Higher Education Review of Truro and Penwith College

March 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Truro and Penwith College. The review took place from 29 February to 1 March 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Helen Corkill
- Mr Brian Whitehead
- Mr Oliver Wannell (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Truro and Penwith 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 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

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

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

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Truro and Penwith College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Truro and Penwith College.

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Truro and Penwith College.

- The comprehensive financial and mentoring support available to students to develop entrepreneurship and enable business start-ups (Expectation B4).
- The timely and constructive assessment feedback to students (Expectation B6).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Truro and Penwith College.

By July 2016:

- conduct more detailed analyses of the academic performance of students based on their entry qualifications, in order to assess the effectiveness of admissions decisions (Expectation B2).

By September 2016:

- record formally the involvement of external stakeholders in the design, development and review of all higher education programmes (Expectations B1 and B8)
- articulate the academic appeals procedure to secure alignment with Pearson requirements (Expectation B9)
- provide detailed written information on the recognition of prior learning for current and prospective students (Expectations C, B2 and B6)
- review and clarify the existing terminology for internal and external stakeholders to capture consistently the College's approach to work-related learning and employability, respectively (Expectations C and B10).

By June 2017:

- work with the awarding body to review and map all existing programmes to ensure full alignment with the *Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement* (Expectation A1).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps taken to strengthen the internal programme approval process (Expectation B1).
- The steps taken to improve student retention and achievement and to evaluate its effectiveness (Expectation B2).

Theme: Student Employability

Student employability is at the core of Truro and Penwith College's higher education programmes. One of the aims of the Higher Education Strategy 2015-20 is to 'embed employability, entrepreneurship, enterprise skills and education for sustainability across higher education'. The College has developed an employability framework which is based on research done by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and relates to the embedding of employability into teaching. The framework has been circulated to the programme leaders to evaluate and report on their own programmes in relation to the framework, and to include relevant information in their Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) handbooks. Employability is noted and discussed as part of the programme design, approval and monitoring processes. The College has a specialist Higher Education Careers Adviser who runs both group and individual careers sessions with students, in addition to giving talks and running a site on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Higher education students have been encouraged to participate in successful initiatives relating to their personal and professional development.

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

About Truro and Penwith College

Truro and Penwith College (the College) is a tertiary College with higher education delivered at two campuses, in Truro and Penwith. The present College came about as a result of a merger in 2008 between Truro College and Penwith College. Its mission is 'to provide the best possible learning experience, leading to the highest possible level of achievement by our students'.

At the time of its Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) by QAA in 2011, the College had 950 higher education students. It now has 932 students on higher education courses, the vast majority of whom study on a full-time basis.

The College continues to offer a range of foundation degrees, Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs and HNDs), a BSc degree, BSc and BA (Hons) top-up degrees, and a PGCE/Cert Ed. Subject areas offered by the College include: computing; media; psychology; archaeology; art and design; health; business; education; counselling; English; sport and exercise; law; and silversmithing and jewellery. Most of the College's provision is validated by Plymouth University and the partnership with the awarding body has been running for over 15 years. The College also delivers programmes on behalf of the University of Greenwich and Pearson. Students are no longer being enrolled to University of Greenwich provision, while the delivery of Higher National courses awarded by Pearson began at the start of the academic year 2015-16.

The College has identified a number of key challenges facing its higher education provision, including: developing local provision that does not directly compete with its main awarding body; recruiting students since the student number control has been lifted; improving retention rates; dealing with the impact of reduced funding in the College sector; and gaining degree awarding powers.

The College has made satisfactory progress with addressing the recommendation and developing further the features of good practice made in the IQER report.

Explanation of the findings about Truro and Penwith College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and 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   Ultimate responsibility for setting academic standards and ensuring that the requirements of the relevant reference points are met lies with the College's awarding partners. The College has partnership agreements with the University of Greenwich and Plymouth University, with the latter awarding the majority of the College's higher education programmes. For the majority of programmes awarded by Plymouth University, the College is responsible for developing and writing the programmes. This includes the alignment of learning outcomes with qualification descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements and the writing of programme and module specifications according to Plymouth University requirements and templates. These programmes are subsequently validated by the University. The College has also recently started to deliver some Higher National programmes through a licence from Pearson. For these programmes, the College is responsible for setting assignments but Pearson designs the programmes, and sets learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Programme specifications and unit/module specifications form part of the Programme Quality Handbooks (PQHs). This includes mapping to demonstrate the alignment of the programme learning outcomes to the qualification descriptors at the requisite level, and the teaching and assessment opportunities available to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes. The College now has an internal programme approval process, using the College Board of Studies for Higher Education (CBSHE), to oversee the strategic development and management of

higher education programmes and to consider documentation before it goes to the awarding partner for final approval. As the awarding partners set the standards of the College's programmes through the application of their own academic frameworks and regulations, this ensures that qualifications are positioned at the appropriate level and are awarded on the achievement of learning outcomes as demonstrated through assessment. This would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.2   The review team considered the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining programme specifications, validation documents, minutes of relevant meetings, and awarding partner regulations. The team also held meetings with teaching and senior staff, including those from Plymouth University.

1.3   When designing programmes, the team saw evidence that staff consult the FHEQ, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, and the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*. Through the process of Programme Committee Meetings (PCMs), the College has begun to make staff aware of the *Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement*, published by QAA in September 2015.

1.4   The team saw evidence that the College and Plymouth University adopt a broad definition of work-based learning within foundation degrees (see also paragraph 3.5). Although some students are also in employment and others are 'strongly encouraged' to find work placements, foundation degree students are not formally required to undertake a work placement which is linked to assessed learning objectives. Instead, programmes include simulations, case studies, live briefs, classroom-based work-related learning activity and employability skills. Therefore, not all foundation degree students necessarily have the opportunity to apply underlying concepts and principles in the external workplace. Information is contradictory across some of the LTA handbooks as to whether work experience or placements undertaken by students are assessed or carry credit (see also paragraph 3.5). Some external examiners have noted that a minority of foundation degree programmes do not contain learning outcomes which permit the achievement of learning in the workplace or learning through work. One external examiner report commented on the need for a professional placement to be included and another that the work-based experience was not appropriate.

1.5   The College's reasons for not making work placements a formal requirement of foundation degree programmes include the loss of work-based learning modules as a result of the University's credit reduction process in 2009-11; and the lack of genuine work experience options in and around Truro and Penwith, largely as a result of the dearth of large employers in the area. While the team acknowledges the College's rationale for not making work placements and/or work-based learning a formal requirement for foundation degrees and accepts that there are opportunities for students on some programmes to encounter real work environments and undertake work-based projects, on some programmes there remains a lack of authentic work-based learning which is a fundamental characteristic of foundation degrees.

1.6   No new foundation degree has gone through approval since 2012-13. While the team saw evidence that the College engages systematically with the periodic review of its provision, as required by its awarding partners, there were some examples of foundation degree programmes which did not appear to have been updated thoroughly. For example, in the Foundation Degree English Studies dated 2009, the section on teaching methods and assessment makes many references to the Subject Benchmark Statement for English, but no reference to the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* 2010. The Foundation Degrees in History, Heritage and Archaeology, Interior Design Practice, and Silversmithing and Jewellery do refer to the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* but do not date the version. The review team was informed that the institutional/periodic review scheduled

with Plymouth University in 2017-18 will have a focus on foundation degrees and the team welcomes this development. Therefore, the team **recommends** that, by June 2017, the College works with the awarding body to review and map all existing programmes to ensure full alignment with the *Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement*.

1.7   The team saw evidence of recent changes to the internal procedures relating to the development of new programmes and this now provides clearer guidance and support for academic staff. Examples include documented guidance, an experienced member of the management team to support the course team leader in developing a new programme, and an internal process for programme approval. The College also produces programme specifications and other programme documentation to the specific requirements of its awarding partners which are considered during programme validation.

1.8   The awarding partners have ultimate responsibility through their own regulatory frameworks for ensuring that the relevant external reference points are adhered to, and there is evidence that the College manages its responsibilities effectively for taking account of Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ. In addition, the College has also made improvements to its internal programme approval process. However, the review team concludes that there are some weaknesses in how the College has taken full account of the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* in some subjects, and therefore there is the potential for students to be awarded a foundation degree without undertaking authentic work-based learning in a real work environment. Subsequently, there is a recommendation for the College to work with Plymouth University to review and map all existing foundation degree programmes to ensure full alignment with the new *Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement*. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met but the associated level of risk is moderate. While the procedures for aligning programmes with the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* are broadly adequate, there have been some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which these processes have been applied on some foundation degrees.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

1.9   The regulatory frameworks of the awarding partners determine academic standards and award of credit for each course. The College has an Academic Co-operation Agreement with Plymouth University and a Financial Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Greenwich which outlines the respective responsibilities of each organisation. Plymouth University provides guidance and templates for the College to use as appropriate, for example in designing modules and programmes, and the College adheres to the University's Assessment Policy which it also applies to those programmes awarded by Pearson. The College delivers and assesses its Higher National courses in accordance with the frameworks and processes set out in Pearson's guidance, most notably the BTEC Guide to Assessment Levels 4 to 7 and Pearson's Self-Regulated Framework Centre Handbook. Staff and students can access awarding partners' academic regulations and information through the respective websites, the Higher Education Student Handbook, PQHs and the VLE. The College has an effective committee structure which has been strengthened further by the introduction of the CBSHE in 2014-15. The College's processes and its adherence to those of its awarding partners would allow it to meet Expectation A2.1.

1.10   The review team considered the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation including partnership agreements, guidance and regulations issued by the awarding partners, and validation documents and events. The team also held meetings with academic and senior staff, and students.

1.11   The evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective in practice. The awarding partners' regulations and policies are communicated to staff and students through the VLE, PQHs, and the Higher Education Student Handbook. As part of development and approval process for each programme, the College produces a PQH. These contain clear and comprehensive references to academic standards, and they are updated annually to ensure the information is current. Staff the team met cited the handbooks as sources for their understanding of the relevant regulatory framework, while students stated that they had received clear information and guidance at interview and in the handbooks. Students also confirmed that they were aware of the relevant policies and procedures and where to find that information.

1.12   The College now has its own internal approval process, primarily for the purpose of approving new Pearson programmes, with the CBSHE having oversight. This ensures that any new programmes fulfil the requirements of the awarding partner prior to final validation. The team found that the internal process has enhanced the involvement in, and the understanding of, the regulatory frameworks among College staff.

1.13   The awarding partners have responsibility for academic frameworks and regulations. The College adheres to these requirements and has appropriate processes in place to ensure that staff understand and enact their responsibilities in this regard. Within the context of the partnership agreements with its awarding partners, the team 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

1.14   The College publishes definitive records, in the form of programme and unit/module specifications, for all its higher education courses. These responsibilities are set out in the partnership agreements it has with the awarding partners. The College writes the programme specifications for Plymouth University awards and the awarding body checks and approves them. The awarding bodies have overall responsibility for defining and approving programme specifications in accordance with assessment regulations and with external references such as the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. For Higher National programmes awarded by Pearson, it is Pearson's responsibility to provide definitive course information and the responsibility of the College to produce tailored programme specifications for each award. Amendments to the documents for programmes awarded by the University follow University processes. Those relating to programmes awarded by Pearson follow the College's internal process which is set out in the 'Major and Minor Change Process Truro and Penwith College' document.

1.15   The College includes definitive programme information within the PQHs, with programme leaders being responsible for writing programme specifications and compiling the handbooks. The PQHs for programmes awarded by Plymouth University are checked annually by the awarding body who also maintain an electronic copy. All PQHs are held electronically on the Higher Education Quality Store within the 'Digital Campus'. The Quality Store is easily accessible for staff and students to view as well as for prospective students and other interested stakeholders. These processes would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

1.16   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining programme specifications, partnership agreements, programme approval documentation, annual monitoring reports and action plans, minutes of relevant meetings, PQHs, and the VLE and website. In addition, the team met senior and teaching staff, and students.

1.17   The evidence reviewed shows the practices and procedures to be effective in practice. The review team found that the College fulfils its responsibilities regarding the awarding partners' processes. The College ensures version control of programme information by keeping only the latest versions of PQHs on the Quality Store and by limiting editing rights to the Higher Education Administrator and the Higher Education Coordinator.

1.18   Students reported that they can access information easily about their programmes via their PQH, the website and the VLE. Students the review team met also demonstrated an understanding of learning outcomes and how their assignments relate to them.

1.19   The review team found that the provision and management of definitive programme information at the College is appropriate for their awards and meets the requirements of the awarding partners. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated 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

1.20   The approval of higher education programmes offered at the College is ultimately the responsibility of its two awarding bodies. Awarding bodies have procedures in place for the formal approval of taught programmes and are responsible for confirming that programmes meet the relevant qualification descriptors and threshold standards in the FHEQ or the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), as well as the Subject Benchmark Statements, and the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*, as appropriate to the award. As set out in its Financial Memorandum, the University of Greenwich maintains all responsibility for both the design and approval of its provision delivered by the College. Under the terms of its Academic Cooperation Agreements, Plymouth University maintains all responsibility for its franchised awards delivered by the College, and shares responsibility for the design, development and approval of all the validated provision. For the validated provision, once the programme proposal is agreed in principle by the CBSHE, the University's planning pro forma for new programmes is presented for approval to their Academic Development and Partnerships Committee before moving to stage one (internal process with awarding body) and stage two approval (includes external scrutiny from an employer and academic representative together with College and University staff).

1.21   The first Higher National programme accredited directly by Pearson started in September 2014. Pearson is responsible for designing and approving all programmes, and for gaining the required recognition from Ofqual. The College proposes awards to Pearson using its vocational qualification approval process. Their Higher National qualifications are specified by Pearson and consist solely of units devised by Pearson. The College uses the frameworks for Higher National qualifications which are provided by Pearson and which are aligned to the QCF. The College has taken a strategic decision to phase out the PGCE/Cert Ed currently awarded by the University of Greenwich. These are being replaced with similar programmes offered on a franchised basis through Plymouth University. The responsibility for approval for these programmes rests solely with the awarding bodies.

1.22   The College's internal approval process was developed further in 2014-15 with the introduction of the CBSHE and approval is required by this Board before any proposal for a new programme can be taken forward with the respective awarding body. The rationale for its introduction was primarily to support the development of additional programmes awarded by Pearson and to allow these to be considered more fully. The CBSHE also maintains the strategic overview of all new approvals, as well as title changes and major and minor changes to programmes and modules. These processes would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

1.23   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation relating to programme approval and revalidation, awarding partners' academic regulations, programme specifications, external examiner reports and partnership agreements. The team also held meetings with senior, support and teaching staff.

1.24   The evidence reviewed shows the practices and procedures to be effective in practice. The review team saw evidence that the College takes careful account of the procedures of its awarding partners for the approval and periodic review of programmes, as well as for major modifications to programmes. In addition, its internal approval process is now established and works effectively to cover all aspects of formal approval. The team saw evidence that approval meetings are all minuted, and outcomes are formally noted by the CBSHE. The team saw evidence that all programmes presented for approval are designed to align with the FHEQ and/or the QCF, and this is checked at the approval stage. The approval process also checks the alignment of curricula, learning outcomes and assessment to external frameworks.

1.25   It is an awarding body requirement that external employers are involved in the stage two approval meeting at Plymouth University. External employers are nominated by the College immediately after the stage one meeting and approved by the University. The College has adopted a similar principle for its internal approval process for new Pearson programmes. It requires an external employer to be part of the approval panel or to feed in comments as relevant about the delivery and appropriateness of a programme in relation to employability. Students are not involved in the formal approval meetings at the College. They are also not routinely involved with Plymouth University events. However, PGCE students did attend the stage two approval event for the BSc (Hons) Applied Social Science as observers.

1.26   The review team considers that the College carries out its responsibilities effectively both in its internal programme approval process and in partnership with its awarding bodies to ensure that programmes are approved at a level which meets UK threshold standards. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.27   The College's awarding partners are ultimately responsible for ensuring the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of all credit and qualifications awarded in their names. The College works within the regulations and frameworks set out by its awarding partners to maintain oversight of assessment and achievement of learning outcomes. Annual monitoring of each programme takes place in line with the requirements of both the College and its awarding partners and includes reviews of assessment. The programme approval processes of the awarding bodies are designed to ensure that programme and module learning outcomes meet the requirements of the FHEQ. The College currently offers a franchised PGCE with the University of Greenwich. The University assumes all responsibility for the determining of academic standards and the alignment to external benchmarks. The College has a new procedure for internal approval of new programmes, and minor modifications to existing ones. External contribution to programme approval is made by subject specialists appointed by Plymouth University, and all programmes are approved by the University with module content, assessment strategies and learning outcomes specified in the relevant programme specifications. Members of programme teams attend assessment boards held by the University and have the opportunity to contribute to the assessment strategy and any amendments to specific assessments. Assessment requirements and achievement of learning outcomes are also specified in the LTA handbooks and the handbooks of the awarding bodies, which are available to each student on the VLE. The Higher National qualifications awarded by Pearson comprise off-the-shelf units and all assessments are internally marked and verified by the programme teams prior to moderation and standardisation. The assessment process is subject to scrutiny by external examiners appointed by Pearson. These procedures would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

1.28   The team tested the Expectation by scrutinising the evidence provided by the College, including assessment regulations and procedures, external examiner reports, programme specifications, minutes of examination and assessment boards, annual programme monitoring reports, and handbooks and operational specifications for a range of subject areas. The team also met senior and teaching staff, and students.

1.29   Overall, the evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective in practice. External examiner reports confirm the achievement of learning outcomes, and that students have access to, and a clear understanding of, assessment criteria. External examiners also confirm that assessments are accessible and reliable, and that tutors are constantly re-assessing module assessments to ensure that tasks meet the intended learning outcomes.

1.30   External examiners for foundation degrees are specifically asked to comment on the assessment of work-based learning and students' achievement of learning outcomes derived from it. While most examiners were able to confirm this, the review team noted that, on one course, the response was recorded as being not applicable and, in two cases, this question had been omitted from the reporting template. A minority of examiners noted the

need to focus on work-based placements in order to ensure an appropriate balance between theory and practice, and to develop formal structures to support students while on placement. The team was assured that external examiner reports are considered carefully by each of the programme teams within the PCMs, and comments followed through in programme action plans.

1.31   The team saw evidence that the well-established programme monitoring and review processes of the College and its awarding partners, for example through PCMs, provide effective oversight of programmes, including the review of assessment practices. Evidence from the minutes of PCMs shows that the process of annual programme monitoring includes clear reference in the agenda template to a range of external factors, including external examiners' comments, National Student Survey (NSS) and Plymouth University's electronic Student Perception Questionnaire (eSPQ) data, professional bodies if applicable, HEA, QAA, and employability. Matters concerning assessment and programme monitoring are also considered by the CBSHE. These are forwarded to the awarding bodies for consideration. College staff also attend the Joint Board of Studies at Plymouth University.

1.32   The College has effective systems in place, and adheres to those of its awarding partners, to ensure that the assessment of students is robust, and that the award of qualifications and credit is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.33   Higher education provision at the College is subject to the programme monitoring and review procedures of its awarding partners. The University of Greenwich produces a Programme Monitoring Report annually for its partnership programmes, and reviews the provision within five years of approval. Plymouth University undertakes annual programme monitoring and periodic reviews of provision every five years. The latter are joint institutional and programme reviews. External examiners are appointed by the University to ensure maintenance of academic standards and they submit annual reports for each programme. Pearson is responsible for the monitoring and periodic review of its provision. The College is responsible for engaging with the consultation phases and, as requested, during the actual review. Pearson will review the College every five years. The first such review is due to take place towards the end of the academic year 2015-16.

1.34   The College's own processes for monitoring and review of programmes operate through the system of PCMs. The process is both evidence-driven and reflective. Programme monitoring reports and outcomes from PCMs are scrutinised by the CBSHE. Outcomes from the CBSHE inform the College senior management team and the higher education action plan. The CBSHE has overall responsibility for annually reviewing and evaluating programmes within the College, and for developing and monitoring the resulting higher education action plan. The College attends the Joint Board of Studies at Plymouth University which considers annual programme monitoring on a formal basis. Students play an active role in annual programme monitoring, including attendance at PCMs and the Joint Board of Studies. The College's own processes and its adherence to those of its awarding partners would allow it to meet the Expectation.

1.35   The team tested the effectiveness of the procedures by examining relevant documentation including annual and periodic programme monitoring reports, minutes of committee meetings, external examiner reports, academic regulations, and partnership agreements. The team also held discussions with senior and academic staff, and students.

1.36   The evidence reviewed showed the procedures to be effective in practice. The review team saw evidence of internal processes working effectively and the College adhering to the requirements of its awarding partners with regard to programme monitoring and review. This includes overview meetings for annual programme monitoring being held on both campuses. In addition, the College compiles a higher education action plan each year which is informed by the annual programme monitoring reports. Staff and students the review team met confirmed their understanding of their role in relation to the processes of monitoring and review and how they relate to the procedures required of the awarding partners. Staff also confirmed positive relationships with module link tutors and programme advisers at Plymouth University, thus ensuring further the parity between the quality requirements of each organisation.

1.37   Overall, the review team considers that the College operates effective processes for the monitoring and review of programmes, and discharges its responsibilities to its awarding partners. These processes allow for UK threshold standards to be achieved, and to ensure

that academic standards required by the awarding partners are being maintained. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.38   The awarding partners have ultimate responsibility for making use of external and independent expertise to set and maintain academic standards. Plymouth University ensures there is input from a representative employer and an independent academic representative at the formal validation stage. Approval documents developed at the College now contain a section on how employers were involved in the design and development of a higher education programme. External examiners are appointed by the awarding partners. The College can nominate potential external examiners for all programmes awarded by Plymouth University other than the PGCE/Cert Ed. All external examiner reports are distributed by the Higher Education Coordinator to the programme leaders and the higher education team leaders, who identify any major concerns. At programme level, staff produce a response to the external examiner report and an action plan to deal with any issues raised. The reports and the action plans are then considered primarily at the autumn PCMs, and other relevant higher education quality assurance meetings. The College's main responsibilities in meeting this Expectation are to ensure appropriate consideration is given to the feedback provided on the management and delivery of courses, for example from external examiners and also from employers who contribute to course development. These approaches would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

1.39   The review team considered the effectiveness of these procedures by scrutinising awarding partners' procedures, their criteria for the appointment of external examiners, the College's use of employers in programme design and development, and minutes of relevant meetings. The team also held meetings with senior and academic staff.

1.40   Overall, the review team found these processes to work effectively in practice. External examiners are involved at appropriate stages of the quality assurance processes and their reports confirm that the academic standards of the awards are being maintained. The College has an effective system for responding to actions identified by external examiners.

1.41   For the formal validation stage of programmes there is input from a representative employer and an independent academic representative. There is also a College requirement that teams discuss plans for new programmes with employers, and evidence is needed during the developmental process. However, there are variations in this practice. While the team saw evidence of extensive external input from the early stages of development, continuing throughout the delivery of one programme, other programme teams have conversations with individual employers where the discussions and recommendations are not formally recorded. This feeds into the recommendation in Expectations B1 and B8.

1.42   The College works in accordance with the regulations and procedures of its awarding partners. The evidence from documentation and meetings shows that, overall, the College is effectively managing its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards and making use of external expertise. However, the recording of this input from employers could

be formalised and more systematically recorded. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.43 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area are met. All have low risk, apart from Expectation A1 which has a moderate level of risk. In A1, the team makes a recommendation for the College to work with the awarding body to review and map all existing programmes to ensure full alignment with the *Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement*.

1.44 The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other 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 awarding partners are ultimately responsible for the design, development and approval of programmes. The College has also put in place formal procedures to govern the consideration of new courses prior to approval from awarding partners (see paragraphs 1.20-1.22 for further details of the programme design, development and approval procedures). The adherence of the College to its awarding partners' formal procedures for programme design, development and approval, and its own internal processes, would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.2   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation relating to programme design, development and approval, awarding partners' academic regulations, programme specifications, external examiner reports and partnership agreements. The team also held meetings with senior, support and teaching staff, and students.

2.3   Overall, the review team found these processes to work effectively in practice. The team saw evidence that the College follows the procedures set out by its awarding partners. For example, the College makes considered use of Plymouth University's approval process and documentation for all new programmes validated within the partnership, and makes good use of the support and guidance provided through Academic Liaison and Faculty Partnership roles. The College also organises and minutes the stage one approval event thoroughly, and participates fully in the stage two event.

2.4   The College has recently developed its own internal approval process. Modelled closely on Plymouth University's process, this covers new awards and modifications to awards. The new process has successfully ensured that all programmes are considered in a similar way. The CBSHE maintains the strategic overview of all new approvals, title changes and major and minor changes to programmes and modules. Approval of the CBSHE is required before any proposal can be taken forward with the respective external partner. Staff met by the team were clear about the processes involved in the new system. The team **affirms** the steps taken to strengthen the internal programme approval process.

2.5   While there is an explicit requirement for current, former and prospective students to provide feedback on programme design and development, there is no explicit requirement to formalise feedback from employers or other external stakeholders. The Plymouth University templates for the proposal of new programmes ask for details of employer feedback. The College's internal approval pro forma for new programmes does ask about employment opportunities on completion as well as 'employability options', but the latter refers to demand for graduates with the proposed qualification rather than employer input into the design or development of programmes. An external employer as well as an independent academic are included as part of the College's internal approval panels. Staff consult routinely with the Faculty Partnerships Managers at the University on the subject of identified employer and student need, while staff met by the review team also indicated that

employer requirements are discussed at CBSHE. However, there is very little evidence of substantial discussion recorded in the sampled minutes of the CBSHE. There was also little recorded evidence of systematic engagement with sectoral and professional bodies, or the consideration and use of National Occupational Standards.

2.6   The team found evidence that the College and its staff engaged with a variety of external stakeholders. This ranged from strategic engagement with the Local Enterprise Partnership to substantial numbers of teaching staff who remained active as practitioners. Employers also contribute to enrichment and employability activities, including acting as external speakers and contributing live briefs. However, there was less evidence of systematic engagement with external stakeholders in the processes of design and development of programmes. With some exceptions, engagement was largely undertaken on an individual or informal basis. The College is developing a new BA (Hons) Education and Professional Studies and the team heard that contact had been made with local employers and a questionnaire enquiring into employer need and focus had been distributed. The involvement of the Cornwall Health Board in the development of the FdSc Exercise, Health and Fitness was also evident. The sports rehabilitation and therapy team had consulted with a wide range of sports bodies, individual practitioners and employers. However, there were no records of these conversations or meetings. No evidence was made available from other programmes. Therefore, the team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College should record formally the involvement of external stakeholders in the design, development and review of all higher education programmes (see also Expectation B8).

2.7   Overall, the review team considers that the College operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes and discharges its responsibilities to the awarding body with regard to academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The review team does, however, make one recommendation in relation to the formal recording of the involvement of external stakeholders in the design, development and review of all higher education programmes. The team also affirms the ways in which the College has strengthened its internal programme approval processes. Despite the recommendation, the team considers that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.8   The College has a Recruitment and Admissions Policy which clearly details its recruitment, selection and admissions procedures and which is reviewed on an annual basis. There is a clear line of communication within the College management structure, and specifically the higher education administration structure, through which the process is managed. For programmes awarded by Pearson and Plymouth University, the College has responsibility for carrying out the recruitment of students before forwarding the information to the relevant awarding partner once students are registered. For these programmes, prospective students apply directly to the College via UCAS. For the University of Greenwich awards, this responsibility is shared with the College following the University's procedures. Students apply online to the awarding body who then pass information to the College. When the College has approved an application, the awarding body makes an offer and, if accepted, the student registers with the awarding body.

2.9   Information on how to apply is found in the College's Higher Education Prospectus and on the College website. All applicants are interviewed by programme leaders either in person or by telephone. In order to speed up the response time, the College's new admissions procedure allows for some of these interviews to be held after an offer has been made. All 'non-traditional' students, or students who do not meet the entry requirements, are interviewed before an offer is made. Where appropriate, they are also given an academic test to demonstrate their ability to complete work at the requisite level. Complaints about the admissions process follow the College's complaints procedure. Information and documents detailing the procedure are available at reception desks around the college, in the Higher Education Student Handbook and on the VLE. These processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.10   The review team examined the effectiveness of the policies and procedures by analysing documentation including the Recruitment and Admissions Policy, higher education prospectuses, the complaints procedure, enrolment, retention, and progression data, and by examining the VLE and website. The team also held meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, and students.

2.11   Overall, the review team found that the policies and procedures for recruitment, selection and admission work effectively in practice. The team saw evidence that the College reviews its Recruitment and Admissions Policy annually and that revisions are ratified by the CBSHE and disseminated through programme leader meetings. A gap analysis using the Quality Code has also been undertaken by the College.

2.12   Students met by the team reported no issues with the information provided prior to applying to the College. They reported that the website, open days and prospectuses were all helpful sources of information that had been made available in multiple ways. Students also reported that their expectations from the point of application had been either met or exceeded. The team did note, however, a lack of written information on the recognition of prior learning for current and prospective students (see paragraphs 2.41 and 3.4) and this supports the recommendation in Part C (see also Expectation B6).

2.13   The College actively seeks to widen access to Higher Education and therefore applies a 60 UCAS point tariff to all applicants. Although drop-out rates remain relatively high on some programmes, the College reported no direct correlation between drop-out rates and the low UCAS tariff. The College has collected data relating to entry qualification, retention and achievement; however, the analyses carried out are limited and some of the data, when initially presented to the team, was inaccurate. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that, by July 2016, the College conducts more detailed analyses of the academic performance of students based on their entry qualifications, in order to assess the effectiveness of admissions decisions.

2.14   In recognition of the high drop-out rates on some programmes and to improve retention and achievement, the College now provides a study skills workshop at the beginning of the academic year, as well as integrating study skills throughout the year in an enhanced tutorial system. Data collected by the College shows a positive impact on achievement for those who attended the workshop. However, only 81 of the 427 first-year students attended the last study skills workshop. The College reported that it will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the study skills programme as it looks to develop it further, starting by integrating the study skills session within registration week. The team therefore **affirms** the steps taken to improve student retention and achievement and to evaluate its effectiveness.

2.15   Overall, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the College's arrangements adhere to the principles of fair admission and are underpinned by appropriate structures and processes. However, there is a recommendation for the College to conduct more detailed analyses of the academic performance of students based on their entry qualifications, and referencing to the recommendation made in Part C about providing detailed written information on the recognition of prior learning for current and prospective students. The team also affirms the steps already taken to improve student retention and achievement and to evaluate its effectiveness. Therefore, while the Expectation is met the level of risk is moderate as there are currently some shortcomings in the rigour with which processes to analyse the impact of a low entry tariff on retention data are applied. In addition, the impact of this is confined to a small part of the provision where retention rates on some programmes remain a concern.

Expectation: 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

2.16   Currently, the College does not have a Teaching and Learning Strategy. The College has developed a range of handbooks which provide staff and students with clear and detailed information on the teaching and learning aspects of their programme. These include two higher education student handbooks, one for programmes awarded by Plymouth University and the other for students on programmes awarded by Pearson. There are also PQHs and LTA handbooks for each programme. The College's Higher Education Academic Team and Higher Education Coordinator review and use feedback from PCMs, eSPQ and NSS data, and external examiner reports to reflect on teaching practice, as well as the support and learning opportunities available to students. The College has a Staff Development Handbook and delegates an annual staff development budget to each programme team leader and this is used to support attendance at external training and conferences. In addition, a central staff development budget is managed by the Director of Studies to cover cross-College training. The College's processes would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.17   The review team examined the effectiveness of teaching and learning procedures by reading relevant documentation relating to the procedures and operational practices for teaching and learning, programme monitoring and review reports, external examiner reports, handbooks, and minutes of relevant committee meetings. The team also held meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, and students.

2.18   Overall, the review team found these processes to work effectively in practice. Following its previous QAA review in 2011, the College took the decision to develop further its learning and teaching materials. In 2013, Plymouth University also offered the College an opportunity to restructure all of the student handbooks. As a result, in 2014, the College developed a new and effective suite of handbooks, including LTA handbooks and PQHs for each programme. The review team saw evidence of a thorough development process for these handbooks including detailed feedback from staff, students and external examiners. This was followed by further comments from students on the initial handbooks and cross-programme peer reviews of the handbooks by staff. Staff and students the team met commented on the quality and usefulness of the information provided in the handbooks, for example assignment briefs and schedules in the LTA Handbooks. The Public Information Verification Procedure, introduced in September 2015, includes a systematic review of the handbooks.

2.19   The College supports a range of staff development activities and staff met by the team considered these initiatives to be effective in maintaining and updating their knowledge and skills. Examples include internal conferences which promote scholarly activity; a range of internal staff development sessions; and an internal VLE moderation event where staff consider and evaluate other subject areas' sites. Each programme team leader is given a budget to send staff to external training events and conferences, and there is also a central staff development budget managed by the Director of Studies. In order to enhance the staff experience, the College produces a scholarly higher education journal, SEEKER, to recognise and promote research undertaken at the College. The journal includes both

academic papers and conference presentations given by staff. The journal was relaunched in 2014-15 after a period of inactivity. Students met by the team commented positively on the quality of teaching at the College.

2.20   The College has a number of strengths in teaching and learning with students valuing the knowledge and teaching skills of tutors and the introduction of a range of new handbooks. The College also has effective staff development activities in place. Despite the lack of a formalised Teaching and Learning Strategy, the team concludes that 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

2.21   The College has a number of operational procedures in place to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Some of these key initiatives are linked to feedback from student away days and NSS/eSPQ data, and are included in the College Higher Education Plan and presented to the Joint Board of Studies at Plymouth University. The initiatives include the development of more assignment briefs linked to employability, the sharing of good practice on employer-focused assignments, and the development of additional study skills sessions and staff/student handbooks. The College has in place several processes to facilitate, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources relating to student development, including the spring PCMs which review the College's resources. The processes the College has in place would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.22   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's arrangements and resources by scrutinising relevant documents relating to its strategic and procedural approaches to providing support and resources for students and by reviewing a selection of information available on the VLE and minutes of relevant meetings. The team also held meetings with students, and senior, teaching and support staff.

2.23   The team found that the procedures for implementing, monitoring and evaluating arrangements and resources work effectively in practice. Higher education students benefit from effective support systems such as learning support and careers advice. Students also confirmed that the support provided by the College, including the knowledge and accessibility of their tutors, enables them to develop as independent students.

2.24   The team saw evidence of changes being made to study skills activities and the impact this is beginning to make on retention, achievement and the learning opportunities available to students (see paragraph 2.14). For example, a study skills week has been introduced for the week before the programmes officially start and, although student uptake has thus far been limited, those who did attend appear to have benefited in terms of improved levels of achievement. The College is considering making this introductory week compulsory for 2017 with an interim voluntary programme continuing for September 2016.

2.25   The College has in place effective processes for monitoring and evaluating arrangements and resources which enables students to develop their potential. The team saw evidence that these matters are discussed at the spring PCMs at which a member of the Learning Resource Centre attends to allow staff and students to ask questions about resources. Staff and students the team met considered these discussions to be very useful in evaluating the effectiveness of resources for higher education provision.

2.26   The College also plans and uses away days to gather student feedback on issues where it feels there may be a weakness and again students are encouraged to organise these events to make the most of them. Topics discussed at these events include the availability of resources and impact on student achievement, and the quality of assessment and feedback. The review team saw evidence that the College sought to address these matters by including relevant actions in the College higher education action plan. Students met by the team commented on the progress made by the College in improving these areas.

2.27   The College considers the development of skills to enhance employability of students to be critically important and it has participated in two major funded initiatives (SPARK and PCISE) to engage employers as a means of achieving this. SPARK has engaged local employers in advising and aiding higher education students to develop successful business ideas, whereas PCISE involved a range of certificating professional development programmes for higher education students. These projects were funded by the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund until June 2015. The College has made a conscious decision to continue to fund the SPARK project. The team heard of several examples of students setting up successful businesses and employing other students. In addition, the College has a record of successful case studies involving former SPARK students which help to inform and to give ideas to current students. The review team considers the comprehensive financial and mentoring support available to students to develop entrepreneurship and enable business start-ups is **good practice**.

2.28   The team concludes that the College has arrangements and resources in place to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. This includes a feature of good practice regarding the financial and mentoring support available to students to develop entrepreneurship and enable business start-ups. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.29   The College has a Student Engagement Strategy which outlines a variety of mechanisms for students to engage in quality assurance and enhancement. The Strategy is reviewed annually by the CBSHE. The College has a robust student representation system which includes elected programme-level representatives and an overall lead student representative. All student representatives are trained by Plymouth University's Students' Union and are supported by the higher education team and the lead student representative who represent students from across the College. Student representatives are invited to attend a student representative meeting every half-term which also includes a member of the Higher Education Management Team, a student support officer and, where applicable, a student liaison representative from Plymouth University. A student representative from each stage of every programme attends two PCMs per year. These meetings are not valid without a student representative present. Minutes of these meetings are made available to students via the VLE. The lead student representative is invited to attend the CBSHE, and a student representative is invited to attend the Joint Board of Studies at Plymouth University. The College takes part in the National Student Survey (NSS) and the eSPQ designed by Plymouth University. Students are also invited to complete module reviews online or in hard copy. The College's Student Engagement Strategy and procedures would enable it to meet the Expectation.

2.30   The review team examined the effectiveness of the procedures in place to engage students by examining documentation including the Student Engagement Strategy, student and programme handbooks, the student submission, minutes and terms of reference of groups and committees, and NSS and eSPQ data. The team also held meetings with teaching and support staff, senior staff, students, and student representatives.

2.31   The review team found that the procedures for engaging students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience work effectively in practice. Evidence from documentation and from meeting students showed that there is a supportive and open environment within which students and staff freely engage in discussions, both within and in addition to the formal student engagement structures. Student representatives met by the team reported that they were appropriately trained and equipped to carry out their role. Other students reported that they feel able to make use of the student representatives when needed. Student representative meetings are held four times a year at each campus. Even allowing for the fact that there are fewer higher education programmes at the Penwith campus, the team did note some inconsistencies in the attendance rates for representatives at the Penwith compared to the Truro campus.

2.32   NSS response rates at the College have been low in previous years. However, the College has done additional promotional work this year to try to increase the response for the NSS 2016 and reported that this has been effective with a 66.7 per cent response rate.

2.33   The College makes use of a number of ways of gathering student views and there is evidence of changes being made as a result of this feedback. The student representation system is effective. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.34   The College's arrangements and processes for assessment are defined within its agreements with the awarding partners and the College ensures it is compliant with their assessment policies and regulations (see also paragraph 1.27). The College is responsible for setting, marking and moderating all assessments except for the PGCE programmes, on which the awarding bodies undertake these tasks. The College does not have an assessment and verification policy of its own but, instead, makes use of those provided by its awarding partners, for example with Plymouth University's Assessment Policy and the Pearson Centre Guide to Assessment (Levels 4 to 7). External scrutiny is undertaken by external examiners. The College does not have its own policy and procedure for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) or Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). Instead, its RPL/APL is governed by the regulations of the awarding partners. These include Plymouth University's Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy and Process 2015-16, and the Pearson Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and Process.

2.35   The Programme Team Leader Higher Education maintains active oversight of assessment for higher education programmes within the College. Assessment procedures, learning outcomes and requirements are communicated to students through the LTA handbooks, and at the presentation of an assignment. The new tutorial scheme of work includes one session on assessment. The College reviews assessment practices through the CBSHE and the Joint Board of Studies with Plymouth University. The policies and procedures in place at the College provide for the consistent application of the awarding partners' regulations relating to assessment, including the RPL/APL, and these would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.36   The review team considered the effectiveness of the policies and procedures by examining documentation such as the LTA handbooks, programme and student handbooks, RPL/APL documents, awarding partner regulations and procedures, external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports, and minutes of committees and meetings that have a role in assessment. The team also met senior, academic and support staff, and students.

2.37   The evidence showed the processes and procedures to be effective in practice. The team saw evidence that the College conducts assessments appropriately within the frameworks provided by the awarding partners, including for design and scheduling of assessments, grading, moderation and the holding of assessment boards. Assessments for Higher National qualifications make good use of assessment criteria, aiding the reliability of the assessments. External examiners confirm the meticulous preparation of materials for moderation and for assessment boards, the adherence to regulations, and the solid support for students within the process.

2.38   The College provides clear assessment information for each programme awarded by Plymouth University and this is made available to staff in the operational specification and the PQHs. Students the review team met confirmed the usefulness and clarity of the information about assessment requirements in the LTA handbooks, in particular highlighting

the value of the grading matrices. Students also confirmed that all assessment documents are easily accessible through the College's VLE and intranet.

2.39   The College has effective processes to ensure the timeliness and quality of feedback on assessment. Feedback to students on assessment is given in a number of ways, including written and verbal, and often involving one-to-one meetings. Students the review team met were well aware of the College's official turnaround time of 20 working days for providing feedback on assessed work, but commented that they frequently received feedback well within this timeframe. They confirmed how useful this has been and the way it allows them to prepare more thoroughly for the next assessment. Students were also appreciative of electronic marking, and the way this enables feedback to be quicker and more formal. Students, staff and external examiners comment on the usefulness of the variety of formats in which feedback is given. Student surveys confirm the positive views on feedback. External examiners also comment favourably on the standard of the feedback, and feedforward, provided to students. The team considers that the timely and constructive assessment feedback to students is **good practice**.

2.40   The College does not have its own policy for RPL, but is cognisant of those of its awarding partners. The College adheres to Plymouth University's APL Policy although very few requests have been made. The Pearson RPL policy has been adopted for the new Pearson programmes, but not yet used. For prior learning claims that had been made, administrative processes were secure, had been appropriately assessed against learning outcomes, and identified on the Subject Assessment Panel paperwork.

2.41   In meetings with staff, the team found some confusion about differences between a claim for the RPL, as defined in *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code, and taking into account work experience in lieu of formal educational qualifications for the purposes of admission. The College does have clear processes for the latter, and there is a brief mention of it in the College prospectus. The team also noted that neither the application nor assessment processes for RPL are clearly communicated in a written format for prospective or current students, either in the prospectus or on the College website. These findings support the recommendation in Part C (see also Expectation B2).

2.42   Overall, the College's assessment processes are thorough, carefully monitored, and rigorously applied. This is confirmed by the awarding partners and external examiners. Students are positive about the nature of their assessment and the feedback they receive. The team did have some concerns regarding the communication of processes for assessment of RPL, and a recommendation about this has been made under Expectation C. Despite these concerns, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.43   The roles and responsibilities of the external examiners are determined and defined by the awarding partners. External examiners are appointed by the awarding partners. The College can, however, nominate potential external examiners for all programmes awarded by the University of Plymouth other than the PGCE/Cert Ed. All external examiner reports are distributed by the Higher Education Coordinator to the programme leaders and the higher education team leaders, who identify any major concerns. At programme level, staff produce a response to the external examiner report and an action plan to deal with any issues raised. The reports and the action plans are then considered at the autumn PCMs and at CBSHE. For programmes awarded by Pearson, the external examiners meet students and also produce a report for the College's Subject Assessment Panels. The College's procedures and its adherence to those of its awarding partners would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.44   The review team examined the effectiveness of these procedures in practice by examining a range of documentation including external examiner reports and associated responses, annual monitoring reports, minutes of relevant meetings where reports are considered, and information on the VLE. It also held meetings with students, teaching staff and senior staff.

2.45   Overall, the evidence showed the processes and procedures to be effective in practice. External examiners are involved at appropriate stages of the quality assurance processes and their reports confirm that the academic standards of the awards are being maintained. The College has an effective system for responding to actions identified by external examiners.

2.46   The appointment of external examiners is the responsibility of the awarding partners. In recent years, there have been timing problems with the appointment of some new/replacement external examiners despite timely requests being made by the College. Similarly, there have been some late external examiner reports, and this has had a knock-on effect as the reports could not be discussed at the scheduled meetings. However, the College report that this has now been dealt with by the awarding body and should not affect the process in future years.

2.47   External examiner reports are made available to students on the VLE via their programme page, although the majority of the students the review team met confirmed that they do not access the reports. In their written submission, some students felt they were not immediately aware of external examiner reports. Students are given the opportunity to meet external examiners and reports can be discussed in tutorials. In an effort to involve the students more, staff have been told to discuss the reports more consistently with the students. While the team heard of progress being made with this development, some of the students the team met were not aware of this happening.

2.48   Overall, the role of external examiners is clear and well embedded in the quality assurance systems, and the College makes effective use of reports in the monitoring and review of higher education courses. The 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

2.49   The College has a series of programme monitoring and review processes which complement those of its awarding partners in line with their requirements (see paragraphs 1.33-1.34 for further details of programme monitoring and review procedures). The College's own processes and its adherence to those of its awarding partners would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.50   The review team tested the effectiveness of the procedures by examining relevant documentation including annual and periodic programme monitoring reports and templates, minutes of relevant meetings, external examiner reports, academic regulations, partnership agreements, and student feedback forms. The team also held discussions with senior, support and academic staff, and students.

2.51   Overall, the evidence showed the processes and procedures to be effective in practice. The review team saw evidence that programme monitoring and review at the College is operated effectively, primarily through the PCM process. These procedures are well established and monitored closely by the College. In addition, while the roles and responsibilities relating to annual programme monitoring are defined by the awarding partners, they are communicated clearly and implemented thoroughly by the College through meetings of the CBSHE, Joint Board of Studies, PCMs, and programme leader meetings. Core information on roles and responsibilities in relation to annual programme monitoring are held on a dedicated site within the VLE. During the annual cycle of PCMs, the Higher Education Coordinator and the Higher Education Academic Team discuss the process and the refining of action plans. All new programme leaders at the College are offered training and support from the Higher Education Coordinator and the Higher Education Programme Team Leader at the start of each academic year. Support is also provided through the programme leader meetings.

2.52   Plymouth University's annual programme monitoring reports include clear reference to a range of external factors, including external examiner reports, and NSS and eSPQ data. Reference to these external factors at programme level is evidenced in the minutes of the PCMs. The Joint Board of Studies meetings receive reports on annual programme monitoring for each subject forum, check that responses to external examiner reports have been made, and have oversight of action plans.

2.53   The team saw evidence that the student voice is considered in programme monitoring and review. The student representative system enables students to be represented both at programme and cross-College levels. At programme level, a template is sent to student representatives prior to the PCM to allow them to collect evidence of the student voice. A PCM is not valid without at least one student representative present. Information from these meetings then feeds into the College's higher education action plan. The CBSHE formally draws together and has oversight of annual programme monitoring at a cross-College level and the lead student representative is invited to attend CBSHE meetings and the Joint Board of Studies.

2.54   The team saw little evidence of the systematic and recorded involvement of employers and other external stakeholders contributing to the review of programmes.

An employer representative was involved in institutional reviews with Plymouth University. However, apart from exceptions such as Silversmithing and Jewellery, there is no formal mechanism for employers to be involved in the ongoing development and review of each foundation degree programme. Staff met by the team did give some good examples of the informal involvement of external stakeholders in review, for example in the sports coaching area. However, this is not systematic across the programmes. These findings support the recommendation in Expectation B1.

2.55   The awarding partners are responsible for conducting periodic reviews, usually every five years. The team saw evidence that the College engages systematically with the periodic reviews of provision, as required by its awarding partners. The team was informed that the institutional review scheduled with Plymouth University for 2017-18 will have a focus on foundation degrees. However, the review team found some examples of foundation degree programmes which did not appear to have been fully updated (see paragraph 1.6). These findings support the recommendation made in Expectation A1.

2.56   Overall, the College has developed thorough processes for monitoring and review which meet its own requirements and follows those of its awarding partners. These include a systematic process of meetings and documentation which ensures the operation of systematic monitoring of programmes. However, the team did find a lack of formally recorded involvement of external stakeholders in programme review and this references the recommendation under Expectation B1. Despite these issues, the team concludes that, overall, the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.57   The College has a Complaints Procedure which all students follow in the first instance. Formal complaints are submitted to the Principal's Secretary and the Principal has overall responsibility for complaints internally. The Complaints Procedure gives clear guidance to students on how to make a complaint and sets timely guidelines for response by the College. When the internal procedure is exhausted, complaints may be escalated and this process varies depending on the awarding partner. For the University partners, complaints can be escalated to the awarding body and thereafter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). For students on programmes awarded by Pearson, complaints which are unresolved by the College can be escalated directly to the OIA.

2.58   For academic appeals, the College uses the awarding bodies' processes for programmes awarded by its University partners. For students on programmes awarded by Pearson, the College deals with academic appeals internally. The complaints and academic appeals procedures are outlined in the Higher Education Student Handbook and on the websites of the College and its awarding partners. The College keeps a log of academic appeals and complaints in order to produce an annual report for the Senior Management Team and the College governors. A report is also sent to Plymouth University twice a year. These processes would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.59   The review team tested the effectiveness of the procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints by examining documents such as the College Complaints Procedure, student handbooks, the College website, the awarding partners' websites and Pearson's BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment. The team also held meetings with senior, support, and teaching staff, and students.

2.60   The review team found that the procedures for academic appeals and student complaints work effectively in practice. Staff and students the review team met clearly articulated the difference between a complaint and an academic appeal. Students also reported that they were aware of where and how to access information regarding complaints and that they were able to approach their tutors or the Higher Education Administrator to settle complaints informally.

2.61   While the review team is satisfied that the College makes its Complaints Procedure available and that staff and students clearly understand the processes involved, the procedure for academic appeals is less clear. While the College provides information to students on what an academic appeal is, direction to the relevant procedure is only provided for students on programmes awarded by the University partners. The review team acknowledges that academic appeals relating to Pearson awards would be dealt with internally and that the College is yet to receive an academic appeal on one of these programmes. However, although the College reported that internal academic appeals would go through the Higher Education Coordinator, the College did not provide evidence of any formal process or procedure to follow. In addition, there is limited information in the student handbook for Pearson programmes regarding the procedure for academic appeals despite this information being comprehensive in the student handbook for programmes awarded by Plymouth University. Therefore, the team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the

College articulates the academic appeals procedure to secure alignment with Pearson requirements.

2.62   Overall, the College has clear procedures in place for making complaints or appeals. Staff and students have a clear understanding of the procedures and where to find the necessary information. However, the College is lacking an internal first-stage appeals procedure for Pearson awards and this led the team to recommend that it articulates the academic appeals procedure to secure alignment with the requirements of the awarding organisation. Despite this recommendation, the team concludes that the Expectation is met. However, the level of risk is moderate because of a lack of clarity about responsibilities in relation to the requirements of the awarding organisation, and the problems being confined to a small part of the higher education provision.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.63   The College has no current formal arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with bodies other than its awarding partners and therefore, in the context of this review, this Expectation is not relevant. Although many of the students are in paid or voluntary work, being in employment is not a pre-requisite for entry onto any of the bachelor or foundation degrees, or the Higher National programmes. There are no formal requirements on any of the College's foundation degrees for students to undertake formal work placement. Students are, however, strongly encouraged to find a work placement to complement their studies, but the responsibility for finding placements rests with the student. Placements are not formally assessed. Full-time PGCE/Cert Ed students are either employed by the College or on a voluntary placement there, while the part-time students are already employed by the College. Students on these programmes receive programme and module handbooks and are assigned a mentor.

2.64   In 2014, the College conducted a review of employment and placement opportunities that are formally linked to foundation degrees. The review team concludes that, although many of the College's higher education programmes link assessment to employment experiences, none of these relationships were formal and none were linked to any formal achievement of learning outcomes.

2.65   The College and the awarding body adopt a broad definition of work-based learning within foundation degrees. Foundation degree students are not expected to spend time in the external workplace, but instead programmes include simulations, case studies, live briefs, classroom-based work-related learning activity and employability skills. The review team found some confusion in the College's literature with regard to the terms surrounding work-related learning and employability (see paragraph 3.5). This supports the recommendation made in Part C.

2.66   Despite the referencing of one recommendation from Part C, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.67   The College does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.68   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All 10 applicable Expectations are met. The risk to the quality of learning opportunities is low for eight Expectations. However, Expectation B2 (Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education) and Expectation B9 (Academic Appeals and Student Complaints) are both associated with a moderate level of risk.

2.69   The team identifies two features of good practice in the quality of student learning opportunities - the comprehensive financial and mentoring support available to students to develop entrepreneurship and enable business start-ups (Expectation B4); and the timely and constructive assessment feedback to students (Expectation B6).

2.70   The review team makes three new recommendations which relate to the following: conduct more detailed analyses of the academic performance of students based on their entry qualifications, in order to assess the effectiveness of admissions decisions (Expectation B2); record formally the involvement of external stakeholders in the design, development and review of all higher education programmes (Expectations B1 and B8); and, articulate the academic appeals procedure to secure alignment with Pearson requirements (Expectation B9). The team also references two recommendations made in Part C: provide detailed written information on the recognition of prior learning for current and prospective students (Expectations B2 and B6); and review and clarify the existing terminology for internal and external stakeholders to capture consistently the College's approach to work-related learning and employability, respectively (Expectation B10).

2.71   The team makes two new affirmations: the steps taken to improve student retention and achievement and to evaluate its effectiveness (Expectation B2); and, the steps taken to strengthen the internal programme approval process (Expectation B1).

2.72   The moderate risks in Part B indicate some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which quality assurance procedures have been applied, a lack of clarity about responsibilities, and problems which are confined to a small part of the provision.

2.73   The review team concludes that, overall, the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3   Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1   The College provides information about its higher education provision on its website and in the University prospectus. All promotional information is subject to a public information verification procedure, oversight of which is shared between the Higher Education Marketing Team, the Higher Education Administration Team and the College Marketing Team. Final sign-off on the webpages and prospectus resides with the Higher Education Administrator. The College provides all students with an LTA handbook at the start of the academic year either in hard copy or on the VLE. Programme specifications are provided to current students in the PQH. Students also receive a higher education student handbook. The LTA handbook, along with the PQH and the staff development handbook, are also key sources of information for staff at the College. The College's arrangements for the production of information would enable it to meet this Expectation.

3.2   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's arrangements for publication and assurance of information by exploring the availability and accuracy of information on the website and VLE, and in the prospectus and handbooks, and by examining the public information verification procedure. The team also held meetings with senior, support and teaching staff, and students.

3.3   Overall, the review team found the procedures for checking and producing information about higher education provision to be effective in practice. Students confirmed that relevant, accurate and useful information was available to them on the website and in the prospectus prior to, and during, application and enrolment. The College enables clear communication between the Marketing Admissions Team and the Higher Education Administration Team to ensure that information is clear, accurate and transparent during the recruitment phase. Current students receive a range of handbooks and those the review team met confirmed that the information provided in them is accurate, comprehensive, and useful.

3.4   Within each programme description in the higher education prospectus, prospective students are directed to further information regarding additional entry criteria. Additional information found at the back of the prospectus advises that mature students without the required academic credentials may be considered individually, as might applicants with pre-2002 qualifications. However, the review team noted that neither the application nor assessment processes for the RPL are clearly communicated in a written format for prospective or current students, either in the prospectus or on the College website. The prospectus does not include any information as to what RPL is, on the possibility of making a claim for RPL, or the formal assessment processes for an RPL claim. There is no reference to RPL in the index of the prospectus. Although students receive verbal advice on RPL during interview, where interviews are held post offer, this would affect consideration for making a claim for RPL. The team therefore **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College provide detailed written information on the recognition of prior learning for current and prospective students (see also Expectations B2 and B6).

3.5   The College and the awarding body adopt a broad definition of work-based learning within their foundation degrees. Although many do, there is no formal requirement for foundation degree students to spend time in the external workplace. Instead, programmes include simulations, case studies, live briefs, classroom-based work-related learning activity, and employability skills. Despite definitions being found in the Employability Framework, the review team found some confusion in the College handbooks and prospectus with regard to the distinctions between, and interchangeable use of, work-related learning and employability. Staff the review team met acknowledged that some of the wording in the student handbooks and in the prospectus might be misleading to prospective students given that the College does not currently offer any programmes with formal work placements. Some of the LTA handbooks refer to foundation degree programmes which include professional placement or practice hours, which have to be evidenced and are an assessable component. The references to the assessed components of these programmes, which contradict what is stated elsewhere concerning the delivery of learning opportunities with others, may lie with the unedited use of generic wording in the LTA handbooks. Therefore, the team **recommends** that by September 2016 the College reviews and clarifies the existing terminology for internal and external stakeholders to capture consistently the College's approach to work-related learning and employability, respectively (see also Expectation B10).

3.6   Overall, the team concludes that the College has adequate procedures for checking that information about its higher education provision is fit for purpose and trustworthy. The College does make available a range of information about its provision in both print and online and students find this to be accessible and useful. However, the team does make two recommendations concerning the provision of detailed written information on RPL, and defining the terminology relating to work-related learning and employability. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low because the recommendations refer to a need to amend and update details in documentation.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.7   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its 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. The review team makes two recommendations - provide detailed written information on the recognition of prior learning for current and prospective students, and review and clarify the existing terminology for internal and external stakeholders to capture consistently the College's approach to work-related learning and employability.

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

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College's strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities is outlined in its Higher Education Strategy 2015-20. Enhancement is taken forward through the associated College higher education action plans. The College has identified two strategic objectives, which relate to enhancement: to 'take deliberate steps to engage all students in enhancement opportunities to ensure excellence in learning and teaching'; and to 'enhance excellence through evidence-informed teaching practices and supporting scholarly activity and professional development of staff at the College'. The Strategy also reflects the College's aim to widen participation, and increase progression opportunities for the local and regional community. The College also tries not to create too much distinction between strategy and operation in building a cycle of continuous improvement. Strategic decisions may be taken at Senior Management Team meetings and escalated up to the main governing body, while strategic initiatives can also arise as a result of governors' working parties. The College's strategies and procedures would allow this Expectation to be met.

4.2 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the strategies and procedures by examining the Higher Education Strategy, meeting minutes, annual reports and other documents relating to the quality assurance and enhancement processes. The team also met the Principal, senior and academic staff, and students.

4.3 Overall, the review team found that the College's strategies and procedures for enhancement work effectively. The College has introduced a series of significant strategic changes relating to its higher education facilities, staffing, quality processes and deliberative structures since the last QAA review in 2011. The College views the provision of dedicated higher education buildings on both its campuses as key enhancement decisions. The Fal building in Truro was already open at the time of the QAA review in 2011, but the new Lamorna building, which houses higher education provision on the Penwith campus, opened in June 2011. Integrated into these higher education centres are dedicated Learning Resource Centres, as well as dedicated staffing for the administration and management of higher education. This has provided a cohesive approach to services for students, aided progression and transition, and helped to build a distinctive higher education ethos.

4.4 The development in September 2014 of a new College Board of Studies for Higher Education (CBSHE) has provided the College with an effective strategic and operational vehicle to oversee quality, academic standards and enhancement across a range of higher education provision (see also paragraph 2.4). The review team saw evidence of the CBSHE being able to discuss and implement a range of carefully considered activities aimed at enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities. Examples include feedback from external examiners, student surveys and NSS data to identify weaknesses and initiate improvements.

4.5 The College values the student voice as a driver for, and an integral part of, its approach to enhancement (see also Expectation B5). The College has made considered changes to the PCM process as a response to requirements by Plymouth University, and feedback from staff, external examiners and students. As a result, programme monitoring and review has been strengthened and the student voice is of central importance in

programme monitoring at the College. The Higher Education Coordinator and the Higher Education Team regularly review the PCM process through team meetings that reflect on and action changes. A half-termly programme leaders meeting was introduced from September 2014, with enhancement as a standing item on the agenda. In November 2015, the programme leaders meeting was given the task of working with the HEA Framework for Transforming Assessment in Higher Education to develop further the culture of teaching excellence by creating new assessment strategies for their programmes. This strategic initiative was intended to bring together student feedback, external examiners' comments, and College overview to enhance students' learning opportunities.

4.6   The development of the College's LTA handbooks for each programme has proved to be a key enhancement measure. The handbooks came about as a result of feedback being sought from students through PCMs, meetings of student representatives and an away day. The programme monitoring and review process was used as a mechanism for strategic change, and a means to seek feedback on the new LTA handbook template and to develop an improved one. This was incorporated into the College higher education action plan 2014-15. In meetings with students and senior and teaching staff, all were clear about the enhancement which the development of the new handbooks had brought about. In addition, the College took the strategic decision to require a draft copy of the LTA handbook, together with three sample assignments, to be presented as mandatory at approval events for all new programmes.

4.7   Overall, the College demonstrates that it is taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The College has developed further its quality assurance processes through which enhancement measures may be identified. Staff were able to articulate a number of examples of enhancement. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met with a low level of associated risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.8   In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low. The team makes no recommendations or affirmations.

4.9   Overall, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   Student employability is at the core of the College's higher education programmes. One of the aims of the Higher Education Strategy 2015-20 is to 'embed employability, entrepreneurship, enterprise skills and education for sustainability across higher education'.

5.2   The College developed an Employability Framework which is based on research done by the HEA and relates to the embedding of employability into teaching. The Framework has been circulated to the programme leaders to evaluate and report on their own programmes in relation to the Framework, and to include relevant information in their LTA handbooks.

5.3   Employability is noted and discussed as part of the annual monitoring process, and programme leaders are encouraged to identify examples of good practice relating to employability and/or employer engagement at these meetings. New programmes involve employer input during the design and approval stages, and the application of theory into practice is exemplified in the recent Level 6 developments at the College. In addition, the College organised a student away day in March 2015 with the focus on 'Employability and personal and professional development'.

5.4   The College has a specialist Higher Education Careers Adviser who runs both group and individual careers sessions with students, in addition to giving talks and running a VLE site.

5.5   Higher education students have been encouraged to participate in two successful initiatives relating to their personal and professional development: SPARK and PCISE (see Expectation B4). This has resulted in the production of a number of successful case studies of former SPARK students and this has helped to generate ideas for current students.

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.