Higher Education Review of Stafford College

November 2015

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Stafford College. The review took place from 30 November to 3 December 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Phil Bassett
- Miss Elizabeth Shackels
- Mr Michael Rubin (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 4. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

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

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

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

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

Amended judgement - June 2017

Introduction

In November 2015, Stafford College underwent a Higher Education Review, which resulted in the following judgements: the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body and other awarding organisation meets UK expectations; the quality of student learning opportunities requires improvement to meet UK expectations; the quality of the information about learning opportunities meets UK expectations; and the enhancement of student learning opportunities requires improvement to meet UK expectations.

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

The College published an action plan in April 2016 describing how it intended to address the recommendations and good practice identified in the review, which it addressed over the following 10 months to demonstrate how it has implemented that plan. During this period, the College underwent a merger with Newcastle-under-Lyme College to form a new institution, the Newcastle and Stafford College Group (NSCG). From November 2016, responsibility for addressing the action plan transferred to the NSCG management team.

The follow-up process included regular progress updates and culminated in the review team's scrutiny of College progress reports and supporting documentary evidence, along with a one-day visit on 15 February 2017 conducted by two reviewers. During the visit the review team met students and staff to discuss progress and triangulate the evidence base received over the preceding months.

The visit confirmed that the recommendations relating to the quality of student learning opportunities and the enhancement of student learning opportunities had been successfully addressed. Actions against recommendations and good practice relating to the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of the provider's information about learning opportunities, which received positive judgements, had also been completed on schedule and contributed to the progress against all judgement areas.

QAA Board decision and amended judgements

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

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

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

Findings from the follow-up process

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

Recommendation 1 - Expectation B3
With regard to clarifying the observation and review of teaching, the provider is in the process of implementing a standard approach across all higher education provision. Given the timing of the merger, this was not fully embedded at the time of the visit, although the processes outlined are clear, staff demonstrate a sound understanding, and plans are in place to develop this area further. The review team concluded that the provider was making sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 2 - Expectation B3 and Enhancement
There is now a clear strategic approach to the analysis and use of data from learning and teaching observations for the purposes of enhancement. Changes to the reporting framework, management arrangements and committee structure have signalled a more formal analysis of data and systematic monitoring of action plans. Although examples from the new merged entity were relatively limited at the time of the visit, this approach has the potential to be effective. The review team concluded that the provider was making sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 3 - Expectation B8
More structured arrangements for the strategic oversight of programme monitoring and review have been put in place, including a revised action planning process, new quality team arrangements and a new deliberative structure with defined responsibilities for the oversight of higher education provision. The new approach is clearly outlined, well understood by staff and has the potential to be effective and robust when fully implemented. The review team concluded that the provider was making sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 4 - Expectations B7, B8 and Enhancement
The provider uses a wide range of data as part of the programme monitoring and review cycle and has adopted a more formal and systematic approach to its analysis and incorporation into annual monitoring and review processes. Responsibility for ensuring appropriate use of data for assurance and enhancement purposes rests with the new quality team and is enacted through the new deliberative structure. Appropriate steps have been taken to enable data to be used more effectively and the review team concluded that the provider was making sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 5 - Expectation C
Detailed information relating to the recognition of prior learning is now published on the provider website for all current and prospective candidates, and eligibility is discussed with students at the point of interview. Discussions are also underway with the awarding body to further strengthen signposting through student handbooks. The review team considered that the provider was making sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 6 - Enhancement
A strategic approach to enhancement is articulated for all higher education provision. A number of mechanisms now exist for the sharing of good practice, and changes to the annual monitoring process provide a sound basis for the identification and use of data for enhancement purposes. There are good examples of the dissemination of good practice and enhancement activity, although it was too soon for a fully developed collegiate approach to be evident within the new merged institution. However, processes to identify, disseminate and monitor the impact of enhancement activity are now in place and the review team concluded that the provider was making sufficient progress against this recommendation..

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Stafford College

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

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

Good practice

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

- The high level of information and personalised support provided through the admissions and interview process that meets student needs (Expectation B2).
- The range of opportunities provided for students to engage positively in their learning experience at all levels of the College (Expectation B5).

Recommendations

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

By June 2016:

- clarify the processes for the observation and review of teaching as they relate to higher education provision (Expectation B3)
- implement a strategic approach to the analysis of data available from the teaching and learning observations higher education provision to inform the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities (Expectation B3, Enhancement)
- develop a robust deliberative structure for the strategic oversight of the processes for, and outcomes of, programme monitoring and review (Expectation B8)
- ensure that data, including external examiner reports, are used effectively for the assurance and enhancement of learning opportunities (Expectations B7, B8, Enhancement)
- ensure consistency in the information provided to students on opportunities for the recognition of prior learning (Expectation C)
- take deliberate steps at senior management level to ensure the College can identify, disseminate and monitor the impact of good practice and enable the enhancement of learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

The College considers employability to be a key feature and strength of its provision and each of the four pillars presented in the College Strategic Plan relate to the development of partnerships with employers to support student learning and professional development. Student employability is developed through teaching and assessing employability skills through the curriculum, creating strong links between curriculum areas and employers and by facilitating placements and work-based learning within programmes. The College also

promotes the Staffordshire University Graduate Attributes across programmes validated by the University. Staff recruited to teach are often drawn from industry and other contributors are encouraged through extracurricular activities such as those facilitated during Review and Development weeks.

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

About Stafford College

Stafford College (the College) is a general further education college based in Stafford, offering further and higher education programmes across 15 subject areas. The College has 2,800 students, of whom approximately 350 were registered on higher education programmes including foundation degrees, Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, a BA (Hons) programme and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education. The main campus is based in the centre of Stafford with a separate Technology and STEM campus located close by at Palmbourne.

The College vision is 'to raise learner aspirations and achievements through excellence in performance and successful partnerships' and this is underpinned by four strategic pillars: achieving outstanding; energised curriculum; developing our communities; and securing our future and diversification. These pillars are outlined in the College Strategic Plan that identifies key features and critical success factors. A new Higher Education (HE) Strategy is currently being implemented although a further draft HE Strategy has been produced pending approval by the Board of Governors. The College Strategic Plan is complemented by four main strategic documents covering further and higher education, namely the Quality Strategy; the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy; the Curriculum Strategy; and the Student Voice Strategy. These strategies and the quality cycle are recorded in a Staff Quality Manual which was being updated during the review period.

The strategic direction for the College is set and overseen by the Board of Governors and led by the Principal and Senior Management Team/Executive. At the time of the review, the College had an Interim Principal, appointed in November 2015. The Senior Management Team/Executive comprises the Deputy Principal, Head of Student Success, Head of Finance and Executive Director(s) for business, partnerships, resources and infrastructure, although a new management structure is in development. The Senior Management Team/Executive meets regularly and is augmented by the Head of Higher Education and the Curriculum Area Managers to form the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) which also meets on a regular basis. Course Leaders are appointed to each programme who report to Curriculum Area Managers with responsibilities for further and higher education provision. The Head of Higher Education and Deputy Principal are relatively new in post following a recent restructure of managerial posts. The Deputy Principal has been in post since February 2015 and has strategic responsibility for higher education and operational responsibility as Acting Quality Manager while this latter post is vacant. The Head of Higher Education also has operational responsibility and is accountable to the Deputy Principal on a day-to-day basis.

During 2013-15, the College operated the Carver model for governance whereby the subcommittees of the Board of Governors were removed and all issues were discussed by the Board as a whole. The Quality Committee referred to in the Staff Quality Manual was therefore disbanded and issues pertaining to higher education were raised by staff at SLT or Curriculum Area Management meetings as appropriate. The HE Forum has met periodically to bring together staff with responsibilities for higher education programmes. At the time of the review, the meeting structure was under review and a draft committee structure was presented which proposed to reinstate subcommittees including a new HE Management Group and HE Quality Improvement Group in addition to the HE Forum, although this

proposal was not fully developed and has yet to be approved by the Board of Governors. As a consequence of the above approach, evidence of the consideration of issues pertaining to higher education programmes within the College over the last two years is limited.

In addition to the changes in senior management posts, governance arrangements and HE strategy outlined above, the College has also undertaken a recent restructure resulting in some relocation of higher education programmes within curriculum areas. After a period of relative stability with Staffordshire University as the single awarding body, the College has also recently entered into a direct relationship with Pearson for the delivery of Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, has developed Higher Level Apprenticeships, and is anticipating a period of growth in its higher education provision. The College has also begun to deliver a programme at Level 6 and is considering further partnerships with degree-awarding bodies.

The majority of higher education programmes are delivered through a long-standing partnership arrangement with Staffordshire University (the University). This includes foundation degrees, a BA (Honours) top-up degree, a Postgraduate Certificate in Education and Higher National Diplomas/Certificates operated under the University's Pearson licence. In addition to the partnership agreement, all programmes have a separate schedule of agreement that is detailed and time constrained. University-validated provision is governed by the academic regulations of the University and quality assurance procedures are outlined in the University Quality Assurance Handbook and UK Collaborative Handbook. The University appoints a Programme Adviser to each programme to liaise with the College Course Leader and also appoints a Partnership Manager to oversee the arrangement with the College. A new partnership agreement was agreed with Pearson in August 2015 for the delivery of four new Higher National awards under the College's own status as a Licence Centre, two of which started in September 2015. Quality assurance procedures for this provision are devised by the College in accordance with the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment although processes draw heavily on the practice established with the University. The Staff Quality Manual and HE Course Leaders Handbook provide internal guidance to staff on College processes and the requirements of both awarding partners.

The College was subject to an Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) by QAA in March 2011. The review resulted in six features of good practice pertaining to partnership working, staff development, student support and the clarity of information on College policies, procedures and guidance. Student support continues to be a positive feature of higher education provision, although it was less evident how other areas of good practice have been maintained. For example, not all College policies and procedures have been subject to regular review with a number of examples of documents being out of date and examples of staff development specific to higher education were less evident. The review also noted four recommendations where action by the College was desirable. These included developing a strategic approach to employer engagement, embedding student representation, developing the virtual learning environment and improving access to programme specifications and the review team saw evidence of how these had been progressed.

Explanation of the findings about Stafford College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* 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 does not have degree-awarding powers and delivers higher education programmes in accordance with formal partnership agreements with the University of Staffordshire and Pearson. The University is responsible for validating programmes, approving entry standards to the programme, monitoring arrangements for its delivery and for the academic standards of all awards granted in its name. The College's responsibilities for the maintenance of standards are specified in the University Quality Assurance Handbook and UK Collaborative Handbook. Similarly, Pearson is responsible for designing and approving Higher National programmes that the College delivers as an approved Licence Centre and responsibilities for maintaining academic standards are outlined in the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment.

1.2 The review team considered documents provided by the College including partnership agreements, awarding partner documentation and programme specifications. In addition, the review team met staff during the review visit to discuss the reference points for maintaining standards.

1.3 The University's validation and approval process ensures that programmes are designed to meet *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. The University

provides programme specifications and module specifications for all of its validated awards which reflect these key frames of reference. Additionally, the University requires all external examiners to confirm that the delivery of programmes aligns with these relevant frameworks. The University has a defined process for the termination of a programme where unsatisfactory provision may be identified through annual monitoring, reports from external examiners, programme advisers or other external bodies.

1.4   BTEC Higher National qualifications are located on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and are awarded by Pearson. The programme and module specifications for these programmes are designed and approved by Pearson and titling and unit development is in accordance with the regulatory requirements of the QCF. In addition, these awards have been developed to meet the requirements of subject and qualification benchmark statements and whenever possible, have been approved by professional institutions. Staff the team met demonstrated a sound understanding of the relevant frameworks and the requirements of the awarding partners with regards to the maintenance of academic standards.

1.5   The responsibility for allocating each qualification to the appropriate level of the FHEQ and for considering subject benchmarks rests with the University and Pearson and the College is cognisant of these responsibilities and the relevant frameworks that apply. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.6   The College uses the University academic framework for the design, delivery and monitoring of programmes validated by this awarding body as outlined in the University Quality Assurance Handbook and UK Collaborative Handbook. University awards are governed by the University Academic Award Regulations for the Undergraduate Modular Framework. The University appoints external examiners for all of its awards and staff from the College attend the University assessment award and progression boards. Pearson programmes are managed in accordance with the BTEC Centre Guide and the College conducts assessment boards to determine progression and awards. Pearson allocates an external subject verifier for each Higher National qualification. The academic frameworks and regulations of the awarding body and awarding organisation are supplemented by a range of internal College policies, regulations and guidance documents.

1.7   The review team considered documentation produced by the awarding partners and the College that define the academic frameworks and regulations relevant to higher education provision. In addition the team discussed these frameworks with senior managers and academic staff during the visit.

1.8   The College has produced a Quality Strategy, Staff Quality Manual and a HE Course Leaders Handbook to support staff who deliver higher education programmes in understanding the responsibilities for academic standards. In addition to the University assessment requirements, a College Assessment Policy applies to all qualifications delivered by the College and recognises the academic regulations of the awarding body. An internal verification/moderation procedure is applied to assessed work. The College organises its own assessment boards for the Higher National programmes and maintains a detailed record of the proceedings. The College policies and procedures are subject to a schedule for regular review, but in a number of instances the designated dates have not been met and many are written from a further education perspective. However, staff the review team met during the review visit were familiar with the requirements of the College and awarding partners' policies and procedures.

1.9   The review team considers that academic frameworks and regulations are in place that govern how academic credit and qualifications are awarded. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.10　　The definitive record of programmes delivered by the College is maintained by the University and Pearson, as the degree-awarding body and organisation respectively. A list of the College's current higher education provision is made available to staff, students and the public on the College website. All qualifications are outlined in programme specifications that are approved by the awarding partners and made available on the College website and the virtual learning environment. Module descriptors outline the assessment details, indicative content and learning outcomes and are made available to students in module guides.

1.11　　The review team reviewed definitive records used by the College including programme specifications and module descriptors linked to both awarding partners and discussed these with senior managers and academic staff during the review.

1.12　　The University validation process ensures that programme specifications for each award are produced and approved at the validation stage and form the definitive record for delivery. The University retains responsibility for ensuring the curriculum remains current and approves all changes through its quality assurance procedures. Staff the team met demonstrated awareness of the reference points for delivery and of the formal University processes for modifying programmes. For Pearson programmes, programme and module specifications are designed and provided by the awarding organisation and are used by teams as the definitive reference point for delivery. The Head of Higher Education is responsible for centrally maintaining programme specifications, and achieves this using a paper-based system. Responsibility for updating the College internal definitive record rests with the Information Manager.

1.13　　The awarding body and organisation retain overall responsibility for maintaining definitive records. The College ensures that these records are made readily available online to staff and students and are used as a reference point for delivery and assessment. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation:　　Met
Level of risk:　　Low

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

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

Findings

1.14   The academic standards of awards are set and approved by the awarding body and awarding organisation through their respective processes for programme validation. Prior to submitting programmes for University or Pearson approval, the College considers the proposal to ensure it reflects College curriculum planning priorities. The College also designs aspects of the learning, teaching and assessment methods within the approved programmes with support provided internally and from the awarding partners on academic standards.

1.15   The review team scrutinised key documentation pertaining to the programme approval process including awarding partner procedures, internal processes and associated submission documents. The review team also met teaching teams, senior academic staff, support staff and students to discuss the approach.

1.16   The College has a degree of responsibility for the design of learning, teaching and assessment methods. For example, in Pearson programmes the course team has authority over the choice of optional modules and the College makes effective use of the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment and programme specifications when designing programmes. In addition Curriculum Area Managers liaise regularly with the University Programme Advisor/Partnership Manager and with the Pearson Regional Quality Manager to ensure that programmes are developed in accordance with the requirements of the awarding partners. The College Staff Quality Manual and HE Course Leaders Handbook provides guidance on the quality assurance processes and staff the review team met demonstrated a clear understanding of the academic standards required when designing assessments. The College internal moderation process promotes the standardisation of assignment briefs and ensures that they have been internally verified or moderated before being made available to students.

1.17   The awarding partners have ultimate responsibility for ensuring academic standards are appropriately set and undertake this through their respective approval processes. The College meets its responsibility for programme and assessment design within this context. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.18   The University is ultimately responsible for the award of its credit and qualifications and manages this through its quality assurance processes and through formally constituted assessment boards. The University provides the College with guidelines on assessment to ensure staff are fully conversant with the approach. For Pearson programmes, the College is responsible for ensuring the appropriate award of credit and qualifications through its own assessment processes and assessment boards, although Pearson provides information on assessment design through the BTEC Centre Guide for Assessment and through programme specifications. The College supports a common approach to assessment through its internal policies and guidelines and through the work undertaken by the Learning Development Unit who work in conjunction with Course Leaders and Curriculum Area Managers to promote staff understanding of the assessment of learning outcomes.

1.19   The review team scrutinised documentation including relevant policies and procedures, handbooks, programme specifications and external examiner reports. The team also discussed the approach to maintaining academic standards with a range of staff and students during the visit.

1.20   College staff demonstrate an awareness of the awarding partners' requirements for assessment and of the relevant frameworks for assessing intended learning outcomes. External examiners confirm that assessments have been appropriately written against learning outcomes and students met the review team met indicated that assignment briefs clearly differentiate between academic levels and link to learning outcomes. The College has developed an internal moderation processes to promote the standardisation of assignment briefs and to ensure that assessment decisions accurately reflect the learning outcomes for that module. Staff attend assessment boards held by the awarding body to consider progression and achievement for University programmes. The College holds an internal assessment board for Pearson programmes which are structured and recorded. External examiner and subject verifier reports confirm that academic standards are achieved.

1.21   The review team considers that appropriate processes are in place to ensure that the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment and is in line with the relevant frameworks for academic standards. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.22   The awarding partners undertake periodic reviews to ensure that academic standards are maintained through the delivery of programmes at the College. Annual programme monitoring is also undertaken for all programmes. For University programmes, course teams produce Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) to a University template which are forwarded to the University. For Pearson programmes, course teams produce Self-Assessment Reports (SARs) that consider similar information (see section B8 for more detail). The Deputy Principal acts as the College Quality Nominee for Pearson and is the first point of contact for Subject Verifiers' engagement with the College to monitor academic standards.

1.23   The review team scrutinised documentation pertaining to the review and monitoring of programmes including a range of SARs, AMRs, minutes of meetings and external examiner reports. The review team also met senior and teaching staff at the College to discuss the approach.

1.24   At programme level, AMRs and SARs provide a detailed overview of the programme and draw on a number of sources of evidence regarding academic standards, including external examiner/verifier reports and progression and achievement data. Reports are comprehensive, highlight strengths and weaknesses including a detailed action plan and provide a sound basis for monitoring academic standards. Feedback from staff indicates that these monitoring functions are well embedded at programme level. The Head of Higher Education, and the HE Forum, provide internal monitoring functions to ensure that programme teams undertake their responsibilities for annual monitoring and produce reports that meet the awarding partner requirements. Internally, these reports inform the production of Curriculum Self-Assessment Documents that in turn inform a College-wide Self-Assessment Report. College oversight of annual monitoring outcomes is undertaken through the senior leadership team and through the Performance Management Review process. However, as indicated in Section B8, these synoptic reports and the College arrangements for oversight of the outcomes of annual monitoring do not operate effectively for higher education provision.

1.25   The responsibility for academic standards ultimately rests with the awarding partners and the College fulfils its responsibilities through its engagement in annual monitoring and periodic review at programme level. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.26   The University ensures that programme validation and periodic review panels include at least one academic representative from another higher education institution with expertise in the subject area to comment on academic standards. The University appoints external examiners to each of its awards to review assessment tasks, outcomes and module changes. At least two external examiners are expected to attend each of the University's assessment boards.

1.27   For Pearson programmes, external input is achieved through the involvement of external subject verifiers appointed by the awarding organisation to each programme to ensure that the College is assessing to the appropriate standard. External verifiers visit the College, audit a sample of assessment briefs and assessed work and produce a report. Quality Improvement Plans produced as part of the annual monitoring process are updated to reflect feedback from examiners/verifiers. External subject verifiers are not required to attend the College assessment boards. Pearson appoints a Centre Quality Reviewer to produce an annual Quality Review and Development Report on the College's quality assurance systems, policies and procedures although this has not specifically covered higher education provision to date.

1.28   The review team considered the approach to externality by reviewing documentation produced by the awarding partners and College and through consideration of reports from external parties involved in overseeing standards. In addition, the review team discussed the approach to externality with a range of staff and students.

1.29   Responsibility for the appointment of external validation panel members, external examiners and external verifiers rests with the awarding partners. Staff the team met were conversant with the requirements for the external assessment of their awards and were aware of their responsibilities in providing information and responding to their external examiners/verifiers. Reports from external examiners/verifiers available to the team are comprehensive and predominantly positive, with action points addressed by the programme teams where appropriate.

1.30   The review team considers that the College engages appropriately with the awarding partner procedures for engaging external and independent expertise in setting, approving and maintaining academic standards. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.31   In determining its judgement on the maintenance of academic standards of awards at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is considered low in all cases.

1.32   The approach to maintaining academic standards at the College is defined by the awarding body and by the requirements of the awarding organisation. The College uses the established University academic frameworks, regulations and procedures and has drawn on these to model the College approach to maintaining academic standards for the new Higher National provision with Pearson. Staff are familiar with the responsibilities that are assigned to the College with regards to academic standards and there is significant external engagement and oversight of standards through the awarding body and through the use of external examiners and subject verifiers.

1.33   Overall, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisations at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2　Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1　As outlined in section A3.1, responsibility for the design, development and approval of programmes rests with the awarding partners. For University programmes, the College follows the awarding body validation process and is supported in this by the University. For Pearson provision, the College completes a Pearson Vocational Qualification Approval Form when proposing to deliver a new award and modules are selected from those designed and approved by the awarding organisation. The Pearson Regional Quality Manager also provides practical support and guidance to ensure that programmes are developed in accordance with the awarding organisation's academic framework and regulations. The business and academic propositions for new proposals are considered internally prior to being submitted to the awarding partners.

2.2　The review team scrutinised key documentation pertaining to the programme approval process including awarding partner procedures, internal processes and documents produced by the College as part of these arrangements. The review team also met teaching teams, senior academic staff, support staff and students to discuss the approach.

2.3　When proposing new programmes Course Leaders submit applications to the Curriculum Area Business Planning team to ensure they reflect College curriculum planning priorities. Once approved they are then forwarded to the Head of Higher Education and Deputy Principal for approval before being submitted to the awarding body/organisation. To date, this process has been undertaken on an informal basis and the outcomes of this process are not recorded. However, the College have plans to formalise this approach through a draft new approach that will require approval of initial programme proposals by a formally constituted panel.

2.4　The College Staff Quality Manual and HE Course Leaders Handbook support staff in the development of programmes. Course Leaders, in conjunction with their teams, are responsible for the production of programme handbooks. Handbooks, and specifications where appropriate, are relevantly contextualised to reflect the aims and learning outcomes of the programme and module content. Any changes to awarding organisation specifications are undertaken in conjunction with the Regional Quality Manager support and approval from the subject verifier for the vocational area. Programme advisers from the awarding body provide a highly valuable support function throughout the validation, revalidation and modification process.

2.5　Staff met by the team were familiar with the processes for programme approval and reported that they were well supported by the Head of Higher Education. Although not formalised, some course teams have developed effective links with key stakeholders who influence the design of programmes, for example the Higher Level Apprenticeship in Business and programmes in sport. Students are not currently involved in the College approval processes.

2.6   The College has processes in place to support programme design and the development and approval of programmes, and has plans to strengthen the initial internal stages of this process. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.7   The approach to admissions is detailed in an Admissions Policy made available to staff students and the public. The policy is not specific to higher education, but outlines responsibilities, process and procedures applicable for all programmes. The Deputy Principal is responsible for overseeing the admissions process and the division of responsibility between the College and University regarding recruitment is outlined in the partnership agreement. Information to applicants is provided via the College website, prospectuses, open days and the admissions team. All prospective students are invited for a meeting with the Coordinating Lecturer and subsequently interviewed as part of the recruitment process.

2.8   The review team considered documentation relevant to the recruitment, selection and admissions process including policies and information available to students through the website. In addition, the team discussed the approach with a range of staff and students during the visit.

2.9   Overall responsibility for admissions resides with the College, except on two programmes where the University has final approval of candidates. Staff the review team met were familiar with the admissions process although the policy itself is overdue its scheduled review and refers to outdated staff structures. The level of information provided to applicants, particularly at the interview stage, is detailed, thorough and easily accessible. Students the review team met were positive about the admissions process, particularly the interview stage, confirming that a high level of flexibility was afforded regarding interview time and date. Feedback is provided to candidates at the interview stage, and where applicants are not considered appropriate for the programme for which they have applied, the College attempts to direct them to an alternative level programme, minimising unsuccessful applications. While there is a procedure for handling admissions appeals, no appeals have been received in the last two years. The review team therefore considers that the high level of information and personalised support provided through the admissions and interview process that meets student needs is **good practice**.

2.10   Induction activities include information on appeals and complaints procedures, assessment, learning resources and programme content, and prepares students well for the requirements of their course. Students who start their course late also receive a thorough induction, demonstrating staff flexibility and desire to meet student needs.

2.11   Overall the review team concludes that the Colleges approach to admissions is effective and appropriate and that the support available to students through this process is particularly positive. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.12   The College Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy outlines the policies and procedures for all College programmes with a primary focus on further education provision. The related Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy develops the policy, identifies further the strategic principles and articulates the criteria for outstanding teaching, learning and assessment across the College. The Strategy describes the key factors for successful implementation and how it will be monitored for impact through internal and external indicators.

2.13   Staff are recruited from industry, undertake mandatory induction activities and, as part of their ongoing development, participate in internal training days, teaching observations and days in industry to maintain expertise in their sector. The College operates a 5:1 model for curriculum delivery whereby the first five weeks of the cycle are taught and the sixth week is allocated for additional Review and Development (RAD) sessions. The approach, and information for students on the respective commitments for teaching and learning, are outlined in the Student Handbook.

2.14   The review team considered documents relevant to teaching and learning including internal policies and strategies, minutes of meetings, annual monitoring activity and details of staff development activities. In addition the review team discussed the approach with senior managers, academic staff and students.

2.15   All academic staff are trained as teachers or are working towards a teacher training qualification that is required within two years of their appointment. Staff the review team met confirmed that they are supported to undertake regular industry updating and wider CPD activities to ensure that the curriculum and delivery remain current. A number of staff have received funding from the College to complete higher degrees with Staffordshire University. Staff teams have completed developmental training with Ofsted-trained inspectors as part of the College's Coaching for Excellence programme and consistently good and outstanding teachers have taken part in a bespoke 'excellence programme' delivered by external specialists to support individuals, teams and courses in reaching and maintaining high performance. Students met during the review were positive about their experience of teaching at the College and considered tutors to be well informed, effective teachers.

2.16   Staff training days are offered by the Learning Development Unit (LDU) to support staff with their understanding of quality assurance responsibilities and with teaching and learning practice. A team of Learning Improvement Facilitators provided further curriculum-specific development although the review team was informed during the visit that these roles have been discontinued. Although the LDU makes use of student module feedback forms to inform staff development provision, planning for higher education staff development is often reactive rather than strategic. Academic staff the review team met cited peer observation and teacher forums as a means of sharing good practice, although industry upskilling days and study for higher qualifications were cited as having had more impact on individuals' teaching and learning practice.

2.17   The College Self-Assessment Report covering further and higher education provision states that more than 80 per cent of all teaching observed is graded as good or better using the Ofsted grading system. Members of staff are observed teaching with an initial observation for developmental purposes and a further observation that is performance-measured based on Ofsted criteria. The same template is used for higher and further education provision and observers are required to tailor implementation for higher education, although there is no documented guidance for observers on appropriate frames of reference in this regard. The team was informed that from September 2015, grades are no longer allocated staff teaching observations on higher education programmes. The review team also heard that a peer review approach has been implemented to support staff engagement in peer observations and that a series of 'drop-in' observations also take place, to consider performance against a chosen theme. The approach to the observation and peer review of teaching is not clearly articulated in College documentation and staff the team met often confused the various approaches, indicating that these processes are neither well understood nor embedded. Documentation provided by the College relating to the peer observation approach incorporates the 'Drop-in Visits Calling Card' even though senior managers identified these as separate processes. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College clarifies the processes for the observation and review of teaching as they relate to higher education provision.

2.18   The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy articulates six aims related to the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. This document is primarily focused on further education and does not differentiate approaches for further and higher education provision. Although the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy refers to the outcomes of student satisfaction surveys, external reviews, internal self-assessment and observation grades as indicators of impact, the review team did not see evidence that the requirements of the policy were being systematically monitored and/or evaluated at a senior level.

2.19   Staff are required to reflect on their teaching and learning practice, their CPD activities and feedback from learners and to set their own action plans which are then recorded on a central software system. This system allows specific objectives to be set by managers and for staff to add two additional, individual objectives. Staff have the opportunity to share their good practice on a section of the virtual learning environment. Although staff described the HE Forum as the place where good practice in teaching was discussed, the minutes of the meetings do not indicate any teaching, learning and assessment initiatives discussed, disseminated and/or implemented across higher education programmes. The review team also did not see evidence of where the information collated from annual monitoring, peer review, learning observations and staff development activities was used by the College to inform the approach to teaching and learning. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College implement a strategic approach to the analysis of data available from the teaching and learning observations of higher education provision to inform the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities.

2.20   The College has strategies and processes in place to ensure that a College-wide approach to learning and teaching is articulated and that staff are supported in their practice. College documentation is geared towards further education and there is a lack of clarity in how processes interrelate and are adapted for higher education programmes. Insufficient emphasis is given to identifying, assuring and enhancing the quality of learning and teaching for higher education programmes and the current governance arrangements (see 'About Stafford College') do not facilitate systematic monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes of such activity. Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of 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

2.21   Key strategies pertaining to the arrangements and resources to support student development include: the Quality Strategy; the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy that sets aims and procedural expectations; and the associated Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy that states that planning and service delivery are explicitly informed by teaching, learning and assessment to add value to the learner experience. The latter document also identifies the criteria that will be used to monitor the impact of the procedures. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy identifies the Curriculum Area Managers as being responsible for monitoring the application of these policies and procedures within their areas and the Deputy Principal as having overall responsibility.

2.22   The review team considered documentation pertaining to the provision and monitoring of support for learning including the outcomes of annual monitoring activity and minutes of meetings and discussed the approach with a range of staff and students.

2.23   Higher education students have dedicated facilities including a study room equipped with computers and printers, a separate IT suite, a quiet room for reflective study and social areas. The Learning Resource Centre houses a large collection of books, journals and reference materials and students on University programmes may also access the University's learning resources and student facilities. Students report general satisfaction with the resources made available to them to support their learning.

2.24   The Student Success Strategy demonstrates the College's commitment to providing equality of opportunity for the development and achievement of all students. The College Safeguarding, Equality & Diversity Group meets six times a year to ensure that all students' needs are considered and addressed. All students are allocated a personal tutor, also referred to as a progress coach, to support them for the duration of their programme and receive additional support from a Learning Mentor when applicable. Students the review team met were very positive when discussing the support received from their tutors and identified them as well informed, supportive, easily accessible and a first point of contact for any issues. Students confirmed that the personal tutors were quick to respond when issues were raised and that they were satisfied with the outcomes reached.

2.25   The College has initiated a number of external partnerships with local employers and agencies to secure enhanced learning opportunities for its students. These include the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) relocating on-site and the development of a number of employer-focused academies onsite. Discussions are ongoing for the College to host the first Microsoft Academy. As a means of ensuring that vocational programmes are supported by well-qualified staff, many are recruited from industry and all staff have the opportunity to undertake an annual work placement or to work closely with local employers. The development of a variety of partnerships with external employers assists the College in developing the University Graduate Attributes that are a requirement of programme validation. Students who had engaged in opportunities for work placement and live briefs were positive about the experiences and were able to identify how these had contributed positively to their learning and assisted them in adopting industry-standard procedures.

2.26   For the last year, the College has structured its curriculum delivery to a model that it considers successful in its further education provision and every sixth week of delivery is

therefore a Review and Development (RAD) week. This week provides the opportunity for students to meet their personal tutor, attend workshops and participate in sessions arranged with employers and external agencies on top of their normal curriculum activities. This initiative has had a positive impact on learning for some groups of students although other students described the week as no more than a reading week, predominantly further-education orientated, or as a continuation of their normal programme. Although RAD week activities had been reported at SMT and a Student Voice Conference meeting, the review team did not see evidence that a systematic evaluation of the impact of this model for higher education students has been undertaken. While aware of the inconsistencies between programmes, the College has not introduced plans to address shortcomings or disseminate the good practice that exists in some areas.

2.27   The College provides a Job Broker Hub that supports students in finding employment including assistance in completing job application forms and the development of CVs. Allied to this is the role of the Recruitment Broker who sources and advertises vacancies from local and national employers and assists students in securing work placements appropriate to their programme. Awareness of these central resources by the students met was not widespread although students were generally positive about the assistance they received, including that from the Library and IT staff available in the recently developed Riverbank Library and Learning Centre.

2.28   The University requirements for annual and periodic programme monitoring include reviews of resources. External examiners/verifiers also have the opportunity to comment on the appropriateness and sufficiency of resources within their reports. These provide an effective basis for evaluating the learning resources provided at programme level. However, the SARs produced at curriculum level are less comprehensive and issues pertaining to higher education are not clearly identifiable. Although the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) format does not include a specific requirement for resources to be reviewed, the College SAR and Quality Improvement Plan identifies generic resource provision as a strength.

2.29   The College has appropriate arrangements and support in place to enable students to develop their personal, academic and professional experience which are valued by students and are monitored effectively at programme level. However, as described elsewhere in this report, oversight arrangements above programme level are less effective in allowing for a systematic approach to the monitoring and evaluation of arrangements and resources for higher education programmes. Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.30   The College sets out its aims for student engagement in a Student Voice Strategy that defines the opportunities for students to engage in enhancement and quality assurance processes. Student Voice Representatives have opportunities to represent their course at curriculum level every six weeks, as well as being invited to attend course meetings with academic staff. Representatives on higher education programmes also have the opportunity to attend the HE Student Forum. A College-wide Student Voice Council meets every six weeks to discuss and address non-course-specific issues and students can attend an annual Student Voice Conference. A HE Student Governor selected from within the cohort of student representatives is a member of the Board of Governors. In addition, further formal and informal mechanisms are made available for receiving student feedback.

2.31   The review team reviewed relevant documentation including student forum minutes, evidence of student feedback and information available through the College website and virtual learning environment. The approach to student engagement was discussed with staff and with a range of students, including student representatives.

2.32   The College offers students informal feedback opportunities with staff, and students the review team met noted that tutors were readily available and receptive to issues raised. Students consider their feedback to be taken into account and there are numerous examples of changes made in response. In addition, an informal 'You Said, We Did' mechanism is used to seek feedback and explain any resulting actions to the wider student body.

2.33   At a more formal level, the College student representation system functions effectively. Student representatives the team met were highly positively about the value of their role and confirmed that issues raised at meetings were given appropriate attention and were addressed. Students not acting as representatives also indicated confidence in the representative system, citing examples of having used the system as well as displaying knowledge of the minutes and outcomes of student feedback. Staff have a good knowledge of the system and the information provided to them is helpful in assisting with their role in ensuring that representatives are appointed and supported. Student participation in the system is high, with every programme being represented and some having deputy student representatives due to the volume of students wanting to undertake the role. Student representatives are provided with written guidance and although there was no awareness of formal training opportunities that may be available, those the team met were able to explain the role and the support received.

2.34   The Student Voice Conference agenda and report are detailed and indicate a programme of activities that enhances opportunities for student engagement at College level, although awareness of the conference among students met was not widespread.

2.35   The Student Voice Council has recently replaced the former Learner Voice Executive Committee, which provides an opportunity for student representatives on further and higher education programmes to discuss College-wide issues with the Principal. There is also a specific HE Student Forum for representatives to discuss issues affecting all higher education programmes. Representatives the review team met were positive about the Forum, commenting on how it provides a useful additional avenue for providing feedback.

The College aims to schedule these meetings immediately prior to the staff HE Forum meeting so that issues raised can be promptly addressed.

2.36   The various mechanisms for students to provide feedback and the level of engagement by staff and students creates a positive and proactive environment for student engagement. Students are represented at all levels of the College and staff and students work closely together. While there are areas for development regarding student engagement, such as formal involvement in programme design, the review team considers the range of opportunities provided for students to engage positively in their learning experience at all levels of the College is **good practice**.

2.37   While the Student Voice Strategy sets out good measurable outcomes to test the impact of the strategy, arrangements for analysing the outcomes of student engagement are not fully developed, although aspects of the approach have been reported to SMT.

2.38   The review team concludes that deliberate steps are taken to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated 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

2.39 The process of assessment is a shared responsibility between the College and its awarding partners. The College has established a range of strategies, policies and procedures for teaching, learning and assessment to promote a consistent approach to assessment, including an internal verification/moderation process. To support staff delivering the programmes and to moderate assessments, the College appoints a number of accredited Internal Lead Verifiers who conduct standardisation assessments with programme teams. In addition, the University monitors the assessment process, through the annual monitoring and periodic review process, external examiner reports, and through the sampling of student work. Staff are provided with guidance on the quality of feedback and are encouraged to use the seven principles of assessment and feedback. Similarly, Pearson monitors the assessment process through subject verifiers' annual visits.

2.40 The review team explored the approach to assessment by considering a range of documentation, including assessment policies, handbooks, minutes of meetings and external examiner and monitoring reports. The review team also met senior and academic staff, and students to discuss the operation of assessment processes.

2.41 Students are made aware of assessment requirements and criteria through programme and module specifications, student handbooks, the virtual learning environment (VLE) and tutorial sessions. Students the review team met confirmed that regulations around assessment and feedback were discussed at various points during their study, and particularly noted the valuable opportunities to discuss assessment in tutorials.

2.42 Staff development opportunities are provided for all new and existing staff to ensure teams are appropriately equipped to undertake assessment. New staff are mentored by experienced staff and support is also provided by course team members. Personal development opportunities are recorded centrally through a software system accessible to senior managers. The Learning Development Unit provides guidance on assessment and has also been involved in the development of the Staff Quality Manual and HE Course Leaders Handbook. Staff the team met were clear in their responsibilities throughout the assessment process.

2.43 Staff demonstrate commitment to devising assessments that link theory to practice, are industry relevant and that promote active learning. This was endorsed by students the team met who reported that assignments were relevant, provided an appropriate challenge and that the assignment schedule was well planned. External examiners and students confirm that assignments are clearly linked to the assessment of learning outcomes. The College has also provided clear guidance to staff on the quality of feedback through the Teaching and Learning Assessment Policy. Students confirmed that feedback was developmental, timely and supported their academic development. Students also indicated that their progress was monitored effectively and formal and informal opportunities were provided to obtain advice on their work.

2.44   The College engages positively with external examiners to provide further oversight of the assessment process. External examiner/verifier reports indicate that programmes adhere to the standards expected. Internal and external moderation takes place and staff have been afforded the opportunity to be involved in cross standardisation and consortium days with the awarding body where relevant. College staff attend the award boards organised and managed by the University. Pearson Assessment boards are scheduled annually and are chaired by the Head of Higher Education, Quality Manager or an appointee who is independent of the subject area.

2.45   The College has processes for the accreditation of prior learning that align with the requirements of the awarding partners. Although University programme specifications and handbooks clearly state the opportunities and process of accreditation of prior learning, not all Pearson handbooks articulate the process clearly as part of the recruitment process (see recommendation in section C).

2.46   Overall, the review team considers that the College has appropriate processes for assessment and for the recognition of prior learning, and that these are embedded and understood by academic staff. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.47   The University appoints external examiners to its programmes following the same procedure and regulations as apply at the University. Similarly, Pearson appoints external subject verifiers to the Higher National programmes. The awarding partners are responsible for training their external examiners/verifiers and for ensuring they are informed of the required procedures, practices and academic regulations before visiting the College. External examiner reports are received at senior management level and forwarded to course teams. Course Leaders are responsible for addressing any action points and updating the Quality Improvement Plan produced as part of annual monitoring.

2.48   The review team considered documentation relevant to external examining including awarding partner requirements, reports form externals and minutes of internal meetings. In addition the team met staff and students to discuss the approach to engaging with external examiners and verifiers.

2.49   The College works closely with its external examiners/verifiers and engages them in the modification of programmes and modules, assignment briefs and assignment setting, as well as in reviewing the outcomes of assessments. Opportunities are provided for students to meet with external examiners/verifiers during their annual visit to the College. Students the team met confirmed that access to the external examiner reports is provided on the VLE and it was noted that in one area, academic staff discuss the report with the whole student group and inform them of the response that is made. The College has negotiated a modification to the University's report template to ensure that, where a programme is validated at multiple sites, specific comments from the external examiners may be attributed to individual institutions. This is evident in a few reports where the external examiner expresses issues specific to the College.

2.50   External examiner/verifier reports are detailed and meet the guidance provided by the Quality Code. The Quality Manager grades all reports as green, amber or red according to a set of criteria which then requires specific actions to be taken. Any recommendations made by external examiners/verifiers must be included in the programme AMR or SAR. The College has an External Verifier Report System which provides an online approach to disseminating reports to Course Leaders and for tracking internal comments and actions pertaining to external reports. However, the review team was informed that this is not currently in use and that reports are emailed to course leaders for action.

2.51   External examiner reports are sent via the University to the College's Quality Manager and external verifier reports are sent to the Deputy Principal or Quality Manager, although in the absence of a permanent Quality Manager, the Head of Higher Education has taken a role in receiving and disseminating the reports. While the Deputy Principal and Head of Higher Education read all external examiner reports, no analysis of all external reports or collated overview of outcomes is currently provided or shared at a senior level. The review team was informed that the collation of external reports was the responsibility of the Quality and Standards Committee although this committee has been disbanded. The newly formed Higher Education Quality Improvement Group has a remit to consider all external examiner reports for the College, although this committee has not yet been formally constituted. The College state that issues and good practice from external examiner/verifier reports are shared at the HE Forum, although this is not reflected in the minutes of the meetings available to the team. The College recognise that the reports are not currently being used to

assist in identifying common themes and good practice across higher education programmes and the review team recommends that the College ensures this data is used effectively for the assurance and enhancement of learning opportunities (see recommendation in section B8).

2.52   The review team considers that arrangements for engaging with external examiners/verifiers and their reports at programme level are generally sound and appropriate actions are taken to address any issues raised. Reports from external examiner/verifiers also confirm that arrangements for managing external input are appropriate, although the College does not currently use the outcomes of this process effectively for monitoring and enhancing higher education provision. Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.53   As outlined in section A3.3, the College produces monitoring reports and associated action plans at programme, curriculum and College level annually. Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) are produced for University-validated programmes to a University template and all other programmes produce Self-Assessment Reports (SARs) to a College-wide format. Action plans are monitored at local level and progress on actions is reported through subsequent annual reports. AMRs and SARs are submitted to the Head of Higher Education and inform Performance Management Reviews (PMRs) conducted by the Senior Leadership Team. The College has implemented a quality cycle, which includes a schedule of dates for monitoring activities, completion of self-assessment reports and timescales for PMRs.

2.54   The review team scrutinised documentation pertaining to the review and monitoring of programmes including a range of SARs, AMRs, minutes of meetings and external examiners' reports. The review team also met a range of staff and students at the College to discuss the approach.

2.55   The process for the production of AMRs and SARs at programme level is well embedded. Course teams undertake regular monitoring, in line with the published SAR calendar, which involves the use of external examiner reports, student performance data, student module evaluations and feedback from student and staff consultative meetings. Staff are able to articulate the monitoring process accurately at programme level, and students confirmed their involvement through the class representative role and through the module evaluation process. AMRs and SARs produced at programme level are comprehensive and provide a detailed overview of the progress in the previous academic year, with clear action plans that differentiate actions applicable to the delivery team and the Curriculum Management Team. However, curriculum-level SARs are less comprehensive with some being incomplete and, along with the College SAR, not clearly differentiating between further and higher education performance and making little reference to the latter.

2.56   Programme-level AMRs and SARs are received by the Head of Higher Education who reviews the documents and provides feedback to course teams before sending the AMRs to the University. The production of AMRs and SARs is discussed at the HE Forum. While the Head of Higher Education and HE Forum monitor to ensure that teams undertake their responsibilities for producing annual monitoring reports, these roles are not currently used effectively to identify or consider the issues presented in the reports. The Head of Higher Education has recently produced a summary of issues and good practice arising from annual reports, although this does not cover all higher education provision and the review team did not see evidence of how this document had been used by the College as part of its quality assurance processes.

2.57   The College operates a PMR process to monitor and review programme performance within curriculum areas. The PMR meetings are chaired by the Deputy Principal, attended by senior managers and academic staff and link with the annual monitoring process in that outcomes are expected to be fed into curriculum SARs. The College states that AMRs are also revisited at these meetings although this is not reflected in the terms of reference or documentation required for the meeting. The records of PMR

activity reflect further education provision and the College were unable to provide evidence of PMR reports or outcomes relevant to higher education. The review team was therefore unable to confirm that these provide an effective mechanism for the oversight of higher education programmes.

2.58   Although the College has sound processes for producing annual monitoring reports at programme level, the College does not currently demonstrate appropriate senior management and/or collegiate oversight of the outcomes of the monitoring activity demonstrated through the AMRs, SARs, external examiner/verifier reports and other monitoring data. The previous Quality Committee referred to in the Staff Quality Manual has been disbanded and although there is some oversight through the Head of Higher Education and HE Forum, these act predominantly as a check on the production of reports rather than a consideration of the issues raised. The College has plans to constitute a Higher Education Quality Improvement Group but at the time of the review the group was not fully operational and had not been ratified by the Board of Governors. Consequently, the review team did not see evidence of any valid challenge function at senior management level to ensure that the quality of learning opportunities as evidenced through these reports is appropriate. The SARs produced at curriculum and College level and the PMR process reflect the priorities of further education and therefore do not provide an appropriate oversight mechanism for higher education. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College develops a deliberative structure for the strategic oversight of the processes and outcomes for programme monitoring and review, and also **recommends** that the College ensures that data, including external examiner reports, are used effectively for the assurance and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

2.59   The University undertakes a review of provision on a periodic basis and the College complies with these requirements. The College does not have a process for conducting periodic reviews of its own Pearson programmes as these have only been recently validated. Pearson undertake an annual management review of the College although this has only covered further education levels to date, with Levels 4 to 7 of the FHEQ due to be monitored in 2015-16.

2.60   The review team considers that the process for monitoring provision at programme level is sound. However, the College does not currently demonstrate oversight of the process, or the outcomes of this process, beyond ensuring that annual reports are completed appropriately. The review team therefore considers there to be a weakness in the College's academic governance structure and insufficient emphasis is given to assuring the quality of learning opportunities. Although the College recognises this weakness, plans to develop a new committee structure for oversight of higher education are inconsistent and not fully formed. The College is therefore unable to effectively discharge its responsibilities for overseeing, assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities on higher education programmes. The review team therefore conclude that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.61   The College sets out its procedures for student complaints in a College Complaints and Accolades Policy. The procedure for academic appeals is outlined in the College Assessment Appeals Procedure which has a section for higher education provision specifying that students on direct Pearson programmes are subject to the internal College procedures and that students on University-validated programmes are subject to the University appeals policy. These procedures are made available to students via the Student Handbook, VLE and the College website, and are also outlined to students during induction. Students are encouraged to resolve issues informally wherever possible and in addition to the formal complaints policy, the College encourages students to raise issues through completion of 'Help Us to Help You' cards. The Deputy Principal is responsible for receiving completed cards and for all formal complaints. The Senior Management Team receive termly reports on all College complaints, and an annual report is also provided to the Board of Governors for monitoring purposes.

2.62   The review team reviewed the documentation pertaining to appeals and complaints including College policies, handbooks and information on the College website and VLE and discussed the approach with students and with senior, teaching and support staff.

2.63   Both the Complaints and Accolades Policy and the Assessment Appeals Procedure are fair and provide for the timely resolution of complaints and appeals. Students are encouraged to resolve issues wherever possible at a local level and students the team met confirmed that issues could be raised with tutors and through student representatives. The approach to addressing issues informally has meant there have been no formal complaints in the past two years. Informal student complaints are dealt with quickly and to the student's satisfaction, suggesting the informal procedures are effective at dealing with student complaints as they arise.

2.64   Although none have been received recently for higher education, any formal complaints are sent to the Deputy Principal and reported to the Senior Management Team and Board of Governors. The College does not have in place a process for ensuring central oversight of informal complaints for the purposes of enhancement, although there are plans to report complaints to a new quality committee when established to allow greater oversight of issues pertaining to higher education.

2.65   Both the Complaints and Accolades Policy and the Assessment Appeals Procedure are made available to students on the VLE. Students the team met confirmed that the procedures are covered in induction, including the differences between the procedures for University and Pearson provision. Information on both complaints and appeals is not co-located in other documentation. For example, only the Complaints and Accolades Policy is available on the College website. The Student Handbook includes the Assessment Appeals procedure but not the Complaints and Accolades Policy. However, information on complaints is made available in programme handbooks.

2.66   No academic appeals have been received from higher education students in the last two years and the review team was therefore unable to test the effectiveness of the stated appeals procedure.

2.67   Overall the review team considers that the College has procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities and that these procedures are fair, accessible and timely. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.68   The College does not hold degree awarding powers and has formal agreements with two awarding partners for its delivery of higher education programmes. The University provides policies and procedures to govern its programmes and requires the College to adhere to its academic regulations and policies, as detailed in the UK Collaborative Handbook and the partnership agreement. For Pearson programmes the College follows the guidance provided in the Centre Guide to Assessment as part of its agreement with the awarding organisation.

2.69   In terms of its own arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with others, the College delivers a number of programmes where a work placement or work-based project is required to meet learning outcomes. The College has policies and procedures to manage this component of programmes including a Health and Safety Management of Work Experience procedure, a Learning Agreement and an Employer pack. Details of the requirements of placements and work-based learning elements within programmes are outlined in module handbooks.

2.70   The review team considered documents pertaining to the management of placements including information provided for students and employers. During the review, the team met employers and staff with responsibility for placements and/or live briefs and also met students to discuss their experiences.

2.71   All placements and live briefs must comply with the College's Health and Safety Management of Work Experience (Students) Procedure, which is a detailed and comprehensive document that clearly identifies the responsibilities of each participant in the process. Placement providers receive an Employer Pack that contains a guide to the work placement requirements, general information on the processes to be followed and details of their responsibilities. The pack also contains all forms that must be completed prior to and during the placement, including a detailed Health and Safety, Safeguarding and Equality and Diversity Assessment Record. Where a placement is graded as high risk, the College undertakes a visit to assess the suitability of the venue. Employers the team met confirmed that briefing documentation provided by the College was comprehensive and that there were close links with lecturers who usually visit prior to the commencement of the activity to discuss the brief. Employer responsibilities were clearly understood, including the provision of mentors to support the student during placement.

2.72   Where programmes have a placement element, the programme team provide a module handbook to identify the requirements and additional support available. Students are generally responsible for finding their own placements but tutors assist if they are experiencing difficulty securing a suitable placement. The College maintains a database of providers who may be contacted should a placement be required. Awareness of the health and safety checks undertaken was not widespread among students the team met, although students were knowledgeable of the requirements and the Learning Agreement signed by all parties is comprehensive. Curriculum Area Managers are responsible for assigning visiting tutors to ensure the quality of the work experience and that the student remains in a safe and supportive environment. Students, staff and employers were positive about placements

and live brief provision and although there were inconsistencies in the level of support provided and the number of hours required, all valued the experience. The review team was informed of practices on some programmes where the live briefs and placements had clearly contributed significantly to the students' learning. At a senior level there is no formal analysis or evaluation of the contribution that the placements and live briefs make to the enhancement of the student learning opportunities or to the identification and dissemination of good practice from these experiences.

2.73   Employers were positive about their links with the College, although few had opportunity for a more formal engagement with the College, to comment on programme design or be involved with aspects other than the programme area with which they provided a placement. There is no formal structure for senior-level engagement with employers who provide placement, work experience or live briefs and contact with employers is limited to programme level. However, at the programme level, staff have developed sound links with industries and providers that are beneficial to their students. Senior staff recognise that there is more to be achieved and have taken a number of steps, including the development of academies associated with local employers and the links with the Chamber of Commerce and Local Enterprise Partnership.

2.74   Overall, the College has policies and procedures in place to support students on placement and academic staff maintain close contact with employers and students during the placement. Students are positive about their work experience and are able to identify the contribution that this made to their learning. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.75   The College has no research degree provision, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.76   In determining its judgement on the quality of student learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met with the exception of Expectation B8. The level of risk is considered low in all Expectations apart from B3 and B8 where the review team considers there to be a moderate risk to the quality of learning opportunities. The review team identifies two areas of good practice in Expectations B2 and B5 and three recommendations for action pertaining to Expectations B3, B7 and B8.

2.77   The College offers considerable support for students. In particular, the personalised level of support afforded through the admissions and interview process is recognised as good practice for the positive impact this has on the student experience at the initial stages of engagement with the College. The review team also notes as good practice the opportunities provided for all students to engage with the College in quality assurance and enhancement processes and considers these to be wide ranging and accessible at all levels of the institution.

2.78   While the College has oversight mechanisms to ensure that quality assurance processes take place, these generally focus on managing compliance and meeting the requirements of the awarding body and the College does not demonstrably evaluate the outcomes from these processes for the purposes of improving the quality of learning opportunities across its higher education provision. Data on the quality of learning opportunities is collated through numerous mechanisms including external examiner/verifier reports, student feedback mechanisms and lesson observations. However, while this is collated and used effectively at programme level to identify and enact improvements, the current approach to assimilating the outcomes from AMRs and SARs into synoptic reports at curriculum and College level means that issues pertaining to higher education provision are not easily identifiable and data is not used collectively or routinely to inform good practice and improvements. Similarly, mechanisms that the College has for reviewing programmes, such as the performance management review process, do not give sufficient emphasis to the identification and consideration of issues related to higher education programmes. Furthermore, although formal strategies and policies include indicators of measurable outputs, the review team did not see how these were being identified or evaluated by the senior team to consider the impact of the approach.

2.79   The limited oversight of higher education provision reflects a weakness in the College's governance structure in that current responsibilities for quality management are unclear and formal structures for the reporting and deliberation of issues pertaining to higher education are insufficient. Although the College has plans to reintroduce a committee structure, the plans for this are internally inconsistent and underdeveloped. The review team therefore considers that there are moderate risks which, without action, could lead to serious problems over time with the management of this area, particularly in light of the anticipated expansion in higher education provision at the College and the diversification into new programmes and partnerships. The team recommends that the College develops a robust deliberative structure for the strategic oversight of the processes for, and outcomes of, programme monitoring and review and that the data generated through these processes is used effectively for assuring and enhancing student learning opportunities.

2.80   Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **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 produces information about its higher education provision through three main methods: the website, the virtual learning environment (VLE) and paper-based publications such as the College prospectus. The VLE is the primary source of student and staff-facing information. Prospective students receive information from the website and printed documentation such as the prospectus. The student induction process is used to convey key information on policies and procedures to students and these documents are also made available online via a Policies and Procedures webpage. Programme specifications and handbooks are also published on the College website for both current and prospective students. The College approach is to review key policies and procedures at least annually and curriculum areas are each responsible for the accuracy of course information.

3.2   The review team reviewed a range of information provided through handbooks, policies and procedures and through documentation available through the College website and VLE. Meetings were held with both students and staff, including marketing and information staff to discuss the approach to ensuring the quality of information.

3.3   The information made available online to prospective students is easily accessible and sufficient to enable prospective students to make informed decisions about higher education programmes. Students the review team met confirmed that information provided prior to enrolment matches up to the reality of studying with the College. The VLE is effective and well used, featuring a variety of information for both students and staff, including key policies and procedures. Staff are provided with further information via a weekly email from the Marketing Department, and during the higher education staff forums which are partially used as a means of information distribution. Although the College aims to ensure a regular review of policies and procedures, there are a number of examples of documents being out of date and having not been reviewed to the scheduled timeframe.

3.4   The sign-off process for information on University programmes involves a combination of marketing staff, the Head of Higher Education and University staff, and responsibilities are understood by those involved. Information is sent to marketing from the Head of Higher Education or relevant course leader to ensure it is fit for purpose and is then forwarded by the Head of Higher Education for final approval by the awarding partner. The Marketing Manager is responsible for reviewing information at key points of the year. Online information can be amended instantaneously, while the review process for written information is longer.

3.5   Programme handbooks are a key method of providing information to students. While overall the quality of handbooks is good, the review team found inconsistencies in the handbooks provided. For example, only one contains information about the accreditation or recognition of prior learning (RPL) and students the review team met did not have an awareness of RPL. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College ensures consistency in the information provided to students on opportunities for RPL.

3.6   Overall, the review team concludes that the College produces information for its intended audience that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.7   In determining its judgement on the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team considered that the Expectation in this area is met and that the risk to student learning opportunities is low.

3.8   The College produces information through a range of mechanisms and media that is generally sound and trustworthy, and good use is made of the website and virtual learning environment to convey information regarding programmes. While information for external audiences such as prospective students and employers is considered comprehensive, the review team noted that internal policies, procedures and guidance directed at staff were less coherent and not subject to regular review. The team also noted inconsistencies in the provision of information to students regarding the accreditation of prior learning and therefore recommended that this oversight be rectified.

3.9   Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College has produced a draft Higher Education (HE) Strategy which highlights its aspiration to enhance the quality of learning opportunities for students and provides the vision for the development of higher education within the College. This document builds on the College's current HE Strategy which focuses on maintaining and developing partnerships and does not make reference to an enhancement approach. In addition to the HE Strategy there are four main College-wide strategies, namely the Quality Strategy; the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy; the Curriculum Strategy; and the Student Voice Strategy. Key factors in improving the quality of student learning opportunities are cited as the Performance Management Review process, Course Team Meetings and various forums for sharing good practice.

4.2 The review team considered the College approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities by reviewing the documentation presented including College policies and strategies and minutes of internal meetings. In addition the team met senior managers, academic staff and those who support student learning to discuss the approach.

4.3 The Quality Cycle for annual monitoring activity promotes a focus on the continual quality improvement of programmes and staff and students met the review team met were able to cite multiple examples of where changes had been made to individual programmes to enhance the learning opportunities provided. However, evidence provided by the College and staff the review team met did not demonstrate how such improvements to programmes at a local level formed part of a provider strategy. Neither was the evidence given underpinned by a common understanding of the approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities as academic staff referred exclusively to examples of individual programme improvements rather than cross-higher education developments.

4.4 The review team identified some initiatives designed to improve the quality of learning opportunities for all higher education learners. For example, the College has provided dedicated facilities for higher education students and has continued to adapt these in the light of students' feedback. The College has also introduced a central Recruitment Broker hub to support students in finding work and developing their employability skills. The Review and Development (RAD) week imposes a structure for delivery which encourages staff to provide individual support and devise value-added opportunities for students. Furthermore, a Good Sharing Practice VLE has been provided for staff to share and reflect on practice. While these initiatives represent College-wide activities, student and staff feedback on the benefits of these initiatives was variable and the review team did not see evidence of how the College exercised strategic intent, oversight or evaluation regarding the impact of these on higher education provision.

4.5 Good practice is identified at programme level and recorded in AMRs and SARs. However, as outlined in section B8 above, these documents are not currently used effectively to identify common themes and good practice across higher education provision. Furthermore, the review team did not see evidence that the Performance Management Review (PMR) process, designed to monitor and review programme performance within curriculum areas, produced outcomes that could be used to inform the enhancement of higher education provision. As reported above, outcomes from annual reports, student

feedback, external examiner/verifier reports and staff development activity are not being collated and analysed for enhancement purposes. The review team therefore recommends that the College implements a more strategic approach to analyse data to inform the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities for students (see sections B3, B7 and B8).

4.6   The Head of Higher Education undertakes a monitoring function to ensure that the quality assurance processes are undertaken. Although this role reports to senior management level on compliance, there is a lack of collegiate oversight at senior management level to review the outcomes of the monitoring process, act as a challenge function or identify and disseminate good practice. Although the Higher Education Forum provides valuable opportunities for staff coordinating higher education programmes to meet, discuss and find resolutions to common issues, the minutes of these meetings do not provide evidence of good practice being identified and adopted in a planned or systematic manner. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College takes deliberate steps at senior management level to ensure that it can identify, disseminate and monitor the impact of good practice and enable the enhancement of learning opportunities.

4.7   Although the College encourages continual improvement of higher education at programme level, there is little evidence of steps being undertaken at provider level to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities in a planned and systematic way and awareness of a strategic approach to enhancement was limited. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is not met and in light of the weakness in the governance structure and lack of clarity in responsibilities for enhancement (see About Stafford College), the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.8   In determining its judgement on the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team considered that the Expectation in this area is not met and that the risk to student learning opportunities is moderate and therefore recommends that action be taken.

4.9   The College does not currently have a clear or shared approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities and current weaknesses in the governance arrangements do not allow for the integration of enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner. Existing quality assurance procedures are not used effectively to collate and analyse information for enhancement purposes or to identify, support and disseminate good practice. While there is evidence of continuous improvements at programme level and evidence of a number of initiatives introduced for the benefit of all learners at the College, there is little evidence of how this activity has been implemented, monitored and/or evaluated at senior management level. The review team therefore recommends that the College takes deliberate steps at senior management level to ensure that it can identify, disseminate and monitor the impact of good practice and enable the enhancement of learning opportunities.

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

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The College considers employability to be a key feature and strength at all levels of learning and for all students. The College Strategic Plan identifies four pillars, each of which refers to the development of partnerships and links with local employers. It has strengthened its work-based learning by introducing new Higher National and foundation degree qualifications to focus its courses on employability and to develop its higher education programmes on the vocational orientation of lower-level programmes at Levels 2 and 3. It identifies three strands in its approach to employability. The first strand provides a focus on classroom practice to teach and assess employability skills. The second focuses on links and partnership between curriculum areas and the third focuses on work placements, work experience and work preparation activity.

5.2 The College has established a number of mechanisms by which it links with employers to gain information on the needs of the locality. The College works in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and is a member of the One 2 Three Breakfast Club that meets with small, newly formed businesses. Senior staff also attend the Local Enterprise Partnership meetings. Liaison with employers for the design of new programmes is at programme level, but the College ensures that all programmes promote the University's Graduate Attributes, which are tested at validation and periodic review by the University.

5.3 The College appoints staff with recent and relevant work experience to teach on their vocational programmes, whenever possible, and they are provided with opportunities to maintain their experience as part of their CPD. Review and Development (RAD) occurs every six weeks when curriculum leaders are encouraged to invite guest speakers from industry to contribute to their programmes and opportunities are offered to students to visit employer locations. The opportunities provided for students to engage in placement or work-based activities, including live briefs, are inconsistent across the programmes offered; however, where they are offered, students value the experiences. A Recruitment Broker hub is available to students to help them find employment and assist them with the preparation of CVs and making applications.

5.4 The College has secured a number of Academies sponsored by industry including the Staffordshire Football Association, Amy Childs, Staffordshire Rugby Club and Risual. A current bid with a Local Enterprise Partnership and Staffordshire University to host the Advance Manufacturing hub is in progress.

5.5 The College recognises a need to develop a more formal approach to its working with employers. Employers met during the review visit expressed the view that they would welcome opportunities for greater involvement with the College. Senior staff are aware of the inconsistencies across the programmes for opportunities for students to engage in work-based and placement learning, particularly during the RAD weeks, and are also aware of the areas where good practice is evident. Currently, there is no formal structure to evaluate the impact that the work-based, placement or live brief provision is having on student learning or to identify and disseminate good practice.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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