



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of St Patrick's International College Ltd

November 2015

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at St Patrick's International College Ltd. The review took place from 30 November to 3 December 2015 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Miss Sarah Bennett (student reviewer)
- Dr Terence Clifford-Amos
- Ms Brenda Eade
- Mr Clive Turner.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by St Patrick's International College Ltd 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 (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
 - the setting and maintenance of threshold 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.

In reviewing St Patrick's International College Ltd 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.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 3. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.³ A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).⁴ 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 (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight-.aspx

Amended judgements October 2016

Introduction

In December 2015, St Patrick's International College underwent a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) which resulted in judgements of 'meets UK expectations' for the maintenance of the academic standards of awards and the quality of the information about learning opportunities, and 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' for the quality of student learning opportunities and the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

As a consequence, the College requested a partial re-review of the two areas with negative judgements.

In preparation for the re-review, the College produced an action plan, published on its website in May 2016, describing how it intended to address the recommendations, affirmations and good practice identified in the original report, and has been working over the last eight months to demonstrate how it has implemented that plan.

Following submission of a new self-evaluation document and supporting evidence, and a student written submission, a two-day partial re-review visit was conducted on 6-7 September 2016. This was carried out by three of the original four reviewers (including the student reviewer) and was managed by the same QAA officer as the original review.

During the visit the review team met with the new interim Principal; the Chair of the Board of Governors; the senior management team (twice); academic staff; professional services staff; and a large group of students, including student representatives and the President of the Student Council. The visit took place at the College's new premises in central London.

The review team evaluated the actions that had been undertaken by the College against their action plan since the original review, and considered new and revised policies and procedures, along with additional supporting evidence.

The review team was satisfied that for each of the two judgement areas, the original recommendations had been acted upon in a serious and effective way, and the two features of good practice were embedded across the College. Five further recommendations were made, but none of these were considered to be serious matters which would compromise the findings that each of the applicable Expectations under Part B and Enhancement had been met and that the College was meeting UK expectations for the two judgement areas which had been unsatisfactory at the original review.

Amended judgements

As a result of this partial re-review, the College's judgements are now as follows:

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

The review can therefore be signed off as complete.

A report from the partial re-review report is published on the QAA website, at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10006243

Key findings

QAA's judgements about St Patrick's International College Ltd

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at St Patrick's International College Ltd.

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at St Patrick's International College Ltd:

- The individualised support for students provided by academic and support staff (Expectation B3, B4).
- The range of opportunities to engage students as partners in the assurance of their educational experience, including the Student Council (Expectation B5).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to St Patrick's International College Ltd.

By April 2016:

- effect strategic oversight of programme development which enables proposals for new programmes to be aligned to the overall mission of the College and local market needs (Expectation B1)
- develop and implement formal procedures which make explicit the stages of, and responsibilities for, programme design, development and approval (Expectation B1)
- implement effective arrangements for applicants to appeal and/or complain about the recruitment, selection and admission process (Expectation B2)
- revise the staff development strategy to give appropriate direction to the personal and professional development of academic staff (Expectation B3)
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the complaints procedure and use the outcomes for development and enhancement purposes (Expectation B9)
- design and implement a clear, accessible and robust academic appeals procedure which identifies each stage of the appeal process to staff and students, the responsibilities for decision-making and the options available to challenge the outcome of an appeal through external bodies (Expectations B9, C).

By July 2016:

- monitor, review and evaluate the effectiveness of the revised admissions process, drawing on feedback from successful and unsuccessful applicants (Expectation B2)
- systematically use information derived from peer review, observation of learning and teaching, and student performance data in the formulation and implementation of action plans to improve learning, teaching and achievement (Expectation B3)
- develop strategic oversight of assessment to monitor the consistency of processes across schools and to enable the sharing of good practice (Expectation B6)
- implement a more robust and systematic approach to developing action plans that effectively addresses both academic and administrative issues raised by Standards Verifiers (external examiners) (Expectation B7)
- use the outcomes of annual programme monitoring and review, including reports from Standards Verifiers (external examiners) and feedback from stakeholders, to identify cross-College themes for development and the sharing of good practice (Expectations B8 and B7)
- develop a strategic approach to College-wide enhancement which requires deliberate steps to improve the quality of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Theme: Digital Literacy

The College's Strategic Plan (2015-17) identifies digital literacy as a 'key theme to enhance over the next 2-3 years' including providing blended and online programmes as well as making available learning resources online. The College sees it as a means to empower students through education. While at the time of the review visit students who met the review team were unfamiliar with the terminology, they could provide examples of different types of activity which could be regarded as the development of digital literacy.

The findings of the review team demonstrate a range of approaches by the College to support students, including through the provision of equipment, the professional support provided by the Department of Academic Learning and Enhancement, the role of the virtual learning environment (stponline), and College requirements for student assessed work to be submitted online (including via plagiarism-detection software). The College is also in the process of replacing the existing virtual learning environment, and implementing an assessment-led teaching approach led by the Dean of Teaching and Learning.

Overall, the review team found that while there are plenty of examples of practical progress, the concept and practice of digital literacy is not being effectively promoted, planned, structurally led and coordinated as fully as it could be at the most senior levels across the College. In the final meeting, senior management representatives acknowledged that more top-down leadership was required towards developing and managing the potential of digital literacy.

About St Patrick's International College Ltd

Originally founded in 1803 and funded by the Catholic Church, St Patrick's International College Ltd is now a private for-profit company based in Stratford, East London. It began delivering higher education provision in 1998 with a 'progressive stance in respect of curriculum development and growth'. It is now part of the Global University Systems Group.

Currently Pearson is the College's only awarding partner, enabling the delivery of Higher National (HN) and postgraduate diplomas in a number of subject areas:

HND Business Management
HND Hospitality Management
HND Health and Social Care Management
HND Information Systems Engineering (ISE)
HND Network Engineering and Telecommunications (NETS)
HND Law
HND Fashion and Textiles
Extended Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership
Advanced Professional Diploma in International Health Management
Advanced Professional Diploma in Strategic Hospitality Management
Postgraduate Diploma in Software Solutions.

Provision is based within seven schools: the School of Technology; the School of Business and Management; the School of Health and Social Care; the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management; the School of Law; the School of Art and Design (currently providing only programmes in Fashion); and the School of Post Graduate and Professional Studies.

At August 2015 the College had 2,840 students, all studying full-time, mostly comprising UK students, and approximately five per cent from other EU countries. The majority of students were studying for the HND Health and Social Care. A number of programmes are designated for student loans. June 2015 saw the first new intake of students since a moratorium on the recruitment of new HN students was introduced in November 2013. A second intake took place in October 2015. The College has 85 full-time equivalent academic staff.

A new strategic plan came into effect in August 2015 to run for two years. This sets out the vision of the College to 'empower our students through education, and thereby to change their lives for the better. We transcend all boundaries to arm our students with the confidence to excel.' The same document indicates that the philosophy of the College is 'education and training focused on employment', with a particular commitment to widening participation and increasing access to education reflected in a belief in 'second chances'.

The College is now solely located at the Duncan House site in Stratford, having closed sites at Billiter Street in the City of London and Carey Street.

Following the appointment of the current Principal in 2013, a number of changes have been introduced at the senior management team (SMT) level and in the committee structures. The former included the appointment of a Director of Enterprise and Student Experience. The latter included the creation of an Academic Board (replacing the Academic Policy Making Committee), chaired by the Dean of Quality, Standards and Research.

The review team was provided with a student submission, based on a survey led by the Lead Student Representative. The timing of this process preceded significant changes introduced by the College to its Student Council, and elections for a fresh Student Council

took place just prior to the review team's visit. The team was able to meet those newly elected members, as well as holding four meetings with first and second year students and very recently completed students from across the range of programmes offered by the College.

The College underwent Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review by QAA in 2012 and developed an action plan in response to the features of good practice and recommendations set out in the resulting review report. In response to the recommendations the College has focused on changes relating to the formality of its deliberative committees, the internal reporting of school-level quality procedures, internal verification, student feedback, and the website. In addition, induction for new staff has been introduced along with revisions to the arrangements for peer review of staff.

In March 2015 QAA carried out a full Concerns Scheme investigation, leading to a published report and an action plan on the part of the College. During the current review, the team considered progress against each element of the action plan, reviewing evidence and talking to staff and students. Progress is reported under each relevant Expectation, with any incomplete actions addressed through recommendations. Further information relating to the outcomes associated with the Concern can be found on QAA's website.

Explanation of the findings about St Patrick's International College Ltd

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 the awarding organisation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College delivers HND and postgraduate diploma programmes in different subject areas, located within seven schools, with Pearson as the College's only awarding organisation.

1.2 Pearson operates clear guidelines for the division of responsibilities for maintaining the standards of its qualifications. These are reflected in the Checklist of Responsibilities, developed by QAA in conjunction with Pearson, and completed by the College in advance of the review visit.

1.3 The review team tested the Expectation by reading Pearson reference material and documents provided by the College, through meetings with a range of staff and by reading responses by the College indicating its responsiveness, duties and shared responsibilities towards its current and sole awarding organisation.

1.4 The College is accountable for ensuring that staff fully adhere to Pearson's academic standards and to achieve this it has developed internal structures, processes and due diligence to ensure that accountability operates at all levels of delivery. There is also a useful ongoing dialogue between Pearson's Standards Verifiers and academic staff members in the various schools. The last two Academic Management Review Reports

(2013-15) are very positive in Pearson's appraisal of the College and its work in relation to the academic standards set by the awarding organisation.

1.5 While it is the responsibility of Pearson to design and approve Higher National qualifications, the College is responsible for designing effective learning materials and learning and teaching strategies which align with the learning outcomes of the Higher Nationals as set by Pearson. The College engages Pearson's learning outcomes effectively, ensuring compliance and appropriate interpretation in relation to the preparation, teaching and assessment of students' work. Specifically, in this latter respect, the College states that Pearson provides generic grade descriptors, but within its delegated responsibilities, the College contextualises descriptors fittingly within each assessment set.

1.6 Based on the evidence seen by the review team, the team concludes that the College is effective in its adherence to the requirements of the awarding organisation in relation to its qualifications awarded by the College and therefore the Expectation is met with low risk.

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

1.7 The Academic Board (formerly the Academic Policy Making Committee) assumes responsibility for all academic regulations/infrastructure. The College has a clear set of academic regulations and procedures which are set out in its Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook.

1.8 The College takes full account of Pearson's frameworks and regulations in its selection of learning materials and assessments. Staff at programme level are required to implement the procedures and processes set out in the Term Management Process Model (TMPM) and pre-term meetings determine that assessors perform in a standardised way in relation to assessments as directed by Pearson.

1.9 The review team tested the Expectation by reading the sections of the evidence-base that relate to Pearson, meeting a range of staff and by listening to views on the practice of 'shared participation' with the awarding organisation.

1.10 To ensure the College complies with the standards, frameworks and regulations that Pearson has established for awarding academic credit and qualifications, the College measures the effectiveness of its own quality management processes, procedures and systems against the standards required by Pearson. This takes place in the Academic Management Review process once each year. The process is conducted effectively as each point in the College's self-assessment is then compared against what has been found by Pearson's Academic Reviewer from his/her assessment of the evidence gathered during the on-site visit to the College.

1.11 Through the process of shared participation, the College aligns with Pearson requirements and refreshes its own internal mechanisms and quality processes for sustaining academic standards. Responding to questions on the meaning of 'shared participation', members of the Leadership Team illustrated this variously, stating that although the HNDs are put together by Pearson, the College and programme staff are responsible for the particular assessment tasks and interpretation of the assessment criteria. Reports from external Standards Verifiers also provide a platform for sharing, in that these inform programme teams' practice and are not merely a process of compliance. The Leadership Team stated that Standards Verifiers appreciate these sharing possibilities and that there is a much welcomed interchange of practice and sharing of experience within programme teams.

1.12 The Expectation is met through the College having in place effective arrangements to ensure compliance with the academic frameworks and regulations of the awarding organisation. This is reinforced by the confidence demonstrated by staff whose familiarity with Pearson requirements allows them to articulate the parameters of the working partnership knowledgeably. The review team concludes that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.13 The College's academic infrastructure is designed to meet the requirements of Pearson which holds ultimate responsibility for maintaining definitive programme and qualifications records. Pearson programme specifications are readily available and are full in their composition, with detail on the title of programmes, generic learning aims and learning outcomes, assessment regulations, programme structure, levels and units, and progression, support for learning and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Programme Handbooks also serve as records of the academic provision.

1.14 There is no opportunity for the College to introduce any significant change to the programmes it operates, since this responsibility resides entirely with Pearson and extends to programme and unit approval, review, alteration, replacement and withdrawal.

1.15 The review team tested the Expectation by reading a range of programme specifications, programme handbooks and other Pearson evidence pertaining to the maintenance of programme records.

1.16 Pearson issues an annual certificate confirming the College's right to deliver Higher National programmes, and the College maintains all records of the arrangements for delivering learning opportunities that it has agreed with its awarding organisation. Contractually related materials are retained by the Dean of Quality & Standards and Research who is also the Quality Nominee for Pearson. All Academic records are retained by the Team Leader of Academic Administration and the Data Analyst. These also serve as permanent sources of information for both students and alumni.

1.17 The review team concludes that the College, through its programme and administrative teams, maintain effective records of the programmes being delivered and the qualifications to which those programme lead. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the 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

1.18 The College currently works with one awarding organisation, Pearson, delivering seven diplomas at Level 5 and four diplomas at Level 7. The College relies on Pearson's approval processes for the development and implementation of its programmes. These are the standard procedures which Pearson applies to all its accredited centres. The College has an approval certificate, from Pearson, dated August 2015 and confirmation of site approval for its current campus.

1.19 Pearson is responsible for setting academic standards to meet UK threshold standards for higher education provision, for ensuring that the programmes are aligned to Ofqual's General Conditions (formerly within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)) and that they reflect other applicable reference points.

1.20 Pearson sets the learning outcomes for the programme and for each unit, and is responsible for the overall design of programmes, which include compulsory and optional modules from which the College selects the units it wishes to run. It ensures that standards are maintained through a rigorous external verification process and through annual monitoring of the programmes.

1.21 The College has delegated responsibility for delivery of its programmes and produces learning materials and designs assessments to enable achievement of the learning outcomes to be demonstrated. The Term Management Process Model (TMPM) provides an audit trail (in hard copy) of the internal processes which ensure that the requirements of Pearson for monitoring and maintaining academic standards are met.

1.22 The team scrutinised the documentation relating to programme approval, including Academic Board Papers, minutes of SMT, and the proposed terms of reference for the Programme Approval and Review Committee. It met members of SMT, Heads of School and teaching staff to discuss the processes for programme approval and for ensuring that academic standards are set at the appropriate level. The team also considered the Standards Verifier reports, the College's self-evaluation report for Pearson and Pearson's Academic Management Review Reports.

1.23 The systems in place for programme approval and development and for ensuring that standards are met and maintained are sufficient for the current provision, which is approved and monitored by Pearson. This is confirmed by the Standards Verifiers' reports and the Academic Management Review Reports from Pearson, for the last two years.

1.24 However, the College does not have rigorous internal processes, which use external input, for the development and approval of new programmes as it has relied on Pearson's approval processes. The review team was advised that the College plans to introduce several new programmes and work with different awarding organisations. The development of these programmes is currently the responsibility of the relevant school. The College proposes to set up a Programme Development, Approval and Review Committee which will be responsible for the development, design and approval of new

programmes. However, the terms of reference for this Committee are in draft and have yet to be confirmed. [M11] This is further addressed in Expectation B1.

1.25 The Expectation is met for the current provision, with low associated risk, as the awarding organisation is responsible for programme approval. It effectively assures that standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standards and the College has in place internal policies and procedures, which ensure that it complies with the requirements of the awarding organisation.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.26 Pearson is responsible for the design and approval of units which are chosen and combined by the College to produce the programmes it delivers. Each unit has defined learning outcomes, assessment criteria and broad grade descriptors that must be put into the context of the assessment set. The College is responsible for designing and setting assessments in accordance with Pearson requirements, and for marking students' work, appropriately applying grading descriptors, and ensuring that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the learning outcomes. Pearson appoints Standards Verifiers who examine samples of students' marked work to ensure that the required standards are met. The College has established the TPM model for assuring that standards in assessment design are checked and agreed at various stages of the assessment process and this process is recorded in each school in TPM files.

1.27 The review team explored a range of documentary evidence provided in the original submission from the College for this review, and requested prior to and during the visit, including Standards Verifier reports, the Pearson Responsibilities Checklist, the College's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook, records of assessment boards, College policy documents and the TPM folders, which included evidence of the internal verification process. The team held discussions with academic and management/support staff, and students and their representatives. The team also explored the College's VLE and online submission system.

1.28 The College's internal verification procedures and standardisation meetings ensure that the assessment set tests the learning outcomes of the unit and that markers effectively use the criteria set for pass, merit and distinction. Post-marking standardisation meetings are held to ensure that the grades are awarded at the appropriate level and meet the criteria set. The College has now adopted the standard BTEC Internal Verification Pro Forma following recommendations from Standards Verifiers.

1.29 The College has established an online system for recording student achievement. There is an established set of procedures for results to be considered at formally constituted exam boards.

1.30 The TPM folders provide an audit trail, in hard copy, of the termly processes for ensuring standards are met, and include minutes of pre, mid and end-of-term meetings, details of standardisation meetings, and minutes of unit assessment boards and examination boards.

1.31 The team was impressed by the new TPM model (referred to as TPM2 by the College) which has been introduced for new intakes of students commencing studies from June 2015. While still in its early stages of development, this approach shows a strategic commitment, implemented effectively at programme level, for assuring the maintenance of

academic standards and the accurate tracking of student attendance and performance. The arrangements in assessment boards leading to the recording, considering and approving of the achievement of unit credit, and to the making of recommendations to the external verifier for the award of credit work effectively; some issues relating to past failings in registering students had led to Pearson withholding certification in a limited number of cases.

1.32 The College has taken significant steps to ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated and where UK threshold standards and those of the awarding organisation have been met. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.33 The College has a Course Management Quality Process Life Cycle (CLQC), which is interpreted at the school-level through the Term Management Process Model (TMPM). Each School produces an annual summary of the process, and the TMPM files are audited by the Dean of Quality Standards and Research and the Dean of Learning and Teaching.

1.34 Pearson uses its Academic Management Review (AMR) process and the reports from the Standards Verifiers to monitor standards across programmes. In preparation for the AMR the College produces a self-evaluation document which identifies and evaluates its own processes for monitoring and maintaining standards.

1.35 The Committee structures have recently been reviewed and the terms of reference for the Academic Board now include oversight of the outcomes of external reviews, validations and accreditations.

1.36 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising the relevant documents, including Pearson's AMR reports for the last two years, and the College's self-evaluation documents. The team reviewed the minutes of Academic Board, and SMT, read through the summary reports for each School contained in the TMPM folders, and held meetings with academic staff, Heads of School and SMT.

1.37 Pearson confirms through the AMR reports that it is satisfied that standards are being maintained and that the College has responded effectively to the actions required from the previous report.

1.38 The College has an Internal Review Process which is carried out annually by the Heads of School. The Internal Reviews are audited by the Dean of Quality, Standards and Research and the Dean of Learning and Teaching. To date, the College has felt unable to produce an overview of the outcomes of this process due to the delivery of units across multiple cohorts each year. However, it proposes to do so.

1.39 The consideration of internal and external reviews by the College's deliberative committees is not clearly defined, with some responsibilities also resting with SMT. Terms of Reference for the College's Academic Board indicate that this committee has responsibility for monitoring all academic reviews and reports. While the Board has considered the College's response to the QAA Concerns Scheme Investigation, the minutes of the meetings of the Board do not show that reports from the awarding organisation, for example the Academic Management Review Reports, are systematically considered.

1.40 Minutes of SMT meetings indicate that the outcomes of reports from Standards Verifiers are verbally presented and action plans are considered. QAA action plans and the QAA Concerns Scheme Investigation report have also been discussed at meetings of SMT. Heads of Department confirmed that SMT is responsible for considering external reviews and for following up action plans.

1.41 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met as the College currently only delivers programmes through the awarding organisation, which has effective procedures and processes for the monitoring and review of programmes that explicitly address whether UK threshold academic standards are achieved. However, the risk is moderate as the internal monitoring procedures of the College would benefit from strengthening and the terms of reference of the deliberative committees could be clarified to support the College's ambitions of future growth and the associated responsibility for programme review and monitoring. (This is further addressed under Expectation B8)

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.42 The College offers only Pearson Higher National and postgraduate diploma programmes although it plans to develop and offer master's level programmes from non-UK providers in the near future. Pearson is responsible for designing and approving the units, including learning outcomes, assessment criteria and general grade descriptors, and the rules of combination which determine the content of the various qualifications offered by the College. The College does not therefore currently involve externals other than Standards Verifiers appointed by Pearson in the management of its academic provision.

1.43 The review team examined a range of documentary evidence including a self-evaluation document, the College's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook, the Pearson responsibilities checklist, Standards Verifier reports, internal verifier procedures and reports and the TMPM files. The team explored the use and application of these procedures in meetings with College staff and examined the electronic tracking system.

1.44 The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook contains clear procedures for the receipt, distribution consideration and production of actions arising out of the reports produced by Pearson Standards Verifiers. These procedures include consideration within schools and a limited facility for thematic issues to be reported at College level. Issues with respect to the cross-College use of reports and some of the administrative failings which have given rise to the blocking of certification in some cases are addressed under Expectation B7.

1.45 The Pearson Standards Verifiers' reports confirm that academic standards across all programmes are being met and that student feedback and formative comments meet their requirements in most cases. The College has arrangements in place to share the findings of Standards Verifier reports with the Academic Board and Leadership team and has plans to share anonymised sections of all Pearson Standards Verifier reports with students. (This is considered further under Expectation B7.)

1.46 The Pearson Academic Management Review contained no essential actions and made only one recommendation relating to the provision of more detailed feedback to students, which is being dealt with by the College and is further considered under Expectation B3.

1.47 The review team concludes that the combination of the College's use of, and response to, Pearson Standards Verifier and Pearson Academic Management Reviews demonstrates effective use of externality in maintaining the academic standards of the awarding organisation's qualifications; therefore the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the awarding organisation: Summary of findings

1.48 In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the one awarding organisation at the College, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.49 Responsibility for the setting of academic standards rests with Pearson as the sole awarding organisation for the College's higher education provision. The College's responsibilities for maintaining the academic standards of those qualifications are set out in the Pearson Responsibilities Checklist. The College has in place processes and procedures to discharge its responsibilities (set out in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook). The last two Annual Management Review reports (2013-15) are very positive in Pearson's appraisal of the College and its work in relation to the academic standards set by the awarding organisation. The most recent report contained no essential actions and made only one recommendation relating to the provision of more detailed feedback to students, which is being dealt with by the College.

1.50 All seven of the Expectations in this judgement area are met, six with a low level of risk and one with a moderate risk. The moderate risk relates to the internal monitoring procedures of the College which require strengthening and the terms of reference of the deliberative committees need further refinement to support the College's ambitions of future growth and the associated responsibility for programme review and monitoring

1.51 Nevertheless, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College relies on the awarding organisation, Pearson, for strategic oversight of the processes for, and outcomes of, programme design, development and approval. The College has a certificate of approval for Pearson programmes dated August 2015 and this is issued annually.

2.2 Programme specifications, created by the College, are based on the information provided by Pearson. [046A-C] These include the compulsory modules for each pathway and modules which have been selected from a range of optional modules. The School of Technology has two customised programmes that have been approved by Pearson until December 2015: Network Engineering and Telecommunication Systems (K6845) and Information Systems Engineering (AY433).

2.3 The review team met members of SMT, academic staff, and students, and scrutinised documents relating to programme design and approval which included the College's Strategic Plan, and minutes of SMT and Academic Board.

2.4 Pearson, through its Centre Approval Process, provides an effective system for the design, development and approval of the Higher National Diplomas and the postgraduate diplomas delivered by the College. The Academic Management Review reports confirm that the programmes comply with Pearson's requirements. However, the College does not have formal procedures for determining which of the optional modules, available through Pearson, will be included in each programme structure, and does not systematically draw on external expertise, or feedback from students, for the design of its current provision. The College student survey does not include questions relating to programme development. However, SMT members indicated the intention to consult with the Student Council and the Student Experience team to increase student involvement in the design of programmes.

2.5 Minor changes have been made to the curriculum for the Higher National Diplomas as a result of feedback from staff working in the field and to maximise the progression opportunities on to top-up programmes offered by other higher education providers. However, these changes have been sanctioned by the Heads of School and have not been considered and approved through the College's deliberative committees.

2.6 Proposals for new programmes are put forward by schools who take responsibility for the design, development and approval of programmes. Although no new programmes had been put forward at the time of the review, the College indicated that final approval rests with SMT and Academic Board.

2.7 The review team also learned that the College plans to work with overseas partners, including Concordia and Uninettuno, and that seven new programmes in a wide range of subject areas are being developed within schools. These include undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, a cross-school programme in media and fashion and delivery by blended learning. These proposals do not provide clear progression routes for

students on the current programmes offered by the College and do not fully reflect the College's stated intention to widen participation and provide educational opportunities for the local community.

2.8 One of the recommendations of the Concerns Scheme Investigation report was that the College should 'take a more strategic and formal approach to programme approval, including approval of programmes operated with partners'. Although the College has drafted the terms of reference of a Programme Development Approval and Review Committee and designed a Request for New Programme form, these have not been finally approved and implemented and the development of new programmes continues to lack strategic leadership and direction.

2.9 The lack of overview of programme development at a strategic level means that the physical and human resources required to deliver new programmes may not be properly considered. The team found that there was no clear plan as to when the proposed programmes should commence, or how the validation and approval process should be effected. For example, reference is made in the minutes of Academic Board to Concordia programmes commencing in February and September 2015, while minutes of SMT suggest that these will start in 2016. Academic staff, including members of SMT, were unclear about the requirements of an approval process. Furthermore, they did not demonstrate an awareness of the effect the development of programmes with different partners, delivered through blended learning, might have on resources.

2.10 The College does not have a clear strategy for supporting staff in programme development. Staff development workshops focus on operational issues such as classroom management, rather than programme development. However, individual CPD forms provide some evidence that staff are engaged in course development activities with other providers, and at the meeting with staff, several members of staff confirmed that they had been involved in the development of new programmes.

2.11 In light of the lack of strategic direction, lack of alignment between College vision and proposed new programmes, and the lack of implementation of formal procedures for programme development and approval, the review team **recommends** that the College:

- effect strategic oversight of programme development which enables proposals for new programmes to support effectively the College mission of widening participation and reflect the needs of the market, including current students
- develop and implement formal procedures which make explicit the stages of, and responsibilities for, programme design, development and approval.

2.12 The College gives insufficient emphasis and priority to assuring quality in the processes for the design, development and approval of future programmes and has not yet adopted procedures to satisfy the requirements of the QAA Concerns report with respect to a more formalised and strategic approach to the development and approval of its programmes. Consequently, there is no strategic overview of programme development to ensure that proposals are aligned to the mission and vision of the College. The plans that the College presented for addressing identified problems in the approval process are under-developed and not fully embedded in its operational planning. Therefore the Expectation is not met. However, as the College uses Pearson's approval processes, for its current provision the risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.13 Recruitment policies and procedures are set out in Appendix A of the College's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook. Information for prospective students about the programmes offered can be found on the College website, with admissions requirements for individual programmes set out in the relevant programme specification. To express an interest in a programme, students can fill out an information request via email, which is sent to the Admissions team. Alternatively, they can speak directly with an admissions adviser who can provide additional information. Minimum entry requirements may be waived for mature applicants provided they can demonstrate that they are sufficiently motivated to undertake the programme in addition to passing literacy and numeracy tests and completing a personal interview.

2.14 The review team examined the effectiveness of policies and procedures to recruit learners, including the College website, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook, and reports from Pearson. The review team also discussed recruitment, selection and admissions procedures with staff and students.

2.15 Recruitment procedures are designed to be fair, transparent, clear and accessible [004]. Website information for prospective students gives students the chance to make informed decisions about their programmes. Pearson Academic Management Review reports find that the College's published information is accurate, and provides students with a basis for making an informed choice about enrolment decisions.

2.16 In March 2015, concerns were raised by QAA regarding referral agents who were cold-contacting prospective students as a means of recruitment, with an emphasis on potential availability of student loans. Since then, the College has updated its Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook to include guidance for its referral agents abroad. The College has also provided recruitment, selection and retention criteria for the employment of such agents. A Referral Agent Policy has been specified to give improved guidance, including acceptable and ethical means of promoting programmes to comply with legislation. Agents whose enrolled students fail to continue their programme, have low feedback, or drop out at induction will not have their contract renewed.

2.17 Following the Concerns Scheme Investigation report, the College has added its own literacy and numeracy tests to admissions measures. These are detailed in the newly updated Recruitment Process. The test must be passed (a score of over 40 per cent) in order to qualify for admission. Admissions staff confirmed that admissions tests are written to Entry Level 3 Multiple versions of the test are available, allowing for randomised assessment. Reasonable adjustments are made to the testing and interview procedures, in order to enable students with a disability or special educational need fair access to the same materials. Students that the team met confirmed that they had all taken the admissions tests. Following testing, prospective students are invited to a face-to-face interview. Interviewing staff from each School judge each candidate's motivation and suitability for their programme. Applicants are scored on a four-item Likert-type scale, from 1; 'accepted', to 4; 'not accepted'.

2.18 The College has also revised Annex A of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook ensuring that it accurately reports the revised recruitment and admissions procedures.

2.19 Staff stated that they have mechanisms in place to inform all prospective students of any changes to their programme, and gave examples of mass text messages, emails and mailshots to inform prospective students at the earliest opportunity. One illustration given was the HND Business Management programme. Pearson had notified the College that this was due to be updated in 2016. Admissions and Recruitment staff were notified by SMT, and the website was updated to reflect the changes.

2.20 Successful candidates are offered a provisional place by the Admissions team by email, which details the tests that the student will take. Careful consideration is given to students who have not met the criteria. Unsuccessful candidates are given the reason for their failed application (either 'did not pass the entry test', or 'failed the interview stage') and are advised to re-apply at a later date. While the College's Student Retention Strategy states that student feedback is used and analysed, there is no evidence to support this, and senior staff reported that consideration has not been given to collecting feedback from unsuccessful applicants.

2.21 To ensure that prospective students meet the selection criteria, the Director of Enterprise and Student Experience and the Vice Principal undertake random audits of completed tests and interviews. While the review team recognises that the College has not been able to recruit learners until June 2015, and has two relatively new cohorts, data examining and evaluating the overall impact of changes before and after changes to the selection and recruitment process have not been systematically analysed. The Student Retention Strategy details the College's key indicator of a positive student experience, measured against the Higher Education Statistics Agency retention benchmark performance indicator. Similarly, analysis of recruitment data has yet to be considered alongside retention rates. When these data are considered, the College will have better management information to evaluate the extent to which its new policies and procedures reflect the College mission, including improvements in student satisfaction and progression.

2.22 Given the absence of systematic feedback from successful or unsuccessful applicants and the limited progress being made to evaluate the revised admissions arrangements, the review team **recommends** that the College monitor, review and evaluate the effectiveness of the revised admissions process, drawing on feedback from successful and unsuccessful applicants.

2.23 Students must attend two induction meetings with the College to be allowed to attend and formally commence their programme of study. The College Induction Policy details the two-part structure. First students are given general information regarding the College, expectations and requirements of students, and tips for living in London. Second, students are given programme-specific information by the teaching staff from their respective schools, detailing module content, learning outcomes and assessments. Those who fail to attend induction are withdrawn from the College register. Students are officially registered on Higher National programmes providing they attend class within the first four weeks of term. This is in accordance with Pearson requirements.

2.24 A new admissions appeals and complaints procedure is in draft, but is yet to be implemented. This sets out to prospective students how to register a complaint or lodge an appeal regarding the College admissions process. This can be achieved formally or informally and all student complaints are kept confidential. However, as this is yet to be introduced, students currently involved in the recruitment process have no means of making a complaint or appealing against any decision. For those reasons the review team

recommends that the College implement effective arrangements for applicants to appeal and/or complain about the recruitment, selection and admission process.

2.25 The College has implemented revised recruitment processes, including admissions tests, which are designed to be objective, clear and accessible and to enable suitably capable students to be selected for their programmes. Adequate information is given to students to allow them to make well-informed decisions. However, there is a lack of provision for appeals and complaints processes and the College has been slow to monitor or evaluate the overall effectiveness of its admissions procedures to ensure that they are supporting the College's mission and strategic objectives. Furthermore, until the arrangements for appeals and complaints and for the provision of feedback from applicants are in place, the College does not have a comprehensive set of information to support such effective monitoring or evaluation. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B2 is not met and associated risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.26 The College sets out its strategic approach to learning and teaching in:

- the Teaching and Learning Strategy 2015-2020, which sets out key five-year plans and performance measures such as the results of student satisfaction surveys and staff development reports.
- the Course Management Quality Process Life Cycle (CQLC) which features a Term Management Process Model (TMPM).
- academic skills support delivered to students by the Department of Academic Learning and Enhancement (DALE).
- a staff development strategy to ensure that teaching staff are competent to teach and enabled to develop their professional and subject expertise.
- continuous monitoring of the estate and facilities by SMT to ensure that these are fit for purpose and effective in supporting the Teaching and Learning Strategy.

2.27 The Teaching and Learning Strategy sets out the key strategic themes defining the College's approach to teaching and learning, its key supporting objectives and the key performance indicators by which its implementation will be monitored. In June 2014 the College adopted a revised Term Management Process Model, which is an auditable four-stage process designed to assure the quality and standards of its assessment strategy. The model prescribes pre, mid and post-term activities and end-of-unit evaluations that are completed by all schools. It has also introduced the Assessment-led Teaching model and a Course Management Quality Process Lifecycle, all of which are designed to ensure that teaching and learning is effective and up to standard.

2.28 The review team evaluated a range of evidence, including the Strategy documents, the self-evaluation, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook, the TMPM files, Standardisation Procedures, TMPM Review minutes, Standards Verifiers' reports, and minutes of Boards of Examiners. The review team also held meetings with the Principal, senior staff and managers, academic staff, professional services and support staff, students and the Student Council.

2.29 The College has a formal procedure for the selection, interview and recruitment of academic staff which shows that a presentation is part of the appointment process. The Vice Principal has overall responsibility for the quality of staff employed and Heads of School are charged with allocating staff their teaching responsibilities. In response to the Concerns Scheme Investigation report, the College has implemented arrangements to ensure that staff CVs are up to date and has developed a set of matrices of teaching allocations in each school which define the academic boundaries of each member of staff. Reports from the observation of teaching and learning of staff are received by the Vice Principal to ensure the adequacy and competency of staff. The review team considers that the College has addressed these issues raised in the Concerns Scheme Investigation.

2.30 The College supports staff development activities and staff indicated that they had been able to take teaching qualifications. Pearson has recently run a developmental

workshop on the assessment process. The College held a Teaching and Learning Conference in October 2015 which provided staff with an opportunity to share good practice in teaching, learning and assessment.

2.31 In addition to the observation of teaching and learning of staff, the College has published guidelines for peer review to enhance the quality of teaching with a supporting pro forma to record the activity. Provision is also made for Heads of School to undertake ad hoc teaching observations and learning walks.

2.32 The College has provided training for all teaching staff in classroom management [030] which addressed specifically the issue of managing students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and encourages and provides support for its teaching staff to achieve a formal teaching qualification. Meetings with staff and with students confirm that this has resulted in much improved classroom behaviour. The steps taken by the College provide an effective response to the issues raised by the Concerns Scheme Investigation.

2.33 Academic staff confirm that the peer review and Observation of Teaching and Learning (OTL) processes work effectively and help to support their teaching practice. They confirm the College's support by way of remission from teaching and payment of fees to support their achievement of higher degrees and the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) qualification. The first staff development conference was widely acknowledged as a success, enabling the discussion of a variety of teaching and learning-related issues to be addressed across the College. College management has undertaken that this will remain a feature of the College calendar. While the provision of the ADHD/classroom management training process and promotion of the DTLLS qualification is driven by the leadership team, the College is responsive to requests for support for conference attendance and similar personal and professional development activity, the College does not otherwise direct the personal professional development of staff. There is little evidence of engagement with frameworks such as UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) and the College does not actively promote engagement with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) or similar bodies.

2.34 Given the College's stated commitments to continuous improvement, its strategic ambitions for further expansion and the development of new partnerships to deliver higher level qualifications (such as master's degrees) the review team **recommends** that the College revise the staff development strategy to give appropriate direction to the personal and professional development of academic staff.

2.35 The College has recently moved into a single site premises which provides teaching rooms, administration and meeting space, a library, the DALE office, an office for the Student Council and a canteen. There are networked computer facilities and wireless access provided through a new network of routers throughout. There is a lift to enable students with mobility issues to access the upper floor. Classrooms are equipped with chairs, tables, computers, an overhead projector and a whiteboard.

2.36 Students confirm that there have been significant and notable improvements to the building and infrastructure since the move to the current site and that the College is responsive to student feedback in the provision of learning resources, specifically library stock and e-learning materials and the provision of computers. The students confirm that the VLE is accessible both on and offsite and that it provides useful materials in support of their learning. Students confirm that the teaching and learning accommodation is satisfactory although there are some infrastructure issues with respect to sanitation, heating, lighting and ventilation of which SMT is aware and which it is addressing as resources allow.

2.37 Student attendance is now carefully monitored using class registers and management audits. These records are evident in the TPM files and students' poor attendance is followed up at school level. While the electronic class registration system has been abandoned, the review team considers that this, taken together with the new TPM model described above, is an effective response to the issues raised in the Concerns Scheme Investigation report.

2.38 Internal quality assurance documentation confirms that students are involved in the learning process. Students are given the opportunity to develop higher-level transferrable skills, and to work together with other students in peer feedback sessions.

2.39 Meetings with students confirm that teaching at the College fully meets and indeed exceeds their expectations. Students confirmed that teaching staff are approachable and make themselves available to give individualised support outside of formal teaching sessions. The students also praised the support given by the DALE team and by support staff in the library. The team recognises that this level of support is consistent with the College's focus on providing learning opportunities for its local community and considers that the individualised support for students provided by academic and support staff is **good practice**.

2.40 TPM documents scrutinised by the review team and the minutes of meetings show that the College produces data which show information about student attendance and performance. The reports and information gathered by the peer review/OTL process are used by the head of each school to address issues that arise. While these data are used by programme teams and school managers to monitor student performance and the effectiveness of teaching and learning within each school, the College does not currently systematically use these data to inform its senior managers of generic, cross-college issues which might be revealed by effective synoptic analysis. There remain, for example, issues across the College concerning retention and the submission of assignments which are not adequately addressed at a senior level. This lack of a systematic cross-college analysis of key themes is recurrent and can be seen in the review team's recommendations under Expectations B7 and B8. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College systematically use information derived from peer review, observation of learning and teaching, and student performance data in the formulation and implementation of action plans to improve learning, teaching and achievement.

2.41 The College has a clear strategy for the monitoring and continuous improvement of the quality of teaching and learning and has introduced procedures to address the issues identified in the Concerns Scheme Investigation report and the College's action plan. In implementing these processes and procedures the review team concludes that the College has yet to fully embed all of these procedures and that there is more to do to facilitate senior management oversight and effective direction of the College's teaching and learning. The team considers therefore that the Expectation is met but the risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.42 The College has published a Strategic Plan which incorporates its values and mission. It has revised its focus to concentrate on employability and engagement with local employer representatives to support a widening participation agenda for Newham and surrounding London boroughs. The Plan incorporates a Teaching and Learning Strategy and arrangements for quality monitoring and review set out in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook and the Staff Teaching and Management Procedures Handbook (STAMP). These procedures are implemented through a committee and organisational structure and a series of associated process models. Students are informed of the arrangements and resources through the Student Handbook and the induction process. The Department of Academic Learning and Enhancement (DALE) is specifically designed to support students with all aspects of their academic progress and to support the development of their digital literacy.

2.43 The review team considered a range of documents, including a self-evaluation, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook, the Student Handbook, the STAMP, the Resource Strategy, and the Teaching and Learning Strategy and tested the implementation of the documentary evidence in meetings with senior staff academic and support staff, students and the Student Council.

2.44 Students' experiences and development are monitored using the Student Experience Strategy. Opportunities for educational development include workshops offered by DALE and the library. Roles and responsibilities for enabling student development are defined and monitored frequently for effectiveness by the Academic Board. The College Student Handbook sets out the College policies on equality, health and safety and a range of academic policies, including assessment and appeals.

2.45 Opportunities for students to enrich their academic and social experience are promoted by the Director of the Student Experience Team and Student Experience Department. Activities and opportunities for students include IT workshops, study skills sessions, debating and visiting speakers. Pastoral support is available in the form of a student counselling service. This is provided by the Student Services Department in collaboration with the Student Council. Students who met the review team said that there were a number of extracurricular opportunities on offer to them, citing a range of sports and debating opportunities. Students also reported that information, advertisements and links to activities are easily found on the College's social media pages.

2.46 The College's SMT monitors and implements improvements to its infrastructure and uses student feedback, particularly from the Student Council Officers, to inform its improvement strategy. As noted under Expectation B3, while improvements have been made, some of which as result of student representations to the College, some students reported that there are still some shortcomings. The oversight of the provision of adequate resources to support teaching and learning was evident in meetings with senior staff and was largely confirmed by meetings with the students and the Student Council.

2.47 The review team concludes that the College does have a strategic approach to the provision and continued improvement of resources to enable the development and

achievement of its students and for these reasons the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.48 The College takes steps to collaborate with all students as partners in the enhancement of their educational experience and in the quality assurance process. This commitment is outlined both in the Student Charter and in the Mission and Values. Students are represented in the form of Student Officers and class representatives, details of which are available in the Student Handbook. Training for Student Officers is provided by the Student Experience Team. Students are encouraged to talk to their representatives about any issue they would not feel comfortable discussing directly with staff. Students who met the review team were aware of who their class representatives were, and how to contact them.

2.49 The student experience is monitored in a number of ways, including a bi-annual Student Survey. Student Council Officers and class representatives from each school are invited to attend mid-term and end-of term Board meetings. Student representatives from each course provide feedback as members of the Mid-Term Board. Representation at meetings allows for the monitoring of student satisfaction, enabling the College to respond to student feedback. Feedback to academic staff is actively encouraged using mid and end-of-term progress checks, and students can also comment anonymously using online feedback surveys.

2.50 The review team examined minutes from meetings where students had been invited to participate and information available to staff and students. The team discussed student engagement opportunities with students, staff and the (newly elected) Student Council.

2.51 The College's Teaching and Learning Strategy details its aim to learn from student feedback. Staff confirmed that students are regularly asked how programmes can be improved at mid-term and end-of-term progress checks. This feedback is acted upon for the improvement of future classes.

2.52 Students who met the review team gave recent examples of how student engagement has positively impacted on their experience. These included alterations to class hours to facilitate easier childcare arrangements, extra classes provided to students in their lunch breaks, later library opening hours and computer hardware upgrades.

2.53 The Student Council was formed in 2014 as part of a two-year Student Experience Strategy to improve links between staff and students. This comprised eight designated officer roles, including the Council President, the Vice President, an international student officer and a student officer from each of the five schools: Health and Social Care, Business, Hospitality, Technology, and Law. In 2015 the Student Council was substantially revised to include several new roles. These include a welfare officer to ensure that physical and material well-being is provided to students and a community engagement officer to encourage positive links between the College and the local area. Academic and social officers organise academic-related events such as guest speakers, and social or sporting activities. Student council officers are encouraged to feed back any improvements to the student experience achieved as a result of their joint contribution with academic staff. This is achieved via email, class talks and posters.

2.54 Members of the Student Council who met the review team reported feeling satisfied and well-supported as partners with academic and senior staff in the development of their educational experience. They confirmed their regular attendance at mid and end-of-term meetings and described how their feedback is shared with the Academic Board. On completion of their role, Student Council officers receive a certificate in recognition of their contribution.

2.55 Although the effectiveness of student engagement has yet to be monitored and evaluated, Student Council members reported feeling well-represented and pleased to be partners with staff in the decision-making process. Many factors have led to the success of the student engagement system within the College, namely the range of opportunities to engage students as partners in the assurance of their educational experience, including the Student Council. The review team considers this to be **good practice**.

2.56 In summary, the College makes a considered effort to involve its students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience, listens to and acts on feedback received whether directly from students or through their representatives. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of Risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.57 The College has a set of assessment regulations which are included in the Student Handbook, are available online and are communicated to students in induction sessions.

2.58 The College Assessment Cycle describes the assessment process and includes an internal verification policy, which sets out the requirements for internal verification of assignment briefs and was recently updated in response to recommendations made by its Standards Verifiers. Assessments are submitted online and marking and moderation is completed through the College's VLE. Plagiarism-detection software is used to identify work that may be plagiarised. Students receive feedback on their assessed work through the VLE.

2.59 The College holds school-based Standardisation Meetings prior to marking and Unit Assessment Boards and Examination Boards at the end of every term. Assessment decisions are recorded on a spreadsheet. Mid-term boards are held to discuss issues relating to teaching and formative assessment. Failing students are invited to attend diagnostic panels. Clinical sessions are offered to students whose assignments are referred. The outcomes of the various stages in the assessment cycle are recorded in the TPM folders.

2.60 Pearson's Standards Verifiers check that assignment briefs test the learning outcomes at the appropriate level and moderate samples of marked work for each unit.

2.61 The review team tested the Expectation by studying the documents relating to the assessment cycle in the TPM files for four schools, which included minutes of the pre-term and mid-term boards, unit assessment boards, internal verification reports and notes of standardisation meetings. Minutes of Examination Boards and Standard Verifiers reports were also scrutinised together with data relating to submissions. The team met Heads of School, academic staff and students.

2.62 The assessment process is managed by Heads of School who monitor assessment through the TPM process. The Dean of Quality Standards and Research and the Dean of Learning and Teaching periodically audit the TPM files to monitor how effectively the assessment cycle is being followed. Heads of School receive and respond to reports from Standard Verifiers and produce action plans. They chair Unit Assessment Boards, Examination Boards and Plagiarism Panels. Action Plans arising from Standard Verifiers reports are sent to the Dean of Quality, Standards and Research who determines if there are any training needs. Where external needs are identified, the Dean refers the matter to the Vice Principal who authorises arrangements and secures financial support for activities. Verbal reports relating to Standard Verifiers reports are presented to SMT.

2.63 The format of assessment briefs has been standardised and follows the template provided by Pearson. Unit Leaders are encouraged to produce assignment guidelines, but this is not consistent across schools. Students confirmed that clear submission deadlines are set, and penalties are applied for late submission. They are able to submit claims for extenuating circumstances provided these can be supported by documented evidence.

In response to concerns raised by Standards Verifiers, assessments which are submitted late can only receive a pass grade. Timely submission is written into the criteria for the award of merit or distinction.

2.64 Opportunities for students to undertake formative assessment that is linked to the final assessment are provided for all units. Students confirmed that they receive helpful feedback from their tutors which identifies areas for improvement. Summative assessment is securely submitted through plagiarism-detection software. Cases of academic misconduct are dealt with through school-based plagiarism panels. All assessment is marked and moderated online (with the exception of specialised, practically-focused projects in the Technology and Fashion programmes) and students obtain their final grades from the VLE. The assessment cycle requires feedback to be given in a timely manner but minutes of assessment boards indicate that there are some delays in the marking process. Standards Verifiers have identified some inconsistencies in feedback. These are being addressed through school-based action plans.

2.65 Some Standards Verifiers' reports suggest that there is some inconsistency in the feedback given to students, and the schools concerned have undertaken staff development to address this. Standards Verifiers have commented that some internal verifiers have given useful narrative feedback relating to the standardisation of assessment while other internal verifiers simply confirm appraisers' comments. The College is addressing these issues through implementation of the TPM.

2.66 The College has recently introduced a unit assessment tracking system which monitors the number of submissions and the pass rates for each unit. The review team found that these identified submission rates as low as 25 per cent for some of the recorded units. Pass rates were also low and in one case was just three per cent. Concerns about non-submission of assignments and lack of student progression are raised as issues in Examination Board minutes and in Standard Verifiers' reports. The College provides academic assistance to students registered on the Higher National Diploma for five years, although their initial teaching period is for two years. This may act as a disincentive for students to submit their assessment according to the deadlines set, as they see their completion date to be within five rather than two years. The Vice Principal intends to use the unit assessment tracking system to improve submission and pass rates by providing support to students and staff, but this is at the early stages of development.

2.67 From the evidence provided through the TPM folders, the review team found that there are variations in the amount of detail recorded in relation to the assessment process. For example, minutes of Business and Management Standardisation meetings related to assessing one piece of work rather than taking an overview of marks achieved. The College indicated that there had been some cross-school working groups on assessment practices in the past, however, these were informal and ad hoc and have not recently been convened.

2.68 Decisions relating to all aspects of assessment are made within schools who convene standardisation panels, diagnostic panels, plagiarism panels, unit assessment boards and boards of examiners. Minutes of these meetings indicate variations in procedures. For example, in the case of standardisation meetings, the School of Health and Social Care discusses how grades are awarded, the School of Business and Management jointly marks a script and the School of Technology includes standardisation of assessment briefs as part of their pre-term meetings. Consequently the College does not have a strategic overview of the assessment process which could lead to inconsistencies in marking and moderation, and in decisions relating to plagiarism, late submission and extenuating circumstances. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College develop strategic oversight of assessment to monitor the consistency of processes across schools and to enable the sharing of good practice.

2.69 The College does not provide information about the recognition of prior learning on its website as few students are eligible for entry with credit for prior learning. Students are advised to contact a member of staff for advice. Students who have completed units from an identical HND qualification offered by another provider are admitted and given credit for those units, provided they meet the College's admissions requirements. The College is currently developing its own guidance on the recognition for prior learning in line with Pearson requirements.

2.70 From the evidence provided and from meetings with staff and students, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met but the risk is moderate as there is a lack of strategic overview of the assessment process which may result in inconsistencies between programmes and schools in decisions relating to various aspects of assessment, including feedback, marking and moderation.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.71 As the College's sole awarding organisation, Pearson appoints Standards Verifiers (the equivalent of external examiners) for all the programmes currently offered by the College. The Standards Verifiers operate to Pearson guidelines and provide a formal report to the College after each visit. The College is responsible for ensuring that Pearson Standards Verifiers have all the information needed to conduct their review, as well as access to students and lecturers. The College is also responsible for responding to Standards Verifiers' recommendations. The College has measures in place to receive and respond to the reports, which are summarised in the College checklist of responsibilities [003] and set out in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook and further detailed in the Staff Handbook.

2.72 The review team considered a wide range of documentary evidence including a self-evaluation, Standards Verifiers reports and responses, the Pearson Checklist, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook, the internal verification Policy, Pearson Academic Management Review Self-Evaluation and Report, minutes of standardisation meetings, minutes of exam boards, minutes of Academic Board minutes of SMT and meetings with senior and academic staff and the Student Council.

2.73 The College recognises that procedures for responding to issues raised by Standards Verifiers reports may need revision, as these issues are not currently accessible by all staff and students. In an effort to progress this, the Dean of Quality and Standards and Research (who is the College's Quality Nominee for Pearson) will collate and share the findings of reports with the Academic Board and Leadership team. In addition, the College intends to then make available to staff and students anonymised sections of all reports.

2.74 The procedures for receiving Standards Verifiers reports within schools, considering their recommendations and taking actions in response are effective and confirmed by the reports themselves. The Pearson Academic Management Review Report provides further confirmation that the processes work effectively in most cases. Some students were not properly registered on programme which led to Pearson withholding certification. While some responsibility for this may lie with Pearson's systems rather than the College the fact that this was not picked up by administrative staff or by senior managers indicates the lack of a systematic process for identifying issues which lie outside the direct responsibility of the school and which need to be considered by the administrative team and the College's senior management. This is further evidenced by Standards Verifiers' comments on the consistency of feedback to students on their assessed work and in some cases the operation of the internal verification process. That the College has not so far implemented its plans for sharing appropriately anonymised Standards Verifiers' reports with students is further evidence that the processes and procedures are not yet fully in place. For this reason the review team **recommends** that the College implement a more robust and systematic approach to developing action plans that effectively addresses both academic and administrative issues raised by Standards Verifiers (external examiners).

2.75 The team concludes that the procedure followed by schools up to and including the determination of credit for students and the maintenance of academic standards are effective but that there is a lack of opportunity for schools to identify common themes or issues arising out of the reports from Standards Verifiers. There is also a lack communication with other key administrative functions which is attributable to the lack of a

systematic approach in cross-College committees to the consideration of issues raised by Standards Verifiers. The team concludes therefore that while the Expectation is met the risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.76 The College relies on Pearson for the monitoring and review of its programmes. Programme and unit learning outcomes are set by Pearson and are monitored by the Standards Verifiers who are appointed for each programme. They monitor and comment on the assessment process, academic standards and student performance and identify any essential action. Their reports are based on samples of assessed work.

2.77 Pearson undertakes Academic Management Reviews each year which include an overview of the quality of learning opportunities across the programmes delivered by the College. The terms of reference for the College's committees, set out in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook, include responsibilities for programme monitoring and review. Programme monitoring and review is carried out regularly and systematically by Pearson which provides links to external reference points such as the Quality Code, including Subject Benchmark Statements, and the FHEQ.

2.78 The College has processes to protect students in the event of programme closure, and since the IQER in 2012 has closed programmes previously offered through the Universities of London, Middlesex, Sunderland and Wales.

2.79 The review team scrutinised the documentation relating to the internal monitoring and review processes within the College (TMPM Files), reviewed minutes of the Leadership Team, Academic Board and SMT, and read the Academic Management Reviews and the Standards Verifiers reports from Pearson. The team met members of SMT, the Leadership Team, academic staff and students.

2.80 Academic provision is monitored and reviewed within each school in a cyclical process through TMPM. Academic staff are responsible for the review of programme effectiveness which takes place through pre and mid-term Board meetings. Student representatives from each programme group attend mid-term Board meetings to voice their own issues in relation to teaching and learning (see Expectation B5). Internal Quality Reviews are carried out by Heads of Department and audited by the Dean of Quality, Standards and Research and the Dean of Teaching and Learning. The outcomes of these reviews are considered by Academic Board.

2.81 Overall responsibility for monitoring and review of programmes rests with SMT. Staff development activities support staff to contribute to programme monitoring and review.

2.82 Academic Management Review reports and Standards Verifier reports indicate that standards are maintained and that the quality of learning opportunities is assured. The College has responded to issues raised in the reports. For example, it has upgraded its learning resources, increased the social space available to students and adopted the Pearson internal verification paperwork to provide greater scope for comment on the outcomes of this process.

2.83 As reported under Expectation B7, Standards Verifier reports are specific to schools and responsibility for responding to them lies with the Heads of School. Although action plans have been produced in response to issues raised in the various reports, the outcomes

of the Standards Verifier reports and the Academic Management Review reports are not brought together into one College-wide action plan which could be reviewed and updated through the College's deliberative committees.

2.84 The College makes use of the external reference points provided by Pearson as well as those provided through its contacts with other higher education providers. This includes previous university partners as well as proposed partnerships with overseas providers. However, the views of external stakeholders, such as employers are not formally considered as part of the programme monitoring and review process.

2.85 The College has a dedicated data analyst whose responsibilities include the provision of data relating to student recruitment, attendance and performance. These have not been used effectively to contribute to programme monitoring, but the College recognises the necessity to include this in the monitoring process and has collected and analysed the data for 2013-14. The results of the analysis were considered at the October 2015 meeting of the Academic Board.

2.86 The College's internal monitoring processes operate through TPM. These include opportunities for students to contribute to the monitoring and review of their programmes through twice-yearly surveys and by attending Mid-Term Boards. However, minutes of these Boards indicate that students do not always attend nor do they fully participate in discussions. The outcomes of the TPM are summarised through Internal Quality Reviews, but these reviews are school based and are not considered at a strategic level through a holistic College-wide approach to annual monitoring.

2.87 The College recognises the need for a more systematic approach to the monitoring and review of its programmes and has recently set up the Programme Development Approval and Review Committee. The draft terms of reference for this Committee indicate that its role will include oversight of the approval, review, modification and withdrawal of programmes. However, the Committee has yet to be formally established.

2.88 Although Pearson effectively monitors and reviews the current programmes the College does not take a strategic approach to programme monitoring and review. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College use the outcomes of annual programme monitoring and review, including reports from Standards Verifiers (external examiners) and feedback from stakeholders, to identify cross-College themes for development and the sharing of good practice.

2.89 As the College relies on the established processes of the awarding organisation for monitoring of the quality of the student experience and for ensuring that standards are maintained, the Expectation is met for the programmes it currently delivers. However, the lack of a holistic approach to annual monitoring enabling the identification of cross-College issues means that the risk is moderate, particularly as the College has ambitious plans for the expansion of its programmes.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.90 The Complaints Procedures and Timeline is featured in the Student Handbook, [005] which details the timescale and opportunities for informal and formal complaint resolution clearly. Full consideration is given to student confidentiality. The Student Handbook is available on the VLE and students are provided with a hard copy at induction.

2.91 Students are primarily advised to contact a member of the Student Services team who can support them during the complaint process. Complaints and issues may be resolved informally by speaking with the Director of Student Services, the Head of Academic Administration, the relevant Programme Manager or the Head of School.

2.92 To make a formal complaint, students may access a complaints form either from the College VLE, or in hard copy from the College support team. This must be completed and returned to the Student Services Office within four weeks of the cause of the complaint. The Director of Student Services, who directs complaints to the Complaints and Grievance Committee (CACG), reviews formal complaints. The complaint is then assessed by the CACG panel to reach a resolution. The panel must have no conflict of interest.

2.93 Reference to appeals in the Student Handbook is made only in relation to appeals against academic misconduct and against complaints decisions, rather than to academic appeals.

2.94 This Expectation was tested by studying documentation provided by the College, including the Student Handbook, a self-evaluation, meeting minutes from Complaints and Grievance Committee meetings and the discussion of complaints presented at Student Council meetings. The review team also discussed academic appeals and complaints processes with staff and students.

2.95 Students who met the review team confirmed that they knew how to make a complaint and that this process was clearly conveyed to them at induction. Students described complaints they had made and how the College had responded, for example by the College purchasing more library materials and updating their library resources.

2.96 Staff who met the review team stated that the number of complaints had fallen in the 2014-15 academic year, explaining that many student comments and complaints were due to finance issues and problems with the infrastructure of the building. Minutes from the latest Complaints and Grievance Committee meeting in September 2015 indicate that complaints are being resolved, and copies of these minutes are sent routinely to each Head of School. However, there is no detail regarding the complaints within these minutes, merely case numbers, a brief statement of action and whether the complaint has been closed or not. Although staff have logged complaints over time using a spreadsheet, these data have yet to be analysed or monitored for enhancement purposes.

2.97 Given that the College has not recognised the value of complaints as a form of feedback which can contribute to enhancing the student learning opportunities, and the lack of systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of the complaints procedures, the review team

recommends that the College monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the complaints procedure and use the outcomes for development and enhancement purposes.

2.98 In relation to academic appeals, students are encouraged to contact the Academic Appeals Committee but it is not specified who sits on this committee or how to contact them. The section in the Student Handbook focuses exclusively on student complaints and it is unclear from the information offered in the Handbook how a student would make an academic appeal.

2.99 The review team was provided with the Appeal Form for Higher National Diploma Programmes. This invites students to make a 100-word statement detailing why they disagree with their awarded grade, and to give clear reasons why they should be awarded the grade they had anticipated. Students are then invited to meet their lecturer to formally discuss the reasoning for their academic appeal. This is termed the 'student interview'. The lecturer and student both sign and date the bottom of the Appeal Form detailing the outcome. Pearson's February 2015 Academic Management Review confirmed that policies were in place for managing student appeals, and these detailed the processes for instigating an appeal and how to appeal their grade with Pearson.

2.100 The College's Assessment Development Cycle briefly mentions that students have the opportunity to appeal their grade within a 'time period', but it is not clear at which stage, or what the time limit is. Students who met the review team explained their understanding of the appeals process, in which they could make a written statement to the Head of School within two weeks of receiving their grade. The team was made aware of one example of internal resolution following a student appeal.

2.101 At the review visit, the review team were given an example of a draft Academic Appeals and Complaints Form featuring an updated appeals section. However, there appeared to be some misunderstanding as to what kind of appeal this details. The draft form describes how to appeal a decision made by the Complaints and Grievance Committee, or a complaint within an educational provider, as opposed to specifying how to make an academic appeal against a result. The form features the contact details and website of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) and the only mention of 'academic appeals' is in a list of examples of incidents that the OIA can resolve. While this is a student's ultimate right to have an unresolved matter considered by an independent external body there is no guidance on the form as to how to appeal at a College level or on what basis an appeal can be lodged (for example, whether appeal against academic judgement is permitted). As the College became a member of the OIA Scheme in September 2015 the College's own appeals procedures for challenging an academic decision, and how these relate to the awarding organisation and the OIA, will need to be clarified to students.

2.102 Similarly, there is there is a lack of guidance as to whom students can present academic appeals to, and which member of staff makes the final judgment in regards to an academic appeal decision. Staff whom the team met reported that Heads of School made the final decision, and clarified that the Principal's role relates only to appeals against misconduct decisions. The original academic appeals form does not reference this, and the draft academic appeals form only mentions the OIA. The document fails to outline students' options for academic appeal. Students are not encouraged to contact their Head of School, the Principal or Pearson in relation to their academic results, despite their right to do so.

2.103 Pearson requires Centres to have their own appeals procedure, and advises that students 'cannot appeal to Pearson without first going through the appeals process of your centre'. Students should have access to a clearly written and accessible appeals procedure

that is easy to find, with grounds for an academic appeal clearly stated and terminology explained.

2.104 Neither the complaints procedure detailed in the student handbook, nor the draft update to the complaints procedure presented at the review visit sufficiently detail the academic appeals procedure. Students are not clearly informed of their right to appeal their assessment judgements. There is confusion between appeals relating to academic results, and appeals of complaints decisions. As a result, staff are unsure of who makes the final decision in regards to academic appeals.

2.105 The review team considered that the information provided to students about the right of academic appeal lacks clarity, including distinguishing complaints, appeals about complaints and academic appeals. Furthermore, it does not make clear where responsibilities for academic appeals lie within the College, or how College decisions relate to the role of the awarding organisation and the OIA. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College design and implement a clear, accessible and robust academic appeals procedure, which identifies each stage of the appeal process to staff and students, the responsibilities for decision making and the options available to challenge the outcome of an appeal through external bodies.

2.106 The review team concludes that students have been unable to access fair, reliable information regarding academic appeals and there is confusion regarding who makes the final decision in regards to academic appeals. The level of risk is considered moderate as the College can take prompt action to ensure that this matter is remedied. For these reasons, the review team concludes that Expectation B9 is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not 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

2.107 The HND Health and Social Care includes a mandatory 200 hour work placement element which contributes to the achievement of the learning outcomes of the programme. Other than this arrangement, the College is not formally involved in working with others as defined in the Expectation.

2.108 Students either find their own work placement, are already in a work setting when they commence the programme, or they receive help from the College. This help is provided through a formal arrangement with Capita, which has a national database of care homes and approaches institutions requesting work experience opportunities for students. Capita is informed of the College requirements and undertakes visits to premises. College lecturers themselves have professional links with care homes and trusts. At the time of the review visit there were 104 students undertaking work experience placements with around 30 providers.

2.109 The review team tested the Expectation by reading a placement portfolio, attendant documents and through meetings with senior staff, teaching and placement staff and students. The portfolio is quite extensive, in setting out a range of tasks to be achieved, including a job description, personal development plan, work-placement diary and a reflective essay.

2.110 There are logs of the work experience being undertaken and attendance registers which are signed off by the placement establishment and the College. A Pearson Standards Verifier also inspects the logs and conducts audits. Although professional work-place monitoring is undertaken, placement staff are not involved in summative assessment.

2.111 The review team found that placement staff liaise with institutional supervisors and communicate regularly via telephone and email. Problems are dealt with swiftly and efficiently.

2.112 At the end of the work experience, signatures are required from both the placement provider and the College to confirm that the required learning opportunity has been provided, that the student has fulfilled the expected role within the placement provider and that the requisite number of hours have been completed.

2.113 The work experience placement process works consistently well under capable direction and care from placement staff and institutional supervisors. The student portfolio is well categorised, detailed, reflective and evaluative. The review team found that the placement work experience element of the programme is mature and well organised and managed. Therefore, the team concluded that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.114 The College does not offer research degrees and therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.115 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities at the College, the review team matched its findings to the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team also carefully considered the progress made by the College in response to the report of the Concerns Scheme Investigation.

2.116 The review team identified two features of good practice, one relating to the individualised support for students, the other relating to the opportunities provided to engage students as partners.

2.117 Of the 10 applicable Expectations in Part B the review team concludes that seven of these are met and three are not met, each of those not met being judged a moderate risk. Furthermore, of the Expectations met, four are judged to be moderate risk.

2.118 In relation to the Expectations not met the review team has made six recommendations: two concerning the development and approval of new programmes in the light of the College's plans to develop new provision; two relating to admission appeal procedures and evaluation of processes; two relating to evaluating student complaints procedures, and designing and implementing academic appeals procedures; and one relating to the development of a strategic approach to College-wide enhancement

2.119 In relation to the Expectations met but judged to be a moderate risk, the review team has made five recommendations: two relating to the staff development strategy and the use of information to improve learning, teaching and achievement; one relating to the strategic oversight of assessment to ensure consistency; one relating to the systematic development of action plans to address issues raised by Standards Verifiers; and one relating to identifying cross-College themes from annual monitoring.

2.120 The review team considers that the College has made progress in response to the Concerns Scheme Investigation report; where insufficient progress has been made this has informed the team's recommendations, principally in relation to development and approval of programmes.

2.121 Based on the number of Expectations not met and judged to be a moderate risk, the review team concludes that the quality of learning opportunities **requires improvement** to 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 provides a range of information, including the College website designed for prospective as well as current students, the Student Handbook, programme handbooks, and the College VLE (known as stponline). The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing the above information taking account of the College's responsibilities for information defined by Pearson. The team also discussed information provision with students and staff.

3.2 Information for prospective students is accessible via the College website. The website has sections for prospective and current students, information about fees, the student experience, the campus and links to the College E-Learning system. Programme information pages link to Pearson's website. Information for parents is also available detailing the qualifications required to study at St Patrick's and details of 'real-world' practical assignments and experiences.

3.3 The responsibility for website information and accuracy rests with the marketing team, staff from each school and SMT. The website content for each programme is reviewed, evaluated and approved before being published. Any changes to website content are approved by the Dean of Quality, Standards and Research and the Principal. Information regarding the College's mission, strategic aims and strategy is both publicly available to view on the College website, and detailed to staff and students in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook.

3.4 While the College has plans to develop new provision, including with international providers such as Concordia University, current information on the website provides only a link to that university without any indication of the nature of the relationship or the programmes which students might be able to apply for in the future. Staff informed the review team that the College has plans to link master's degree courses with Concordia in 2016, subject to approval from the relevant awarding bodies.

3.5 Each student is provided with a handbook detailing programme specifications and unit assessments, as well as College policies, procedures and information about living in London. A section on student responsibilities details what the College expects from students. Likewise, the College sets out what students can expect from the College in the Student Handbook's Student Charter.

3.6 All course publications and activities associated with admission are approved by Pearson and are issued by College staff to students at induction. These include curriculum and assessment details and methods, entry criteria, unit aims, structure and learning outcomes. Programme specifications are also available. Once enrolled, students also have access to online materials, progress profiles and information from the College VLE.

3.7 Students are provided with information about opportunities to develop transferrable skills, undertake work placements and volunteering activities, and links to engineering and business, with talks given by industry experts. Students whom the review team met reported

satisfaction with the information they had received prior to starting their programme and found these materials to be relevant.

3.8 Detailed records of students' learning and achievement are issued by Pearson following successful completion of the programme. This is supplemented by a College record of student grades and progress, managed by an Academic Administrator. On confirmation of their progress profile by the College, students can apply for an official certificate or award using Edexcel Online.

3.9 Quality assurance and enhancement are documented in the College's Course Management Quality Process Life Cycle and its Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook. The College has responded effectively to the recommendation in the Concerns Scheme Investigation report and updated Appendix A of the Handbook to accurately report its now-revised recruitment and admissions procedures (reported on more fully under Expectation B2).

3.10 In summary, the information available through the College's website, VLE and direct to students is monitored and updated regularly, is fit for purpose and generally consistent. The College has addressed a further recommendation of the Concerns Scheme Investigation report relating to the accuracy and reliability of information, and in having in place a procedure to ensure third parties are aware of inaccuracies in the information they publish about the College, should this be needed. Students confirmed that the information provided to them by the College is clear, useful and appropriate. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.11 In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook

3.12 The College has responded to those issues in the Concerns Scheme Investigation report relating to information and the review team concludes that, overall, the information available through the College's website, VLE and direct to students is monitored and updated regularly, is fit for purpose and generally consistent. On that basis the single Expectation is met and the review team concludes that the quality of information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 St Patrick's International College considers itself to be a 'learning organisation' and over the past five years has introduced a number of changes in response to feedback from both internal and external stakeholders. The Learning and Teaching Strategy 2015-20 sets out six strategies to enhance student learning opportunities. These relate to: customer care, a student-centred approach to teaching, learning and assessment, widening participation, use of technologies, research-informed approach to learning and teaching, and the development of industry-focused programmes.

4.2 The College has a Student Experience Department headed by the Director of Enterprise and Student Experience, and a revised Student Council for 2015. The Department of Academic Learning and Enhancement (DALE) supports students to improve their academic skills and assists them in the submission of their assignments. During 2014 the College made a commitment to improving progression, upgraded the VLE revised its admissions procedures, provided staff training on classroom management, set up learning centres, developed the E-library and promoted digital literacy.

4.3 The review team examined examples of enhancement provided by the College, scrutinised minutes of the Academic Board, SMT and the Student Council, and met senior and academic staff, students and newly elected members of the Student Council.

4.4 The College is responsive to feedback from students and other stakeholders, and has made a number of changes to improve the student learning experience and support its policy of widening access. During 2015, it introduced the St Patrick's Pledge which provides free teaching support for students after their initial two-year registration period, up to the end of their five-year registration period with Pearson. It recently introduced Assessment-led Teaching which monitors student progress throughout the term. In response to feedback from the Student Council and the Student Experience Team, the College changed the focus of its student experience activities from entertainment to Skills Based options

4.5 There has also been a number of enhancement initiatives by schools. These include a fashion show (School of Art and Design), a visit to a court of law (School of Law), and an agreement with Capita to provide placements for Health and Social Care students (addressed under Expectation B10). Although many of the school-led activities enhance the student experience, the review team could not find evidence that these are evaluated and monitored on a regular basis at College-level, and they therefore remain within schools.

4.6 The library has been updated and the College VLE (sponline) has been improved. In 2014, the College gave over 4,000 tablet computers to students who displayed the specified motivation and levels of attendance, an arrangement which has not been continued. The College publishes a journal to which staff can contribute, and in October 2015 held a Conference on staff development. It plans to subscribe to an online education programmes' provider offering a wide variety of courses, including ICT, which will initially provide opportunities for staff development but will also be available to students at a later date.

4.7 The College has been proactive in the formation and reformation of the Student Council, and the recently elected Council has been structured around key roles for various officers such as welfare and academic matters. However, the involvement of students in determining enhancement activities is at the early stages of development, and the Student Council has yet to fully establish its objectives for the forthcoming academic year. Furthermore, minutes of a meeting of the previous Student Council are critical of how the College engaged students in important issues such as the relocation to new premises.

4.8 Students were unclear about the purpose of the Department of Academic Learning and Enhancement (DALE), and the College's theme of digital literacy, although the College views these as key elements of its support for and enhancement of student learning.

4.9 The College described a number of proposed enhancement activities, including the provision of a simulation system to assist Health and Social Care students to obtain the practical experience they need for their intended profession. However, these are at the early stages of development, and are school based.

4.10 The review team was unable to find evidence of enhancement being clearly driven at the strategic level. The majority of initiatives cited by the College as examples of enhancement are either action taken in response to external review processes, or have been school or programme-based innovations, which have benefited students on specific programmes. Although some reference is made in the minutes of SMT and the Academic Board to enhancement activities, they do not provide evidence that the College takes deliberate steps to enhance the quality of learning opportunities across its entire provision. Furthermore, members of SMT could not clearly articulate how enhancement is driven across the College. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College develop a strategic approach to College-wide enhancement which requires deliberate steps to improve the quality of student learning opportunities.

4.11 The team recognises that the move to new premises has necessitated significant investment in refurbishment and equipment to produce accommodation fit for the purpose of an educational establishment and that this investment has been led by senior management. Furthermore, the team recognises that action has been taken to improve the teaching and learning opportunities for students in response to the QAA Concerns Scheme Investigation and the previous QAA review of the College. Notwithstanding these actions the expectation is not met as the College does not take a strategic overview of enhancement activities that are discussed, agreed and evaluated through its deliberative committees. However, the College is responsive to feedback from its stakeholders and has introduced a number of initiatives to improve the quality of the learning experience. The risk is therefore moderate as the College recognises the need for enhancement but as yet does not have the necessary systems in place to ensure that it is embedded in all aspects of programme development, delivery, assessment, monitoring and review, and in its procedures, for example relating to complaints and academic appeals.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.13 There is one Expectation within this judgement area which the review team considers is not met with a moderate level of risk. The review team was unable to find evidence of enhancement being clearly driven at the strategic level and has made a recommendation to address this. The risk is judged to be moderate as the College recognises the need for enhancement but as yet does not have the necessary systems in place to ensure that it is embedded.

4.14 The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement** to meet UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy

Findings

5.1 The College perceives digital literacy as a means of enhancing the students' learning experiences, empowering them through education to change their lives. This powerful precept and message is slowly assuming an operational culture, however, the review team found that the majority of students it met were not familiar with this terminology. Several year-two students were aware that the College was promoting digital literacy, which is being supported through developing abilities to use IT as a learning tool. [M9] More generally, students interpreted the concept as a means to gain IT competence at various levels of advancement, mentioning in particular support delivered by the library-based Department of Academic Development and Enhancement (DALE). Other students claimed the concept of digital literacy is being addressed without recipients necessarily being aware of processes.

5.2 Support is given through one-to-one engagement workshops on a range of skills, including referencing and how to research. DALE is particularly active during induction and in the essential skills sessions operated over the first year, five hours each week. Students also receive emails, information via posters and visits from DALE specialists with offers of bespoke help and assistance. Some students said that they were required to request assistance if it was needed at higher levels of development. There are e-library workshops twice weekly where training is given researching e-books and using the online library.

5.3 The Learning Centre is well-equipped with computers although there were said to be issues with the functionality of some. Lecturers also bring students to the Learning Centre. At the greater heights of development, SMT hoped that capable students in IT would access the College's chosen online training package to enhance their own training needs, once this was made available.

5.4 In practice, the VLE is said to enable and enhance work in learning, teaching and assessment for all College programmes. This is claimed to promote flexibility and development towards independent learning, facilitating 'time, pace and place' that suits students. Full academic and technological support is available and is also supported by the 'message function', which operates outside the email system, enabling participants' communication with peers and staff as part of the VLE.

5.5 The VLE is helpful in both formative and summative assessments, enabling lecturer-student dialogue and discussion. The system also facilitates various interactive assessment tools. Providing instant feedback, it can operate as a reference point for lecturers to realign lesson plans to suit the individual needs of learners, and in such ways it is claimed to enhance formative assessments and the marking and grading of students' work. The VLE is therefore able to assist pedagogic methods in encouraging interactive and personalised communication. Successful and productive negotiation is able to create and maximise the digital interface of staff and students on stponline and increase engagement towards the stronger command of digital literacy.

5.6 The College mentions that the VLE system is in a transition period into a newer version, affirming that it is more pedagogically focused and offering greater creativity and innovation, thereby taking the existing VLE into a more active learning and teaching arena. As a further aspect of this development, SMT members are currently in the process of subscribing to an online education programmes' provider offering a wide variety of courses, including ICT.

5.7 The Dean of Teaching and Learning is also developing a new proposal for Assessment-led Teaching. This completely new approach locates a major benefit in the more rapid and concentrated identification of at-risk students for whom there can be special workshops.

5.8 The College now operates a strict policy that all assignments must be word-processed and uploaded on the VLE. This practice develops skills in Microsoft Office and in using the VLE.

5.9 Opportunities for staff development towards improving skills in digital literacy exist in all schools. The College admits that the levels of support provided are uneven. To address this, the SMT has suggested that there should be a College-wide approach to ICT support and development. Plans are in train to award in-house certificates for staff members who undertake and complete ICT-specific programmes offered through the College's chosen online training service provider.

5.10 While acknowledging the rhetorically powerful narrative and illustrations of practical progress and enhancement the College conveyed in its documents and during the review team's onsite visit, the team nevertheless found that the concept and practice of digital literacy was not being effectively promoted, planned, structurally led and coordinated as fully as it could be at the most senior levels across the College. In the final meeting, senior management representatives acknowledged that more top-down leadership is required towards developing and managing the potential of digital literacy.

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 22-25 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) 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.

Awarding organisation

An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications

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.

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.

Self-evaluation document

A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

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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