



Higher Education Review of The Sheffield College

September 2014

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at The Sheffield College. The review took place from 22 to 24 September 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Elaine Crosthwaite
- Professor Stephen Denyer
- Dr Joshua Lay (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by The Sheffield 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 threshold academic standards
 - the quality of student learning opportunities
 - the information provided about higher education provision
 - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

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

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode.

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about The Sheffield College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **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.

Good practice

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

- The use of the College teaching, learning and assessment strategy to drive a range of staff development and enhancement activities (Expectation B3, Enhancement).
- The breadth and diversity of work-based learning opportunities including employer-led projects available to students (Expectation B4, Enhancement).
- The approach taken by the College to embed student employability in all programmes (Expectation B4, Enhancement).
- Adoption of a unified and comprehensive approach to monitoring and evaluation across all provision (Expectation B8).
- The close working relationship between the College and Sheffield Hallam University which enhances students' learning opportunities (Expectations B4, B8 and Enhancement).
- The highly productive relationship between individual employers and individual course tutors (Expectation B10, B4).
- The establishment and support of advanced practitioners with a significant role in developing academic and support staff (Enhancement, Expectation B3).

Recommendations

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

By August 2015:

- introduce formal arrangements for the governance, management and monitoring of work placements (Expectation B10)
- provide briefing and training for work placement providers to ensure employers understand their roles and responsibilities, including those relating to the assessment of student achievement (Expectations B10, B6, C).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that The Sheffield College is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- the actions being taken by the College to support student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement, including the appointment of a student involvement facilitator (Expectation B5).

Theme: Student Employability

The College has a very strong commitment to student employability. This is evidenced in the Strategic Framework which clearly defines employability and enterprise as central themes and is underpinned by the College's reputation as a leading college for enterprise education.

All higher education courses at the College have a vocational focus and the development of students' employability skills is embedded across its provision. Employability skills are developed through a range of activities including work-based learning modules, consultancy projects, portfolio preparation, student exhibitions, planning and organising events, group projects, support in company start-ups, and live projects. Students on Foundation Degrees in graphics, photography and media production are given a live brief for a client to whom they have to deliver on time and to a specification; this culminates in 'the Crit' where students present their work to the employer and their peers, and receive feedback.

Work placements are a significant feature in many courses. All Foundation Degrees have work-based learning embedded in the courses, often as distinct modules. All courses have at least one module or unit involving a research project, which develops research, writing and referencing skills as well as depth of analysis and use of theoretical concepts. Also, all courses have a professional studies module or unit. This requires students to reflect on their learning and consider their career development in their chosen industry.

The College careers service provides assistance with CV preparation and interview skills. In addition, to assist students in their transition to employment, the College gives an entitlement to the services of a business adviser in the Enterprise Unit, although the awareness and use of this service vary between courses.

Students and employers are positive and enthusiastic about the opportunities that the College provides to students to enhance their employability, and work experience frequently leads to permanent employment.

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

About The Sheffield College

The Sheffield College is a large general further education college serving the city of Sheffield and the Sheffield city region. Currently it has five centres, though one of these will close shortly with the provision moved to new buildings at one of the other campuses. The College has approximately 21,000 students of which 413 were on higher education courses in 2013-14. The College mission statement is:

'The Sheffield College will transform lives by offering outstanding education and training. We will inspire our students, unlock their potential and allow them to lead fulfilling lives and pursue successful careers. Our aim is to enhance the wealth and

quality of life of individuals, employers and the communities of the City Region and beyond.'

The College strategic aims and objectives for its higher education provision centre around the three key drivers of alignment to the needs of the local and regional economy, internal student progression into and through the College's higher education provision, and quality.

The College offers full or part-time higher education provision in a variety of subject areas including arts, media and graphics, music and drama, fashion and textiles, construction and the built environment, engineering, environmental conservation, health and social care, business and management, events and tourism management, sports and exercise, policing studies and animal management.

The College works with two awarding bodies, Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield, as well as with Pearson for the provision of HNC/Ds. The College's principal partner is Sheffield Hallam University, with whom it has a very close working relationship. There is one small course with the University of Sheffield, a Foundation Year to Medicine, and on successful completion of this course students are guaranteed progression to the University of Sheffield Medical School. The College uses Pearson HNC/Ds in certain subject areas, mainly animal management, construction, engineering, and health and social care, music, and creative media production (games development).

The College has undergone considerable change since the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) published in July 2010. The College has re-shaped its management structure to enable it 'to have a sharper focus on the student experience and respond more effectively to changes in the external environment'. The College Higher Education Unit has been placed within the Quality Unit, allowing an integrated approach to quality across the College. The College was graded as 'Good' by Ofsted in the inspection report published in June 2013, an improvement from 'Satisfactory' awarded in March 2012.

Key challenges for the College are the student number control which continues to provide a block on growth despite strong recruitment to their full-time provision, combined with a fall in demand for part-time provision; and changing government policies around areas such as the Disabled Students' Allowance, and the direction of higher education in general.

The College has made good progress with all the recommendations from the 2010 IQER, and all have been addressed effectively. A few areas are still ongoing, such as student involvement in quality assurance, and this is the subject of an affirmation in the review report.

Explanation of the findings about The Sheffield College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

d) consider and take account of relevant subject benchmark statements.

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

Findings

1.1 The College does not award higher education qualifications; all awards are made by its awarding bodies (the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University) and awarding organisation (Pearson). The College's higher education provision meets the requirements of the FHEQ and takes account of national benchmark statements. This is achieved through close working relationships with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation whose approval and monitoring processes ensure that programmes align with national frameworks. These robust processes allow Expectation A1 to be met.

1.2 The team reviewed the College's self-evaluation document and associated supporting evidence including partnership agreements and operations handbooks, programme documentation and external examiner reports. In addition, the team met senior, teaching and support staff, students, and representatives of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation, and explored understanding of and engagement with the national qualification frameworks and benchmark statements within College processes.

1.3 The College relies on its awarding bodies and awarding organisation to ensure that the academic standards of its higher education provision are appropriate and secure and that programme content meets the requirements of the FHEQ and aligns with relevant

subject and qualification benchmark statements. The College receives comprehensive support in programme development and management from Link Tutors in the faculties of its university partners. For the approval and validation of College-designed programmes, Sheffield Hallam University provides mandatory programme documentation which includes reference to national standards. For the preparation of programme specifications for Higher National programmes, the College benefits from the clear linking of Pearson awards to qualification frameworks and sector benchmarks.

1.4 College staff understand the function of the FHEQ and benchmark statements in programme design, and receive in-house training and information from the Quality Unit and HE Unit. External examiners confirm that College provision meets the required academic standards at each level.

1.5 The review team concludes that the College has effective arrangements in place to ensure that qualifications are allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ and take account of subject and qualification benchmark statements. The Expectation is met and the risk in this area is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.6 The College has delegated responsibilities from its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation to undertake assessment activities that contribute to the award of academic credit and qualifications. It has established assessment policies and procedures to enable it to meet the academic regulations of the relevant collaborative partner. These arrangements are subject to regular scrutiny and approval by the awarding bodies and awarding organisation, primarily through the appointment of external examiners. The College's policies and procedures allow Expectation A2.1 to be met.

1.7 The review team scrutinised the College's self-evaluation document, higher education assessment policy, collaborative partnership agreements, operations handbook and programme documentation to ascertain the arrangements to secure the award of academic standards. In addition, external examiner reports were reviewed to check the operation of assessment. The team also met with senior staff, teaching staff and representatives of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation to explore the College's understanding of its responsibilities for academic standards.

1.8 The College has a higher education assessment policy which articulates its arrangements for accreditation of prior learning and the conduct of assessment. Primarily, it is responsible for the setting, marking and internal moderation of assessments. The partnership agreements and associated handbooks indicate the College's specific responsibilities for the awards it delivers. The College also receives information and advice from the universities' Link Tutors about relevant regulations and procedures to be followed.

1.9 The College obtains feedback on the effectiveness of its arrangements through annual review and monitoring and reviews by awarding bodies. For example, the Sheffield Hallam University Collaborative Periodic Review in 2014 found that methods of assessment are sound. External examiners' reports confirm that programmes are assessed fairly and consistently in line with the awarding body regulations and systems and policies of the College.

1.10 College staff are made aware of academic frameworks and regulations through regular contact with university Link Tutors and by information disseminated by the HE Unit. The awarding bodies and awarding organisation confirm that they obtain confidence in the College's arrangements to secure academic standards through a variety of processes including external examiner reports and annual monitoring. Students indicate that the College provides clear and concise information on assessment in programme documentation and on the virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.11 Overall, the College has effective arrangements to implement the requirements of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation to establish academic frameworks and regulations for the award of credit. The review team thus concludes that the College processes and procedures meet Expectation A2.1 and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.12 As the College is not a degree-awarding body, it takes responsibility for using reference points provided to maintain standards in delivery and assessment. The exact responsibilities delegated to the College by the two awarding bodies and the awarding organisation are laid down in the partnership agreements. The College produces programme specifications for each course, which are included in course handbooks. The College also uses a handbook template to ensure a level of consistency across programmes. The College keeps and maintains a definitive document for each programme area, representing a reference point for programme delivery, assessment and review. The College processes and procedures allow Expectation A2.2 to be met.

1.13 The review team scrutinised handbooks and definitive documents to test the effectiveness of the College's response. Programme specifications include all relevant information and are well written. The pre-medical year course handbook follows a different format to other course handbooks as it is the only course awarded by the University of Sheffield. In addition to specifications, definitive documents provide historical programme data that can be used for review.

1.14 Programme specifications within handbooks are up to date and informative. The adoption of templates for handbooks helps to make specifications easy to follow.

1.15 The review team concludes that the definitive course documentation including programme specifications maintained by the College is complete and consistent. Thus, Expectation A2.2 is met with an associated low risk.

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

1.16 The College's higher education provision consists of FHEQ level 4 and 5 Higher National and Foundation Degree (FD) programmes, variously offered in part-time and full-time mode.

1.17 For new programmes, the College follows the approval process of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation; the College is an approved centre for Pearson. The processes and procedures of the College allow Expectation A3.1 to be met.

1.18 The review team considered the College's self-evaluation document and associated supporting evidence, including Course Definitive Documents. It met with senior staff, teaching staff, University and Pearson representative link staff, course leaders, and support staff associated with the HE Unit and quality enhancement to explore the relationship of the College with the awarding bodies/organisation.

1.19 For courses run in collaboration with Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield, the academic standards are set out in the Course Definitive Document and programme specification approved by the universities and monitored by annual review. As an approved centre, the College adds new Higher National provision through the Pearson website; such provision is subject to annual monitoring by the external Standards Verifier.

1.20 In some instances the College works collaboratively with its awarding bodies/organisation to develop new modules and assessment strategies. New Higher National provision is planned for 2015-16 and these courses are currently under consideration through the College's internal procedures before submission to Pearson.

1.21 The College ensures its staff are aware of the awarding bodies'/organisation's academic framework and any subsequent changes through training and updates from the HE Unit, Link Tutors and course leaders.

1.22 The review team concludes that the College higher education provision is developed and approved in accordance with the established academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding bodies and organisation. Effective operation of these procedures by the College is monitored by its awarding partners. Expectation A3.1 is met and the associated 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

1.23 The College's assessment regulations and internal verification processes are contained in its Assessment Policy: Higher Education. It aligns these procedures with those of its awarding partners. The operation of these processes and procedures by the College allows Expectation A3.2 to be met.

1.24 The review team considered the College's self-evaluation document and associated supporting evidence, including the College's Assessment Policy, Course Definitive Documents, Standards Verifier and external examiner reports. The team met senior staff, teaching staff, University and Pearson representative link staff, course leaders, and support staff associated with the HE Unit and quality enhancement to explore the relationship of the College with the awarding bodies/organisation.

1.25 For Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield partner programmes, arrangements for assessment and the award of credits are outlined in the Course Definitive Document which details programme design and structure, learning outcomes, assessment strategies, benchmarking of standards and external examiner arrangements. For Higher National awards, the College operates its own internal procedures for demonstrating achievement of standards, which are subject to annual monitoring and verification by the external Standards Verifier who samples assessment decisions and student work, providing recommendations in a subsequent report.

1.26 Clear moderation procedures are in place with the majority of student work being subject to internal moderation prior to being sampled by external examiners/Standards Verifiers.

1.27 Sheffield Hallam University operates and chairs subject assessment boards at the College, ensuring provision of agreed marks to the University using spreadsheets generated by the University. Link Tutor arrangements ensure liaison and engagement with the University frameworks, regulations and requirements. For Higher National provision, assessment boards are held at the College to an agreed timetable with Pearson and in accordance with the HNC/D Operations Handbook and the College Assessment Policy: Higher Education. The University of Sheffield maintains responsibility for the conduct of the Foundation Year to Medicine examination boards, which may be held at the College or at the University, and reports and records the results; the University Academic Lead is in attendance to ensure maintenance of standards and to moderate marks. The College HE Manager serves as chair for the assessment boards for Pearson programmes and the University of Sheffield's Director of Studies for the Foundation Programme chairs the examination board for the Foundation Year to Medicine.

1.28 The review team concludes that the College assessment procedures operate in accordance with the requirements of the awarding bodies/organisation to ensure credit and qualifications are awarded only when learning outcomes have been met and to the appropriate standard. Expectation A3.2 is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.29 In accordance with its Collaborative Courses Agreement Annex 2, the College has adopted the Sheffield Hallam University process for annual review (formerly known as routine monitoring and review) of all its FD courses. For consistency, it has adapted this annual process to suit Higher National provision. The annual review specifically includes course statistical evaluations and external examiner/Standards Verifier comment, together with progress on an action plan as part of monitoring academic standards. This meets the expectations of its partner awarding bodies and organisation. These processes and procedures also allow Expectation A3.3 to be met.

1.30 The review team considered the College's self-evaluation document and associated supporting evidence, drawing extensively on annual review documentation and Standards Verifier and external examiner reports. The review team met with senior staff, teaching staff, University and Pearson representative link staff, course leaders, and support staff associated with the HE Unit and quality enhancement to explore the relationship of the College with the awarding bodies/organisation.

1.31 The annual review is submitted via the HE Unit to the appropriate Sheffield Hallam University Faculty, and is provided to Pearson for the Standards Verifier during review of the Higher National provision. The annual review cycle documentation is also provided to the University of Sheffield for the Foundation Year to Medicine course and this feeds into the University's own annual reflection process.

1.32 Annual review records and tracking sheets are prepared and used by programme teams and progress is checked by the HE Unit. The College operates a structured, iterative process in the annual review cycle, enabling institutional oversight of actions taken at course and departmental level; lines of accountability for these actions have been established. Higher National module relevance is considered annually at meetings of staff and students.

1.33 Collaborative Periodic Review operated by Sheffield Hallam University offers the opportunity to continue to approve delivery of provision. For the University of Sheffield University, a re-approval process occurs before renewal of contract, and provision is currently renewed for two years from September 2014.

1.34 The review team concludes that the College employs a robustly applied annual monitoring and review of higher education provision with external verification to assure awarding partners and itself that academic standards are being maintained. Expectation A3.3 is met and the associated 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

1.35 The College is responsible for maintaining the academic standards of the provision it delivers, to the standards set by the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. It largely relies on the expertise of the external examiners appointed by its collaborative partners. The external examiners' reports provide assurance that academic standards are appropriately set by its awarding bodies and organisation and maintained by the College. The effective processes for consideration of external examiners' reports allow Expectation A3.4 to be met.

1.36 The team considered the College's self-evaluation document and collaborative partnership agreements to establish the College's responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards. In addition, the team scrutinised external examiners' reports and annual monitoring reports. The team explored the processes for obtaining and using external expertise in meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, as well as employers.

1.37 The College makes effective use of the independent expertise of external examiners in a range of processes. External examiner reports are used by programme teams, in annual monitoring, by the HE and Quality Units, and in discussion at course committees and team meetings. The recent Collaborative Programme Review by Sheffield Hallam University found that relationships with external examiners were sound and appropriate, and that College staff were appreciative of the support and guidance received.

1.38 The external examiners' reports assist the College in maintaining standards according to the requirements of the awarding body and awarding organisation. The Sheffield Hallam University reports advise on the achievement of UK threshold academic standards and the assessment of learning outcomes in line with the University's regulations. The reports for Pearson awards indicate whether the assessments are of a standard appropriate to the qualification level. There are no external examiner reports for the University of Sheffield course as this is the equivalent of level 3 provision. The University of Sheffield takes responsibility for reviewing student work internally.

1.39 The College has made limited use of other external and independent expertise. There has not been any new programme development since the validation of the FD Sport and Exercise Coaching in 2011, and employers' contribution to programme and module development has been largely on an informal basis. A number of the College's programmes benefit from the input of independent industry professionals as mentors to support teaching, learning and assessment within the workplace.

1.40 Overall, the review team concludes that the College uses academic external examiners and independent industry professional personnel in processes for annual monitoring and curriculum delivery and effective operation of these processes is monitored

by its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Expectation A3.4 is met, and the 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

1.41 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.42 All seven of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated level of risk is low in each case. There were no recommendations, affirmations or good practice in any of the Expectations in this area.

1.43 The review team notes that the primary responsibility for much of this judgement area lies not with the College but with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The College has good relationships with its awarding bodies and organisation and responds appropriately to their requirements. The College has internal policies and systems to ensure that it can meet the requirements of the awarding bodies and organisation, and systems are effectively implemented.

1.44 The review team concludes that the maintenance of academic standards of awards offered by the College on behalf of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design and Approval

Findings

2.1 The College awarding bodies and awarding organisation regard the design, development and approval of courses as their responsibility. In practice, however, programme design and development is conducted collaboratively with Sheffield Hallam University using their processes and procedures in preparation for University validation. Pearson procedures for new qualifications, regulated by Ofqual, are in a process of change and require a complete programme specification and example assignment to accompany approval documentation from the College. A new internal College approval process is in place to accommodate these developments. Consideration is given to external reference points and expertise by the awarding bodies/organisation. External expertise is employed in course design, but involvement with employers at this design stage is variable.

2.2 There have been no recent revalidation events of existing provision, the last taking place in 2012-13 as an early revalidation of a programme in response to feedback from an external examiner.

2.3 The College's curriculum strategy lays the foundation for provision and curriculum design, concentrating on student success and progression. New provision is considered by the College Higher Education Strategy Group and, if accepted, progresses through internal approval by the head of the relevant academic department with the support of an appropriate Assistant Principal prior to discussion with the awarding bodies or organisation. Criteria for internal approval by the Course Approval Panel include: strategic fit, evidence of need, income, resources including staff, quality measures, support needs, marketing and enrolment. The processes of the College allow Expectation B1 to be met.

2.4 The review team considered the College's self-evaluation document and associated supporting evidence. It met senior staff, teaching staff, University and Pearson representative link staff, course leaders, and support staff associated with the HE Unit and quality enhancement to examine the processes for course development and approval.

2.5 For Foundation Degrees, course leaders play a central role in leading their teams during programme design and development. Higher National developments are usually progressed by Heads of Department or their Deputies but Course Leader expertise is being developed in this area. Sheffield Hallam University Link Tutors play a pivotal role in FD revalidation; the College Higher Education Quality and Operations Manager supports the development of all collaborative provision.

2.6 The College plans to increase and broaden the engagement of students in course development in the future. There have been no recent approvals, but the College will ensure students are part of the approval process for two new programmes planned for 2015-16. Module and unit reviews involving students are now formally incorporated into the annual review.

2.7 For the Foundation Year to Medicine, programme design follows a prescribed curriculum from the University of Sheffield aligned to A Level content which the College uses.

2.8 The review team concludes that the College operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of higher education programmes. Expectation B1 is met and the associated 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

2.9 The College has mixed responsibilities in this area. For courses awarded by Pearson, the College is fully responsible for recruitment, selection and admissions. For courses awarded by the University of Sheffield the admissions process is the responsibility of the University and is carried out by the University of Sheffield. For courses awarded by Sheffield Hallam University, the awarding body takes responsibility for maintaining the admissions process, with the College responsible for maintaining the academic standards of the course. Despite this, the College conducts all recruitment, selection and admissions processes for higher education courses.

2.10 The College has a clear and detailed policy for admissions, recruitment and selection for all courses in addition to a general admissions policy. Clear minimum entry requirements for every course are provided on the College website, and are also detailed in the higher education prospectus. All applications to full-time courses are performed through UCAS. It is the responsibility of course leaders to offer places based on their own judgement and historical admissions data, and they are provided with training to fulfil this role. The senior higher education administrator processes all offers to ensure they fall in line with policy. The level of requirement for interview differs across the College and this is also documented. The policies and procedures of the College allow Expectation B2 to be met.

2.11 The review team examined the College's self-evaluation document, student submission and evidence concerning admissions and met senior staff, staff responsible for admissions and the HE Unit staff and students. The student submission states that admissions is 'a simple and straightforward process'. This was confirmed during a meeting with students. However, some students reported difficulties with the £500 deposit system used for cases where funding is not in place on commencement of study.

2.12 The College oversees the admissions process through the HE Unit, using the higher education senior administrator to perform checks on offers made by course leaders to ensure they fall in line with policy. The senior administrator also informs course leaders of any instance in which a prospective student may fall outside the HEFCE number allocation, allowing offers to such students to become unconditional. Offers are processed at least once per month to ensure that students receive accurate offers in a timely manner. The College has oversight of the admissions process, and the process is understood and confirmed by both course leaders and the senior administrator.

2.13 The review team concludes that the College operates a clear and transparent policy and process for admission of students and that it has effective oversight and control of the process. Thus Expectation B2 is met and the associated 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

2.14 The vision of the College is to become a learning organisation, supporting staff to become outstanding practitioners, and equipping staff and students with excellent resources. The College articulates its approach in its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy.

2.15 The College has a number of arrangements to facilitate the development of staff so that they can deliver the objectives of the strategy. These include a Performance Development Review process, a peer observation scheme, and the appointment of two Higher Education Advanced Practitioners, one of whom is building staff forums into communities of practice. Financial support for higher-level study which fits with strategic priorities has been increased and all higher education lecturers have a time allowance to invest in scholarly activity.

2.16 The review of provision of learning and teaching is undertaken annually at course, departmental and cross-College level. The College conducts an annual student survey, and also uses module and unit reviews and external examiner reports to obtain information on strengths and areas for improvement. The College's strategies and policies allow Expectation B3 to be met.

2.17 The review team tested the application of the College's strategies and policies through review of committee minutes at strategic, cross-College, campus and course level. The team also held a series of meetings with the Principal, senior, teaching and academic support staff, and students.

2.18 The College ethos is 'to put students at the heart of everything'. A review of the provision of learning opportunities is embedded in College processes from course to strategic level. At course committee level, routine agenda items include monitoring of the student experience, review of teaching strategies, and an update on progress with the annual academic review. A learner-centred orientation underpins discussion at the Higher Education Staff Forums which meet on a campus basis, and the Higher Education Strategy Group.

2.19 The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy was articulated by staff through a bottom-up approach, with strong support from the Principal. The strategy is clearly owned and widely adopted by staff, giving a common vocabulary and a sense of community across departments. Launched by a teaching and learning festival in July 2013, it has led to a number of staff development activities around the theme of teaching, learning and assessment. A significant development is that the majority of higher education staff are working towards fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. Teaching staff regard the appointment from September 2013 of two Higher Education Advanced Practitioners as providing momentum and a highly beneficial resource in developing their practice. One of the advanced practitioners is promoting staff engagement with the Higher Education Academy, aiming for 95 per cent of full-time staff as Fellows in three years. The other Advanced Practitioner is developing Higher Education Forums into communities of practice, as well as facilitating sharing of scholarly activity and good practice in the use of the VLE as

a teaching tool. The use of the teaching, learning and assessment strategy to drive a range of staff development and enhancement activities is **good practice**. Furthermore, the creation of advanced practitioners with a significant role in developing academic and support staff is also **good practice**, and this is further considered in the section on Enhancement.

2.20 Students are satisfied that members of staff are fully trained and qualified, and appreciate that staff have business and work experience which enhances their teaching. They indicated that staff are approachable, and they receive feedback and support tailored to their individual needs. Students confirm that the College obtains their views on the provision of learning and teaching through a number of channels including surveys, module feedback and the student representative system, and that they are satisfied that the College responds quickly and appropriately.

2.21 There is substantial involvement of employers in the College's learning and teaching processes and initiatives to enhance student employability. The College commitment to student employability is explained more fully under Expectation B4.

2.22 Overall, the College is committed to providing a quality learning experience to students and has a strong focus on the development of staff who deliver and support teaching. The review team concludes that Expectation B3 is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.23 The College has a Higher Education Strategy that articulates its commitment to inclusion and diversity and includes the provision of electronic information sources which can be accessed by students 24/7. A wide range of resources are made available to students to support their learning. These include the VLE site, a Learning Resources Centre located on each of the College campuses, and disability support. Students enrolled on university courses also have the use of university learning resources. Overall responsibility for enabling student development and achievement rests with Heads of Department, who in turn delegate to course leaders. The College facilitates student development through 'tailoring support to individual needs' with academic tutorials planned into all courses, and the use of a system to record meetings with students and track progress.

2.24 Departments have varying approaches to facilitate student transition from level 3 to 4. At College level, there are pre-admission Open Days and an induction process following enrolment to aid transition onto courses. The College has a focus on employability and enterprise education and arrangements to assist students in the transition to employment include a business advisory service, and all courses have a professional studies module or unit.

2.25 The College's policies and arrangements allow Expectation B4 to be met.

2.26 The review team examined evidence in the self-evaluation document, student submission and annual academic review and held a series of meetings with senior, teaching and academic support staff, and students. In addition, the team was given a demonstration of the VLE.

2.27 The support provided to students to develop and achieve progress is a strength of the provision. External examiners have commented on the supportive environment for a diverse group of students. In a recent review, Sheffield Hallam University commended the College on the level of support given to students and found that learning resources are broadly sufficient for the current level of engagement of students. The College works closely with the University and has recently secured agreement to enable student use of University learning resource centres which will improve access to electronic journals. The close working relationship between the College and Sheffield Hallam University which enhances student learning opportunities is **good practice**.

2.28 Teaching teams and course committees meet to review provision throughout the year. Annual review records and tracking sheets are prepared and used by course teams to enhance the learning experience and progress is checked by the HE Unit.

2.29 Students are satisfied with the College's progress in the provision of electronic sources of information. There is substantial involvement of employers in the College's learning and teaching processes and the College has a strategic emphasis on employability. The development of employability skills is embedded in all courses and reflected in programme specifications. Employability skills in FDs in Graphic Design, Media Production and Photography are largely developed through live projects, with students working on briefs from clients. The approach taken by the College to embed student employability in all programmes is **good practice**. In other courses such as construction, engineering and

business management, students work on group projects, and in the FDs in Sport and Exercise Coaching, Events and Tourism Management, and Police Studies, students undertake a work placement. There is regular and meaningful involvement of employers in the delivery of the curriculum. The breadth and diversity of work-based learning opportunities including employer-led projects available to students is **good practice**. The positive contribution of work-based learning to the students' learning is facilitated by the highly productive relationship between individual course tutors and individual employers, which is explained in section B10.

2.30 Given the College policies and arrangements in place, the review team concludes Expectation B4 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.31 The College provides a number of ways in which students can be involved in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The two main channels through which students are able to provide meaningful feedback to the College are student representatives and termly student forums. In addition to these, the College also performs annual student surveys and provides both informal and formal complaints procedures. The College uses a student charter to inform students about the ways in which they can be involved in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The College responds to issues raised by students through staff meetings, course committee meetings and student forums. The channels for student engagement outlined above allow Expectation B5 to be met.

2.32 The review team examined evidence from the self-evaluation document, student submission and supporting evidence, and held a series of meetings with staff and students. Students generally feel that their views are taken on board and that they are valued as part of the continuing development of the College. The College uses feedback from annual student surveys to inform activity, with a student involvement facilitator now appointed to provide guidance and training to student reps. Students and student reps understand their role and are involved in the process.

2.33 Having identified that wider student participation may be an issue at the College and having also been advised to 'develop more effective ways of ensuring formal student representation' in the 2010 IQER, the College has appointed a student involvement facilitator to improve this. The student involvement facilitator is responsible for ensuring students are aware of involvement opportunities available to them. Both students and staff are able to identify areas in which the College has made improvements as a direct response to student feedback. It is clear that a strong relationship exists between staff and students, and this allows students to take an active part in providing feedback at a departmental level, in addition to the College-wide approach facilitated by termly student forums and annual student surveys. The review team **affirms** the actions being taken by the College to support student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement, including the appointment of a student involvement facilitator.

2.34 The review team concludes that the College makes deliberate steps towards student engagement, involving students in the enhancement of the educational experience in a number of ways. Thus, Expectation B5 is met and the associated 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

2.35 Standards are set by the awarding bodies/organisation, and assessment is ultimately an awarding body/organisation responsibility with the approval of awards in accordance with their regulations and procedures. Each programme has an assessment board attended by external examiners/Standards Verifiers.

2.36 The College is responsible for managing assessment which is entirely coursework-based except in the Foundation Year to Medicine, which has module examinations at two points in the year. The Course Definitive Document and examples of Course Definitive Documents set out assessment procedures for Sheffield Hallam University and University of Sheffield provision. Assessments are designed by College staff by reference to validation (Sheffield Hallam University) and blueprint (University of Sheffield) arrangements. Pearson locates responsibility for the design of assessment instruments at College level; the College Assessment Policy outlines the operational processes that apply. The College's policies and procedures allow Expectation B6 to be met.

2.37 The review team considered the College's self-evaluation document, associated supporting evidence including the College's Assessment Policy, and new evidence provided during the visit. It met with senior staff, teaching staff, employers involved in work placement (some by telephone conversation) and support staff associated with the HE Unit and quality enhancement to examine the processes for assessment of student achievement.

2.38 Work placements are a mandatory part of some course provision. For Foundation Degrees with mandatory work-based learning, details are provided in definitive course documents and in information to employers and students. The College has close working relationships with local employers who support these arrangements, but induction processes vary. While the College contends that placement providers are not involved in assessment, it is clear that they are required to make judgements on the students' performance for certain learning outcomes. In these instances, assessment involves both the employer and course team in consideration of a learning work book/portfolio. As noted in Expectation B10, specific information and training on assessment of student achievement is not given to placement providers. This has led to a recommendation under Expectation B10.

2.39 Subject assessment boards, chaired by the relevant faculty collaborative coordinator from Sheffield Hallam University, consider FD marks which are then submitted to the Faculty Award Boards at Sheffield Hallam University. The University of Sheffield maintains responsibility for the conduct of the Foundation Year to Medicine examination boards held at the College or at the University and reports and records the results; the University's Director of Studies for the Foundation Programme chairs the board to ensure maintenance of standards and to moderate marks. Pearson assessment boards are also held at the College, chaired by the College Higher Education Quality and Operations Manager using the College's Assessment Policy and Pearson Guide to Assessment. Standards Verifier reports have confirmed the appropriateness of these boards. The College has employed additional staff to process and deliver assessment board decisions in a timely manner to students.

2.40 The College operates internal verification processes to verify marks awarded against assessment criteria, described in the College Assessment Policy; these are validated by external examiners for FDs and Standards Verifiers for Higher Nationals sampling work from across the programmes. For Sheffield Hallam University awards, the external examiner attends the exam boards, but this is not part of the role of the Standards Verifier. Feedback from external examiners and Standards Verifiers on the process of internal verification and the operation of assessment boards suggests that the processes are sound, a conclusion also reached by a recent Collaborative Periodic Review by Sheffield Hallam University. There is evidence of practices commended by external examiners/ Standards Verifiers.

2.41 The College receives few enquiries regarding recognition of prior learning, but procedures are set down in the College Assessment Policy. Other policies are available in course handbooks linked to assessment regulations which are available electronically; students are shown how to access these during induction.

2.42 Learning needs are identified and adjustments made using advice from the Higher Education Disability Adviser. On occasions these needs are met with the support of specialist tutors with understanding of the particular demands of the course.

2.43 The College Assessment Policy describes the various forms of academic malpractice and provides advice on managing these instances. The Assessment Policy has been subject to external review and will be amended for use in 2014-15.

2.44 Staff CVs are checked and approved by awarding bodies. Staff involved in the assessment of student work receive regular training, and the self-evaluation document states that specific needs were determined during a staff audit; there are opportunities for development and harmonisation of practice through conferences organised by the College and Sheffield Hallam University, and emerging communities of practice. Clear and constructive feedback to students appears to be a strength, remarked upon by external examiners/Standards Verifiers and in student surveys, although there are some areas for further development. Generally students find the academic feedback timely and helpful; this is provided in a variety of ways including through the VLE and by individual discussion with tutors. The assessment burden for Higher National awards is under review, with pilot work undertaken.

2.45 Advanced Practitioner roles have been established to help develop professional practice and the scholarship necessary to inform assessment and feedback practices.

2.46 The review team concludes that the College, drawing on the requirements of the awarding bodies/organisation, operates valid and reliable assessment procedures which enable students to demonstrate when learning outcomes have been achieved. Expectation B6 is met and the associated 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 College's awarding body, Sheffield Hallam University, and awarding organisation, Pearson, are responsible for defining the role of external examiners and for their appointment, training and recognition in relation to provision at levels 4 and 5. There are no external examiners for the University of Sheffield course as this is the equivalent of level 3 provision. The College is responsible for communicating with external examiners regarding the moderation of assessments and the arrangements for their site visits, and for considering and responding to external examiner reports.

2.48 The College's policy and procedures for external examining are described in its higher education assessment policy. The College has internal systems for receiving and responding to reports. The awarding body sends reports simultaneously to the HE Unit and the Quality Unit, both of which review and monitor the use of the reports, and a copy is sent to the Course Leader. Awarding organisation reports are provided online for course leaders to access. In both cases, course leaders are responsible for preparing a response to the reports on behalf of their department. This is undertaken in conjunction with the Link Tutor for programmes validated by Sheffield Hallam University, which provides the formal response to the external examiner. Course leaders are responsible for progressing any actions from external examiner reports, with monitoring by the HE Unit and Quality Unit. The policies and procedures of the College, in collaboration with their awarding bodies and organisation, allow Expectation B7 to be met.

2.49 The review team scrutinised a range of external examiner reports and documentary evidence showing consideration of the reports within the College. In meetings with senior, teaching and academic support staff, as well as awarding body and awarding organisation representatives, the team explored the process by which reports are received by the College and subsequently processed. The team also discussed the sharing of external examiner reports with students.

2.50 The process of considering and taking action in response to external examiner reports is rigorously documented. Reports are considered thoroughly and follow-up action is monitored at both course and institutional level. The annual academic review process uses a template which ensures consideration of external examiner reports and enables effective tracking of issues. An update to the annual academic review action plan is on the course committee agenda throughout the academic year and enables actions to be monitored at course level. Staff have a clear understanding of the arrangements for receiving and responding to external examiner reports and their integration into quality assurance systems. The HE Unit prepares a summary spreadsheet of good practice and actions arising from reports, which is used as a tracking and audit tool at institutional level regarding the implementation of course-level action plans.

2.51 External examiner reports comment on the currency and comparability of the curriculum, resources, assessment and feedback, and many highlight good practice. They confirm that actions are taken in response to the recommendations in their previous report. A recent Collaborative Programme Review by Sheffield Hallam University found that College relationships with external examiners are sound and appropriate, but noted that a delay in receipt of some reports had given rise to difficulties in completing the Routine Monitoring and Review. External examiners provide verbal feedback to the College during

their visits, so the receipt of the report was a formality and any delay did not inhibit action on any recommendations.

2.52 While partnership agreements indicate that responsibility for the induction and training of external examiners rests with the awarding body and awarding organisation, the team found that there was no consistent procedure for providing College-focused information to external examiners on taking up their appointment.

2.53 Students have access to external examiner reports via the College VLE site, and in some courses, students are given printed copies of the reports. However, there is variation in students' understanding of their availability and usefulness. The team concludes that the reports are available but the communication about them to students is variable.

2.54 The policies and procedures established for consideration of and response to external examiner reports under the oversight of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation meet Expectation B7. While the College does not routinely provide College-focused information to external examiners, and their reports are not routinely made available to students, the team is satisfied that the College makes scrupulous use of external examiners. The 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

2.55 The College operates an annual review of programmes, meeting the requirements of both universities and Pearson. A single mechanism is used which reflects the annual review cycle designed by Sheffield Hallam University for the regular review of their own provision, with particular College adaptations for Higher National courses. The annual review is a systematic review and evaluation of the programme, which includes statistical evaluation, student survey analysis, a Link Tutor commentary (if appropriate), external examiner/Standards Verifier reports and an action plan. The relevant report is submitted to the universities via the College HE Unit following agreement with the College Head of Department and checking by the HE Unit; similarly, the Higher National report is provided to Pearson for the Standards Verifier to consider during review of the provision.

2.56 All responsibilities are clearly defined in operational handbooks; course leaders are advised of any changes to the procedures in annual training sessions. Course Leaders and their teams are supported throughout the process by the HE Unit and the Higher Education Quality and Operations Manager.

2.57 Teaching teams and course committees meet to review provision throughout the year. Annual review records and tracking sheets are used by course teams to enhance the learning experience and progress is checked by the HE Unit. The policies and procedures of the College allow Expectation B8 to be met.

2.58 The review team considered the College's self-evaluation document and associated supporting evidence, including external examiner/Standards Verifier reports, extensive and detailed annual reports and action plans. It met senior staff, teaching staff, representatives of collaborating partners, and support staff associated with the HE Unit and quality enhancement to explore the processes for monitoring and review of programmes.

2.59 The adoption of a unified and comprehensive approach to monitoring and evaluation across all provision as detailed in paragraph 2.56 is **good practice**.

2.60 The College receives feedback for Sheffield Hallam University FD courses from the relevant Sheffield Hallam University Faculty, or from the Standards Verifier on Higher National programmes. The College HE Unit monitors timely completion of actions for all higher education programmes via an audit the following February. Occasionally, delayed receipt of external examiner reports has given rise to difficulties in completing the annual review but this is mitigated by the formal recording of oral comments given at the exam board. This enables the College to establish an action plan in advance of receipt of the report. Sheffield Hallam University requires formal submission of the written report to complete its cycle of academic review. The College and Sheffield Hallam University have a very close working relationship and this has led to an area of good practice identified in Expectation B4.

2.61 Significant use is made of the annual student survey and module/unit evaluations which are now required from all courses. Student representatives can attend all course committees, including the annual review meeting. Student engagement with the quality

processes is being made more effective through the support of the Student Involvement Facilitator. This has led to an affirmation in Expectation B5.

2.62 Sheffield Hallam University undertakes a Periodic Review of collaborative programmes; the Collaborative Periodic Review for Sheffield College was undertaken in April 2014. Using external, partner and University members, the review concluded, without conditions, that the management of the quality of standards of the provision is sound and the use of action plans is to be commended. It also concluded that the Academic Quality and Standards division of the University and the College HE Unit work together to make enhancements to the annual review process. A similar Periodic Review does not operate for the Pearson provision. The University of Sheffield University undertakes a review of the business case, partnership and collaborative arrangements prior to renewal of the agreement. The University of Sheffield Medical School conducts a Periodic Review of all its taught learning and teaching provision every five years. Additional comment is included in Expectation A3.3.

2.63 The review team concludes that the College's diligent application of, and support for, a systematic annual monitoring and evaluation process for all its higher education provision meets Expectation B8 and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.64 The College has a complaints procedure which is detailed in student handbooks and on the College website. The complaints procedure includes two stages: an informal discussion stage and a formal complaints procedure. The formal complaints procedure is also detailed on the College website, complete with a complaints registration form for students to complete. The College also operates a dedicated appeals policy. The policies and procedures followed by the College allow Expectation B9 to be met.

2.65 The review team examined the complaints policy, appeals policy, course handbooks and VLE, and met senior staff, student reps and students. No formal complaints or appeals have been received in the past year. Complaints are routinely resolved informally. This is supported by the student submission, stating 'most students will go and speak directly to a member of staff about making a complaint'. Students confirmed that they find tutors and teaching staff accessible and are comfortable with taking an informal approach.

2.66 As the College deals with the majority of complaints informally, it keeps records of these such that it can document the level of each complaint made and the actions taken by the College in response. Although no formal complaints can be evidenced, the procedure for making formal complaints is freely available to all on the College website and a complaint form is also provided, demonstrating an accessible complaints procedure.

2.67 The review team concludes that clear procedures for complaints and appeals are in place, with all necessary information provided in an accessible format. Thus, Expectation B9 is met and the associated 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 majority of College courses include an element of work experience through group projects, live projects to a client brief, or work placements. This work-based element is approved by the awarding body as part of the validation process. The College has arrangements with a range of employers to provide work experience. There are five courses in which work placements are mandatory, while in other courses, work placements are encouraged, and the College has a work placement policy which details the responsibilities of the College, students and employers. Course Leaders are responsible for organising placements, including ensuring that a placement is fit for purpose, liaison with employers and students on placement, and solving any issues that may arise during the placement. Students are briefed on the learning opportunities to be assessed, and have individual responsibility for securing their placement with support and guidance from the Course Leader. Lists of appropriate placement opportunities are held within departments, or the student may make their own arrangements.

2.69 The College has prepared a short guide for students and employers regarding work-based learning. Module guides and work-based learning handbooks detail the intended learning outcomes and tasks, and the form of assessment, which usually entails the preparation of a portfolio and a reflective journal, and can also include a project. The majority of assessment of work-based learning is carried out by College staff, although employers are involved in giving feedback on achievement of learning outcomes. In reviewing the evidence and samples of student work, the team found a demonstrable relationship between learning outcomes and assessment of the placement.

2.70 The College does not require employers to enter a formal learning agreement to provide work experience; employers are asked to sign different forms according to the course. One example of a work-based learning agreement signed by the College, employer and students largely concerns the provision of information. The work-based learning handbook for the FD Public Services (Police Studies) includes a mentor agreement to conduct workplace observations and review learning with the student.

2.71 The organisation and management of work-based learning is primarily achieved through the personal contacts that course leaders develop with employers. The College undertakes annual health and safety checks at the employers where mandatory placements will be undertaken, but not in other workplace settings. In some courses, for example the FD Sports and Exercise Coaching, students arrange their own work placement and risk assessment. The College obtains information that work-based learning is effective through student surveys, destination data and feedback from students on how well they are prepared for employment, but there is no formal monitoring and review of the arrangements for work-based learning.

2.72 There are no robust agreements with placement providers that clearly outline the parties' responsibilities and student expectations. Appropriate safety checks, risk assessments, due diligence and site visits are not routinely carried out for all the employers' premises in which students undertake placements. Furthermore, the College does not have arrangements in place to monitor and review work placements as a distinct activity.

The College's processes and procedures for the management of work-based learning do not allow Expectation B10 to be met.

2.73 The team **recommends** that by August 2015, the College should introduce formal arrangements for the governance, management and monitoring of work placements.

2.74 Employers are involved in the assessment of students since, as mentors, they are asked to confirm the achievement of learning outcomes. However, there was no documentary briefing for employers on their role in assessment. Therefore the team **recommends** that by August 2015, the College should provide briefing and training for work placement providers to ensure employers understand their roles and responsibilities, including those relating to the assessment of student achievement.

2.75 The review team scrutinised the evidence in the self-evaluation document, the work placement policy, information packs, module guides and work-based learning handbooks, and completed student portfolios. In addition, the team held a series of meetings with senior, teaching and academic support staff, employers and students to discuss the organisation and management of work-based learning.

2.76 The evidence from students and employers is that the work-based learning arrangements are effective in their implementation. Students were enthusiastic about the opportunities and benefits, and confident that the College would resolve any issues. Employers confirmed that there is good communication with course leaders and strong personal contacts. Overall, work-based learning makes a positive contribution to the students' learning experiences. The highly productive relationship between individual employers and individual course tutors is **good practice**. In addition, the College-wide commitment to employability, and the breadth and diversity of work-based learning opportunities including employer-led projects, are identified as good practice in section B4.

2.77 At an individual level, the relationship between the College, the employer and the student is working well. However, the lack of formal arrangements for the management and monitoring of work placements as well as briefing employers regarding their roles and responsibilities could put a student at risk of not achieving the intended objectives of their work experience. Expectation B10 is not met, but as the potential risks are at the individual level, and not cohort level, the risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.78 The College does not offer research degrees.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.80 Of the 10 applicable Expectations for this judgement area, nine were met with a low risk and the remaining Expectation (B10) was not met but with a moderate risk. There are two recommendations in this Expectation, both relating to the management of work placement activities. In addition there are five areas of good practice identified (located in Expectations B3, B4, B4, B8 and B10) and one affirmation relating to the College's actions to support student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement located in B5.

2.81 The review team notes that while B10 is not met with a moderate risk, there is no evidence that any students have to date been disadvantaged. Indeed, the students value highly the opportunities for work-based and placement learning afforded to them by the College. The issues relate to a lack of College overall management of work placement activities which means that students could be disadvantaged if placements were to fail.

2.82 The review team thus concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The College provides a wealth of information for prospective students and members of the public on the website, including information on the values and strategy of the College as well as details of available courses. The College uses the VLE to provide information to current students. The level and accessibility of information provided allow Expectation C to be met.

3.2 The review team examined the College website, VLE, course handbooks and College prospectus. The review team also met teaching staff and students.

3.3 Despite information being available on the College website, some students note that the website is less useful for current students. Some students also report that the use of the VLE is inconsistent. However, the VLE contains all the necessary information. Feedback is given through the VLE in a timely manner. The HE Unit is also able to provide teaching staff with a great deal of information and support.

3.4 The College has fulfilled a number of essential requirements following the 2010 IQER, meaning it is now much stronger in this area. The prospectus is useful and informative, as well as being consistent with information provided on the website. The College provides new students with a booklet to assist with induction and the VLE is used as an effective tool for providing information to current students, with training provided to staff members to maximise its potential. The College website is particularly useful and easy to navigate, making it easy to find appropriate information such as policies and procedures. The level of information provided to employers involved in work-based learning could be improved, and this has led to a recommendation under Expectation B10.

3.5 Course handbooks supply teachers and students alike with relevant course information such as specifications, assessment regulations and availability of learning resources. Course definitive documents provide additional information such as historical data and module descriptors.

3.6 Overall, the College meets Expectation C with an associated low level of risk. This is because information provided for all audiences, barring the aforementioned employers, is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.8 Expectation C is met and the level of risk is low. There are no recommendations, affirmations or areas of good practice associated with the Expectation, although one of the recommendations in Expectation B10 is also relevant to this section.

3.9 The review team concludes that the quality of the information produced by the College about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy and thus **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 recently prepared a College-wide Quality Enhancement Strategy for adoption in 2014-15.

4.2 The main mechanisms in operation for identifying areas that require enhancement are through the annual student survey reports, the College Self-Assessment Report and the annual review. A peer observation policy, specifically framed to include higher education provision, exists to share effective practice. The College policies and procedures allow Expectation (Enhancement) to be met.

4.3 One area of concern to FD students has been limited access to the facilities available in the learning resource centres of Sheffield Hallam University. This is now resolved for 2014-15, and is an example of a successful close working relationship between the College and Sheffield Hallam University which is good practice. This good working relationship is examined further in Expectations B8 and B4.

4.4 From 2015-16 Norton College will close and the provision will move to Hillsborough College as part of a planned investment to provide a purpose-built facility for the majority of full-time higher education. Reorganisation is already taking place at Hillsborough in anticipation of this development.

4.5 Employability skills are embedded in higher education courses. All FDs have work-based learning as part of the course, often as distinct modules. In some cases this involves mandatory placement, in others networking or live projects set up by employers. Engagement with live briefs can have significant value to employers. All students are entitled to the services of a business adviser and this facility has been used by students in establishing start-up businesses. The embedded character of student employability in all programmes and the breadth and diversity of work-based experiences are examples of good practice and are explored further in Expectation B4.

4.6 The College teaching, learning and assessment strategy has led to a series of enhancements. These include: progress towards Higher Education Academy Fellowship for 95 per cent of teaching staff, with further demonstrable engagement by learning resources support staff; recognition of Course Leader responsibilities in the College workload model; and the allocation of time for scholarly activity. These strategic developments are strongly supported by the establishment of advanced practitioners with a significant role in staff development.

These are considered features of good practice and are further explored in Expectation B3.

4.7 The appointment of two Higher Education Advanced Practitioners with a role to develop scholarly activity has strengthened the higher education ethos among staff. One of the advanced practitioners is promoting staff engagement with the Higher Education Academy, aiming for 95 per cent of full-time staff as Fellows in three years. The other Advanced Practitioner is developing Higher Education Forums into communities of practice, as well as facilitating sharing of scholarly activity and good practice in the use of the VLE as a teaching tool. The establishment and support of advanced practitioners with a significant role in developing academic and support staff is **good practice**.

4.8 The College is taking deliberate steps to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities through improved learning resources, a focus on employability, and staff development. The Expectation (Enhancement) is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.10 The Expectation (Enhancement) is met and poses a low risk. There are no recommendations or affirmations associated with this judgement area. There is one area of good practice associated with this judgement area concerned with the establishment and support of advanced practitioners, but in addition the good practice identified in Expectations B3, B4, B4 and B8 is also relevant to this judgement area.

4.11 Given that the Expectation (Enhancement) is met with a low risk, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The College's commitment to student employability is evidenced in the Strategic Framework which clearly defines employability and enterprise as central themes. This is underpinned by the College's reputation as a leading college for enterprise education. The team notes the top-level determination to pursue employability initiatives to respond to the economic challenges facing the region.

5.2 All higher education courses have a vocational focus and the development of students' employability skills is embedded across its provision. This is reflected in programme specifications, definitive course documents and course handbooks. Employability skills are developed through a range of activities including work-based learning modules, consultancy projects, portfolio preparation, student exhibitions (for example in photography), starting a company in media production, and planning and organising events on the Events and Tourism Management course. Employability skills in FDs in Fashion Design and Manufacture, Graphic Design, Media Production, and Photography are largely developed through live projects. For these, students are given a live brief for a client to whom they have to deliver on time and to a specification; this culminates in 'the Crit' where students present their work to the employer and their peers, and receive feedback. In courses such as construction, engineering and business management, students work on group projects, and in many courses work placements are a significant feature. All Foundation Degrees have work-based learning embedded in the courses, often as distinct modules, for example in the FDs in Sport and Exercise Coaching, Events and Tourism Management, and Police Studies. All courses have at least one module or unit involving a research project, which develops research, writing and referencing skills as well as depth of analysis and use of theoretical concepts. Also, all courses have a professional studies module or unit. This requires students to reflect on their learning and consider their career development in their chosen industry. The College careers service provides assistance with CV preparation and interview skills. In addition, to assist students in their transition to employment, the College gives an entitlement to the services of a business adviser in the Enterprise Unit, although the awareness and use of this service varies between courses.

5.3 Students and employers are positive and enthusiastic about the opportunities the College provides to students to enhance their employability, and work experience frequently leads to permanent employment. In some instances, students said that they would like to see a greater focus on employability in their assessments; the College is working towards fully embedding its employability strategy as courses are revalidated.

5.4 There are three areas of good practice relating to employability: the College-wide commitment to student employability (Expectation B4); the breadth and diversity of work-based learning opportunities including employer-led projects available to students (Expectation B4); and the effective relationship between individual employers and individual course tutors (Expectation B10).

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27 to 29 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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