



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of West London College of Business and Management Sciences Ltd

November 2017

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at West London College of Business and Management Sciences Ltd. The review took place from 31 October to 2 November 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Tessa Counsell
- Ms Amanda Donaldson
- Mr Joshua Elderfield (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

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

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#)<sup>2</sup> and explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).<sup>3</sup> For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code).

<sup>2</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education).

## Key findings

### Judgements

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

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

### Good practice

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

- The quality assurance adviser role provides an effective external perspective and engagement with the wider academic community in supporting the maintenance of academic standards (Expectation A3.4).
- The extensive support provided for staff professional development and scholarly activity enhances the quality of teaching (Expectation B3).
- The well-developed peer observation scheme, including inter-departmental review, supports the effective sharing of good practice (Expectation B3).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations**.

By March 2018:

- ensure that students have access to plagiarism detection software in accordance with the College's stated policy (Expectation B6)
- ensure that the Complaints Policy informs students that the process includes representation to the awarding organisation before proceeding to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (Expectation B9).

By June 2018:

- formalise the processes for including students and employers in the selection of optional units of study for new and revised programmes (Expectations B1, B5)
- consider ways of further engaging students as active partners in the deliberative and quality enhancement processes (Expectation B5)
- develop and implement a coherent and effective process for annual monitoring and review at programme and at institutional level which results in specific and measurable objectives (Expectation B8)
- review the presentation and reporting of data to ensure consistency, accuracy and clarity, allowing for effective analysis and action planning (Expectation B8)
- ensure that students are provided with full and accurate information regarding terms and conditions (Expectations Part C, B2)
- review all current information and introduce effective mechanisms to ensure that information is accurate, trustworthy and fit for purpose (Expectation Part C)

- formalise the strategic approach underpinning enhancement initiatives to ensure that they are more clearly defined and supported by specific and measurable targets (Enhancement).

### **Affirmation of action being taken**

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions already being taken to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to students:

- the implementation of a range of strategies in place to support the retention and achievement of distance learning students (Expectation B4).

## About the provider

West London College of Business and Management Sciences Ltd was formed in 2005 to offer full and part-time further and higher education programmes in business, management, computing, health and social care, law, and English language. The majority of students live within a seven-mile radius of the College and are representative of the local population in background and ethnicity. The majority of the College students cite improved employment and income opportunities as the primary reasons for enrolling on programmes. The College is located on two nearby sites in Hounslow, west London, with one site offering mainly further education courses and one site focusing on higher education.

Currently, 821 higher education students are enrolled. The College's aim is to give support and enable its students to participate in higher education and to provide programmes that meet the needs of students and local employers. The College aims to provide small class sizes and use specialist tutors to ensure that students achieve their academic potential and receive value for money. Programmes are designed to enable students to become professional practitioners and to build their careers in an increasingly competitive market. Students attend on full-time, part-time, distance or blended learning modes of delivery.

The College currently works with one awarding organisation, Pearson, and is currently delivering HNC and HND programmes at FHEQ levels 4 and 5. More than 800 students are enrolled, of whom around 500 are full-time, in-house with the balance as distance and blended learners. The College is structured into four management departments: Business Management, Health and Social Care Management, Computing and Systems Development, and Law. Heads of Department are members of the Executive Committee.

A recent major change has been the graduated introduction by the awarding organisation of the new RQF qualifications, replacing the QCF versions. This has required major changes to the structure and content of programmes. This transition has been implemented by the Business Management department in 2016, and the Computing and Systems Development department in 2017. Progression agreements with a number of universities based in and around London have provided a route for College students to gain degree qualifications after completing their HNDs.

The College has made changes in three areas: firstly, in academic staffing, where over the past two years the majority of lecturers have become employed on a full-time basis; secondly, the organisational structure of the College has been consolidated around its academic departments; and thirdly, the College continues to make use of external subject specialists. The College is actively seeking a franchise partnership with a UK university to deliver level 6 top-up undergraduate degree programmes.

A significant change in strategic planning has been the decision to move ahead with recruitment of international students under the distance learning provision earlier than was originally planned. The College executive has agreed that, owing to continued changes in the UK educational environment and the uncertainties surrounding the Brexit vote, overseas expansion will now be promoted. The College intends to make full use of its distance and blended learning platform. To support these international students the College is in the process of establishing local offices in Pakistan, India, Dubai and Sri Lanka.

The College was subject to a Review for Specific Course Designation in 2014. The outcomes of that review were that the team identified one area of good practice, nine advisable and four desirable recommendations. Following this review, the College was subject to annual monitoring visits in 2015 and 2016. Outcomes of these annual visits were that the College was deemed to have made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision.

## Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

1.1 The College is not an awarding body and threshold standards for awards delivered are secured through the primary responsibility of its awarding organisation, Pearson. The awarding organisation has primary responsibility for ensuring that the six HNC/D programmes delivered at the College are positioned, aligned and named appropriately according to the FHEQ and that the learning outcomes are appropriate to level 5.

1.2 The responsibilities checklist and Pearson Accreditation Agreements outline the College's and the awarding organisation's responsibilities for maintaining the academic standards of the awards. The College's Quality Manual details the structures and processes in place. These arrangements would allow this Expectation to be met.

1.3 The team considered a range of documentation relating to the maintenance of threshold standards from both the awarding organisation and the College. This included scrutiny of the Pearson Academic Management Review (AMR) reports for the last three years, external examiners' reports for all programmes, the internal verification, assessment

and quality improvement and standardisation policies, and minutes of standardisation meetings. The team also met with the Principal, senior staff and teaching staff to discuss how academic standards are maintained in practice.

1.4 The FHEQ is used as a key reference point for all higher education programmes using the approval processes of the awarding organisation, and through the College's own internal programme approval procedure. Programme specifications demonstrate that courses are positioned at the required level on the FHEQ. Contextualised programme specifications for delivery at the College are in place, and detailed unit descriptors are included in course handbooks, available to staff and students on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.5 Staff confirmed that they are aware of the processes and procedures set out in the College's Quality Manual. They understand the requirements of the assessment and internal verification policies and display an awareness of the Quality Code, the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. The College has appropriate processes in place to ensure adherence to the awarding organisation's external verification procedures and regulations. The policies and procedures in the College's Quality Manual, along with the regulatory requirements of the awarding organisation, provide a sound basis for assuring academic standards.

1.6 Overall, the College's adherence to the requirements and procedures of the awarding organisation ensures that programmes are effectively aligned with the appropriate external and sector reference points. The College is aware of its responsibilities for maintaining threshold standards and is fulfilling them effectively. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

1.7 The awarding organisation is responsible for setting the academic standards of the awards. The College's responsibilities lie in the delivery and assessment of units and programmes, and in maintaining academic standards through its own academic frameworks. The College governance processes set out in the Academic Governance Handbook provide clear and effective policies for governing academic credit and qualifications. These arrangements would enable this Expectation to be met.

1.8 To test the operation of these arrangements the review team scrutinised relevant documents, including committee terms of reference and organisational structures, and held meetings with the Principal and senior staff.

1.9 Directors of the College have responsibility for the management and administration of the College. The Board of Directors, as the College's governing body, is responsible for setting the strategic direction, approving major developments and receiving regular reports from the Executive Committee. There is an extensive deliberative structure comprising eight committees, including those related to academic matters, teaching, student-staff liaison and quality assurance. There are also subject and examination and assessment boards. These committees together have oversight of all aspects of planning and regulation of the College's academic framework, programme delivery, assessment and quality assurance. The College has an external academic quality adviser whose role includes involvement in some of the College's committees. This matter is also addressed as good practice under Expectation A3.4.

1.10 The College's committee structure is complex and at times overlapping, although evidence from meetings with senior staff and college management indicates a general understanding of individual responsibilities pertaining to academic governance and frameworks, and the role of the awarding organisation's assessment guidelines in the assurance of academic standards.

1.11 The executive committee reports to the Board of Directors and minutes provide evidence of discussion of a range of issues related to quality assurance and the management of teaching and learning, including external reviews such as the annual HEFCE Monitoring Review. There is a clear distinction between the executive and academic committees of the College, and this is evident in the role descriptors for the recently introduced management structure.

1.12 The College's Assessment Policy and Procedures confirm that assessment is carried out with adherence to the awarding organisation's requirements. Assessment Policy and Procedures are detailed and give clear guidance to staff. Additional policy statements are contained in the Student Feedback Policy, Internal Verification Policy and Plagiarism Policy. External examiners' reports and departmental Annual Programmes Reviews from the last two years indicate that the requirements of the awarding organisation are fully met.

1.13 The review team concludes that there is a comprehensive academic framework for awarding academic credit and qualifications which is supported by effective governance



arrangements, and which meet the requirements of the awarding organisation.  
The Expectation is met and the associated risk level 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 responsibility for maintaining a definitive record of each programme approved and delivered by the College ultimately rests with the awarding organisation, Pearson. Programme specifications constitute the critical reference point for the delivery of each programme and reference the FHEQ level, educational aims and assessment strategies. However, programme specifications are inconsistent in terms of their layout, format, and presentation of content. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.15 The review team scrutinised the programme specifications, programme handbooks, and the College's website, and confirmed its understanding of the process for recording and dissemination of information through meetings with senior staff, academic staff, and students.

1.16 The awarding organisation has responsibility for maintaining the definitive record of the programme and qualification. Despite inconsistencies in the programme specifications, students are able to identify learning outcomes, and reported that they found the information they received to be accurate and helpful. There is comprehensive information on the VLE relating to students' studies, which serves as the main source of information.

1.17 The definitive documents show how the content and structure of the programme and its assessment strategy provide students with the opportunities for learning and assessment which they need to enable them to demonstrate that they have achieved the programme learning outcomes at the requisite level.

1.18 There is a course handbook for each programme delivered. Handbooks include details of each unit of the qualification, as well as the Pearson programme specification and learning outcomes at unit level. Credit value and learning outcomes are also included. The College produces a scheme of work for each unit. Assessment briefs show links between assessment criteria and learning outcomes.

1.19 The course handbooks, as well as student handbooks, are accessible online through the VLE. Students confirmed that these handbooks are useful and have sufficient information for them to use as a reference point for their studies.

1.20 The review team concludes that programme specifications and module outlines function as effective reference points for the delivery, assessment and review of the provision. Programme information provided is accurate and is readily available to students and staff. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

## **Findings**

1.21 Processes for the design and approval of modules, programmes and qualifications are undertaken by Pearson, including the individual core and optional units that create qualifications within the College. Programmes are aligned to the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and qualification descriptors. Programme design at institutional level is limited to making choices about optional units. These processes ensure that the programme meets threshold academic standards and allow the Expectation to be met.

1.22 The review team scrutinised policies, procedures, programme specifications, Pearson Academic Management Review reports and minutes of meetings, and met with senior staff to discuss the effectiveness of the processes.

1.23 The College creates its programme specifications from available Pearson units of study. Optional units are chosen because of specialist expertise of staff and to allow progression opportunities for students going on to level 6 study, or to meet the needs of employers.

1.24 The College's Quality Manual identifies the criteria for developing new course proposals. These criteria include the need to comply with its own and the awarding organisation's quality assurance criteria. The College has devised a New Programme Approval Form which ensures that proposals are thoroughly considered against the business needs of the College, and the skills and knowledge needed for employment.

1.25 The College is gradually moving its programmes from the QCF to RQF specifications and has so far completed the process for the HNC/D Business programme. This change involved the production of a new programme approval process which is outlined in the Programme Approval Policy. The policy sets out the criteria against which new programme proposals are judged and the approval process to be followed. Senior staff confirmed that the Academic Committee makes the final recommendation to the College executive group. Minutes of the Programme Committee, the Academic Committee and the Executive Committee meetings confirm that the process is followed appropriately and is effective.

1.26 The College meets its limited responsibilities for designing and developing provision by working with its awarding organisation, Pearson. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.27 The College has processes and procedures to ensure that credit and qualifications are appropriately awarded. Unit specifications are provided by the awarding organisation and clearly state the learning outcomes to be assessed. Pearson is responsible for ensuring that credit is awarded only where students have met the required learning outcomes and UK threshold standards, as articulated in the FHEQ, and that its own standards have been met. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.28 To review the effectiveness of these processes the team examined documents from the various review activities, particularly assessment, external examiners' reports and programme specifications, and discussed their operation with staff. The team scrutinised minutes and terms of reference from the Subject Examination and Assessment Boards (SEAB) and the Examination and Assessment Boards (EAB).

1.29 Minutes of the SEAB and EAB indicate that there is an effective process for awarding credit and qualifications. Some issues with the presentation of student data had been identified by senior staff, who explained the actions that the College is taking to ensure accuracy of data. This matter is also addressed under Expectation B6.

1.30 The Academic Management Review (AMR) and the standards verification processes operated by Pearson ensure that the College is meeting the required academic standards. Internal processes for assessment and internal verification are monitored by Pearson to ensure that they are effective and that they align to the awarding organisation's expectations.

1.31 There are appropriate structures in the College which support effective assessment of learning outcomes. The Assessment Policy requires that all assignment briefs state the learning outcomes to be assessed, along with assessment criteria, and deadlines for submission. Assignment briefs show that the policy is followed effectively. Assessment criteria are clearly mapped to learning outcomes on feedback reports. All assessment briefs are internally verified by another member of the team and reviewed by the Dean of Teaching and Learning. The College has in place a rigorous system of internal verification, with a high number of assessment scripts sampled. The EAB is then responsible for confirming unit marks and final awards and includes an external academic adviser among its membership. The College has also responded positively to awarding organisation recommendations by introducing sub-examination boards at a departmental level, allowing for the closer scrutiny of unit assessment. The terms of reference for the EABs and SEABs confirm their role in awarding credit and qualifications, which is overseen by the Academic Committee.

1.32 The College works effectively in partnership with its awarding organisation and operates successful practices that ensure credit and qualifications are awarded only where learning outcomes and the academic standards of the awarding organisation have been met.

The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that 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 The awarding organisation is responsible for ensuring that credit is awarded only where students have met the required learning outcomes and UK threshold standards, as articulated in the FHEQ, and that their own standards have been met. The awarding organisation has ultimate responsibility for the monitoring and review of HNC/D programmes, including directing the College to take necessary action. These systems include the Academic Management Review (AMR) and the external examining process overseen by Pearson, both of which take place annually. Pearson reviews its programmes every two years and expects the College to comply with this process. The College has its own system for annual programme and institutional-level monitoring and review. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.34 To test the effectiveness of these processes the team examined documents from the awarding organisation's review activities and the internal annual monitoring reports produced by the College. These processes were also discussed with senior and teaching staff.

1.35 The Pearson external examiners' reports and the AMR indicate overall satisfaction with the way in which the College operates its programmes, and that threshold academic standards are being maintained. Where recommendations are made by examiners the College plans for improvements within its Annual Programmes Review report. This report is then discussed at Academic Committee.

1.36 Departmental monitoring and review reports have been produced for the first time in 2017. These reports aim to consider student achievement and recommendations from Pearson, and feedback from students and staff. However, these reports do not appear to relate closely to the needs of the individual programmes and their students, nor do they provide effective processes for action and improvement. This matter is addressed as a recommendation under Expectation B8.

1.37 External examiners' reports confirm that the College is maintaining threshold academic standards, and that assessment requirements are appropriate to the unit level, allowing students to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.38 The responsibility for engaging external and independent expertise rests primarily with the awarding organisation. The awarding organisation is responsible for the design of the programmes and units, with appropriate externality utilised in the design of the qualifications. Centre approval includes a visit to the College by an external reviewer and subsequent report. The College is responsible for the design of teaching materials and assessments to ensure that the learning outcomes are met. External examiners for each programme are appointed by the awarding organisation, and through their visits and annual reports, ensure that threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved. The awarding organisation also undertakes an annual Academic Management Review (AMR) which enables confirmation that all accreditation requirements are met. These arrangements would allow the expectation to be met.

1.39 In order to test the Expectation, the review team scrutinised documentation including that relating to the internal development of new programmes, Pearson AMRs for the last three years and external examiners' reports. The team also met senior and teaching staff.

1.40 The College's procedure for the internal approval of new programmes is set out in its Quality Manual, with responsibility for oversight resting with the Academic Committee. Responsibility for the Programme Approval Policy and managing the process rests with the Deputy Principal. The policy outlines the criteria for the development of a new programme, and the procedure to be followed. The Dean of Teaching, in consultation with Head of Department, completes a programme proposal which is subject to approval by the committees responsible for teaching, academic matters, and the College executive, prior to application to the appropriate awarding organisation.

1.41 Externality in the development of new programmes is focused around the understanding of market forces in the local environment and employer demand for the programme. The College's academic staff, in conjunction with the Executive Committee, are responsible for monitoring changes in government policy, the business environment, workforce needs, new technological developments and demographic trends.

1.42 The College has appointed an External Quality Assurance Adviser who sits on key College committees and provides a valuable role in ensuring the use of and alignment with external reference points, and in supporting new programme development. In addition, External Subject Specialist Advisers may be involved in the development of programmes as members of the consultation and advisory team. The external academic adviser provides an effective external perspective and engagement with the wider academic community and maintenance of academic standards. The team considers this to be **good practice**.

1.43 External verifier reports and the awarding organisation's Academic Management Reviews indicate that the College adheres to the awarding organisation's requirements

regarding the maintenance of academic standards and operates within a clear framework established at the College. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**



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

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

1.45 All seven of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated level of risk is low in all areas. There is one feature of good practice in the role of the external academic adviser which provides an effective external perspective and engagement with the wider academic community. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this area.

1.46 The team notes that the primary responsibility for much of this judgement area lies not with the College but with its awarding organisation. The College has good relationships with its awarding partner and responds appropriately to its requirements. The College has internal policies and processes to ensure that it can meet its responsibilities to the awarding organisation.

1.47 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The College has limited responsibility for the design, development, modification and approval of the programmes it offers. The awarding organisation designs the units that make up the programmes and defines the core units relevant to each qualification. Through this process, academic standards are set and assured. The College has policies and procedures in place to ensure that proposals for the delivery of new programmes are considered effectively. These external and internal processes would allow the expectation to be met.

2.2 The review team discussed the design, development and approval processes with senior staff, teaching and support staff, employers and students. The team considered the Academic Management Review (AMR) reports from Pearson and the College documents related to programme development and approval.

2.3 The College's Quality Manual outlines the process and criteria for planning new programmes in the Programme Approval Policy. This policy describes the criteria against which new programme proposals are assessed and the process which must be followed. In addition, there is a programme proposal form which requires consideration of aims of the programme, assessment strategy, recruitment and market intelligence, methods to be used for monitoring, and review and business planning.

2.4 The recent approval process for the new HNC/DBusiness indicates that optional units had already been chosen at the time the proposal went through the College's internal approval processes. Heads of Department stated that optional units are chosen based on the future employability requirements of students. Teaching staff asserted that optional units are chosen on the basis of staff expertise, feedback from universities and employer needs, to determine the most appropriate units. An example of this is the inclusion of CISCO units in the HND Computing and Systems Development programme and the development of staff skills to support delivery of the curriculum. Teaching staff recommend the choice of optional units to the Heads of Department, who then put together the proposal form. The proposal for the new HNC/D Business programme states that students were instrumental in choosing the optional units. Students who met with the review team were not aware that their programmes contained optional units, or of their involvement in choosing them.

2.5 Minutes of the Programmes Committee, Administration Committee, Academic Committee and Executive Committee demonstrate that the programme approval process is effective. However, there is no record of any committee discussion about the choice of optional units, and no evidence of students' involvement. During a meeting with employers, it was clear that they not had input into the choice of optional units, although they stated that they would like to be involved in the future. The review team **recommends** that, by June 2018, the College formalises the processes for including students and employers in the selection of optional units.

2.6 In addition, External Subject Specialist Advisers are effectively involved in the consultation and advisory team, as part of the programme approval process. Three subject specialist advisers were present at the Academic Committee where the HNC/D Business proposal was discussed.

2.7 The College discharges its responsibilities for the design, development and approval of new programmes. The review team concludes that the Expectation B1 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's recruitment, selection and admissions processes are made clear to students through a variety of channels. Entry criteria and admission processes are specified in its prospectus, on the College website and through its Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy. This policy articulates the processes through which the College ensures the fair recruitment and admission of prospective students. These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.9 The team tested the admissions policies and procedures by examining a selection of documentary evidence, including the Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy, pre-enrolment information, and marketing information provided to prospective students. The review team also met with senior staff responsible for the management of the admissions and induction process, teaching staff and a range of students.

2.10 Selection processes are underpinned by clear entry requirements for each programme offered. The process for receiving selection decisions and information on how these are recorded are also provided. Students confirmed during the review visit that they are given sufficient information to help them make informed decisions when applying to the College.

2.11 Applicants are awarded a place on merit and based on the recommendation outlined in the Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice by the Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group. The Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy is designed to allow all applicants equal opportunity to demonstrate the achievement of their potential. The College clearly sets out the admissions and selection process to prospective students and how the admissions will be conducted.

2.12 The Deputy Principal oversees the selection process and adheres to the principles set out in the Admissions Policy, coordinating and ensuring that compliance is followed in accordance with national and regulatory standards. The Vice Principal of Administration has a senior operational admissions role and ensures procedures are followed in accordance with the policy. The Vice Principal of Administration is also responsible for induction of new staff involved in the recruitment, selection and admissions process, and for ensuring the continuous professional development of relevant staff.

2.13 There are clear procedures in place for handling appeals and complaints about recruitment, selection and admission, which also include the timescale in which students will receive a decision. All policies are reviewed and monitored annually.

2.14 Admissions processes for distance learning students have been modified in the light of issues regarding retention and achievement. Information to prospective distance learning students about the requirements of study have been made more explicit. Distance learning students now complete the online induction and confirm that they have considered the policies and procedures prior to their enrolment.

2.15 The College makes clear how the processes will be conducted and instructs prospective students about what to do when they apply to the College. The College uses a variety of channels to publish information about its admissions processes and entry requirements, mainly on its website. Students confirmed that they are happy with the level of information they received prior to enrolling at the College.

2.16 The College makes information about its admissions processes and procedures clear to students through a range of methods. Students confirm that they are happy with the quality of information they received from the College and staff prior to enrolling. The College has a clear and comprehensive Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy which is reviewed on an annual basis. The review team concludes that the expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching***

#### **Findings**

2.17 The Teaching and Learning Strategy sets out in detail the College's approach, based on 14 key aspects, including recruiting and supporting suitable staff, recognition and dissemination of good practice and regular review of programmes. Ultimate responsibility for the strategy lies with the Academic Committee and the senior management. The Teaching Committee is responsible to the Academic Committee for the day-to-day academic quality and standards, and for ensuring effective engagement with students. The Teaching Committee supports the Dean of Students in the effective management of teaching and learning and in programme design, approval and delivery.

2.18 The Attendance Policy makes clear that attendance is compulsory for students other than those studying by distance learning, and the role of both staff and students in cases of poor or non-attendance. The College considers full attendance necessary for receiving of information, learning and preparation for assessment, and group and practical work in teaching sessions. This approach is supported by the Student Engagement Policy. These strategies and policies would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.19 In testing the Expectation, the review team scrutinised documentation, including the Staff Recruitment Policy, together with the policies on staff induction and appraisal, and through evidence of the peer review process. The team also met with senior staff, teaching staff and with students.

2.20 The Staff Recruitment Policy states that teaching staff must be appropriately qualified to carry out their role. Although the policy does not define what qualifications are required, senior managers stated that there is an expectation that teaching staff will be qualified to master's level, or be supported to attain a qualification at that level. The policy contains detailed information on the interviewing process for teaching posts, which includes the Dean of Teaching, Head of Department and External Quality Assurance Adviser, and the Deputy Principal. Once in post, staff undergo an induction, with a three-month assessment period during which their teaching is observed. This ensures that any areas for development are highlighted. The Director of Studies has overall responsibility to ensure that the policy and guidelines are adhered to. The Quality Assurance Department is responsible for the probationary period and the review process.

2.21 Following induction and the probationary period staff are formally appraised biannually by their line manager. Appraisal is used to identify individual development needs and to align these with the objectives of the Teaching and Learning Strategy, linked to the College's continuing professional development programme. Lesson observations and peer review processes support the staff appraisal system. Teaching staff provided positive feedback on the effectiveness of these processes. The well-established peer review process is being extended to include cross-departmental reviews. There are also plans to extend this review activity working jointly with a similar college. The team considers that the well-developed peer observation scheme, including inter-departmental reviews, supports the effective sharing of good practice, and is a feature of **good practice**.

2.22 Teaching staff are well qualified in their specialist subject specialist areas. The Deputy Principal, Dean of Teaching and Learning and Quality Assurance Manager are responsible for staff training and professional development. The College subscribes to the Higher Education Academy (HEA) with a number of submissions for staff accreditation in place. The aim is for 50 percent of teaching staff to become fellows of the HEA. Staff receive support for teacher training leading to a formal teaching qualification. The Staff Professional Development Policy and Professional Development Calendar list a number of examples of development activities, including teaching methodology, health and safety, first aid, training for new equipment, and peer group sharing. There is little information available about the development of further academic qualifications, or scholarly activity. However, the review team heard examples of staff being supported to achieve postgraduate qualifications, including at doctoral level.

2.23 The College has an effective staff recognition and reward process which is linked to continuing professional development, pay review, promotion and progression. This strategy is encapsulated in a Staff Reward Policy, College Teaching Fund and Excellence in Teaching Award Policy. Staff can make proposals to the executive committee for funding from the teaching fund for supporting innovative teaching projects, which is regularly utilised by staff. Recent support has enabled staff to achieve the professional qualifications associated with the HNC Computing and Systems Development. The extensive support provided for staff in professional development and scholarly activity is a feature of **good practice**.

2.24 Staff and students spoke positively about the learning environment, which is enhanced by the fact that many teaching staff are also practitioners, who regularly utilise real-life case studies in their teaching. Staff also encourage students to provide input from their own current and past employment. The learning environment is enriched by study visits and formal debating sessions. Student engagement in learning is further enhanced by guest speakers, the external quality assurance adviser, and the on-site development of well-equipped health and social care and computer laboratories. The ongoing effectiveness of resources is ensured by informal links between academic and support staff. The Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) aims to ensure that there is an effective channel for formal communication between students and staff and specifically considers facilities available to students.

2.25 The College has a well-qualified and experienced teaching team and student learning is effective. There are robust procedures to review the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practice to enable students to develop as independent learners and study their chosen subject. There is good practice in the staff development and scholarly activity, and in the established peer review process. The Expectation is met and the 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**

2.26 The College's mission is to provide quality education, to maximise the potential of its students and to promote individual achievement at the highest level. Strategically, this is expressed through the Teaching and Learning Strategy, Strategic Plan, Student Handbook, course handbooks, and the Student Engagement Policy. The Widening Participation Strategy states that the College aims to promote the principles of fair access and ensure that able students from any background can access the College programmes without facing any institutional barriers to progression. This strategy is clearly linked to the College's recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures. The College's processes for enabling student development and achievement allow the Expectation to be met.

2.27 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising documentation, including a range of policies related to students' personal, academic and professional support, and through meeting with staff and campus-based and distance learning students.

2.28 The College operates an Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy, which aims to ensure that equality and diversity are well embedded in all aspects of the provision. The Dean of Teaching ensures that the policy is carried out in practice and chairs the Teaching Committee. The Equality and Diversity Report is detailed and includes an outline of policy and responsibilities within the College, together with an analysis of data relating to retention and achievement linked to student age, home location, gender, disability and ethnicity. There has been specific analysis of data for the new distance learning cohort.

2.29 The Student Welfare and Career Guidance Policy provides clear strategic responsibilities. The Deputy Principal is responsible for the student welfare team which consists of a student welfare officer, learning support and disability adviser and student support staff. The team works closely with all the College staff including teachers, personal tutors and heads of departments. The policy recognises the necessity for pastoral support and guidance, with the aim of ensuring that students' issues of lack of engagement or poor attendance are mitigated, and includes statements regarding initial and diagnostic assessment, numeracy, literacy and disability support.

2.30 There are detailed procedures in place regarding the initial application and interview process for applicants. The Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy and Procedure is supported by detail of the literacy and numeracy assessment undertaken by applicants and the student application and interview forms, aiming to provide open, fair and consistent levels of access to all potential students (see also Expectation B2).

2.31 The Student Induction Policy is supported by information available in the handbooks. Handbooks ensure that students have all the information they need to be successful on their programmes. Once on programme, students have academic and personal tutorials. Students attend timetabled academic tutorials at which teaching staff provide individual or group feedback. Each student has a personal tutor with tutorials at least three times per academic year to support personal and academic development, planning and progression. Students are extremely positive about the accessibility of tutors and the support they receive. Individual Learning Plans and Individual Education Plans are used as part of the tutorial system to record individual students' progress, and additional support requirements. All students undertake an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and



English language ability, and study skills support is put in place as required. For more specialist support and resources students may be signposted to local external agencies. Direct support is put in place by the College, depending on assessed need, for example specialist seating and computer equipment.

2.32 Students gave examples of how interactive classes, supportive teachers, good staff engagement with students and small group sizes all contribute to their development and achievement. Students are made aware of good academic practice and how to find information relating to their courses and the support available. Distance learning students were also positive regarding their experience, including how email, an online chatroom and webinars provided rapid and effective support. For both campus-based and distance learning students the virtual learning environment (VLE) is an effective online learning tool, with links to lectures and presentations, details on assessment and deadlines, and an online library section. The College recognises the poor retention levels on the distance learning delivery mode of the HNC Business. A range of strategies to support the retention and achievement of these students has been put in place. This strategy has included requiring students to sign a declaration that they have seen and understood all the information provided during their induction, prior to being permitted to continue their studies. The team **affirms** the action being taken by the College to support the retention and achievement of distance learning students.

2.33 The Quality Assurance Manager provides brief reports to the Academic Committee summarising the student feedback collated from the Admissions Survey. The 2016 reports include recommendations that information provided for students at both pre-application and induction is improved and more detailed. There is evidence that in the 2017-18 academic year this was addressed. Student feedback for each academic year is captured in an internal end-of-year survey. The breakdown of student responses includes data for College and for each department. There is a detailed action plan response to the written comments received from students. The Staff Student Liaison Committee provides evidence that student representatives have opportunities to put forward pertinent issues from the student body for discussion and consideration.

2.34 The College has a framework for enabling student development and achievement that is comprehensive in its scope and effective in practice. The focus on teaching and learning is effective in enabling students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Action is being taken to address the poor retention and achievement of distance learning students. Therefore, 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**

2.35 The College has both formal and informal processes to engage students in the assurance and enhancement of the academic experience. The Student Engagement Policy clearly sets out how students can become involved in decision making at all levels. The policy demonstrates how the College uses student feedback to engage with students and make improvements. Student representatives are supported through training, and information provided in the representatives' handbook. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.36 The review team referred to a range of documentation including the Student Engagement Policy and minutes of the Teaching Committee minutes, and met with academic staff, professional support staff and students.

2.37 Student representation occurs on the majority of the College's committees, with the exception of the Examination and Assessment Boards (EAB). This process of engagement demonstrates that the College creates and maintains an environment within which students and staff are able to engage in discussions that aim to bring about enhancement of the academic experience. Students gave examples of how their voice had been heard by the College as a result of feedback, which had resulted in an increase in resources. Students use social media as a way of engaging with their cohorts and gaining feedback for representatives to take forward.

2.38 The Student Engagement Policy is reviewed and monitored annually. Minutes from a range of committees demonstrate that students are participants in quality assurance processes. These processes are reviewed periodically, and students are positive about the role and engagement of student representatives. The QAA annual monitoring visit report in 2015 stated that it was clear that not all students were fully engaged with, or had a clear understanding of, the range of opportunities available to them.

2.39 Student engagement has improved, and students are mainly satisfied with aspects of their ability to feed back and engage with the College. However, concerns have been expressed by students about the seriousness with which their comments have been treated and acted upon as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. Students appear at times to be involved in committees in a tokenistic way. Minutes of the Teaching Committee include dismissive comments from a member of staff in response to a student representative expressing concerns about the way in which students are treated in class. The handbook provided for student representatives has a number of formatting issues, spelling mistakes, and a lack of consistency. This matter is also addressed under Expectation Part C with a recommendation to ensure that information provided is accurate, trustworthy and fit for purpose. Additionally, students are not formally involved in programme design and the selection of units of study. This matter is addressed under Expectation B1 with a recommendation to formalise the processes for including students and employers in the selection of optional units of study. The team **recommends** that, by June 2018, the College considers ways of further engaging students as active partners in the deliberative and quality enhancement processes.

2.40 The College listens and responds to feedback from students. Student engagement operates effectively through student representative mechanisms, unit surveys and informal

feedback. Students are not systematically consulted or involved in the strategic developments at the College. The quality of the information for student representatives requires improvement. Students' involvement as active partners in the deliberative processes needs to be further developed. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met but that the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**Expectation (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**

2.41 Assessment of programmes delivered at the College is overseen by the awarding organisation. The College has a range of policies and procedures that support assessment practice. Documents include an Assessment Policy, Assessment Handbook, Internal Verification Policy, a Standardisation Policy, a Plagiarism Policy and a Student Feedback Policy. These policies, procedures and arrangements would allow the expectation to be met.

2.42 In order to test the effectiveness of these processes the team examined handbooks and policies, assessment briefs, internal verification schedules, schemes of work, minutes from standardisation meetings and Examinations and Assessment Boards (EABs), and discussed assessment processes and practice with teaching staff and students.

2.43 The Assessment Policy clearly outlines the expectations of what should be included in assignment briefs. Assessments are planned by course teams, and assignment briefs are clear, with intended learning outcomes linked to assessment criteria. Briefs provide clear indicators for students of what they need to do in order to achieve a pass, merit or distinction. Students find assessment briefs clear and helpful. Assessments are approved by the Dean of Teaching, external examiners and the EAB prior to use.

2.44 As part of their induction and mentoring staff new to higher education are given appropriate training and support for assessing at that level. This process includes additional moderation of marking during their first term in post.

2.45 Students appreciate that they can find information about assessment on the VLE. Students are positive about the support they receive from staff and about the weekly tutorial sessions which help their achievement. Formative assessment and feedback takes place within tutorials and allows tutors to support students with their summative assessment tasks. Records of the formative assessments are clear and demonstrate the effectiveness of the process.

2.46 Standardisation meetings are effective in ensuring that teaching staff are supported in a consistent approach to assessment and providing feedback. The meetings address assessment feedback, plagiarism and moderators' reports, and allow staff teams to sample assessments and feedback, identifying professional development needs.

2.47 The Internal Verification policy provides a robust framework for the moderation of assessment. Assessment trackers are used to plan and monitor the verification process. All those on the teaching team are involved as verifiers, and staff new to assessing at higher education level are supported through a greater level of sampling (50 per cent sampling for new staff, as opposed to 25 per cent for more experienced assessors). However, this model contradicts the policy, which indicates that verifiers should not be involved in the setting or assessment of assignments, a matter which the College needs to clarify within its documentation and practice.

2.48 The Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy outlines the procedure for students to apply for remission of some units through the recognition of prior learning. There is a thorough process where applications are made to the College and discussed at an RPL panel meeting. There are appropriate systems for mitigating circumstances. College policy allows for either short-term or long-term extensions to deadlines, based on a clearly stated set of criteria, and students and staff have a good understanding of these procedures.

2.49 Teaching staff are experienced at identifying and dealing with academic misconduct. Staff use plagiarism detection software as required. The College has a Plagiarism Policy and has increased the number of licences for its plagiarism detection software in response to a recommendation from a previous QAA review. Students are well supported in avoiding plagiarism through information available on the VLE, and through study support sessions on academic referencing. The College action plan indicates that the plagiarism detection software is available for all students, and the Plagiarism Detection Software Policy states that all students have a right to check their work and see the originality report prior to submission. However, most students are not aware of its availability and are therefore not given the opportunity to check their work prior to submission. The review team **recommends** that, by March 2018, the College ensures that students have access to plagiarism detection software in accordance with the college's stated policy.

2.50 The College has recently introduced Departmental Examinations and Assessment Boards in order to scrutinise individual unit achievement more closely. These boards feed into the EABs, where progression and achievement decisions are made. EAB minutes indicate that the scrutiny of assessment decisions is effective, and that any errors in the data presented are identified at this stage. Senior managers explained that steps have been taken to eradicate errors in data, including using dropdown menus instead of data input fields, and exploring how the virtual learning environment and electronic systems can export data rather than relying on manual data entry.

2.51 Assessment processes are clear, meet the awarding organisation's expectations and are carefully implemented, although students need access to plagiarism detection software. The review team concludes that Expectation B6 is met and that 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**

2.52 The Deputy Principal has overall responsibility for all matters relating to assessment, including external examiners, and sits on the Examination and Assessment Board (EAB), chaired by the Academic Registrar. The Assessment Policy provides details on internal assessment practice but does not explicitly define the role of the external examiner. The policy does, however, list related documentation, including the Pearson Guide to Assessment Levels 4-7, which includes the definition and role of external examiners. Course handbooks provide students with information on external examiners. The awarding organisation appoints external examiners for all higher education programmes at the College. These policies and procedures would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.53 The team tested the expectation further by scrutiny of documentary evidence, including external examiners' reports, the awarding organisation annual Academic Management Reviews (AMRs), minutes of EABs, and in discussion at meetings with senior and teaching staff and students.

2.54 The 2015-16 Pearson AMR report recommended that the College's assessment board be more proactive in its scrutiny of results, particularly relating to those students with incomplete or exceptional results, and the setting of deadlines and conditions for resubmission. The College has subsequently updated its Assessment Policy and examination board structure to ensure compliance with the awarding organisation's recommendation. The EAB now systematically and fully documents decisions reached for each student. The Registry then formally notifies each student in writing of the decisions of the board in relation to their own results.

2.55 There is clear evidence that recommendations from external examiners' reports and the AMR reports are addressed promptly by the College in action plans linked to annual programme reviews. Examples of actions include giving clearer assessment guidance and encouraging developmental feedback which is clearly linked to assessment criteria.

2.56 External examiners' reports are made available to staff and students on the course pages on the VLE. Formal responses to external examiners' reports are identified in annual programme reviews and action plans as part of the annual monitoring cycle. This matter is also addressed under Expectation B8.

2.57 The awarding organisation and the College have clear policies and guidance to support the effective use of the external examiners' reports. The College makes effective use of external examiners in assuring and developing the quality of its students' learning opportunities. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and that 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**

2.58 According to the awarding organisation's Responsibilities Checklist the College is required to have systems to routinely monitor the programmes it delivers, and to keep under constant review all aspects of the management of academic standards, quality assurance and delivery. The College has its own internal annual monitoring processes which supplement those required by Pearson, whose systems and processes it is required to follow.

2.59 The Quality Assurance and Improvement Policy sets out the College's intention to enhance its programmes through a process of monitoring, review and evaluation. Additionally, various annual reports are produced which could contribute to the overall monitoring of programmes, including a Key Performance Indicators report, an Annual Quality Audit report and a College Annual Programmes Review. Within its new management structure the College has recently introduced department-level monitoring of programmes through Annual Programmes Review reports. There are also systems in place to gather feedback from students and staff on the effectiveness of its provision. These systems supplement the monitoring and review activities of the awarding organisation. These processes, together with those of the awarding organisation, would allow the expectation to be met.

2.60 The review team examined a range of evidence, including annual and periodic monitoring and review reports, external examiner documentation, and minutes of key quality assurance committees, and had discussions with teaching and support staff, senior staff and students.

2.61 The College produces an Annual Monitoring Report (also called Annual Programmes Review) which addresses the external examiners' reports and provides a broad overview of student feedback, and a commentary on data sets which include student recruitment and achievement. The annual reports identify some actions for the following year, although these are not specific or measurable, and it is unclear how they are reviewed or tracked through to completion. The Quality Manual indicates that the Annual Monitoring Report/Annual Programmes Review is informed by a programme-level report. However, there is little evidence that the Annual Monitoring Report draws on the information within the departmental Annual Programmes Reviews. This Annual Monitoring Review/Annual Programmes Review provides senior managers with an overview at a College level, but does not allow the opportunity to plan specific actions to improve the quality of learning opportunities because it is not detailed at programme level. The Annual Quality Audit provides a commentary on the College's processes and policies related to quality matters, but does not result in any forward planning or action points.

2.62 At programme level, feedback is sought from students informally at the end of each taught session and every semester, through a survey sent out to all students and staff. Annual Programmes Reviews for each department are produced centrally by the Dean of Teaching, which include almost identical commentary for each department. A College Annual Monitoring and Enhancement plan is appended to each report, which is also identical for each department, and does not include the actions outlined within the report or the feedback from the external examiner. Although the HNC/D Business external examiner's

report reminds the College about a series of previous recommendations which have not been effectively addressed, these do not feature in the Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Plan. There is little evidence of actions, developments and enhancements planned at an individual programme level to address feedback from student and staff evaluations, awarding organisation recommendations or the results of data analysis. One report provided for the Department of Business Management takes no account of the fact that the two HNC/D programmes are delivered in different modes, through distance and blended learning, and full-time on-campus provision. Good practice for dissemination, and planned actions, are not differentiated at programme level.

2.63 Actions planned for the 2017-18 academic year are almost identical for each department and bear little relation to staff and student feedback. Nor do the reports analyse or address the data, which indicates poor retention and achievement on the distance learning HNC Business programme. In addition to the Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Plans, there are also Programme Action Plans, which are based solely on the awarding organisation's recommendations and so do not reflect College-based monitoring and review processes. The plans vary in style and duration and do not detail how progress is being made or whether actions have been addressed. Minutes of the Teaching Committee, Academic Committee and from the Staff Student Liaison Committee illustrate some discussion of module and programme feedback. However, there is little evidence that feedback is used to systematically improve the quality of learning opportunities. The processes for quality assurance and enhancement are over-complicated and staff were unable to provide a coherent account of how all the varied elements interact in a coherent and effective way. At the time of the review the College drew together its quality assurance and enhancement activities to provide a quality cycle flowchart to help clarify its approach. The review team **recommends** that, by June 2018, the College develops and implements a coherent and effective process for annual monitoring and review at programme and at institutional level which results in specific and measurable objectives.

2.64 Data is presented in the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) report. However, the report does not include an evaluative commentary, so it is unclear whether conclusions are drawn from an analysis of the data, and whether subsequent actions are identified and monitored. The report does not make any recommendations for actions to improve or enhance provision. Little indication is given as to whether the College is satisfied with its performance data.

2.65 Data is inconsistent and reported in different ways in different reports. The senior staff explained that this is due to Pearson's requirement for certification of students who do not complete within expected timeframes. However, this approach makes the data variable in presentation and difficult to evaluate and analyse. For example, in the Annual Programmes Review for Health and Social Care, overall numbers are reported as 82 per cent completed and 15 per cent withdrawn. In comparison in the KPI report, cohort figures are shown indicating lower pass rates, with only 58 to 62 per cent of starters achieving their intended award within the intended time frame. This is not discussed, nor are actions robustly planned within either report or at any committee. The data for HNC Business distance learning/part-time programme shows that results are declining, with the last two cohorts showing low numbers of starters achieving their intended award within the intended timeframe. The inconsistency in reporting, evaluating and analysing data prevents the College from having a coherent overview of its students' performance. The review team **recommends** that, by June 2018, the College reviews the presentation and reporting of data to ensure consistency, accuracy and clarity, allowing for effective analysis and action planning.

2.66 Overall, the College has a complicated set of interacting processes at different levels for the regular monitoring and review of processes. These lack coherence and staff



are unable to articulate clearly how the processes systematically and effectively enhance provision. Monitoring and review reports are often very similar in content and fail to articulate clear actions at programme level with measurable targets and timeframes for action and review. Greater analysis and commentary on retention and achievement data would also ensure that programme monitoring is more effective in enhancing provision.

2.67 There are no clear processes for the systematic gathering and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, nor is there a process in place for information gathered to be fed into a quality improvement cycle at course level. Low achievement and retention rates on some programmes do not seem to be effectively addressed or actioned. Student feedback is considered separately from statistical data, which is addressed in isolation from the awarding organisation's recommendations.

2.68 The review team therefore concludes that this expectation is not met and that the level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Not met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

2.69 The College operates fair and transparent complaints and appeals processes which are clearly articulated in the Student Complaints Policy and Procedure, and Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure. Both policies are published in the Student Handbook. The College also subscribes to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The policies and procedures in place to govern complaints and appeals would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.70 The review team tested the effective operation of these processes by scrutinising a range of documentary evidence, including the relevant policies and procedures, programme handbooks, and the awarding organisation requirements. The review team held meetings with professional support staff responsible for managing the complaints and appeals process and with a range of students.

2.71 Students confirmed that they are aware of the processes and know how they can lodge an appeal or complaint. Students are initially encouraged to raise any concerns informally with the relevant member of staff or programme manager. The Student Complaints Policy and Procedure clearly indicate the accessibility of its process, as well as demonstrating the fairness and confidentiality of the approach. The policy is readily available to students on the website and the VLE, and in student handbooks. The policy makes it clear that The College will look to implement appropriate remedies if any part of a complaint is upheld or unresolved.

2.72 The Academic Committee terms of reference do not refer to consideration of complaints, although there is reference in the policy that the committee undertakes an annual review of complaints. However, the Complaints Policy does not make reference to the awarding organisation as an intermediary stage for students prior to taking issues to an external body. This requirement is set out in the Pearson responsibilities checklist. The review team **recommends**, that by March 2018, the College ensures that the Complaints Policy informs students that the process includes representation to the awarding organisation before proceeding to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator

2.73 The College operates fair, accessible and timely processes for handling complaints and academic appeals. Policies and processes are clearly communicated to students. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.74 The College Work Placement Policy and Framework states that each programme manager has responsibility for ensuring that work placement practice is carried out in alignment with the policy. The contribution made by placement learning to the overall learning outcomes is made clear in course handbooks, together with clarification where the placement is compulsory. The work placement handbook provided by the College relates to the HND in Health and Social Care and is detailed regarding the respective responsibilities of the student, the employer and the College. The HND Health and Social Care course handbook makes it clear where work experience links to unit learning outcomes. The College prospectus indicates that for the HND in Health and Social Care there is a requirement for a minimum of 200 hours of work experience. These frameworks and procedures for managing student placements enable this Expectation to be met.

2.75 The team scrutinised the policies and quality assurance documentation related to the operation and review of work placement. The team held meetings with students and with placement mentors to explore their experiences, and discussed with senior and teaching staff the role of placements as part of the institution's pedagogic approach.

2.76 The review team further tested this Expectation by means of scrutiny of documentation, including detail of work placements in the current academic year, employer feedback and the Placement Learning Policy and Framework, and in meetings with teaching and support staff, employers and students.

2.77 Work-related learning is a strength on all programmes although at present the only students at the College who undertake formal work placements are those on the HND Health and Social Care programme. The HND Business Management programme has no formal plans for work placements but does involve employers by means of employment-related visits and staff who are working practitioners, and through guest speakers. Placement learning on the Computing and Software Development programme is currently considered unsuitable owing to the complex nature of networking companies and issues of confidentiality. Simulated work environments are provided for this programme through computer laboratory activity.

2.78 The College has an extensive list of providers of healthcare placements. HND Health and Social Care students are clear regarding the requirement for them to spend time on placement during their programme. Many students find suitable placements themselves and praised the College for support in finding placements where necessary. The information available to students regarding placement requirements is comprehensive, both before enrolment on the College website, and then on programme in the course and work placement handbooks. Health and safety checks are undertaken by the College's work placement coordinator, who also liaises with the employers regarding their responsibilities and those of the College and students. One employer was complimentary about the effectiveness of communication with the College. Employers are not formally involved in assessment of the student while on placement but do complete an employer feedback form.

2.79 Placement activity is well managed and overseen in line with the College's policy and procedures. Work placements at present are only formally undertaken within health and social care. Students, staff and placement mentors speak of the positive impact that placements have on student learning opportunities and the College's connections with industry. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and that 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**

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

**Expectation: Not applicable**

**Level of risk: Not applicable**

## **The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings**

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

2.82 Most Expectations in this area are met and the associated level of risk is low in most areas. The review team identified one area in Expectation B8 where the Expectation has not been met. Under Expectation B5 and B8 the level of risk is considered moderate.

2.83 The review team identified two areas of good practice, one affirmation and six recommendations.

2.84 The two areas of good practice are the support provided for staff development and scholarly activity, and the well-developed peer observation review scheme.

2.85 The affirmation relates to actions being taken to implement a range of strategies to support the retention and achievement of distance learning students.

2.86 The six recommendations encourage the College to: formalise the processes for including students and employers in the selection of optional units of study; further engage students as active partners in the deliberative and quality enhancement processes; ensure that students have access to plagiarism detection software; implement a coherent and effective process for annual monitoring and review at programme and at institutional level; review the presentation and reporting of data to ensure consistency, accuracy and clarity, allowing for effective analysis and action planning; and ensure that the Complaints Policy informs students that the process includes representation to the awarding organisation.

2.87 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the provider 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's website provides comprehensive information regarding its mission statement and values, as well as the process for application and admission to programmes of study. Information on the website is clearly signposted to prospective students to provide them with sufficient material and allows them to make informed decisions about selecting their programme. Information is also provided about how students will be supported after enrolment and as they progress with their studies. These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.2 The review team explored the College's approach to the production and verification of information by viewing documentation, including a wide range of information available electronically, websites, handbooks and programme specifications. In addition, the review team met staff and students to verify its findings.

3.3 Students confirmed that information is easy to locate and is also accessible on a range of mobile devices. Information regarding the process is clearly evidenced in the College's Admissions Policy. Students are provided with information about the support that is provided, what they can expect from the College, and their responsibilities as students. This information includes a code of conduct and the rules, regulations, policies and procedures that apply to students. On enrolment and commencement of studies, students are provided with the student handbook and access and links to the appropriate websites for current and ongoing information about their programmes, as part of their induction programme.

3.4 The College publishes information about the provision available to support students with their development and achievement. There are individual pages on the College website which are dedicated to support, such as student finance, mental health and the disabled students' allowance. It is the responsibility of the Principal to ensure that the website is accurate, informative and reflects current operations. The VLE has been improved significantly and students are positive about its purpose and the information available to them. The College has clearly made an active effort to address issues previously raised, particularly in the improvements made to the VLE.

3.5 Students state that the information they receive is accurate in terms of content, timely and helpful. However, layout of information available to students is often poorly presented. There are frequent typographical, spelling and grammatical errors in documentation and handbooks, including the handbook for student representation. Minutes of meetings held at the College are poorly presented and recorded. Students have raised their concerns at the Staff Student Liaison Committee and at the Teaching Committee, and they compare unfavourably the published information they receive with the expectations the College has for the standard of work required of students. Programme specifications are inconsistent in terms of their layout, format and presentation of content. There is a no reference in documentation to the awarding organisation process which students need to be aware of when making an appeal or complaint. The review team

**recommends** that, by June 2018, the College reviews all current information and introduces effective mechanisms to ensure that information is accurate, trustworthy and fit for purpose.

3.6 There is no formal process for ensuring that the College understands its responsibilities with regard to the requirements of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) advice for higher education providers. Nor is there evidence of how CMA requirements have been taken into account. The College's terms and conditions do not appear to take account of CMA guidance. The review team **recommends** that, by June 2018, the College ensures that students are provided with full and accurate information regarding terms and conditions.

3.7 The College has some processes and procedures in place to ensure that the information it provides to all audiences is accessible and trustworthy. However, further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that these processes are robustly undertaken and that all information is reviewed to ensure that it is accurate and fit for purpose. The College also needs formally to ensure that it is in line with the guidance provided by the CMA. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**



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

3.8 The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

3.9 Information published by the College is broadly fit for purpose and trustworthy. Processes for the development and verification of information are understood by staff. Students confirm that information is comprehensive, accessible and helpful to them, and that they are provided with sound information to support their learning. However, further work needs to be done to introduce effective mechanisms to ensure that information is completely accurate, trustworthy, well presented and fully fit for purpose. Full account needs to be taken of the CMA guidance for higher education providers.

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

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College's strategic plan sets the direction and objectives of the College. Although there is no explicit mention of enhancement, the College does commit to excellence in education. Responsibility for enhancement is also addressed with the job description of the Dean of Teaching, the role of the Quality Assurance Department, and the responsibilities of the Deputy Principal. The terms of reference for the Academic Committee and the Executive Committee have enhancement as a key focus. This approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.2 The team considered the College's strategies, policies, committee terms of reference and job descriptions for senior staff, and discussed enhancement with staff at all levels, and with students.

4.3 There are many examples in the College of activities that contribute to improvement and enhancement, particularly in relation to learning and teaching. Many of the examples of enhancement activity are effective and dynamic. Peer observations are well established within teaching teams and, as a pilot this year, have been extended across departments, and enable the effective identification and sharing of good practice. Peer observation is well managed, and staff spoke with enthusiasm about the impact it has on improving their own learning and teaching practice. The use of external subject specialists and the quality assurance adviser provides an effective external perspective and engagement with the wider academic community in supporting the maintenance of academic standards and enhances all aspects of its provision.

4.4 The Teaching Fund, which is made available to support staff development, also has a very positive impact on learning and teaching. Support from the College has enabled two members of staff to become accredited CISCO trainers, ensuring that these vocational units can be delivered to enhance the employability of students. The fund is also used to support higher level qualifications at master's and doctoral level for members of the teaching team. These matters are addressed as good practice under Expectations A3.4 and B3.

4.5 Students and staff provided examples of how the College enhances learning opportunities, including through the recent staff and student debate entitled 'Is Islam a peaceful religion?' The enthusiasm generated about the debate has led to further plans to engage with a local college in another academic debate. Guest speakers from industry and study visits also support students' understanding of the needs of employment.

4.6 There is a well-established open door policy within the College, with the Principal and senior staff readily accessible to students. This allows students to interact with and feed back to the Principal and senior managers directly, and has the potential to support enhancement activities.

4.7 The College is taking tentative deliberate steps towards strategically embedding enhancement within its practices. However, the issues already addressed under Expectation B8 reflect the current lack of robust mechanisms by which the College operates effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes. This deficiency reflects on the College's current ability to enhance the learning opportunities on its programmes systematically in a deliberate and strategic way. Discussions with senior

staff identified a lack of clarity about where responsibility for enhancement lies. While enhancement activities are taking place at provider level, there is a lack of clarity about the College's strategic approach. The review team **recommends** that, by June 2018, the College formalises its strategic approach to underpinning enhancement initiatives to ensure that they are more clearly defined and supported by specific and measurable targets.

4.8 Overall, the review team acknowledges that the College has many enhancement activities taking place and that a commitment to improving student learning opportunities, and the establishment of a culture of promoting excellence, is emerging at a strategic level. However, the approach to enhancement needs to be formalised and driven by a more strategic approach, underpinned by a systematic and effective process for the monitoring and review of provision. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.10 The College has an emerging culture of enhancement, and a number of improvement activities are taking place. However, the College needs to formalise its strategic approach underpinning enhancement initiatives. The Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

4.11 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

## 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 21-24 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality](http://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](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx).

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Awarding organisation

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

### **Framework**

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

### **Framework for higher education qualifications**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Self-evaluation document**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

### **Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)**

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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