



Higher Education Review of Tower Hamlets College

May 2016

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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 Tower Hamlets College. The review took place from 9 to 12 May 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Nicola Jackson (Reviewer)
- Mr Stuart Cannell (Student Reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 6. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 11.

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

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

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

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

² Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages:
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Amended judgement - December 2017

Introduction

In May 2016, Tower Hamlets College underwent a Higher Education Review, which resulted in the following judgements: the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding organisation meets UK expectations; the quality of student learning opportunities requires improvement to meet UK expectations; the quality of the information about learning opportunities meets UK expectations; and the enhancement of student learning opportunities requires improvement to meet UK expectations.

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

The College published an action plan in October 2016 describing how it intended to address the recommendations, affirmations and good practice identified in the review, and has been working over the last 10 months to demonstrate how it has implemented that plan.

During 2016-17 the College underwent substantial change as a result of the Further Education Area Reviews, first merging with Hackney College in August 2016 then with Redbridge College in April 2017 to create a new entity, New City College (NCC). Although the three colleges currently retain their titles and campus identities, a new NCC management and governance structure has been put in place to develop institution-wide policies and procedures appropriate for implementation across the new merged entity during 2017-18. A further significant change has been the discontinuation of the subcontracted partnership arrangement with QAHE Ltd, which featured in many of the recommendations made by the original review team. This arrangement ended by mutual agreement and the close of the 2015-16 academic year.

The follow-up process included three progress updates submitted by the College since October 2016. This culminated in the review team's scrutiny of the progress reports and supporting documentary evidence, along with a one day visit on 25 September 2017 by two reviewers. During the visit, the team met students, senior managers and teaching staff involved in programmes delivered at the Tower Hamlets campus to discuss progress and triangulate the evidence base received.

The visit confirmed that the recommendations and affirmations relating to the quality of student learning opportunities and the enhancement of student learning opportunities had been successfully addressed and the good practice appropriately maintained. Actions against recommendations relating to the maintenance of academic standards of awards, had also been completed on schedule.

QAA Board decision and amended judgements

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

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

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

Findings from the follow-up process

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

Recommendation 1:

The College has taken appropriate steps to ensure the full understanding of academic frameworks to assure the secure award of credit. The Staff Handbook for Higher Education Programmes has been updated to include information regarding key reference points. Training has been provided by external bodies and support is provided through a new Head of Higher Education appointment. College staff demonstrate a more detailed understanding of the Quality Code and FHEQ supported by staff development events and more explicit reference to the role of the FHEQ and other external reference points in College documentation. The College has made sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 2:

The College has terminated its subcontracting arrangement with QAHE and has strengthened the oversight of any future partnerships through a revised higher education subcontracting agreement that includes clear guidance on the College's oversight of admissions. It has also revised the Admissions Policy to include procedures in relation to subcontracting partners. Staff confirmed that all applicants are now interviewed by specialist academic staff in a systematic manner and that all students will come under the same operational admissions system in any future subcontracted arrangement. The College has made sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 3:

The College has updated its policies for admissions, course advice and careers to ensure that unsuccessful applicants will be referred to the College's internal advice and guidance team in any future partnership. The Higher Education Self-Evaluation document for Student Services, due in October 2017, will evaluate the admissions and advice processes for the newly merged college. Student views have been central to informing the revised advice and guidance procedures, including careers coaching, which was regarded positively by students. The College has made sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 4:

The College has enhanced its Student Engagement Strategy and contributions from student representatives to committee meetings have led to enhancements in learning opportunities. Student feedback training was provided to support completion of the College student survey published and considered by the Student Services Board in July 2017. Training of nominated representatives was carried out in one-to-one interviews undertaken through the tutorial programme. A student engagement task group has begun reviewing recruitment and training support for student representatives across the new merged institution, which will be finalised through the NCC deliberative committee structure. Students confirmed that the approach was effective in practice and that trained representatives were in place. The College has made sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 5:

The College has revised its Tutorial Support Policy to give greater clarity to the needs and entitlement of higher education students. The Policy contains information on regular tutorial sessions and provides further guidance for staff on the role of the personal tutor in providing pastoral and academic support. There is evidence of student satisfaction with the tutorial

support received and that issues affecting students had been effectively addressed. Input from academic staff and students into the revised Policy had informed an enhanced focus on core skills to support study and on progression and careers. The College has made sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 6:

The College has strengthened its internal procedures for recording programme modifications and discontinuations. A standard template has been introduced for all modification proposals and the process is clearly outlined in the Staff Handbook for Higher Education. Completed forms demonstrate that the process is clearly articulated and is operating effectively. The College has made sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 7:

The College has revised the Staff Handbook for Higher Education to strengthen guidance on the use of external examiner reports and has improved documentation for staff. Full external examiner reports are made available to staff and students through the virtual learning environment, are discussed at programme-level meetings, and a commentary on the reports is required as part of annual programme reports. External examiner reports are routinely used to inform action plans, which are monitored at programme and College level. The College has made sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 8:

The College has improved the internal collaboration between Student Services and academic staff by ensuring that terms of reference and membership of deliberative committees better reflect the student experience. All support services are now delivered within the College. The minutes of Higher Education Academic Board and the cross-College Student Services Board demonstrate effective liaison across the College for support services, supported by the revised committee structure. There is a clear strategic approach and academic staff recognise the potential for sharing expertise through the new merger. The College has made sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 9:

The College has completed the self-assessment process developed by the Quality Improvement Team which is detailed in the Staff Handbook for Higher Education. The process drew on a range of information including retention and progression data, student feedback and external examiner reports. Annual programme reports are thorough, use relevant data and contain detailed action plans. Minutes of committees demonstrate that the process and outcomes of annual self-assessment have been appropriately discussed and key issues identified. Senior Curriculum Managers have a thorough understanding of their responsibilities for annual monitoring and, although this was less evident across the wider programme team, the outputs from the process were satisfactory. The College has made sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 10:

The College has implemented a revised Teaching and Learning Observation Policy that incorporates significant changes to the lesson observation process and accompanying documentation. Observations are now ungraded and are intended to support a more reflective, developmental approach. The frequency of peer observations has increased and those with experience of the new process recognised the difference of approach in practice. Following the merger, all staff teaching higher education received Higher Education

Academy training on lesson and peer observation. The College has made sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 11:

The College has reviewed and updated the Student Engagement Strategy following student consultation. Although an interim strategy due to the merger, it supports student attendance at course meetings and Staff-Student Liaison Committee, and minutes confirm student involvement. Actions raised from these meetings are reviewed at Higher Education Academic Board and the Quality and Standards Committee. Students attend meetings regularly and noted changes arising from feedback such as support for academic literacy and other higher skills needed for progression. Although progress is more limited in strategic areas due to the merger, the College has made sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Recommendation 12:

The College has adopted an interim enhancement strategy for higher education, which was developed following internal consultation with students and staff. Enhancement areas for 2016-17 were identified by the Quality and Standards Committee, which also monitors progress against the objectives. A new Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy was put in place for NCC in 2017 which will run until 2020. The Enhancement Summary for 2016-17 is comprehensive and includes strands on developing employability, providing students with access to wider learning resources and increasing scholarly activity. Students informed the team that the College was consistently striving to enhance their experience. The College has made sufficient progress against this recommendation.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Tower Hamlets College

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

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following feature of **good practice** at Tower Hamlets College.

- The responsive and comprehensive approach to the provision of learning resources that contributes to the effective engagement of students in their learning opportunities (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

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

By September 2016:

- implement a formal process to ensure the full understanding of academic frameworks to assure the secure award of credit (Expectations A3.2 and A2.1)
- revise and strengthen admissions procedures at provider level to ensure full oversight and consistency of processes for all applicants (Expectations B2 and B10)
- implement and monitor effective processes for the provision of advice and guidance to enable all applicants to make an informed decision (Expectations B2, B10 and C)
- establish a robust student representative training mechanism to equip students to fulfil their roles more effectively in educational enhancement and quality assurance (Expectation B5).

By October 2016:

- establish and implement formal procedures for the approval and definitive recording of minor and major modifications (Expectations B1 and A2.2)
- review and revise tutorial policy and procedures to ensure consistency and coherent oversight for all higher education students (Expectations B4, B3 and B10)
- develop, monitor and evaluate a strategic approach to the oversight of support services for students at all locations of delivery to support equity and the sharing of good practice (Expectations B4, B10 and Enhancement)
- formalise the procedure for making scrupulous use of external examiner reports (Expectation B7)
- strengthen the annual monitoring process by systematically identifying and analysing relevant sources of higher education information to assure and enhance

the quality of student learning opportunities (Expectations B8, B10, Enhancement and C).

By January 2017:

- review its processes and documentation for lesson observations to ensure the process supports enhancement in a higher education context (Expectation B3)
- engage students at all levels as partners in the development and implementation of the Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy (Expectation B5, Enhancement)
- take deliberate steps at provider level to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities through further development and implementation of the Higher Education Strategy and the sharing of good practice across provision (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that Tower Hamlets College is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The steps taken to introduce a robust two stage approval process for the internal development of higher education programmes (Expectation B1).
- The steps taken to establish the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee to capture and respond to the strategic needs of its higher education provision (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

Tower Hamlets College (the College) regards itself as strongly rooted in the local community and student employability is a key component of its mission. The borough of Tower Hamlets according to the 2011 Census, records an employment rate of 57.6 per cent (for the 16 to 74 age group) and below the national averaged for England (61.1 per cent) and for London (62.4 per cent). The challenges for the borough are reflected in the College's student cohort whereby 28 per cent of its adult learners have been in employment prior to enrolment in the 2014-15 academic year.

The College's partnership with QAHE Ltd was developed to allow for clear pathways into employment. Its higher education delivery encompasses provision in business, computing and systems development. A programme in health and social care is delivered at the College itself. The College works with the finance industry and two local NHS trusts: Barts Health NHS Trust and Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust, to support student employment opportunity. It runs a successful Internship Preparation Programme with KPMG for its level 3 provision; the College plans to extend this to its higher education programmes. As a result of the programme, the College has secured internships for over 50 further education students, resulting in permanent employment for some as a direct result. Placements form a central component of the College's HNC Health and Social Care programme, enabling students to hone their practice through a workplace setting. All higher education students are able to access careers advice at both campus delivery locations.

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

About Tower Hamlets College

Tower Hamlets College is a general further education college, based in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, East London. Its mission is to 'create opportunities through inspiring teaching and learning, by developing students' skills, knowledge, curiosity, resilience and employability'. As part of its Strategic Plan, the College aims to become an 'outstanding provider of education', that encompasses higher education, by 2018. Consequently, the College's higher education provision is regarded as a 'key strategic area for development to meet the skill needs of the local economy, providing additional progression opportunities for existing learner and local residents'.

The College is approved to offer the following programmes:

BTEC Higher National Certificate (HNC) Diploma in Health and Social Care Level 4
BTEC HNC Diploma in Business Level 4
BTEC HNC Diploma in Computing and Systems Development Level 4
BTEC HNC Diploma in Interactive Media Level 4 (currently not being delivered).

The programmes are offered on behalf of the College's awarding organisation, Pearson Education Ltd (Pearson). The College gained approval from Pearson in 2013 and began delivery in September 2015. This is the first set of higher education delivery undertaken by the College since the conclusion of its teacher training provision in 2012.

The HNCs in Business and Computing and Systems Development are jointly delivered through a subcontracted partner organisation, QAHE Ltd (QAHE); this arrangement commenced in September 2015. The College has over 5,000 students enrolled across its provision, 38 of whom are higher education students on the HNCs in Health and Social Care, Business, and Computing and Systems Development.

Tower Hamlets College faces a range of challenges in response to local and regional needs and government spending cuts. Its self-evaluation document outlines how the College has responded positively to these challenges including 'significant improvements to curriculum, quality and the financial health of the College'. In December 2013 Ofsted judged the College to be a good provider.

In July 2015 the government announced plans for a national programme of area-based reviews. Shortly after the announcement a number of colleges in the region began to explore options with neighbouring providers. In August 2015 the College formed an alliance with two local colleges, Newham College of Further Education and Redbridge College. In addition to forming alliances, the Board of Governors for Tower Hamlets College, Hackney Community College and Redbridge College approved the first stage of a proposed merger. This is currently under consultation with plans for a merger to come into effect from August 2016 between the College and Hackney Community College and a strategic alliance with Redbridge College.

The College was previously reviewed by QAA in November 2011 where it achieved a positive outcome from its Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER). At the time of the review the College offered the Professional Graduate Certificate in Education/Certificate in Education (PCET) in partnership with the University of East London; the Postgraduate Certificate in Education Literacy or ESOL in partnership with the Institute of Education and the Additional Diploma in Teaching Mathematics (numeracy) in partnership with the University of Greenwich. As noted in its IQER report, the College was in the process of reviewing its higher education provision in light of government policies and subsequently

took the strategic decision to close its Teacher Training department, and thereby cease delivery of its higher education programmes in partnership with its three awarding bodies.

The IQER report identified four features of good practice and made four recommendations, one advisable and three desirable. These recommendations were to ensure that the quality and use of data relating to its higher education provision is appropriate to inform the effective management of academic standards (advisable); to consider methods to promote the engagement of all higher education tutors, and staff involved in the provision of student services, with the Academic Infrastructure and its application (desirable); to ensure that information on all student services used by higher education students is always included in the self-assessment reports (desirable); and to enhance the extent of staff development that is focused on higher education (desirable).

The College has made improvements in its use and understanding of data so that it is 'used very effectively to set targets and drive improvements in quality and standards'. It uses a system used to track the progress of individual students and an active dashboard that provides statistical student information (progression, achievement and attendance); the College plans are in development to extend this to its higher education programmes. The College intends to provide additional training on the Quality Code and is 'working closely with counterparts at QAHE who are experienced and managing academic standards and the quality of learning against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education' to support this. There is an annual process for self-assessment that is completed by all its departments and the full impact of delivery for higher education students will be included. The College also has a range of development opportunities available to staff, including a process to secure funding for higher level qualifications. The provision of specialist training, arranged centrally, is also available. The College has 'focused on developing a robust assessment and verification process and meeting the academic standards of the qualification'. It's cross-College staff development days focus on themes central to teaching and all its staff have 'recently attended training on the new Prevent Agenda'.

Explanation of the findings about Tower Hamlets 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 the awarding organisation

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

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (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 have degree awarding powers; its higher education provision is validated by the awarding organisation, Pearson. The responsibility for the design of each qualification (that is, modules, specifications and assessment criteria) rests with Pearson; these are in line with national benchmarks and credit frameworks. The qualifications at levels 4 and 5 are on the Qualification Credit Framework (QCF) and Pearson has oversight of the registration and approval of final awards. Pearson set the academic standards for its higher education provision and they are positioned at the appropriate level of the FHEQ.

1.2 Programme specifications make reference to FHEQ levels and the College's Quality Handbook for Higher Education, available to all staff, references the Quality Code. Programme specifications also set out specific aims and learning outcomes aligned to relevant Pearson programme specification documents, the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. A mapping exercise against Subject Benchmark Statements has been undertaken for courses delivered by the College's subcontracted partner organisation, QAHE.

1.3 Pearson are responsible for the appointment of Standards Verifiers who ensure that academic standards are met for the specification in line with national standards. The College undergoes annual quality review with Pearson and use is made of both the Pearson Centre Guide to Assessment and the BTEC Quality Handbook.

1.4 The design would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.5 The review team examined approval and guidance documentation for Pearson programmes, as well as programme specifications and the College's Quality Handbooks. The team interviewed senior and academic staff and students regarding the academic standards of its programmes.

1.6 All programmes offered by the College have received approval from Pearson to be delivered. The College has approval to deliver HNCs in Business, Computing and System Development, Health and Social Care and Interactive Media and has approval for a level 5 qualification in Computing and System Development but has not yet commenced delivery of this course. Its provision for HNCs in Business and Computing and System Development is subcontracted to QAHE for shared delivery.

1.7 College staff are familiar with Pearson standards, assessment and verification processes through their work at level 3, and their extensive experience of active engagement with Pearson. Staff at the College and QAHE influence the choice of units within the allowed rules of combination. Pearson have provided training in delivering HNCs and senior staff told the review team that the Quality Handbook for Higher Education Learning Programmes is regarded as a definitive manual, though in meetings with staff it was clear its usage is not yet fully embedded but is used as a reference point; further developments of this handbook are planned. Professional staff are aware of the handbook and use it as a source of information.

1.8 Senior curriculum managers confirm that academic staff have some awareness of the Quality Code, and of the FHEQ as aligned through Pearson. Programme specifications are stand-alone documents contextualised for option choices at the College and QAHE, with differing factors having a bearing for choosing units such as employers' needs and progression opportunities (including those with QAHE). The review team understands that the Head of Faculty has final sign off for module choices, and senior curriculum managers spoke positively about the guidance documents provided by Pearson indicating that less use is made day to day of the College's Quality Handbook for Higher Education.

1.9 Academic staff at the College have some awareness of the Quality Code but little familiarity with the FHEQ. Academic staff at QAHE confirm that they are aware of Subject Benchmark Statements through its university partners and industry requirements. Staff awareness of the FHEQ and Quality Code is explored further under Expectation A3.2.

1.10 Processes and procedures are in place to ensure that the requirements of the FHEQ, national credit frameworks and Subject Benchmark Statements are met, by following Pearson requirements and rules of combination, and by engaging regularly and appropriately with Pearson's processes, including approval to deliver all current programmes. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.11 The College's management structure consists of the Curriculum and Quality Committee of the Governing Body, the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee and the Head of Quality; final responsibility rests with the Vice Principal for Curriculum and Quality. At an operational level, the College has Heads of Faculty and senior curriculum managers who have responsibility for quality and standards.

1.12 The Curriculum and Quality Committee is responsible for academic affairs across the College including higher education academic standards. The Vice Principal for Curriculum and Quality has the responsibility for the strategic development and delivery of higher education provision within the College. All relevant committees will feed up to the newly established Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee, chaired by the Vice Principal for Curriculum and Quality. The College has two Academic Boards for its higher education programmes, one Academic Board for its College-based provision and another to oversee its partnership with QAHE, the QAHE Joint Academic Board. The Programme Committees and Staff and Student Liaison Committees (Learner Voice) report to the respective Academic Boards.

1.13 All higher education provision is governed by the academic standards set out by Pearson and approval agreements are in place for delivery. Pearson academic standards are set out in the BTEC Quality Assurance Handbook. The Head of Quality is the College's Quality Nominee for Pearson and therefore monitors quality and standards of higher education. The College has developed its own Quality Handbook for Higher Education and a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy to support the delivery and assessment of all programmes under a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy.

1.14 The academic frameworks and regulations that are in place to govern the correct award of academic credit and qualifications would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.15 The team scrutinised a range of policy documentation and agreements, the College's committee structure, and quality handbooks for the College's higher education provision. The team also interviewed senior managers, academic staff and students regarding the award of academic credit.

1.16 All programmes go through an internal approval process which commences within curriculum departments, is signed off by the Head of Faculty and then goes to the Vice Principal for final approval as part of the College's curriculum and business planning process. The same process applies for programmes delivered in partnership with QAHE; the expectation being that it is a cross-institutional team that will develop the programme. Delivery at QAHE is governed by a signed subcontract agreement.

1.17 Maintenance of records is provided through the College's exams department and through an internal audit record system. For higher level qualifications, definitive records (including programme specifications) of all validated programmes delivered by the College and QAHE, are retained by Pearson. Internally, these documents are published for both staff

and students on the relevant course pages of the College's virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.18 Programme specifications document each programme's course structure permissible within Pearson's rules of combination and use Pearson unit descriptors. The academic committee structure supports secure governance of the award of credit.

1.19 The College is approved to deliver its current higher education provision and its approval of the subcontracted arrangement with QAHE is in place. Pearson have confirmed that they are aware of the College's arrangement with QAHE although its annual quality review carried out in February 2016 states that there are no collaborative or partnership arrangements recognised by the Pearson system and will be addressed by the next Pearson Centre visit.

1.20 The review team found that College staff do not have a full understanding of the Quality Code, and a recommendation is made under Expectation A3.2. However, senior staff confirm that College staff are familiar with Pearson standards, assessment and verification processes through their work at level 3 and QAHE staff confirm their experience through their relationships with its university partners. The review team heard how staff have focused on accuracy of assignment briefs, with the provision of Pearson training to inform design. Senior curriculum managers describe how they use assessment feedback to inform practice, which a QAHE programme leader said has helped to avoid 'drift' of level. All assessment is subject to Pearson's verification and a schedule of internal verification is in place in preparation for the Standards Verifier visit. The review team was told of an example where discussions about grading had been addressed through moderation. In Business, College staff also internally verify assessments from QAHE, which are first marked by QAHE academic staff.

1.21 Academic staff use the Pearson assignment checker to assure assessments are set at the correct level and they have regular interaction with Pearson verifiers to assure standards. Academic staff also confirm the process by which assessment is awarded. Firstly the assignment brief is designed by the academic team with internal verification oversight, each assignment is then sent to the senior curriculum manager for checking and sign-off. At the summative assessment point, internal verification takes place to an agreed schedule and then the Assessment Board (Awards Board) and the Pearson Standards Verifier approves the award. Awards Boards will be scheduled to meet at the end of each stage of the course with Academic Boards for higher education provision held termly. Health and Social Care students confirm that they are aware of the forthcoming Standards Verifier visit.

1.22 The College has comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications, and operational evidence confirms that these systems are in place, and involve approval at all levels by Pearson. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.23 For higher level qualifications, definitive records (including programme specifications) of all programmes delivered by the College (or QAHE) are validated and retained by Pearson. The programme specification is the definitive record of information in relation to each programme. Internally these documents are published on the relevant course pages of Moodle. Pearson also produces a Centre Guide to Assessment, a BTEC Quality Handbook relevant to levels 4-7 and internal quality guidance documents outline the process for its approval and amendment.

1.24 Pearson stores records of registration, achievement and external verification activities which can be accessed by the College through a secure website. Once a claim has been submitted through the website, certificates will be distributed through the College's central exams department and sent out to respective students.

1.25 The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.26 The team examined a range of documentation regarding awarding organisation and College responsibilities for definitive records and documents pertaining to internal quality policies and guidance. A demonstration of the VLE was provided to examine online availability of documentation to staff. The review team spoke to senior managers, academic and professional staff, and students, regarding the definitive provision of records of study.

1.27 The College has an internal student record system, EBS, used to record all information relating to a student's enrolment and programme achievement. This system is also used to record timetable information, attendance and progression data. For the students on learning programmes delivered in partnership with QAHE, all details are recorded on the College's EBS system. Student attendance data is stored on QAHE's local system, SITS.

1.28 Students confirm that at the beginning of each module, the tutor discusses with them what is needed in order to meet the assessment criteria, and that course handbooks and unit information are made available to them on the VLE. Students at QAHE confirm they have access to the VLE. Health and Social Care students also confirm that the choice of units in the programme had been discussed with them in light of their workplace setting (in hospitals and social care) and their likely career progression.

1.29 Programme specifications are contextualised to delivery and based on Pearson's rules of combination. The team heard that the College has a local process in place to enable staff to make minor modifications through its Programme Committee and in liaison with the Standards Verifier at Pearson. One example was the change to include a unit covering social aspects in the Health and Social Care programme that mirrored student interest. Senior staff confirm that a minor modification would require the completion of paperwork with programme specifications approved by the relevant Head of Faculty. The review team requested that the College provide the evidence base for which the minor modification was agreed upon. The College provided the team with the committee minutes in which the modification was discussed and agreed upon; however, there was no subsequent

documentation to support the modification process. The review team determines that this process is insufficient as it does not fully document and record the programme modification process in full. This has led to a recommendation being made under Expectation B1.

1.30 Contextualised programme specifications are available for higher education courses on the VLE, and Standards Verifier reports will also be made available following its receipt.

1.31 The College uses Pearson documentation and guidance to produce programme specifications as a definitive record of programmes and optional units are selected in accordance with Pearson's rules of combination. Definitive programme records are displayed on the College's VLE. The College liaises regularly with Pearson Standards Verifiers to assure content, and the process to approve minor and major modifications at faculty level is in place. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.1): 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

1.32 The College does not have degree awarding powers and is validated by its awarding organisation, Pearson. The responsibility for the design and approval of each qualification rests with Pearson. The College operates a two-stage internal approval process that culminates in the College's Senior Management Team's consent, prior to its submission for approval to Pearson.

1.33 The responsibilities of the College regarding programme development and its approval by Pearson, are set out and agreed within the Responsibilities Checklist.

1.34 The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.35 The review team examined programme specifications and documentation relating to the College's qualification approval process. The review team spoke to senior managers and academic staff regarding the robustness of this process and its application.

1.36 The College's two-stage approval procedure forms part of its curriculum and business planning process. Its proposal documentation demonstrated how its existing provision had been internally assured by the Vice Principal for Curriculum and Quality and the College's Senior Management Team prior to its submission for approval by Pearson. The review team confirms that the College's process for the internal approval of qualifications meets the requirements set out by Pearson. Programme documentation required for Pearson's approval ensures academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standards for the qualification.

1.37 The College aligns each unit-level assignment to learning outcomes that contribute to the wider completion of the respective programme and outlined in detail within each assignment brief. Within each programme specification the entire list of expected learning outcomes are also recorded. Students confirm that they are informed of the learning outcomes as the assignment briefs are discussed with them at the beginning of each unit. This ensures that the standards within assessment are achieved.

1.38 The review team concludes that the College's procedures for the approval of programmes and its processes meet the requirements set out by its awarding organisation in order to secure academic standards. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.39 The responsibilities of the College and its awarding organisation, Pearson, are outlined within the agreed Responsibilities Checklist, the College also have a signed formal agreement in place for its subcontracted arrangements with its partner organisation QAHE - a provider that the College regards as having significant experience in the delivery and assessment of higher education. The responsibilities between the College and QAHE are set out in a separate checklist.

1.40 The College has in place assessment, internal verification and moderation guidelines, together with the quality handbook for higher education, that outline the procedures and processes for the achievement of learning outcomes and the secure award of credit and qualifications. The College's policies and procedures are overseen through Pearson's annual quality review.

1.41 Pearson's Standards Verifier feedback attest that assessment standards are set at the appropriate level in order to secure outcomes.

1.42 The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.43 The review team examined the College's assessment procedures, the responsibilities checklists, its quality handbook for higher education and reports from Pearson. The review team spoke to senior managers and academic and professional staff about external reference points and the application of the College's procedures and processes.

1.44 It is Pearson's responsibility to set out the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for each component of the programme. It is the College's responsibility to maintain academic standards on behalf of Pearson by setting assessments that meet Pearson requirements and regulations; this responsibility for setting assessments has been delegated to programme teams. Senior staff and senior curriculum managers advised the team that College academic staff are familiar with Pearson standards, assessment and verification processes through their work at level 3 and their extensive experience and active engagement with Pearson. Senior QAHE managers confirm their academic staff experience through relationships with its university partners.

1.45 Academic staff for both the College and QAHE confirm use is made of the Pearson assignment checker to assure assessments are set at the correct level and have regular interaction with Pearson's Standards Verifiers to assure assessment standards. Staff reported that they focused on the accuracy of assignment briefs, with the provision of Pearson training to inform design. All assessment is subject to the College's internal verification process and Pearson's external verification activity.

1.46 The review team found a disparity in the knowledge and understanding of external reference points that dictate the awarding of credit and level of achievement between staff at the College and staff at QAHE. While reference is made to both the UK Quality Code and the FHEQ in the College's Quality Handbook for Higher Education, there was limited awareness among College staff of external reference points or its inclusion in the quality handbook. College academic staff and senior curriculum managers indicated some awareness of the Quality Code but little familiarity with the FHEQ. QAHE academic staff confirmed awareness of the FHEQ (through its university partners) and showed some familiarity with the Quality Code. Staff at QAHE have undergone training to introduce them to the Quality Code. In view of the Expectation and the place of external reference points in ensuring academic standards, the team **recommends** that the College implement a formal process to ensure the full understanding of academic frameworks to assure the secure award of credit.

1.47 At the time of the review visit the College had yet to run an official Awards Board, though its Quality Handbook for Higher Education indicates this would be 'scheduled to meet at the end of each stage of the course'; the review team heard the first is planned to take place at the end of the College's current academic semester, although a formal date is not established. The membership and responsibilities for the Awards Board are clearly set out within the College's Quality Handbook for Higher Education.

1.48 While the College has in place procedures and processes for the assessment of learning outcomes and monitoring arrangements for the associated award of credit and qualifications, the review team found a disparity between College and QAHE staff understanding about external reference points that govern the awarding of credit and level of achievement; and this led to a recommendation being made. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met but that the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

1.49 Pearson is ultimately responsible for the monitoring and review of its approved programmes. The College is responsible for ensuring appropriate processes are in place to routinely monitor and review its Pearson-approved programmes. The College have in place an annual monitoring process involving a mid-year report being generated for each programme that feeds into an annual programme self-assessment report (SAR). The programme SAR then feeds into a departmental self-evaluation document (SED) and this culminates in an overall College SED. The programme SAR template format is aligned to the Quality Code.

1.50 The College has two quality handbooks. The Quality Handbook for Higher Education describes the cyclical review process undertaken for higher education programmes, and the Quality Handbook 2015-16 outlines the detailed process as applicable across all the College's departments. The former handbook also outlines the College's process for periodic review.

1.51 The College's arrangements for meeting Pearson's requirements allow for the Expectation to be met.

1.52 The review team examined the arrangements for annual monitoring, including mid-year reports, the programme SAR template and College guidance materials. The review team also spoke to senior managers, academic and professional staff about the process, their involvement and how standards are monitored and reviewed.

1.53 Senior staff, senior curriculum managers and academic staff confirm that mid-year reports are produced for each programme and that its programme SARs will be prepared as part of the College's cyclical review process. The programme SAR template provided, encompasses the Quality Code and requires the inclusion of academic outcomes to be recorded and considered.

1.54 Further annual checks are completed by Pearson, principally through its Standards Verifiers, who will assure academic standards are delivered and met in line with national standards and Pearson's requirements. At the time of the review visit, the Standards Verifier visits were yet to take place. The review team also heard how use is made of both the Pearson Centre Guide to Assessment and the BTEC Quality Handbook.

1.55 The provision was approved by Pearson in 2013 and commenced delivery in September 2015. Consequently it is too early for the College to undergo periodic review. The College's Quality Handbook for Higher Education indicates that periodic review will take place every six years, will incorporate external expertise and will be led by the Quality Improvement Department and overseen by the Vice Principal for Curriculum and Quality.

1.56 The review team concludes that the College is following the appropriate procedures set out by its awarding organisation and have an annual monitoring process for the review of academic standards. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.57 The College does not hold degree awarding powers and its programmes and units for delivery are therefore selected from the range permissible by Pearson. The College has an internal mechanism for signing off new programmes of study prior to its submission to Pearson. Approved programmes are reviewed annually by Pearson through its external verification process to assure the College's maintenance of academic standards and outlined in the College's Quality Handbook for Higher Education.

1.58 The College's processes and procedures as set out by Pearson would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.59 The review team examined the College's Quality Handbook for Higher Education, documentation for programme validation events, minutes of meetings and correspondence received from Standards Verifiers. The review team spoke with senior managers and academic staff about the involvement and use of external expertise to secure and maintain academic standards.

1.60 The College is subject to annual reviews from Pearson that ensure its institutional policies and procedures meet Pearson's requirements. A visit was conducted in February 2016 and reported that no actions were needed and made one recommendation regarding the legibility of some interval verification reports.

1.61 The College is yet to receive a visit from a Pearson Standards Verifier at the time of this review, though arrangements to schedule visits and receive reports are in place. The review team heard from the Head of Quality who outlined the College's process to address requests for action arising from external verification activity. The process was also described by senior curriculum managers who reported that on receipt of the Pearson Standards Verifier report, the College's Quality Coordinator will produce a summary document which is uploaded to the College's internal electronic software system and will then be responded to by required academics. The Head of Quality will then track any actions that need to be carried out. The process is formally outlined in the College's assessment, internal verification and moderation guidelines and its Quality Handbook for Higher Education.

1.62 The College's internal arrangements for the approval of provision incorporates the relevant industrial expertise that its College and QAHE academic staff hold; they are also included as members of the programme approval and development process. Formal external expertise is not presently captured though the College plans to incorporate employer involvement in the rationale and development of its higher education provision as it expands. The team was advised about the College's current discussions with employers regarding their possible involvement, including an annual employer conference, though the College is keen to ensure employers are not brought in too early into the development stage so as to secure 'buy in'.

1.63 The review team found that the College makes use of external expertise through the knowledge and expertise of its qualified and experienced academic staff and uses its arrangements for annual monitoring and Pearson external verification visits as the mechanism for ongoing review of academic standards. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

1.64 In reaching its judgement on the maintenance of academic standards at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.65 All of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated level of risk is low, the exception being A3.2 where the associated level of risk is moderate. The moderate level of risk resulted in one recommendation being made for the implementation of a formal process to ensure the full understanding of academic frameworks to assure the secure award of credit. There are no affirmations or features of good practice in this section.

1.66 The setting of academic standards is provided through Pearson, and the College is responsible for maintaining standards on behalf of Pearson. The College has in place the structure, processes and procedures for assuring itself that programme documentation, assessment of learning outcomes and the monitoring and review of its approved programmes meet Pearson requirements and there is oversight of standards through the reporting process of the Standards Verifiers.

1.67 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the awarding organisation at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College does not have degree awarding powers and works with its awarding organisation, Pearson, to ensure its procedures meet requirements though the College has a process for signing off programme proposals internally prior to seeking Pearson approval. All proposals for new provision are reviewed by the College's Senior Management Team in line with its Strategic Plan to ensure its higher education provision accords with its objectives and to ensure the allocation of sufficient resource. Proposals are developed initially by programme teams, that then go through respective senior curriculum managers before sign-off is sought from the Head of Faculty and final authority gained from the College's Senior Management Team for its submission to Pearson.

2.2 The College's arrangements for the approval of minor and major modifications are set out in the College's Quality Handbook for Higher Education. Proposals for minor modification arise from programme team discussion that require the approval of relevant senior curriculum managers and major modifications require the approval of the relevant Head of Faculty. This is then approved through the College's Higher Education Academic Board, or the QAHE Higher Education Academic Board where it pertains to the subcontracted programmes.

2.3 The College's processes and procedures for the design, development and approval for programmes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.4 The review team examined the processes and procedures relating to programme design and development and minor and major modification of programmes. The review team spoke with senior managers, academic staff and students about the programme development and approval process, the process for modification and the involvement of stakeholders.

2.5 The College's two-stage approval procedure forms part of its curriculum and business planning process. The Head of Faculty gains approval from the College's Senior Management Team as part of the initial approval that agrees the programme in principle and allows for the programme teams to commence development work, including the production of programme specifications and assessment materials. The Senior Curriculum Manager has responsibility for ensuring that each programme is well designed and meets the appropriate Pearson academic standards though it is the Head of Faculty who has overall responsibility for its sign-off before submission to Pearson. After approval is granted by Pearson, the College undergoes the second stage or full approval, that formerly records the programme's inclusion in the College's course file.

2.6 The internal programme approval process was recently revised to distinguish the two-stage process and provide clarity, this is set out in the College's Quality Handbook for Higher Education and the team **affirms** the steps taken to introduce a robust two-stage approval process for the internal development of higher education programmes. Senior

curriculum managers and academic staff were able to explain the importance of the internal development process and the need to incorporate external specialist insight so as to support the maintenance of standards. QAHE academic staff apply their industry knowledge in programme development and the selection of module choices so as to ensure students develop the core skills needed for employment.

2.7 The College's Quality Handbook for Higher Education is the primary document that outlines the relevant procedures, processes and policies and this includes programme design, development and approval. In the meeting with senior staff the review team heard that the Quality Handbook is regarded as a definitive manual although staff usage appears inconsistent and would suggest less use is made of it on a day-to-day basis by senior curriculum managers, academics and professional staff, who appeared to be mostly unaware of the document's content and application.

2.8 While the Quality Handbook outlines the process for all minor and major modifications, and senior staff confirm the requirement to complete modification paperwork together with the subsequent approval of the programme specification by the relevant Head of Faculty, the review team found this process was not clearly adhered to. Two examples were provided of modification for two separate programmes (the HNC in Health and Social Care and the HNC in Computing and Systems Development); one modification had already been carried out in full and another is presently in its planning stage. The review team was told the former modification that had been approved related to a change of unit within the HNC Health and Social Care programme. This was discussed and agreed at the relevant Programme Committee meeting and then noted at the College Higher Education Academic Board. Students confirm that changes to their units had been made to reflect their workplace settings. The review team asked the College to provide the evidence base for which the minor modification for HNC Health and Social Care programme was agreed upon and was provided with the committee minutes. No further evidence was provided to support this minor modification. Based on the evidence provided, the review team considers that the modification was agreed through formal committee discussion with no formal programme modification paperwork being completed by relevant academic and senior staff. The review team considers this procedure to be insufficient as it does not fully document and record the programme modification process in full.

2.9 The second modification yet to be processed related to the scheduling of unit delivery on the HNC in Computing and Systems Development at QAHE and was highlighted as a potential modification following student module feedback. QAHE academic staff also cited this example and said that the intention was to link module choices to the research expertise of its academic staff and to possible progression routes available to students on completion of the HNC programme, with QAHE's university partners. This would indicate that the current process for the approval of minor and major modifications is not robustly applied and that formal changes made to the definitive programme record are not sufficiently approved and recorded. While the review team acknowledges the College's awareness for the need to provide staff with further guidance regarding programme modifications, the team **recommends** that the College establish and implement formal procedures for the approval and definitive recording of minor and major modifications.

2.10 The review team concludes that the College has in place appropriate procedures for the internal development and approval of programmes; however, it does not have a sufficiently robust process for the formal approval of minor and major modifications. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met but that the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.11 The College's procedures to recruit and select students for its higher education provision are governed by its Admissions Policy and the Course Advice and Guidance Policy; both these policies specify the principles of fair access and widening participation. The College's admission process is managed by the student support department, which lies within the Directorate of Student Services and is administered by the College Admissions Team, including an Admissions Coordinator, coordinated by the Director of Student Services. Academic staff are also involved. The College's Admissions Policy is reviewed annually by the Director of Student Services and approved by the College's Senior Management Team. The College has a range of documentation in place for its operational delivery.

2.12 The College holds a matrix Accreditation with a positive report recognising the 'support for students and depth of knowledge of staff and their tenacity'. Course advisers at the College are suitably experienced and hold relevant qualifications.

2.13 The College sets levels of entry tailored to each programme offered; entry requirements are communicated to the College's marketing information team, and are available on the website for prospective students to view. The admission criteria for the HNCs delivered by its subcontracted partner organisation, QAHE, were agreed between both organisations as part of the partnership agreement and are set at Level 3 or equivalent. The procedure to deal with any complaints that arise within the admissions process is covered within the general College Complaints Policy.

2.14 For the College's provision delivered through QAHE, marketing materials produced by QAHE are approved by the College while other recruitment activity remains the responsibility of the College. Applicants may apply directly to QAHE or be referred by the College.

2.15 Adherence to the admissions policy is overseen by the College through periodic audit and spot check of the QAHE admissions process. Applications are assessed by the QAHE admissions team against the current entry criteria, in line with the College's Admissions Policy, and any unconditional offer made by QAHE staff through its systems. Where applicants are unsuccessful at QAHE, on the basis of qualifications and experience, this is communicated to the applicant directly or via their educational agent; feedback on this decision is available from the QAHE admissions team on request.

2.16 Although arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met, confirmation will be needed to ensure equity for all students concerning admissions.

2.17 The team examined a range of documentation including admissions and course guidance policies and manuals, the matrix Accreditation and the complaints policy and the College student services' self-assessment documentation. The review team spoke with students and senior, academic and professional staff concerning the oversight and application of the admissions process at both the College and QAHE.

2.18 Students can be recruited onto programmes at a number of points in the year. For HNC Health and Social Care students recruitment is annually at the start of each academic year while HNC students in Business; and Computing and Systems Development recruitment is at the start of each semester.

2.19 The admissions protocols in place are governed by the College admissions and course guidance policies, and are managed by student support staff along with the course teams. International qualifications are equated to UK qualifications using UK National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC). At QAHE there is a central oversight check, via due diligence processes, and entry qualifications are verified; evidence was seen of communication with the College regarding verification of qualifications.

2.20 For students that are directly recruited at QAHE, international qualifications are equated to UK qualifications using UK NARIC, and applications are reviewed by the admissions team at QAHE, overseen by the Executive Dean. QAHE is responsible for forwarding details of students it has offered places to in order that they can be enrolled by the College and access funding. QAHE applicants are required to sit English and Maths diagnostic tests as appropriate, and non-standard applicants are required to undertake an admissions interview.

2.21 College students and professional staff confirm that the procedures outlined in policy and procedural documents were adhered to. Thus students described a streamlined process of online application, guidance interview and enrolment.

2.22 Discussions took place with the Head of Faculty for Business, Finance and Computing (the College's Link Manager for QAHE) and the Director of Student Services to confirm alignment of admission procedures at QAHE and agreed procedure. Initially the review team heard conflicting information about the delegation of admissions to QAHE, first being told by the Director of Student Services that responsibility was not delegated and later told by the Head of Faculty for Business, Finance and Computing that responsibility was delegated to QAHE with oversight by the College in the form of annual spot checks and case-by-case consultation. The evidence confirms that delegation is in place.

2.23 This confusion is further evident in the responsibilities checklist, which states that the College is responsible for selecting applicants and making offers, which is contrary to the QAHE admissions manual and the information provided to the review team. Professional staff stated that students who apply to the College for its provision based at QAHE complete an application form that is forwarded to the College faculty and then onwards to QAHE for admission. Yet QAHE documentation refers to review by the Executive Dean (QAHE) only. Students described similar admissions experiences at the College and QAHE. The College states that it intends to review admission arrangements with its partner organisation to ensure parity and best practice. This was also confirmed in the meeting with the Head of Provider. The review team acknowledges these future plans but **recommends** that the College revise and strengthen admissions procedures at provider level to ensure full oversight and consistency of processes for all applicants.

2.24 Where applicants are admitted, QAHE provides a list of students offered places to the College in order that they can be enrolled. The review team heard that checks are undertaken by the College's MIS team on receipt of the enrolment form to ensure this meets the College's requirements. Student records, including attendance, are maintained at QAHE through their own in-house system, SITS, in addition to enrolment records at the College. A full record of student documentation is maintained by the College.

2.25 The College's Admissions Entry Criteria and Admissions Process does not refer to the provision of guidance to aspiring students who receive a rejection, stating that QAHE admissions staff are available to explain the reasons for a rejection in more detail to the

applicants involved. The process document states that students are either rejected or an unconditional offer made. Professional Staff at the College confirm its support arrangements for rejected applicants who are redirected to the College's other provision which may help them to develop the necessary skillset to enrol on the College's higher education provision. However, it remained unclear what guidance is in place or offered to rejected applicants at QAHE.

2.26 A contractual process is in place regarding agency recruitment arrangements and contractual oversight of the partnership is addressed through due diligence. The review team found that although recruitment agents do not make admission decisions themselves it was not clear what arrangements the College has in place to maintain oversight of QAHE's use of agents although an initial vetting process is in place by QAHE. The review team considers that the use and oversight of recruitment agents by QAHE in the recruitment of the College's students, albeit based at QAHE, poses a potential risk to the impartiality of advice to all higher education applicants, regardless of delivery site. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College implement and monitor effective processes for the provision of advice and guidance to enable all applicants to make an informed decision.

2.27 The recruitment, selection and admissions process is reviewed annually through the College self-assessment reporting process and a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and admission procedures are evaluated via student feedback collected by student ambassadors on completion of the admission process; outcomes are actioned via the student services QIP. In 2014-15 Student Services was judged as 'good' through this process prior to commencement of its higher education provision. Key performance indicators are recorded in the area's SAR, such as the number of online applications and staff/student appeals; good higher education advice is highlighted as a key strength.

2.28 Admissions for higher education courses are governed by policies and procedures for courses delivered at the College, but these are not operationally aligned at QAHE. The review team finds that admissions are governed by two separate sets of operational systems at the College and at QAHE. For courses delivered at QAHE there is insufficient oversight of the admissions process by the College, including oversight of QAHE's use of recruitment agents and the provision of advice and guidance to prospective applicants and to unsuccessful candidates. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is not met and that its associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.29 The College has a Teaching and Learning Policy that applies to all levels of its provision, and includes a section on the needs of higher education students. Its draft Higher Education Strategy was updated in May 2016 to include a focus on higher education skills and delivery, best practice across high quality higher education provision in specialist vocational areas, creating progression or additional learning opportunities for students, and further developing staff skills and expertise. Teaching methods are designed to facilitate students linking workplace/placement experience and theory through case studies and reflective writing.

2.30 The Head of Faculty for Business, Finance and Computing is the College link manager and has overall responsibility for the management of the QAHE partnership, and has conducted joint observations with QAHE for parity in practice. The College and QAHE carries out lesson observations to an established schedule using Ofsted criteria with summative, thematic and developmental processes. Observations are governed by the College's Lesson Observation Policy 2015-16.

2.31 Teaching staff ensure that a handbook is available for each course with hyperlinks to unit specifications and learning outcomes; access to a generic student handbook is also available through the VLE. Students have access to a range of information, including relevant policies and procedures and course information. The College monitors VLE usage through recording exclusive student activity.

2.32 The College has systems in place to support, monitor and evaluate learning and teaching at higher education level that would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.33 The team examined a range of documentary evidence including teaching and learning policies, lesson observation paperwork, student handbooks, staff CVs and CPD records. A VLE demonstration was provided to review material available to students. The review team spoke to students and all staff involved in higher education delivery to explore the student learning experience and its arrangements and strategies for high quality delivery.

2.34 The College has seen significant improvements regarding learning and teaching. The review team heard from the College Principal who regards QAHE as having the facilities, expertise and potential areas of recruitment that the College does not have due to the newness of its higher education provision.

2.35 Lesson observations have been carried out according to an established schedule and include developmental observations and action plans to improve teaching practice. These are mapped against Ofsted criteria and use Ofsted grades; observation paperwork does not currently make reference to the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) Senior curriculum managers state that developmental observations and learning walks are conducted to evaluate higher education sessions. Health and Social Care teachers have all been observed as part of the College's observation cycle and all were judged to be 'good' or

better. Some combined lesson observations have been undertaken in QAHE sessions and this has informed development of practice at QAHE for the College's students. The review team found that QAHE academic staff are aware of the UKPSF but that higher education teaching observations are not mapped to the UKPSF and teaching evaluation is currently in the light of Ofsted criteria. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College review its processes and documentation for lesson observations to ensure the process supports enhancement in a higher education context.

2.36 The review team heard how College academic staff are experienced with programmes up to level 3 with capacity to develop as teachers of higher education and that College academic staff also co-deliver on some modules at QAHE. Staff have received Pearson training relevant to HNC delivery and assessment. Academic staff at QAHE have received training relevant to learning and teaching at level 4 and extensive specialist training relevant to their curriculum area of delivery, organised through QAHE. The College records each staff CPD attendance, including Pearson delivery of HNC training and retains records of Staff CVs. Staff are able to register to study for further and higher qualifications such as master's level courses.

2.37 The College has made moves towards Higher Education Academy (HEA) Fellowship as an offer for academic staff, with one member of College staff currently trialling an application for fellowship; the majority of QAHE staff hold at least Associate Fellowship of the HEA. QAHE academic staff are well-qualified, and some hold advanced qualifications up to level 7 and have a record of research publications; additionally, some staff in both organisations are members of other professional bodies.

2.38 Senior curriculum managers told the review team that the key to successful higher education delivery is absolute clarity on agreed and approved assignments. Academic staff also regard a strong industry and vocational base as crucial along with an entrepreneurial drive. The review team heard how staff respond to feedback from Pearson Standards Verifiers and use the assignment checking service to improve practice.

2.39 College staff attend Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) and Programme Committee meetings at QAHE. These are seen as an important link to enable response to student feedback at team level. The review team was given examples of how academic support has been put in place at both the College and QAHE in response to staff and student feedback. However, the review team found there to be considerable differences in the tutorial arrangements for students at the College and QAHE, and a lack of oversight by the College; this led to a recommendation being made under Expectation B4.

2.40 The student submission states that academic staff are excellent at explaining things and that they are highly qualified and enthusiastic; they feel that the staff are dedicated, of a high standard with good knowledge and are very helpful and approachable; HNC Computing and Systems Development students emphasise their pleasure at being 'treated as adults' by academic staff. Some students at QAHE expressed some concerns about different standards of teaching between classes, but spoke positively about lecturers' subject and technical knowledge and greatly appreciated the advanced qualifications of staff, at or above the level at which they were being taught. Health and Social Care students have a clear understanding of assessment expectations, and have received formative feedback on their work as well as supportive visits by College academic staff to their workplace/placement settings. One student described a very positive experience regarding the link between the application of underpinning knowledge and their employment that has led to positive comments from their work manager. QAHE students also reported input from employers, and were positive about their learning experience.

2.41 Students are able to provide feedback on their learning experience through module evaluation forms and SSLC meetings.

2.42 Students at the College are positive and enthusiastic about their learning opportunities and the group ethos they experience, though they expressed surprise at the advanced level in the standard of work required. They receive study skills support but told the review team that they would benefit from pre-arrival study skill support. Students said their studies were linked to their existing employment or work placement (which they obtain themselves). Students noted that early difficulty in accessing sufficient books in the library had been promptly dealt with by the College's library to include access to online libraries for journals, following student feedback. QAHE students feel that resources in computing are particularly strong, and students access resources at both sites. The review team heard about the considerable engagement by the library with academic teams and students to ensure the currency of its learning resources to support higher education students and is recognised as a feature of good practice under Expectation B4.

2.43 The review team found evidence demonstrating that staff are qualified to teach at higher education level and consider that staff are receiving appropriate training to support delivery; a recommendation for the College to review its processes and documentation for lesson observations will support the development of staff and the delivery of higher education. Resources are in place as are student module feedback arrangements to improve delivery. Students are able to develop as independent learners, study their chosen subject in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking. The review team therefore concludes the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.44 The College outlines its commitment to higher education student development, and achievement of this is via academic support, the personal tutor/academic supervisor system for all students, and a focus on employment. The College stresses a strategic emphasis on employability, with curriculum and delivery designed with industry currency and focus in mind. Services at the College are governed by the Equality Act 2010 and the College monitors achievement gaps between groups of learners.

2.45 Study skills are developed through additional support, including for language use, in the form of twilight and Saturday support sessions at QAHE; at the College, students receive support in class and the workplace. Additional study skill classes are available on request.

2.46 Student attendance is monitored - QAHE students through QAHE's SITS student record system, College students through the College's EBS system.

2.47 The College has matrix-accredited career advisers and students can request an appointment with them. Students within QAHE have access to careers and employability services. The College runs a successful Internship Preparation Programme with KPMG for level 3 programmes and plans to extend this to higher education provision. The College has progression agreements with local higher education institutions including London Metropolitan University and Coventry University London Campus (since 2014), to ensure that students have the option of progressing onto their next level of learning at the end of their programme.

2.48 The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.49 The team examined evidence including policy documents, records of monitoring visits and minutes of committee meetings. The review team spoke with students and all staff involved in the delivery and oversight of higher education concerning strategies and support arrangements.

2.50 The College states that oversight of its subcontracted arrangements with QAHE is undertaken through its QAHE Joint Higher Education Academic Board, Programme Committees, Staff Student Liaison Committees, franchise monitoring visits, Senior Management meetings and student feedback. The terms of reference for the College's QAHE Joint Higher Education Academic Board include academic resources, though it does not outline how oversight of the provision of student services is maintained. The review team found that membership of the QAHE Joint Higher Education Academic Board did not include a senior representative from the College's Student Services department to inform a strategic approach in the provision of academic support arrangements. SSLCs have a similar academic and resource focus, as do Programme Committees. The QAHE Joint Higher Education Academic Board meetings allow consideration of student support needs but do not include strategic or systematic consideration of support services. Franchise monitoring of QAHE undertaken by the College includes a focus on basic student information such as student numbers, withdrawals, attendance and staff and student understanding of organisational responsibilities; they do not include a focus on student support services.

The QAHE Joint Higher Education Academic Board minutes show concern at the number of student withdrawals which have occurred.

2.51 Professional staff report that student support is individualised within each organisation, delivering services separately, with no apparent dialogue between the professional teams. QAHE students have access to both QAHE and College support arrangements; College Health and Social Care students receive support through the College. College professional staff were unsure about the College's oversight of support services across the two organisations. There was no obvious differentiation of support for higher education learners other than language support at QAHE. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College develop, monitor and evaluate a strategic approach to the oversight of support services for students at all locations of delivery to support equity and the sharing of good practice.

2.52 Academic staff take account of possible student progression routes, with QAHE university partners or other higher education providers, within the delivery of programmes, and consider wider issues addressing the 'practical and softer skills, in terms of the marketability'. Staff aim to enable students to become more innovative. Though College students find the move from level 3 to level 4 challenging they said they have been effectively supported, through embedded study skills support and scheduling their work to enable them to achieve. The student submission notes the supportive interaction between QAHE students recruited in the first and second semesters, who can support the learning process and 'guide them in their assignments'.

2.53 Professional staff demonstrated an awareness of the challenges and needs of higher education students from a library and careers service perspective, and confirmed students received study skills support. QAHE academic staff reported that students were finding the course hard and that the staff team had therefore provided extra lessons. The student submission states that it would be advantageous for students to be provided with a list of skills that they could improve on or learn about between course acceptance and start.

2.54 College academic staff confirm students receive a weekly one-hour tutorial to support their progression to university because it was apparent that students who came through a vocational route needed help with developing their academic skills; staff use teaching time for study skills, which they said became integral to delivery. College students described their weekly tutorial as timetabled regularly as a group activity, with the option of one-to-one sessions as required. Students said the sessions included academic and pastoral support and are seen as 'one of the best things to happen on the course, without that I don't know how I would succeed'. Careers advisers with expertise in HNCs and next steps attend tutorial sessions and provide informative guidance. Health and social care students said they wanted to progress their study to HND and degree top-up awards. QAHE students confirm that they receive internship opportunities and access to careers advice at QAHE.

2.55 QAHE students said they do not have a specific personal tutor or dedicated timetabled tutorial sessions although they have received advice concerning study skills and career progression; students felt they could approach their course leaders for advice. QAHE academic staff describe an embedded model focused on three strands for tutorial: student services/welfare, academic, and pastoral. They state that part of their function is to be that support as the 'person closest to the student', they are able to seek welfare advice and refer students. Consideration of student support needs is also evident in curriculum team meetings. While QAHE students may therefore have access to pastoral support, the review team found inconsistency between the two organisations in the tutorial arrangements for higher education students, and little evidence of collaboration and strategic oversight of

these services. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College review and revise the tutorial policy and procedures to ensure consistency and coherent oversight for all higher education students.

2.56 The College hosts a safeguarding page on its website that allows students to anonymously access advice around identifying risks to their safety. Interaction with this site is monitored by the College and any issues referred to the Safeguarding Board. Students are also supported in using plagiarism-detection software formatively as well as summatively for submission of work, and uptake has been monitored by the College to show a good level of use.

2.57 Learning resources have been systematically supplemented to offer higher education level texts and journals via a planned commissioning process driven by course reading lists. QAHE students are automatically enrolled onto the College's library services, following enrolment, and can remotely access its resources. The review team was told that the College has subscribed to a web hosted library catalogue and online library resources; the online services manager monitors their use and has seen good use within QAHE. QAHE Programme Committee feedback confirms that the Head of Learning Resources attends the meetings, and that teaching staff are encouraged to contact the library. This Committee is also a vehicle to capture and action any expressions of student concerns regarding learning resource access at the College. Similarly, College team meetings confirm that it meets the librarian to clarify reading lists and agree the order of appropriate texts for its programme. The review team finds the responsive and comprehensive approach to the provision of learning resources that contributes to the effective engagement of students in their learning opportunities to be **good practice**.

2.58 The College has resources in place to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, though the team found inconsistencies of practice in arrangements for tutorial provision across the two organisations and insufficient strategic oversight of the provision of student support services across all campuses of delivery by the College. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met but that the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.59 The College's Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy outlines its approach to engaging students within their higher education provision. This document makes reference to the Quality Code and outlines the responsibilities of managers and students. The strategy will be discussed in the College's Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee and reviewed with students through the SSLCs.

2.60 The College have a formal student representation system. Student representatives are elected by their peers to attend the SSLC and Programme Committees. They are responsible for collecting student feedback and bringing it to the relevant committees for discussion with academic staff.

2.61 The SSLC meetings and Programme Committee meetings have terms of references which outline its respective objectives, responsibilities, membership and reporting structures. The terms of reference apply to both the College and its subcontracted partner organisation, QAHE. Student representatives are invited members of the two deliberative committees for the purpose of providing feedback on the student experience. Minutes of meetings from the SSLC and Programme Committee are uploaded to the College's VLE.

2.62 The College's arrangements for student engagement would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.63 The review team examined documentation about the College's governance arrangements, minutes of committee meetings, the QAHE student representative training material and the Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy. The review team also spoke with students and all staff involved in the delivery of higher education about the arrangements for and response to student feedback.

2.64 The student submission indicates dissatisfaction within the student population around the lack of a fully formalised and effective student representative structure. There is recognition by the College for the need to standardise the practice for student engagement including additional work on training student representatives so as to maximise their potential in the role. However, the review team found that there was no clear approach taken by the College to support the training of student representatives.

2.65 In its meetings with students the review team heard of examples where a student had recently been appointed as a student representative and did not understand what was expected of them (they also did not know they had been selected for the role until recently). Other student representatives also said that they had not received training though they supported each other in how to undertake their roles. One student who was a later entry to the programme commented positively on the mentoring they received from a more experienced peer representative. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College establish a robust student representative training mechanism to equip students to fulfil their roles more effectively in educational enhancement and quality assurance.

2.66 Despite a lack of understanding about their roles as student representative, other students told the review team how they would raise issues directly with their representative or course leader and that issues would also be discussed in meetings with QAHE and College staff who would explore resolutions. None of the students, that the review team met,

were familiar with the names of the College's or QAHE's deliberative committees for which student representatives were members of and students were not aware that minutes of the two committee meetings were available on the VLE. Academic staff were more familiar with the formal committee structure where student representation occurs. QAHE academic staff described how student feedback informed the Programme Committee and the College's senior managers. The review team heard of an example about QAHE student access to learning resources, an issue raised in the first semester SSLC and resolved by the following semester to student satisfaction. The review team found the College and QAHE act on the feedback provided to them and are proactive in their approach to resolving student-related issues.

2.67 The review team asked students about their awareness of and involvement in the development of the College's Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy and found that neither students nor student representatives had been involved in its development or its purpose. Similarly, academic staff at both the College and QAHE do not appear to be aware of the Strategy and therefore not cited as a key driver in enhancing student engagement. The review team was later told by senior staff that the Strategy had been created without the direct involvement of students in a 'top-down' approach. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College engage students at all levels as partners in the development and implementation of the Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy.

2.68 While the College has in place a structure for student representation and engagement to occur at programme level and is presently responding to the needs of its students, the review team finds the College has not adequately equipped its student representatives with the training needed to fulfil their roles effectively. Nor has the College engaged its students in a systematic manner in the development of its Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy that has led to two recommendations being made. The review team therefore concludes that although the Expectation is met, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.69 The responsibilities of the College and its awarding organisation, Pearson, are set out in the Responsibilities Checklist; the responsibility for the design of each qualification (that is, modules, specifications and assessment criteria) rests with Pearson, and the College is responsible for maintaining academic standards delivered on its behalf. Oversight of student registration and approval of final awards rests with Pearson. The College has a signed formal agreement in place for its subcontracted arrangement with its partner organisation, QAHE, its responsibilities are also set out in a separate checklist.

2.70 The College has a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy. The College's assessment, internal verification and moderation guidelines, together with its Quality Handbook for Higher Education outline the College's arrangements for the achievement of learning outcomes and the secure award of credit through the Awards Board. The College's assessment standards are verified through Pearson Standards Verifier reporting arrangements. The College has a Recognition of Prior Learning Policy in place.

2.71 The College's arrangements allow for the Expectation to be met.

2.72 The review team examined programme specifications and documentation for assessment, internal verification and the recognition of prior learning. The review team also spoke to students about assessments and feedback and confirmed with senior managers and academic and professional staff about assessment practice, arrangements for internal verification and the use of anti-plagiarism software.

2.73 The College is responsible for maintaining academic standards on behalf of Pearson by setting assessments that meet its requirements and regulations, a responsibility that is delegated to Programme teams. Senior staff and senior curriculum managers confirm that College staff are familiar with Pearson standards, assessment and verification processes through their work at Level 3; QAHE senior staff confirm staff experience of assessment through their engagement with university partners. This is also echoed by academic staff who demonstrated a full understanding of the College's processes for assessment, internal verification and moderation guidelines. The review team found that the College ensures the setting of assignment briefs is robust; academic staff at the College and QAHE confirm the use of Pearson assignment checker in order to assure assessments are fit for purpose; the receipt of training from the awarding organisation has informed the design of assignment briefs. All assessment is subject to the College's internal verification process.

2.74 The College's guidelines for the recognition of prior learning of students is used in conjunction with its assessment guidelines. The College confirmed that no student was recruited through this procedure.

2.75 Students told the review team that they had a clear understanding of what was expected of them for each assignment because academic staff discuss the assignment requirements at the start of each unit. Students also said that all assignment briefs,

and teaching materials such as notes and presentations were uploaded to the VLE for them to access.

2.76 The College has yet to run an Awards Board and could not evidence a scheduled date though the College's Quality Handbook for Higher Education indicates the Awards Board will 'normally be scheduled to meet at the end of each stage of the course'. Its membership and responsibilities are clearly set out within the handbook. It was unclear to the review team what involvement of QAHE staff would have in the Awards Board though programme leads or senior curriculum managers will attend.

2.77 The review team concludes that the College has in place appropriate assessment procedures and strategies in line with Pearson requirements. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.78 Pearson is responsible for the appointment of Standards Verifiers who ensure that academic standards are met for the specification. All programmes currently delivered by the College and with QAHE have an assigned Standards Verifier for up to five years. External verification visits take place annually and review the maintenance of academic standards in both the setting and award of assessments. The College's policies and procedures are overseen by Pearson's annual quality review.

2.79 The College Quality Improvement Department is responsible for monitoring and coordinating all external verification visits. Following a visit, the report is published and sent to the College. The Quality Coordinator produces a summary report that is shared with relevant academics for comment. The College plans to include a general overview of the Standards Verifier feedback within the respective faculty self-assessment report (SAR). These reports will be managed within each curriculum area, with the Head of Faculty completing an action plan that is issued by the College's Quality Improvement Department; actions are then monitored by the Head of Quality.

2.80 Though the College is yet to receive a completed Standards Verifier visit, its arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.81 The review team examined Pearson Standards Verifier reports relating to further education courses (not in scope) and minutes of committee meetings to understand how the College's internal processes operate in practice. The review team also spoke with all staff involved in the delivery of higher education provision about its arrangements for external verification and with students about their understanding of the process.

2.82 At the time of the review visit the College was yet to receive a visit from a Standards Verifier and so the process is untested at this stage. The College has undertaken arrangements to ensure the setting of assessment activity is meeting Pearson requirements through active engagement with Pearson and its Standards Verifiers. The College's assessment and moderation guidelines outline how external verification and feedback will be responded to. The College's Quality Improvement Department checks that any actions or recommendations arising from Standards Verifier reports are met by curriculum areas. The review team found no formal linkage between these reports and the College's deliberative committee structure to ensure effective oversight.

2.83 The College is experienced, through its further education provision, in the management of external verification activity from Pearson. However, its guidelines do not make clear how the College will make scrupulous use of external examiner feedback. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College formalise the procedure for making scrupulous use of external examiner reports.

2.84 Although external verification activity is yet to take place, the review team found the College has processes in place to meet and respond to the requirements of Pearson. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (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

2.85 The College's Quality Handbook outlines the institutional self-assessment process and this is contextualised to higher education programmes through the College's Quality Handbook for Higher Education, the purpose of self-evaluation being to reflect the College's higher education provision. Programme teams are expected to 'reflect on how the programme meets academic standards and what deliberate steps are being taken to enhance the learning opportunities for students'.

2.86 The College has a process for the annual monitoring of programmes that involves the creation of mid-year reports that feed into an annual programme review that is summarised within a faculty SAR and informs the College's overall self-evaluation. The programme SAR template is aligned to the Quality Code and includes reference to standards, quality of learning opportunities, admissions and enhancement with a summary section for programme highlights. This is then signed off by the senior curriculum manager and Head of Faculty.

2.87 Its annual monitoring process is monitored by the Quality Improvement Department and it has overall responsibility for its operation with input from QAHE. Senior curriculum managers from the College are responsible for completing a mid-year report for their respective programmes with feed in from academic staff; where actions are required of QAHE the College oversees its completion.

2.88 The College's process for periodic review is outlined in the College's Quality Handbook for Higher Education and scheduled to take place in five to six years. A separate process by Pearson will be carried out every six years.

2.89 The College's processes and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.90 The review team examined the annual programme review template, the mid-year programme reviews and minutes of meetings for SSLC and Academic Board. The review team spoke to students about how they are engaged in the annual monitoring process and with senior managers and academic and professional staff about how the process is used to engage stakeholders and reflect on practice.

2.91 This is the first year of higher education delivery for the College and so the process for annual monitoring is yet to be completed. Each programme has completed a mid-year report and according to the College's process this will feed into the programme SAR, expected to take place at the end of the academic year. The review team found the mid-year reports to be lacking in the effective evaluation of the programme's initial operation, with commentaries on learning, teaching and assessment, admissions and the student profile. One mid-year report, the BTEC HNC Diploma in Computing and Systems Development, identifies the potential need for a modification based on student module feedback. While the proposal for modification arose via the annual monitoring process, the review team found mid-year reports had not been considered through its deliberative committee structure and so there was missed opportunity to enhance the delivery of student learning opportunities.

2.92 The College has acknowledged the need to further develop its process to include opportunities for programme teams to reflect on its effectiveness in support of student learning opportunities and to inform evaluation using in-year performance data. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College strengthen the annual monitoring process by systematically identifying and analysing relevant sources of higher education information to assure and enhance the quality of student learning opportunities.

2.93 The review team concludes that while the College has arrangements in place for self-assessment and the annual monitoring of programmes, its process does not provide opportunity for the utilisation of all relevant sources of higher education information that will support enhancement. Therefore the Expectation is met but the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.94 The College has an Academic Appeals Policy and a Complaints Policy outlining the formal procedures and processes that a student must follow. The College is also registered with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and students can therefore raise their complaint with the OIA.

2.95 When a complaint is received it is logged by the Quality Improvement Department and the Head of Quality finds a suitable manager to conduct an investigation in line with the appropriate procedures. Both policies are overseen by the Quality Improvement Department and outline in detail the process by which the appeal or complaint will be completed until its resolution.

2.96 The policies are accessible to students through the Student Handbook and the VLE; students are told about the policies during induction.

2.97 The College arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.98 The review team examined the Academic Appeals Policy, Complaints Policy and Student Handbook. The review team also spoke to students about their understanding of these policies and confirmed with senior managers and academic staff about the implementation of the policies.

2.99 The College has received two formal complaints regarding its higher education provision that related to finance payments and were resolved in a timely manner. All formal complaints and appeals will fall under the remit of the newly established College Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee. The review team considered this would allow the opportunity to enable enhancement though minutes of its first meeting showed no discussion regarding the complaints received. Formal complaints are also monitored as part of the College's Equality and Diversity Steering Group. The review team found that both the committee and its steering group provide appropriate oversight and monitoring should an academic appeal or formal complaint be made about the student learning experience.

2.100 Students at the College were aware of the processes by which to lodge an academic appeal or make a complaint and told the review team how they would seek further information from the student handbook. The team heard of one specific example in which the Complaints Policy had been used with a positive resolution for the student in question. Students studying at QAHE also had knowledge about the processes by which to lodge an academic appeal or make a complaint and added they would most likely approach their student representative, course leader or read the student handbook for further information.

2.101 The review team concludes that the College follows its policies relating to academic appeals and complaints appropriately, and that students have a number of different methods to access this information. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.102 The College is approved to deliver HNCs (and an HND) by its awarding organisation, Pearson. The allocation of responsibilities between Pearson and the College is set out in the Responsibilities Checklist. The College also has a subcontracted arrangement with a partner organisation, QAHE, who co-deliver HNCs in Business and Computing and Systems Development at its campus on Roseberry Avenue, separate to the College's Poplar campus. The subcontract agreement with QAHE has been considered and approved by the College's governing body - due diligence and a subcontracting agreement is signed and in place. Pearson confirm awareness of the subcontracted arrangement with QAHE.

2.103 QAHE is the College's key partner in the delivery of its higher education provision, with the majority of students studying at its campus. The Head of Faculty for Business, Finance and Computing has overall responsibility for managing the relationship and is Chair of the College's QAHE Joint Academic Board. Staff confirm that there is regular communication at senior and teaching staff levels between the two organisations.

2.104 The College has established formal progression agreements for students with London Metropolitan University and Coventry University (London Campus) and students on the HNC in Health and Social Care complete work placements as part of their formal requirements for the programme.

2.105 The College retains overall responsibility for all higher education qualifications delivered in partnership with QAHE, though Pearson is responsible for the award of credit and certification which will be issued to the College for distribution to its students, including those at QAHE.

2.106 The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.107 The review team examined a range of documentation relating to QAHE's approval by the College and minutes of meetings from the deliberative committee structure, records of collaborative meetings and records of Pearson. The review team spoke with all staff involved in the delivery of higher education and with students about the collaborative arrangements and the College's oversight of the student experience.

2.108 QAHE has been delivering programmes since 2012 and offers degree programmes franchised from the Roehampton University, Ulster University and University of Northumbria. In entering into a partnership with QAHE, the College sought to support its strategic aim for the development of higher education and combine its significant experience of educational delivery with an experienced higher education provider. The arrangement with QAHE is seen by the College's senior staff as harnessing higher education expertise that was not initially in place at the College. In considering the partnership it involved operational discussions and alignment of processes at Head of Faculty level. The review team was told the introduction of higher level provision was timely following a good Ofsted outcome and the College's strategic aim to extend its capacity into levels 4 and 5 study and capitalise on opportunities to provide for student progression focused on the College's local demographic needs. The partnership further offered opportunity to boost student numbers enrolled on HNC

courses and meet learner numbers required to access the HEFCE grant; the requirement to meet the College's due diligence requirements and secure governor approval is also noted.

2.109 The review team was told that the delivery of teaching at QAHE is subject to a compliance oversight model by the College with joint lesson observations carried out by the Head of Faculty for Business, Finance and Computing that resulted in the shortfall in teaching structures being addressed. As learning programmes are delivered in partnership, academic staff are in regular communication; there have been a number of meetings at QAHE of the SSLC, Programme Committees, and the College's QAHE Joint Higher Education Academic Board to allow for operational oversight of academic matters. Business and Computing academic teams conduct regular team meetings aligned to those at the College. Students said professional and academic staff at QAHE are supportive and they have benefited from the student-centred atmosphere they experience.

2.110 Pearson have confirmed that they are aware of the College's arrangement with QAHE, though its annual quality review carried out in February 2016 states that there are no collaborative or partnership arrangements recognised by the Pearson Edexcel system; subsequent correspondence from Pearson state that documentation will be verified at the College's next Pearson Centre monitoring visit. Pearson have also issued an updated policy on collaborative arrangements so as to outline its expectations of approved providers where there is a collaborative arrangement in place.

2.111 As part of the agreement, the College has delegated the responsibilities for recruitment activities and student support to QAHE though the College retains overall responsibility and will monitor these aspects as part of the subcontracting agreement. While the QAHE admissions manual states that its admissions process operates under the College's Admissions Policy, the review team found it was not clear what arrangements the College had in place to maintain oversight of QAHE admissions, its use of agents and the provision of advice and guidance to prospective/unsuccessful students - this led to two recommendations being made under Expectation B2.

2.112 A review of the collaborative arrangement with QAHE in February 2016 led to suggested developments and the review team was told that the College's subcontracted arrangement with QAHE will continue to be reviewed. However, the forthcoming merger is deemed to affect its higher education strategy and so the review team was told the development of collaboration arrangements is on hold pending its completion.

2.113 Business learners expressed some concern around continuity of communication between QAHE and the College and a slight delay in information as a result.

2.114 Professional staff report that student support is individualised within each organisation, delivering services separately, with no apparent dialogue between the professional teams. When probed about the College's oversight of support services across the two organisations, professional staff were unsure of the arrangements. This led to a recommendation being made under Expectation B4. The review team further found inconsistency in the student experience of tutorial arrangements at the College and QAHE, and little evidence of collaboration and strategic oversight of these services. This led to a further recommendation being made under Expectation B4.

2.115 The review team also made a recommendation under Expectation B8 for the College to strengthen its annual monitoring arrangements with the systematic inclusion of relevant sources of higher education information so as to support effective evaluation and oversight of its arrangements with QAHE.

2.116 The College has a substantial proportion of its higher education provision delivered through its subcontracted agreement with QAHE, for which a formal agreement is in place

and which Pearson is aware of. The benefits from its partnership align with the College's strategic aim to develop its capacity for higher education study, provide opportunities for student progression and to use specialist curriculum expertise available at QAHE. The review team found the strategic oversight of the College's arrangements including those for admissions, the provision of advice and guidance, student services and tutorial arrangements together with the systematic consideration of enhancement opportunities to be underdeveloped. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met but that the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.117 In determining its judgement on the quality of student learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.118 All Expectations in this area with the exception of one are met, with four low levels of risk and six moderate levels of risk. The review team finds that there are shortcomings in the College's oversight of its delivery across its provision and its subcontracted partnership with QAHE and this is reflected in eight of the 10 recommendations made. The review team has made a total of 10 recommendations in this area under Expectations B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B7 and B8.

2.119 There is one affirmation made under Expectation B1 for the steps taken to introduce a robust two-stage approval process for the internal development of higher education programmes. The review team has also identified one good practice in Expectation B4 for the responsive and comprehensive approach to the provision of learning resources that contributes to the effective engagement of students in their learning opportunities.

2.120 The review team found that in relation to admissions, there is insufficient oversight and priority given to assuring standard. There are other moderate risks related to approving modifications to programmes, enabling student achievement, student engagement, and programme monitoring. Recommendations relate to shortcomings in the quality assurance procedures, weaknesses in the College's oversight of some of its provision, and insufficient emphasis given to assuring quality in the College's processes. The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement** to meet UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

- 3.1 The College regards its website as the key point of contact for all prospective students. The website has a higher education section and provides information on governance and minutes from relevant meetings, course information including key information such as programme entry requirements and course content and governance.
- 3.2 The website is maintained by the Marketing Department in line with the College's Marketing Policy and all higher education information is overseen by the Director of Student Services. The Head of Marketing ensures that all externally available information is accurate in liaison with the Heads of Faculty. The College has published wider information sets for its programmes. The Director of Student Services has overall responsibility for this.
- 3.3 Internal documentation is approved and signed off by the Head of Faculty. The College produces an annual higher education brochure; paper-based course information is structured as a sleeve with inserts.
- 3.4 The College organises and runs open days/taster days to provide prospective students with more information. The College is planning to list all higher education programmes on the UCAS website, starting in the academic year 2017-18.
- 3.5 At the beginning of each academic year, students receive an induction. Students receive course handbooks and those who are studying at QAHE also receive an additional handbook.
- 3.6 Pearson is responsible for the production of certification while the College is responsible for the distribution of student certificates for all higher education courses.
- 3.7 The College has a number of information systems to provide trustworthy information for prospective and existing students and alumni, and there are oversight processes to assure this. The design would allow the Expectation to be met.
- 3.8 The team examined a range of documentation including the website, online information and course documentation. The team examined information available on the VLE through a demonstration. The team spoke to students and senior managers, professional and academic staff concerning information sources, content and oversight.
- 3.9 Students at the College use the website to access course information and to apply for higher education study, and said they find it accessible and easy to use. They are interviewed and receive information including student finance, fees and foundation degree equivalence. Students said they felt quite well informed and received a timetable a week before commencing their studies. They considered that all the information was appropriate. At induction, students receive booklets and timetables, course structure information and a reading list, with further information provided on commencement of their programme. They said they were informed of changes made to their course with communication by email or the VLE. They receive a copy of the course handbook and also confirm that there is a copy

on the VLE, along with teaching information such as presentations and academic articles. Students were not aware that minutes of the College's SSLC or Programme Committee are posted on the VLE.

3.10 Students at QAHE receive information on admissions criteria and indicate a similar pattern, to students at the College regarding information prior to and on entry. Some students had an individual discussion to obtain the answers they needed at the College. They said they received an overall view of the courses, how their class would be structured, and felt that everything was clear. At induction to QAHE, students are given a timetable, a code of conduct, and handbook, and staff explain about credits, absenteeism, and their contacts for student services. Their course handbook is available on the VLE on the landing page and a physical copy is also provided on induction. Some students reported a little inconvenience initially as they could not access the VLE but that this was promptly rectified. QAHE students were also not aware that minutes of the College's SSLC or Programme Committee are made available on the VLE.

3.11 Students regard the VLE as helpful and the student submission states that a vast amount of information is regularly posted onto the VLE by tutors, with some students referring to it as a 'lifeline'. The information provided to students prior to joining the course is well received, with good pre-course information given at open evenings and interviews, and tours conducted with prospective students. The team examined documentation available on the VLE and this confirms the student view. Plans are in place for Standards Verifier reports to be available on the VLE alongside current higher education policies.

3.12 Senior curriculum managers confirm that course information is provided by the programme teams to the marketing department after being signed off by the Head of Faculty. The Head of Marketing oversees an annual audit of course information to ensure currency and accuracy with sign-off by the College's Senior Management Team. Professional staff also confirm that course information is checked through the yearly curriculum plan, that sections of the website are audited including higher education programmes and that factsheets are signed off.

3.13 The review team concludes that the College ensures that the information for intended audiences about the higher education they offer is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.14 In reaching its judgement, the review team considered its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations, affirmations or features of good practice in this area.

3.15 College academic material is first signed off by senior curriculum managers after it has been reviewed for accuracy by programme teams. It is then signed off by the Head of Faculty, who works with the College's marketing department. An annual audit is overseen by the Head of Marketing to ensure currency and accuracy and final sign off is made by the College's Senior Management Team. Students receive an induction and course handbooks detailing the programme of study, also made available through the VLE.

3.16 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College's strategic plan states its key aim of becoming an outstanding provider. The Strategic Plan encapsulates the College's entire provision, with reference to higher education throughout the document. Additionally, the College has developed, and is due to publish in May 2016, a separate Higher Education Strategy that outlines its approach through to 2020. The Strategy highlights the objectives and strategic management and overview of the College's higher education provision, and while it makes reference to the development of its relationship with employers, it does not make specific reference to enhancement.

4.2 The College's deliberative committee structure includes Programme Committees and SSLCs that feed into the relevant Higher Education Academic Board, either the College's Board or its QAHE Joint Academic Board. Minutes of meetings from the Academic Boards are then discussed at the newly established College Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee. The College's Senior Management Team meetings and the College's Curriculum and Quality Committee of its governing body sit above.

4.3 While the College has in place a deliberative committee structure to oversee academic standards, its design does not allow for the systematic consideration of enhancement and therefore does not allow for the Expectation to be met.

4.4 The review team examined a number of evidence pieces including the College's strategic plan, its higher education strategies and the terms of reference and minutes of meetings from its deliberative committee structure. The review team spoke with students about their involvement in enhancement activities, with senior managers about how strategies are developed and applied for the enhancement of its provision, and with academic and professional staff to explore stakeholder involvement.

4.5 The College has established the Higher Education Strategy and Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy that, as key documents could inform the enhancement of its higher education provision. However, the review team found no evidence to demonstrate that the College's Higher Education Strategy had been formally approved, suggesting it remains in draft form. The review team was told this was to account for the College's forthcoming merger and that the strategy was presently on hold. Further still, based on the review team's discussions with senior curriculum managers, professional and academic staff and students, evidence would suggest that the College's internal stakeholders were not involved in the development of either strategies, though senior staff told the review team that the College had taken a 'top-down' approach.

4.6 The Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee, set up in March 2016, has responsibilities that include the maintenance and oversight of its higher education academic standards and quality of learning in line with the Quality Code, to oversee the effectiveness of the self-evaluation process and to report back to the College's Senior Management Team and its Governors about the development of the College's higher education provision. The committee has met on one occasion to agree its Terms of Reference and received minutes from the QAHE Joint Higher Education Academic Board, the Access Board and wider information sets.

4.7 The review team heard from senior managers about the rationale for the creation of the committee and how they envisaged the flow of information from other higher education committees, such as the QAHE Joint Higher Education Academic Board and the College's Higher Education Academic Board reporting into the Committee, for review and discussion. Senior managers describe how the responsibilities of the committee might develop in the future, though not presently in place.

4.8 The College's governance arrangements do not currently allow for the integration of enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner. While the College has taken steps to establish a Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee to eventually discuss and disseminate enhancement-based activities, the review team notes that this is a recent development. The review team found the establishment of the committee to hold the potential to allow for enhancement activities to be captured, its analysis considered, good practice identified and shared and strategies agreed and applied, the impact being to monitor and to inform its next steps. The review team therefore **affirms** the steps taken to establish the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee to capture and respond to the strategic needs of its higher education provision.

4.9 The College has in place a structure that allows for annual monitoring to occur through annual programme SARs, a template for which has been aligned to the Quality Code and will require the inclusion of progression and attainment data, student survey feedback and Standards Verifier reports. As the annual monitoring process is yet to be completed the review team considered the College's mid-year review arrangements for the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The team found though the mid-year reports have been completed for each programme they contain commentaries based on specific headings and lacked evaluation of its new delivery and the programme's overall effectiveness thus far. The review team deemed the lack of evidence for the consideration of the completed mid-year reports through the College's deliberative committee structure to be a missed opportunity for the review of enhancement. The College has acknowledged the need to further develop its annual monitoring process to include opportunities for programme teams to reflect on its effectiveness in support of student learning opportunities and to inform evaluation using in-year performance data. This led to a recommendation being made under Expectation B8 as the review team considered the process to lack sufficient opportunity for the College to make use of information that could lead to systematic and planned enhancement-led activities.

4.10 The majority of the College's students are taught through its subcontracted partner organisation, the due diligence and contract agreement being complete and in place. The review team found the College had insufficient arrangements in place for the strategic oversight of its student learning opportunities and enhancement activities, delivered through QAHE. The College's QAHE Joint Higher Education Academic Board is responsible for the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, in accordance with the College's requirements. However, its membership did not include senior staff from the College's Student Services Department, who are responsible for oversight of the provision of student learning resources and student admission and thereby there are further missed opportunities to identify good practice and determine enhancement activity. This led to a recommendation being made under Expectation B4.

4.11 The College has also developed a Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy that outlines its approach to the engagement of higher education students, this is due to be formally reviewed, developed and approved by the College's Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee. The review found no evidence to demonstrate that the Strategy had been formally approved. Additionally, there is no reference made to the strategy in the student submission, and the review team, having spoken with students about their involvement in the development of the strategy, found that students had not been consulted

nor involved in the Strategy's creation. The review team considered this to be a missed opportunity to engage stakeholders in the development of a strategy that would have a bearing on the student learning experience. This led to a recommendation being made under Expectation B5.

4.12 The review team asked senior managers and academic and professional staff about the key driver for the College's higher education provision and how this related to the development of the College's Higher Education Strategy. The team found that academic staff were not aware of the Higher Education Strategy, its purpose and content in the delivery and enhancement of provision and that staff had not been involved in its development. The review team found no connection between the College's deliberative committee structure (including the two Higher Education Academic Boards, Programme Committees or SSLC) where discussion had taken place around the Strategy; senior curriculum managers told the review team that the strategic driver for its provision was the successful creation of assignment briefs and the input of the learner voice. However, it was clear that senior staff had been involved in drafting the Higher Education Strategy and the review team was told that the Strategy was 'on hold' due to the College's forthcoming merger. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College take deliberate steps at provider level to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities through further development and implementation of the Higher Education Strategy and the sharing of good practice across the provision.

4.13 The review team finds the College's arrangements for the enhancement of student learning opportunities to be underdeveloped and does not evidence opportunity for robust discussion, development and dissemination of enhancement activities. The College does not have a fully developed strategy in place to support its key aim in the strategic plan and its Higher Education Strategy and Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy remain in draft form. While the review team affirms the steps taken to establish the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee, it concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.14 In reaching its judgement the review team considered its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.15 The Expectation in this area is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate. There is one affirmation in this section relating to the steps being taken by the College to establish a Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee so as to capture and respond to the strategic needs of its provision and one recommendation for the College to take deliberate steps to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities through further development and implementation of the College's Higher Education Strategy and the sharing of good practice across its provision.

4.16 The College's arrangements do not allow the Expectation to be met due to an underdeveloped structure for enhancement, a Higher Education Strategy that is in draft form, the lack of stakeholder involvement in the development of its key strategies including the Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy, and the limited awareness by College staff involved in the delivery and support of academic provision about the key driver for the College and its relationship to, and the purpose of, the Higher Education Strategy. This is attributed to a weakness in the College's governance (as it relates to quality assurance) and an insufficient emphasis or priority given to assuring standards or quality in the College's planning processes.

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

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 Tower Hamlets College regards itself as strongly rooted in the local community, and given that Tower Hamlets is a borough of complex, multiple and severe deprivation, considers employability as key to any growth in provision. Since 1991, the development of Canary Wharf as a major financial district, has brought considerable infrastructure development to the borough.

5.2 The College therefore regards employability as the key goal for its students - the partnership between the College and QAHE was developed to allow for clear pathways into employment. Each course (Business; Computing; and Health and Social Care), is targeted towards growing demand for jobs within the finance industry and two major NHS Trusts local to the College (Barts Health NHS Trust and Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust).

5.3 Students on the HNC Health and Social Care are all either employed or have secured a work placement. Their placements are central to the programme. All placements are monitored by the College as part of a student's studies.

5.4 The College runs a successful Internship Preparation Programme with KPMG for Level 3 and plan to extend this to its higher education. Through this programme the College has secured internships for over 50 students, a number of whom have gone on to secure permanent employment as a direct result of the scheme. Senior curriculum managers and students confirm that this is now being extended to higher education courses.

5.5 Students within the College (Poplar Campus) access the College's own career services. Career services provide one-to-one appointments; drop-in sessions; email appointments; remote appointments; CV review; placement advice; job search and group workshops.

5.6 Students within QAHE receive additional support through their Career services and will in future be able to take advantage of enhanced employability and training. Students confirmed that timetabled Careers advice had proved informative and staff approachable. Students at QAHE had been invited to apply for an internship for foreign accounting in Chancery Lane, and had been on a visit to improve their career prospects. Staff confirm that course design for the HNCs has universally been in the light of industry knowledge and softer skills as well as academic, although there has been little systematic engagement with employers directly for higher education.

5.7 The College envisages that their students may progress onto discounted courses run through QAHE; the College is planning to enable their students to access the two-year training programme run by QA Consulting. Staff confirm that the intention is to offer short courses in the summer break after HNC completion.

5.8 Health and Social Care students report excellent communication with staff while on placements. Visits were planned fully and announced appropriately so that students could prepare questions or materials in advance. One student whom the team met said he had benefited significantly in his place of work from applying techniques learned in his HNC studies.

Glossary

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

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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