effective strategic oversight exercised through the College's deliberative committee structure for its Pearson provision, the team concludes that Expectation B8 is not met, and that the associated risk is serious due to ineffective operation of parts of the provider's governance as it relates to quality assurance.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

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

2.85 The College states that it uses the academic regulations of its awarding bodies and organisation for academic appeals, and the regulations that inform these processes are made accessible to students via student handbooks and are also available online. It does not have in place a procedure for its Pearson provision. The College operates its own complaints policy that covers admission appeals. The academic appeals process it has in place only covers a student's right to appeal against a case of academic misconduct and does not allow for a student to appeal a mark awarded.

2.86 The College has procedures and policies in place that would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.87 In testing the Expectation the team looked at a range of documents including the Comments, Compliments & Complaints Procedure, examples of complaints, the complaints and appeals policy for each of the awarding bodies, and course handbooks. Meetings were held with staff and students.

2.88 The College relies largely on the procedures of its awarding bodies, but the documentation shows that all policies are current. No formal appeals have been made by higher education students. In meetings, students demonstrated an awareness of their right to appeal, and those studying on awarding body programmes were aware that they would follow the University's procedure.

2.89 The College takes steps to ensure that students receive clear information about the complaints and appeals process and information is provided to students through a variety of methods including the induction process, information on the VLE and website, and course handbooks. Students confirmed that they receive advice and information about the complaints process and know how to access it if needed. Students are aware of processes and regulations on plagiarism. This was supported by meetings with students.

2.90 In meetings with senior staff the review team noted that complaints within courses are reported in Self-Assessment Reports, but a formal process for including complaints in the College-wide quality assurance processes is lacking.

2.91 Students on the Pearson programme were unaware of how they would appeal. In meetings with support staff there was an acknowledgement that the College needed to develop its own procedures for its Pearson provision.

2.92 The review team is satisfied that the College makes information about complaints and appeals procedures available where such documents already exist. However, the team **recommends** that the College devises and implements an academic appeals policy for its Pearson provision.

2.93 The team concludes that Expectation B9 is met and the associated level of risk is moderate due to weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's academic governance structure.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.94 The College's Staffordshire University-awarded programmes are franchised, which means that ultimate responsibility for their delivery and quality assurance lies with the awarding body. Strategic oversight of the curriculum delivery is managed by the Staffordshire University Partnership Manager, Programme Advisor and Academic Link Tutor. University of Wolverhampton-validated programmes are not franchised, but are bespoke and include work-related components. The Pearson-awarded programme is managed in accordance with the Pearson BTEC Handbook and Assessment Guide.

2.95 The awarding body monitors the learning opportunities and resources available to the students through various quality assurance processes of programme validation, monitoring and review.

2.96 The foundation degrees delivered by the College include a work-based component. The College issues guidance for students in a work-based handbook and also provides guidance for the work-based mentor in a mentor handbook. It is the student's responsibility to source work-based learning opportunities. For those who are unable to find offsite work experience the College provides placements through College-based commercial businesses. Work Experience Officers support work-based learning within curriculum areas.

2.97 The College has processes in place designed to ensure that arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with industry-based organisations (including the College's onsite commercial businesses) are implemented securely and managed effectively and therefore this would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.98 The team examined a range of documentation to test how the College manages its collaborative provision where students undertake work-based learning within industrial contexts. Documentation included awarding body and organisation operational handbooks, job descriptions, work-based handbooks, mentor handbooks and College commercial businesses information. Meetings were held with the senior staff, teaching staff and professional and support staff, employers and students to discuss the arrangements for delivering work-based learning opportunities.

2.99 Communications with the primary awarding body (Staffordshire University) are generally effective and there is documented reporting on the collaborative arrangements, which allows the quality assurance of the provision, including the learning resources available to the enrolled students.

2.100 The foundation degree programmes contain work-based learning elements and the College has direct responsibility for the implementation of these. The College supports students to find placements and to pursue employment opportunities if they are self-employed. The College employs a functional approach to securing higher education placements and to supporting students while they are undertaking them. The College undertakes established checking procedures of work-based learning providers before giving the employers a mentor handbook, which is designed to assist them with supporting the College student.

2.101 The College also provides internal work-based learning opportunities in its own commercial enterprises. These are used effectively and are subject to the same checks and application processes as external positions.

2.102 The College takes responsibility for checking and assessing the learning opportunities delivered within industry. The College also ensures the appropriateness of the employment and provides support for the student and employer via work-based and mentor-handbooks respectively. Therefore the team concludes that Expectation B10 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.103 The College does not offer research degrees, therefore Expectation B11 is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.104 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the Expectations relating to the College's quality of student learning opportunities for its provision offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies are met with low levels of risk except for Expectations B5, B8 and B9, which are met with moderate risk.

2.105 For provision offered on behalf of Pearson, Expectations B2, B3, B4 and B10 are met with low risk and Expectations B5 and B9 are met with moderate risk. Expectation B6 is not met with moderate risk and Expectations B1, B7 and B8 are not met with serious risk.

2.106 The review team makes six recommendations that sit primarily in section 2, which relate to operating effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes (see also Expectations A3.1 and A3.3); implementing effective external verification processes (see also Expectation A3.4); establishing a deliberative committee that has strategic oversight for academic standards, quality and enhancement (see also Expectations A3.3 and Enhancement), strengthening student engagement at all levels and support with training for student representatives; devising and implementing an assessment process for the College's Pearson provision (see also Expectation A3.2); and devising and implementing an appeals policy for Pearson provision.

2.107 The review team found that the discrepancies it identified between the quality of learning opportunities available to students on programmes leading to awards of degree-awarding bodies and those on the College's own Higher National programme justifies a differential judgement between these two types of provision. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities validated by degree-awarding bodies at the College **meets** UK expectations. The quality of student learning opportunities offered on behalf of Pearson 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 The College publishes annual prospectuses for its higher education provision. Information within these publications is checked for accuracy by the Higher Education Manager, working with the Marketing Team. The Quality Manager has oversight of materials published through the College's VLE. Governance documents and the College's mission statement are available online. Students can access information through a variety of media including the website, course leaflets, prospectus, the VLE and course handbooks. The College also makes use of social media to advertise its courses. Course handbooks are checked for accuracy at the University. Information for the Pearson provision is internally verified.

3.2 The information provided by the College, and the processes and polices that it has in place, would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.3 In testing the Expectation, the team reviewed a number of sources of information, including the College website and VLE, printed material, course handbooks, the student submission to this review, examples of information, advice and guidance provided to applicants and students, and a demonstration of the VLE. Meetings were held with staff and students.

3.4 Students are generally aware of where to access information about their courses or College services. Students spoke highly of the use of a web-based classroom tool on some courses. Those with access to the VLE feel that it contains relevant and accessible information, such as course handbooks, information on complaints and assignment briefs.

3.5 Fee information is not available on the College website or in the higher education prospectus. Information on assessment, module information, entry requirements and progression options is available on the website and is accurate and accessible.

3.6 In meetings held with College staff, including senior staff, it was confirmed that the accuracy of the information is checked as part of the approval process with the awarding bodies. The College presented evidence that Staffordshire University's Partnership Officer is responsible for the approval of all marketing material concerning courses it accredits, and that these materials were included in the University's periodic review processes. Staffordshire University is also responsible for producing degree transcripts and certificates for courses that it accredits.

3.7 The College provides its own programme handbooks and course information for its Pearson provision. The handbook submitted as evidence made reference to the course being 'externally validated'. Evidence found in pursuing other Expectations identified that provision for external moderation is not yet in place for the Pearson provision, leading the team to conclude that the handbook is not accurate. No evidence of checks for Pearson information could be found. No information regarding transcripts or certificates for Pearson could be found among the relevant evidence.

3.8 The team concludes that the College makes available a wide range of information about its provision validated by degree-awarding bodies in both print and digital formats and that the checks put in place by the partner Universities mitigate any potential risks. Students have confidence in the accuracy and availability of information. Therefore, for the College's University provision Expectation C is met and the associated level of risk is low.

3.9 The College's information about its Pearson qualifications is not of the same standard, and in some cases is misleading to students. It is not clear what information a student on this course would receive upon completion of their studies. The team **recommends** that the College strengthens formal processes to ensure that information for its Pearson provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Due to these issues the review team concludes that, overall, Expectation C is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate due to weaknesses in the operation of part of the academic governance structure.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

3.11 There is one recommendation in this section concerning strengthening formal processes to ensure that information for the College's Pearson provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team found that the discrepancies it identified between the quality of the provider's information about programmes leading to awards of degree-awarding bodies and that provided about the College's own Higher National programme justified a differential judgement between these two types of provision.

3.12 Therefore, the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations for provision validated by degree-awarding bodies. For Pearson provision the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The Strategic Plan is a College-wide document derived from the College 2025 Strategic Vision. It is complemented by a draft Higher Education Strategy, which outlines the strategic aim of developing a higher education culture and the emphasis placed on teaching and learning, as well as vocational opportunities. This draft strategic document also emphasises a higher education vision for enhancing the curriculum and sets out priorities for improving provision over time. This is informed by the College's mission to improve existing provision, to transform life chances and to exceed expectations.

4.2 While there is no specific enhancement strategy, the College has recently developed several enhancement initiatives. These include the Learning Zone and the web-based classroom initiatives, as well as the appointment of a team of Teaching and Learning Innovators. Together with these initiatives, the policies and processes that the College has in place, namely the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the Learning Walks, the lesson observation scheme, the Quality Improvement Policy (QIP) and process, and the programme annual monitoring process, would enable the Expectation to be met.

4.3 To test the effectiveness of arrangements to support enhancement, including strategically driven initiatives, the review team examined documentation and held meetings with both students and staff at the College.

4.4 In the absence of a specific policy or strategy on enhancement the review team was referred to the College's Learning and Teaching Strategy. Although not higher education-specific, this document refers to a number of aspects of the College's arrangements for supporting improvement in learning and teaching, such as sharing good practice through peer observation of teaching, visits to other institutions, and the College's continuing professional development programme. The lesson observation scheme has a stated purpose of monitoring, evaluating and improving the quality of the learner experience. It informs the Annual Performance Review process, which in turn identifies staff development and teaching improvement requirements. The Learning Walks involve senior staff and members of the governing body in snapshot observations of the teaching and learning environment in classrooms. These arrangements are understood by staff and work effectively.

4.5 All students have access to one-to-one tutorials and Individual Learning Plans and each programme has a student representative who is able to feed back issues relating to learning opportunities to College staff or Programme Advisors from the partner University. The programme annual monitoring and review process is used to support improvement. Annual monitoring reports are monitored through Higher Education Award Tutor meetings, and through the higher education SAR and QIP reports and processes, where areas to improve the student experience are also identified. Performance across higher education provision is further discussed through fortnightly Head of Curriculum operational meetings. These procedures are understood by staff and work effectively.

4.6 It was noted that one VLE innovation had emanated from discussions among the Senior Leadership Team and had resulted from a decision to improve infrastructure. It was also informed by advice from Teaching and Learning Innovators and Digital Innovators. The ensuing pilot project was positively received by students since it provided a more interactive

experience with their tutors. In the view of the review team, this technology enhances learning initiative, adds value to the student experience and integrates various parties in the interests of students. The team also considered the beneficial impact, in terms of enhanced learning opportunities, of the Learning Support Zones initiative. This had resulted from a strategic decision to restructure the Additional Learning Support (ALS) department in November 2014. The zones are areas that are made available to higher education students outside of timetabled hours, on a drop-in basis, and have been well received by students. Teaching and Learning Innovators (TLIs), though contributing less directly to the enhancement of student learning opportunities, make an important contribution to the professional development of teaching staff colleagues.

4.7 The team looked at how good practice is identified, shared and disseminated by the College, and the level and type of staff development provided to support enhancement of student learning and academic practice. They also focused on the use made of student feedback for enhancement purposes. Regarding the latter, the College itself acknowledges that the use of student surveys can be improved upon. With reference to good practice dissemination mechanisms, the team noted that while CPD opportunities are made available, and cross-College meetings take place, the team formed the view from meetings with teaching staff and professional support staff that sharing good practice is more likely to happen within a member of staff's own department or immediate area, with less emphasis being placed on inter-department mechanisms.

4.8 The team formed the view that while senior staff and higher-level bodies within the College are undoubtedly focused on quality improvement, evidence of enhancement initiatives is limited. There is no explicit focus on enhancement in either the Learning and Teaching Strategy or the Quality Improvement Policy. The Higher Education Working Group, for which there are no formal terms of reference, is being replaced by an Academic Board. This committee, while it will consider higher education matters in a designated higher education meeting, will focus primarily on strategic matters relating to portfolio planning. The team concludes, therefore, that there is no deliberative committee within the College's committee structures that exercises strategic oversight of enhancement (see also Expectations A3.3 and B8).

4.9 The team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and that deliberate steps are being taken to improve the quality of learning opportunities, with some examples of positive enhancement. However, there is little evidence of a systematic and planned approach to enhancement, or of strategic oversight being exercised in the College's deliberative committee structures. The associated level of risk, therefore, is moderate due to weaknesses in the operation of part of the provider's academic governance structure.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.10 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation in this area is met and the level of risk is moderate.

4.11 There are no recommendations that refer only to this section, but the recommendation relating to the establishment of a deliberative committee that has strategic oversight for academic standards, quality and enhancement under Expectation B8 also applies here. The review team therefore 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 maintains that employability is central to its ethos and underpins the strategic development of its higher education portfolio (meeting 1). Part of this process is to ensure that students are recruited to programmes with integrity so that they can complete a suitable programme of study aligning with their career goals. The College is therefore making a concerted effort to ensure that students are provided with sufficient advice, information and guidance on application to ensure that they are recruited to, and enrol on, the correct course in terms of their chosen career path/destination.

5.2 Since the majority of the College's higher education provision is awarded by Staffordshire University, the College has adopted the Staffordshire Graduate University Pledge. This initiative focuses on producing graduates who are not only subject specialists but also possess high-level skills enabling them to be well prepared and able to make an impact on global society. The College's adoption of the Staffordshire Graduate initiative encourages students to demonstrate the following values: professional, global citizen, teamwork, lifelong learner, reflective and critical, discipline expert. The College maintains that Staffordshire Graduates of the College will also possess a triad of overarching 'E' life skills/characteristics: they will be Employable, Enterprising and Entrepreneurial. This initiative has not been fully adopted or understood by students, as very few of the students that the team spoke to were aware of it.

5.3 Owing to the onsite commercial businesses aligning with three of the curriculum areas, namely animal science (the Animal Zone), performance (Armoris) and film and media (Grease Paint Productions), the College is well placed to develop employability-related life skills in addition to practical subject skills. Staff that run the businesses also have significant input in the teaching, learning and assessment of the programmes. There are also strong collaborative relations with early years providers (some of whom are also completing their foundation qualifications at the College) and a local theatre (the Garrick), which enhance the opportunities to develop the employability-related skills of the College's students.

5.4 On a general College level, subject advisory boards have been disbanded. However, the Higher Education Manager has retained them for the higher education provision. These remain effective and, along with regular consultations with professionals in practice, allow the identification and continuous updating of curricula at subject level according to industry changes. Therefore, the subject advisory boards allow the programmes to remain current and applicable due to the inclusion of contemporary academic content.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

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

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

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

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