Higher Education Review of Weymouth College

March 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Weymouth College The review took place from 14 to 17 March 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Mark Atlay
- Ms Polly Skinner
- Mr John Simpson (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Weymouth College

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

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

Good practice

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

- The established and active employer engagement in a wide range of provision, which enables access to practitioners and supports the development of students' academic, personal and professional potential (Expectations B4, B10).
- The well planned, clearly structured and supported opportunities for work experience, which enable students to clarify their career choices (Expectations B10, B4).

Recommendations

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

By July 2016:

- ensure full alignment with the Pearson BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment and develop associated procedures (Expectation A3.2)
- provide prospective students with programme information that is fit for purpose to ensure that they can make informed choices (Expectation C).

By September 2016:

- develop more effective mechanisms for student engagement and representation to support students as partners in the enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5)
- ensure that College and awarding body policies relating to the timely provision of feedback are consistently applied (Expectation B6)
- ensure that there are effective and systematic annual and periodic review processes for all programmes (Expectation B8)
- ensure that the senior higher education deliberative committee fully discharges its objectives and responsibilities for quality monitoring and enhancement (Expectations B8, B3, B1, Enhancement)
- ensure closer alignment between the HE strategy, HE Quality Audit process and HE Development Plan to enable more effective monitoring of enhancement activities (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

The College considers employability to be a strength of its provision and the Higher Education Strategic Plan aims to transform lives and economic prosperity by providing access to high quality learning in skills that match local growth sectors and address skills gaps. Curriculum planning guidance within the Strategy commits to developing College provision in subject areas that align with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), and College priorities include those for Information and Communications Technology (ICT), digital media, engineering areas and heritage skills. Employers are clear that students are a strength of the College and students commented favourably on their ability to benefit from work placements supported by many staff who are current practitioners. This benefits students studying on the College's programmes by keeping the curriculum up to date with industry developments.

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

About Weymouth College

Weymouth College (the College) is a general further education college based in West Dorset. The main campus is located near to Weymouth town centre with a smaller campus in Poundbury, Dorchester, where the Dorset Centre for the Creative Arts is based. The College has 3,976 students of whom 124 are enrolled on higher education programmes, including foundation degrees, Higher National Certificates and Diplomas.

The College mission is to transform lives and contribute to economic and social regeneration, bringing skills and knowledge to life. Its values place the interests and needs of students at the heart of what it does and behaviours include promoting equality of opportunity and celebrating cultural diversity; acting with integrity and mutual respect; supporting innovation and entrepreneurship; recognising and rewarding the efforts and success of students and staff; fostering high expectations; and supporting long-term quality relationships with employers.

The strategic direction of the College is set and overseen by the Board of Governors and led by the Principal and Senior Leadership Team. The Higher Education Committee is the senior higher education deliberative committee in the College and has been established for a year with revised terms of reference. Membership of the Committee includes the Principal; Higher Education Governor; Director of Curriculum 19+ and Higher Education; Director of Curriculum and Students; Higher Education Registrar; Programme Leaders; and a student representative, among others. This Committee is central to the College's quality assurance and enhancement arrangements and has responsibility for monitoring, including considering the outcomes of student surveys; receiving annual monitoring reports and action plans; discussing and agreeing actions arising from annual course reviews and external examiners' reports; monitoring actions arising from reviews by awarding bodies; and making recommendations to the Senior Leadership Team and College Corporation.

Since 2011 the College has undergone a period of significant change. Following an Ofsted inspection in 2013, which judged leadership and management to be inadequate, the College entered a difficult and challenging period. The Further Education Commissioner instigated a Structure and Prospects Appraisal (SPA) and the College was put into a period of administrative status. Three members of the senior leadership team left in early 2015 and this resulted in a reorganisation of responsibilities across the College and the appointment of an interim Principal. The focus of the College became the achievement of financial stability and mitigating the negative impact upon the student experience. Significant progress was made, with a subsequent Ofsted inspection in November 2015 judging the College to be good across all areas of the Common Inspection Framework, and achievement of a

balanced budget. The appointment of the Principal was confirmed in February 2016, with the interim Principal taking over the role.

The College has undertaken a major review of quality processes and procedures and this has resulted in changes to the Higher Education Strategy, the Higher Education Audit process, the Higher Education Teaching Observation Scheme and development of Programme Leader self-evaluation documents. The College has also taken a strategic decision to rationalise higher education provision by strengthening its relationship with one awarding body and one awarding organisation and teaching out on other programmes. This links to the strategic priority of strengthening progression routes and fulfilling local needs.

The College has a relationship with three awarding bodies and one awarding organisation. The partnership with Plymouth University is long-standing and the College currently delivers five programmes which comprise foundation degrees in a range of creative industries: Sport Coaching, Health and Fitness; Health and Social Care; and a Higher National Certificate in Business and Management. The partnership with Bournemouth University is in its final year with the sole programme validated by this awarding body, the FdA Public Services, transferring to Plymouth University in the next academic year. There is one programme validated by Kingston University, the FdSc Applied Architectural Stonework and Conservation, which attracts a small number of students. Three Higher National programmes at Levels 4 and 5 are delivered by the College and awarded by Pearson Education, with one of these linked to a higher apprenticeship, the HNC Manufacturing Engineering.

The College was subject to an Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) by QAA in June 2011. The review resulted in four areas of good practice being identified, pertaining to the quality of feedback to students, student support, higher education facilities that promote a higher education ethos, and processes for checking the accuracy of public information. External examiners comment favourably on the quality of feedback to students, while a dedicated Higher Education Support Worker continues to support students and Opportunities Funding is used to assist students with study skills. The Higher Education Centre is well used by students and significant resources have been used to resource technology-dependent programmes such as the FdA Contemporary Photography Practice. The College and awarding bodies continue to monitor the accuracy of public information.

The review team noted that three desirable recommendations were made in the 2011 IQER. The first related to the need for a policy and support for scholarly activity. The College reports that while the current policy is under review, four members of academic staff have completed or are undertaking higher level degree qualifications. The second recommendation referred to the need for development and review of a higher education Teaching Observation Scheme and the review team noted that a scheme was in place and that observations were taking place on a rolling basis. The third recommendation related to the need to work with awarding bodies to review handbooks, to maximise their usefulness. The College reported that this had been undertaken and that student handbooks had been produced for all Pearson provision. The review team saw evidence of these.

Explanation of the findings about Weymouth College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1   The College delivers foundation degrees and Higher National programmes in collaboration with, and validated by, three awarding bodies and one awarding organisation. Most are validated by Plymouth University, with a smaller provision validated by Bournemouth University and Kingston University. Pearson validates Higher Nationals, with one exception being the HNC Business Management, validated under licence by Plymouth University. The awarding bodies, awarding organisation and College are jointly responsible for their continued alignment during the delivery of programmes.

1.2   Collaborative arrangements, Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding, which are annually reviewed by the degree-awarding bodies, describe the agreed quality framework and the frequency of confirmation of the operation and delivery of programmes. The awarding body validation and regulatory processes ensure that the framework regulations and subject benchmarks are considered during programme approvals and validation.

1.3   The College, as an approved Pearson Centre, is required to align with the BTEC Centre Guide to Managing Quality. Adherence to this is confirmed annually, in a Quality Review and Development Report, by the Centre Quality Reviewer. Pearson states that all centres delivering BTEC Level 4 to 7 qualifications must follow the guidance in the Quality Code.

1.4   The College Higher Education Quality Policy objectives set out the College's responsibility to test the quality assurance framework so that it can assure both itself and stakeholders that academic standards are at an appropriate level and comparable with the standards of similar awards delivered elsewhere. Part of the College Higher Education Quality Audit is focused on monitoring the implementation of College and degree-awarding body/organisation policies. All degree academic regulations are available on the awarding body websites.

1.5   Pearson Centre Approval for Level 4 to 7 provision is in place and this allows the College to deliver prescribed 'off the shelf' units for Higher Nationals from the organisation. The College and Pearson are jointly responsible for continued alignment with the UK threshold standards of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and other relevant external reference points. Agreements with Plymouth University, Bournemouth University and Kingston University set out the main requirements of University and College roles and responsibilities to ensure that the Expectation can be met.

1.6   The review team examined the Pearson BTEC Guide to Managing Quality, the Centre Quality Review and Development report, and the Memoranda of Understanding and Agreements between the College and the awarding bodies. The team also talked with senior staff, academic staff and a representative from the main degree-awarding body, Plymouth University, to determine the level of support and interaction between them.

1.7   The review team is satisfied that the College is delivering programmes at the appropriate levels according to the FHEQ, Qualifications and Credit Framework, subject benchmarks and the Quality Code. Threshold academic standards are confirmed in external examiner, subject verifier and Centre Quality Review and Development reports. Regular meetings with the degree-awarding bodies confirm that the College is complying with its signed agreements.

1.8   The College effectively relies on the minutes of the Plymouth University Academic Partnerships Programme committee to enable programme managers to update their action planning throughout the academic year. This forms part of the Annual Programme Monitoring process that relates to programme-level standards.

1.9   Senior and academic staff state that the robust validation process, programme committee meetings and regular scrutiny by the degree-awarding bodies and Pearson confirm that they are delivering against national qualifications, credit frameworks and subject benchmarks for higher education. Academic staff clearly understand the need to check their delivery against the subject benchmarks for their relevant degree programmes. There is supportive and interactive communication between the College, all of the awarding bodies and Pearson, which ensures that the agreed conventions are met.

1.10   The team concludes that the College, in its arrangements with the awarding bodies and Pearson, has in place adequate processes and sufficient safeguards to ensure that threshold standards are met. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.11   The College procedures follow the academic regulations of each of the appropriate degree-awarding bodies and Pearson which align with the FHEQ and QAA frameworks. The academic regulations, policies and procedures define the responsibilities of the awarding bodies, the awarding organisation and the College.

1.12   College staff attend regular degree-awarding body partner forums or committee meetings and Award and Reassessment Panels or Boards. Kingston University operates a Module Assessment Board. University and College representatives attend either the Joint Board of Studies, Subject Assessment Panels or Award Boards. All external examiner reports following the Award Boards are monitored by the College Higher Education Committee and the degree-awarding body Board processes are articulated.

1.13   Pearson Higher National Assessment Boards are held within the College to agree and ratify marks before they are submitted to the awarding body. Membership of the Board includes Programme Leaders, the College Lead Internal Quality Assurer (IQA) and the Higher Education Registrar. This College-initiated process is to assure the validity of marks and to consider any mitigating circumstances, academic offences or appeals; it is not prescribed by Pearson.

1.14   The purpose of the College Assessment Policy for higher education is to provide a clear approach to assessment. The policy comprises the assessment needs of degree-awarding bodies and the awarding organisation and includes the College approach to dealing with the principles of assessment, design, planning, feedback, re-submission and related assessment issues such as mitigating circumstances, appeals and academic offences. The design of the agreed documentation and associated processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.15   In considering this Expectation, the review team examined College and degree-awarding bodies' documentation including the Academic Misconduct Policy, Appeals and Complaints policies for the College and degree-awarding bodies and College Higher National Assessment Board minutes. They also talked to College senior staff, academic staff and degree-awarding body representatives. Staff spoke very clearly and knowledgeably about their role in the implementation of academic regulations, subject benchmarks and the Quality Code. Clear policies, procedures, regulations and guidance for the Award Assessment and Reassessment Board processes are in place, which appropriately address time frames, mark bands, membership, roles and responsibilities, contingencies and required documentation. The academic frameworks of the awarding bodies and Pearson are relied on by the College, which readily acknowledges that it benefits from sustained support from the Academic Partnerships unit at Plymouth University, link tutors and external examiners.

1.16   Staff use degree-awarding body unit/module descriptors as a basis to develop and produce assignments, with moderation and supervision provided by external examiners. As part of the awarding organisation process, assignment briefs are sent to Pearson for checking. Both of these processes ensure that academic standards are met.

1.17   The College's Assessment Board and its ratification process are appropriately minuted, recording final grades, referrals, deferrals, recommendations by subject verifiers and recommendations for the next academic year. The Higher Education Committee has ultimate responsibility for maintaining the standards of the awards within the College.

1.18   The College has an appropriate academic framework and an adequate system in place to secure academic standards for degree programmes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.19   The College takes responsibility for using the reference points for the maintenance of standards in delivery and assessment provided by the degree-awarding bodies. Although the delegated responsibilities differ between Plymouth University, Kingston University and Bournemouth University, the College has full awareness of its responsibilities to each degree-awarding body. Programme leaders and the Higher Education Registrar keep a definitive record in accordance with the various degree-awarding body agreements; however, there are inconsistencies in relation to documentation with the awarding organisation's programmes. As the majority of this Expectation is reliant on the degree-awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's qualification approval process, this would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.20   The review team was informed of the process of maintaining programme records and qualifications. Students confirmed that they had a good understanding of the requirements of their programme prior to enrolment and that they have an awareness of the programme aims and learning outcomes through programme handbooks, which are available on the College's website and VLE. The programme handbooks are branded with the relevant degree-awarding body or Pearson logos, giving students a clear indication of which awarding body or organisation validates their programme.

1.21   The College produces programme specifications, which are included within the programme handbooks. For Pearson programmes there is an internal process to ensure that information is accurate, and programmes validated by the degree-awarding bodies are verified by the degree-awarding bodies prior to being publicly available. These are reviewed annually by the Programme Leader and the Higher Education Registrar and confirmed by the degree-awarding body. The review team found that not all programme handbooks are available online.

1.22   The review team considered that overall the College meets its responsibilities as agreed with the degree-awarding bodies to maintain a definitive record for each programme, and that relevant information about programme aims and learning outcomes is made available to students. However, this could be more consistent throughout higher education provision at the College and in particular with Pearson programmes. Nevertheless, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.23   After initial consideration by the College, the approval of taught programmes follows the procedures of the College's degree-awarding bodies and Pearson. In the case of the universities, this is through a validation or approval event involving external panel members, and for Pearson awards it is through the submission of documentation on standard templates together with a draft programme specification and student handbook. These processes confirm that the design of modules, programmes and qualifications meet the threshold standards of the FHEQ, subject benchmarks and other relevant external reference points. The procedures of the degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation would allow the Expectation to be met and are supported by the procedures of the College.

1.24   The team tested the Expectation by examining programme approval documentation, programme specifications and records of degree-awarding body approval events, and by exploring the operation of approval processes with senior staff, programme leaders and representatives of the awarding bodies and organisation.

1.25   All recent approvals have been with Plymouth University or Pearson. For the former, regular planning and review meetings are held between the College and the University to discuss plans for new developments and for periodic review. Approval panels are held over two stages. The first involves consideration by the University and representatives from the College programme team. The second stage involves the additional presence of an external academic adviser and industry adviser nominated by the College and approved by the University. For the awarding organisation, the College completes approval paperwork and a subject specialist is appointed by Pearson to scrutinise the documentation provided.

1.26   College procedures support this process through initial checking that module and programme learning outcomes and assessments are defined in relation to the requirements of the awarding bodies and national expectations. All programmes and modules have learning outcomes that are established with reference to appropriate external benchmarks and these are considered as part of the approval process.

1.27   The review team concludes that the College works with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation to implement processes that ensure that academic standards are set at a level that meets UK threshold standards. Therefore the Expectation is met and the 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

1.28   The College's awarding bodies and organisation are responsible for ensuring that credit and qualifications are awarded only when the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment and that UK threshold academic standards have been satisfied. Consideration of learning outcomes, assessments and assessment criteria forms part of the approval process and these are detailed in module and programme specifications. Assessment policies are defined by the awarding bodies or devolved to the College under the agreed quality assurance arrangements, which specify the assessment setting, marking and moderation processes. External examiners are nominated by the College and approved by the University. Subject verifiers are appointed by Pearson. The policies and procedures of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation, supported by those of the College, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.29   The review team tested this Expectation through scrutinising the documentation provided including programme and module specifications, the arrangements for assessment and Assessment Boards, external examiners' reports and in meetings with staff and external stakeholders, including the representative of an awarding body.

1.30   All modules and programmes have clear learning outcomes which form the basis of the assignment-setting process. Assessments are set by College staff but moderated by the awarding body and approved by the external examiner in line with the requirements of the awarding bodies and organisation.

1.31   The arrangements for Assessment Boards vary depending on the awarding body. For Plymouth University programmes there is a two-tier system of Subject Assessment Panels with College staff and external examiners present, and Award Assessment Boards with one of the subject external examiners designated as the Award External in attendance. Bournemouth University processes involve a preparatory board and an Assessment Board of internal and external examiners, while Kingston University operates module and programme Assessment Boards. These arrangements were confirmed by relevant staff.

1.32   A ratification board for Pearson provision, consisting of the programme leaders for the relevant subject areas, the Lead IQA and the Higher Education Registrar, meets at the end of the academic year to agree marks before they are submitted to Pearson. The College states that this is not a mandatory process but it operates to ensure the validity of marks and consideration of any mitigating circumstances and the outcomes of academic offences and appeals. In the most recent annual report, the Pearson Quality Review Manager noted that the College had appropriate procedures in place. The current Pearson Guide to Assessment requires each Centre to have a published set of regulations in place by June 2016, covering a range of matters such as scheduling boards, membership, Terms of Reference, operation and administration, appeals, assessment of students with disabilities, and anonymity of students in assessment. Some of these aspects are covered by the College's Higher

Education Assessment Policy. The College was unaware of this Pearson requirement, which the review team heard from the Pearson Development Manager was a pilot for the current year, although the relevant Pearson documentation did not make this clear. Notwithstanding issues about whether the Pearson requirements were a pilot, the review team concludes that to prevent student appeals and legal challenges to the decision-making process, it is **recommended** that the College should ensure full alignment with the Pearson BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment and develop associated procedures. The review team noted awarding body and organisation satisfaction with current assessment, external examining and examination board operations and concluded that the College works with its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation to implement processes that ensure academic standards are set at a level that meets UK threshold standards. Therefore the Expectation is met and the 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   Monitoring and review processes are defined by the awarding bodies and Pearson. For the awarding bodies, this involves the completion of annual monitoring reports according to University-devised templates, which cover standards issues and include external examiners' comments and responses. Reports are considered by formally constituted boards or committees in line with the arrangements for each awarding body. For Pearson, programmes are monitored annually through external quality assurance and Centre visits.

1.34   The awarding bodies have defined processes for the periodic review of programmes. The awarding organisation regularly reviews the content and structures of its awards and units to ensure that they remain current. The design of the processes for annual monitoring and periodic review would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.35   The review team tested this Expectation through scrutinising documentation covering annual monitoring, including the use made of external examiners' reports and periodic review, the minutes of relevant boards and committees, and in meetings with staff, students and external stakeholders.

1.36   For Plymouth University programmes, annual monitoring of student progress, achievement, module delivery, quality and assessment is discussed at programme committees, which have a standing item related to the external examiner's report and the programme manager's formal response. The University's programme-level quality assurance of annual programme monitoring is managed by Faculty Partnership Managers and is ultimately reported by them to a Joint Board of Studies, which feeds into both the University's and the College's action plans. The Joint Board of Studies covers all of the programmes with the University and involves College staff and student representatives together with University staff.

1.37   For Bournemouth University, a Framework Leader's report informs a Partner Quality Report and includes consideration of standards and the external examiner's report. This is discussed at a Partnership Board and at Management Team meetings. Kingston University programmes are monitored at a Board of Study, which has the external examiner's report as a standing item.

1.38   Where Pearson is the awarding organisation, annual monitoring occurs through an annual report by the College Lead Internal Quality Assurer and a visit by the Centre Quality Reviewer, which leads to a Quality Review and Development Report.

1.39   The termination of programmes with some long-established awarding bodies and the relatively recent approval of some programmes meant there were limited examples of periodic review processes for the review team to consider. However, the processes are clearly set out in awarding body documentation and there is evidence that they are effectively applied in relation to the main awarding body.

1.40   The review team concludes that the awarding bodies and awarding organisation have effective processes in place for the monitoring and review of programmes, which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether academic standards are being maintained. Therefore the Expectation is met and the 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

1.41   The awarding bodies' procedures ensure that external independent expertise is used to set and maintain academic standards in the design and approval of modules and programmes. This is largely through the use of external examiners and standards verifiers but also by contracting with external academic and industry advisers who carry out their designated roles in accordance with the degree-awarding body requirements.

1.42   Minutes of validations show industry and academic external experts in attendance at an approval meeting and that external panel member advisers receive all the course documentation prior to the event directly from the University. At programme level, subject verifiers and external examiners evaluate the effectiveness, consistency and fair application by the College of the awarding organisation's and awarding bodies' academic regulations and processes. Following a Centre approval process, a subject specialist will be assigned by the Pearson organisation to liaise with the College and scrutinise documentation prior to approval being given for Higher National programmes.

1.43   External examiners, nominated by the College, are formally appointed and inducted by the awarding bodies. External examiners usually attend interim visits and the final degree Award Boards. Their remit is to ensure that student achievement meets academic standards by validating marks and being satisfied that students have been fairly assessed, that achievement meets Subject Benchmark Statements and that awards are consistent with the standards of similar awards at other institutions. Standards verifiers are solely appointed by Pearson. They seek to confirm that the College aligns its quality processes with the guidance in the BTEC Guide to Managing Quality and to ensure that the College is working to national standards.

1.44   There is a formal process for nominating external, independent advisers by the College for degree-awarding body approval panels. Plymouth University provides guidance for the approvals and permitted changes process, which includes liaison with University link staff prior to the formal processes. If the subject area is not part of the existing University offer, external examiners or advisers are significantly helpful. The College Higher Education Quality Audit process monitors at programme level the implementation and application of College and University policies in setting and maintaining standards. The degree of independent external expertise and the effective implementation of the awarding bodies', awarding organisation's and College's procedures would enable this Expectation to be met.

1.45   The review team tested the Expectation by appraising the College, awarding body and Pearson documentation relating to their Agreements and the appointment and role of external examiners, the diagram showing the College course approvals and the interaction between the College and the awarding bodies, the College Development plan, Annual Monitoring Reports, College Higher Education Policies, the Higher Education Quality Audit, and the Higher Education Development Plan.

1.46   The review team considered the College Assessment Policy, which states that the design of assessment should be informed by feedback from students, peers and external examiners. In meetings with staff from the College, a member of staff from a degree-awarding body, students, alumni and employers, the review team tested the roles of different groups and engagement with approvals, external examiners, subject verifiers and the Higher Education Audit process.

1.47   The processes of the awarding organisation and degree-awarding bodies clearly enable College engagement in gaining independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards. There is good interaction and constructive dialogue between the College, the awarding bodies and the awarding organisation, from which the College has been able to draw external guidance. External examiners attend Subject Assessment Panels to comment on their content and assessment.

1.48   For pre-course approval and development, the College clearly sets out its procedure. There are clear indications that recent validations have benefited from the input of industry experts and external examiners have made adjustments to assessment feedback and commented on the industry relevance of several programmes. Student opinion has been sought from within the wider College context to inform new approvals, and alumni told the review team about their involvement in validation and re-validation processes.

1.49   External examiner reports confirm that the academic standards meet threshold requirements; that programmes remain current; that they are comparable to similar programmes delivered elsewhere in the UK; and that programme learning outcomes are in line with the relevant qualification descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.50   The aim and scope of the College Higher Education Quality Audit and quality framework processes are clearly described. The audit aligns with the Expectations in the Quality Code and the outcome is a development plan that embeds external examiners' recommendations and the key elements that each programme is expected to have in place for its successful operation. This process is in the early stages of implementation; however, first indications are positive, with approximately 50 per cent of programmes having been audited.

1.51   The College successfully implements the awarding bodies' and organisation's procedures to ensure that the threshold academic standards are delivered, achieved and maintained. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.52   In determining its judgement on the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is considered low in all cases. There are no areas of good practice or affirmations in this area; however, the team identifies one recommendation in relation to Expectation A3.2.

1.53   The approach to maintaining academic standards at the College is defined by the awarding body and by the requirements of the awarding organisation. The College uses the established University academic frameworks, regulations and procedures; however, the review team recommends that for Pearson provision, the College needs to ensure full alignment with Pearson Centre guidance and develop associated procedures to support this. Staff are familiar with the responsibilities that are assigned to the College with regards to academic standards and there is external engagement and oversight of standards through the awarding body and the use of external examiners.

1.54   Overall, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1   The College's Higher Education Strategy aims to develop a higher education offer that includes flexible modes of delivery and different entry and exit points and which meets the needs of employers and students. Proposals for new programmes undergo a series of approval steps within the College before final consideration by a Course Approval Panel involving Senior Leadership Team members and chaired by the Principal. A standard pro forma is used to record the elements of each stage. Once approved by the College, the proposal is then considered by the awarding body or Pearson through their approval procedures. The design of the processes for the development and approval of programmes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.2   The team examined the documentation of programme approval through the Course Approval Panel and discussed the programme approval process with senior staff, Programme Leaders and other stakeholders. Proposals for new course ideas are identified from gaps in progression routes, or College or regional priorities. College staff are encouraged to contribute proposals and the Higher Education Committee has responsibility for considering the further development of the College's higher education provision. Proposals are initially agreed by the Curriculum Planning Group before being developed further. The College is consolidating its provision largely with one awarding body, although new programmes are reviewed on a case-by-case basis when determining the most appropriate awarding body or organisation.

2.3   The review team was able to view the records of the Course Approval Panel, which showed that it considered a range of relevant information in reaching a decision about whether a course should proceed to approval. The process had recently been enhanced to make more explicit the resource requirements for new programmes at the point of College approval.

2.4   Course teams work with the chosen awarding body or organisation to develop programmes. There is no specific staff training for those developing new programmes but Plymouth University provides detailed documentation to assist course development, as well as a link contact. The College provides the opportunity for those new to course design to work with a mentor who has gone through the process and those developing programmes are supported by the Higher Education Registrar and the College's Performance and Delivery team.

2.5   Employer engagement in course approval is largely through analysis of local labour market intelligence rather than through direct discussions with local employers, although the views of employers are taken into account once the programmes are in operation and this can lead to approved changes. The team considered that although more systematic use might be made of employers' views in course design, there was appropriate consideration of employer demand as part of the approval process.

2.6   The College uses a streamlined version of the programme approval process for approved courses wishing to 'change direction'. This culminates in internal review by the Course Approval Panel before consideration by the awarding body or organisation. Minor changes arise through annual monitoring procedures and are dealt with under the processes of the appropriate awarding body or organisation.

2.7   The Course Approval Panel has a role in considering reports from evaluation and review events and making recommendations to the Higher Education Committee. However, as there was no record of this yet occurring, the wider higher education community within the College is missing an opportunity to learn from the approval processes of the awarding bodies. The review team considers that the Higher Education Committee, in discharging its remit for monitoring and disseminating effective practice, would benefit from oversight of the approval reports or the recommendations arising from the approval process. The team therefore refers the College to the recommendation made in Expectation B8, which states that the College should ensure that the senior higher education deliberative committee fully discharges its objectives and responsibilities for quality monitoring and enhancement.

2.8   Although there is scope to strengthen approval processes by ensuring the systematic involvement of employers at the design stage and that the outcomes of approval events are discussed and shared more widely, the review team concludes that the processes for the design, development and approval of programmes and for amendments to programmes in operation are effective in setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. Therefore the Expectation is met and the 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

2.9   The College has a policy and procedures relating to the recruitment, selection and admissions of higher education programmes. The College follows University recruitment processes where appropriate and its own process for recruitment to Pearson programmes. Prospective students apply via UCAS for foundation degrees and through the College's website for Pearson programmes. Entry requirements are determined by the degree-awarding bodies during the approval process and are published on the College's website and in the prospectus. In some cases applicants may be asked to attend an interview to discuss their application. Students who have self-identified with a learning difficultly and/or disability meet with the Higher Education Registrar who advises on support available. The admissions process is overseen by the Higher Education Registrar, who reports to the Assistant Principal of Higher Education. The design of the College's recruitment, selection and admissions processes and structure would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.10   The team reviewed the College's policy and procedures relating to the admissions of higher education programmes, which are publicly available to prospective students on the College website. The team further explored the College's website, prospectus and UCAS for information on recruitment, selection and admissions. During the visit the review team met with academic and professional staff to explore organisational structures and processes relating to recruitment, selection and admissions. The team also met a range of students to discuss their experience of the College's admissions process.

2.11   The College's processes for admissions are clear and students who met the review team confirmed that they had a good understanding of their programme and its requirements prior to enrolment. Some courses require prospective students to undertake an interview or audition before a place of study is offered and students commented on the effectiveness of these. There is a strong commitment from the College to widen access to local students who would not otherwise be able to participate in higher education. The College also has a dedicated International Student Coordinator to support international students with their transition into the College. The College has effective mechanisms in place to support students with specific needs to remove barriers prior to the programme commencement; for instance, students who have support needs will meet with the Higher Education Registrar who will advise them of the support available.

2.12   The team considered the College's arrangements for recruitment, selection and admissions and found them to be transparent, fair and explicit. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.13   The Higher Education Quality Audit is the College's model for the internal audit of the framework for supporting teaching and learning. It is intended that this will ensure that adequate and appropriate mechanisms are in place to guarantee the quality of provision. The process is overseen by the College Senior Leadership Team, which forwards a summary to the Higher Education Committee, which, in turn, considers the audit report and development plan.

2.14   Since the IQER which took place in June 2011, the College Staff Development Policy has been revised to include higher education scholarly activity, which was a desirable action. The Higher Education Committee is responsible for considering scholarly activity.

2.15   The College Performance and Delivery team supports the lesson observation scheme, whose key aims are to improve the student experience, improve teaching and learning practice and inform the development of resources.

2.16   The College VLE is undergoing further development. The intention is to provide a stimulating resource across the higher education provision which enables students to develop skills in independent learning, as well as analytical, creative and critical thinking.

2.17   Academic and pastoral support are provided formally in one-to-one tutorial sessions, during which students' development and progress are also monitored. The recently initiated Assistant Principal Higher Education surgeries enable students to talk to a member of the College Senior Leadership Team and feed back any comments. Higher education study skills are supported in professional development modules in degree programmes. The College is considering implementing similar models for induction and enhancement opportunities across the Higher National provision. Work experience and placements feature in most programme areas.

2.18   Minutes and action plans record the arrangements for the closure of the Public Services programme, including a plan for any Level 5 students who fail to complete within the conventional timeframe. The process is in accordance with Bournemouth University procedures and the closure action plan is reviewed by the degree-awarding body.

2.19   The range of processes outlined above would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.20   The review team considered the Higher Education Quality Audit process and quality cycle; the remit and Terms of Reference for the Higher Education Committee; the Staff Development Policy; Higher Education Case Studies; and Disability Support Case Studies. The effectiveness of the processes and policies was evaluated, viewed in the Higher Education Development Plan and tested during meetings with senior management, academic staff, professional support staff and students. Minutes and the action plan for the teach-out of the Public Services programme were also considered by the review team.

2.21   During the period of College-administered status there has been limited opportunity for staff to reflect on their practice through scholarly activities or to undertake substantial externally offered professional development. However, the College has now reviewed its Staff Development Policy and consultation is underway with Plymouth University to secure College staff participation in continuous professional development activities, such as master's and PhD studies. There is a distinct lack of clarity among staff in their understanding of what constitutes scholarly activity and how this impacts on students' progress. Nonetheless, internally devised processes, such as the lesson observation process, aim to promote a culture of self-reflection on practice among team members. There was no perceived lack of staff engagement and willingness to develop their professional development. Staff explained that most staff teach on both further and higher education programmes. Some staff have prior higher education teaching experience and others clearly articulated and understood the requirements of learning and teaching at higher education levels. To meet the stated aims and purposes, lesson observations are becoming more student-focused. Outcomes are recorded in personal development plans with best practice shared across programmes by Teaching, Learning and Assessment Champions.

2.22   The links between the Higher Education Audit and quality cycle, intended to enable senior management to monitor and review programme adherence to the Quality Code, are underway but are yet to be fully operational. This links to the recommendation made in Expectation B8, which states that the College should ensure that the senior higher education deliberative committee should fully discharge its objectives and responsibilities for quality monitoring and enhancement.

2.23   The review team were given a demonstration of the current VLE by staff and students, who discussed its functionality and proposed developments. In further discussion with staff and students, the team learnt more about the tutorial system, study skills, work experience opportunities and resources. Both staff and students are engaged in the development to reinvigorate the VLE from its current use mainly as a repository for teaching and learning materials to a resource that enables students to develop skills in independent learning, as well as analytical, creative and critical thinking.

2.24   Students with Disabled Student Allowance are well supported and forward planning is in place for those who require special access to provision. The review team found that the learning environment is inclusive and promotes equality, diversity and inclusion.

2.25   There are frequent student surveys with students receiving timely prompts to complete these. The recently introduced Assistant Principal Higher Education surgeries, for students to use as a drop-in quick-response service from senior staff, are supplementing the survey responses. Staff say that the format of these meetings is still emerging but the review team considers that a good start has been made.

2.26   An open-door policy for academic support is appreciated by the students, who also say that pastoral support is exceptional and report that the College provides a safe, secure and nurturing learning environment that meets local needs for widening participation. This was further confirmed in discussions with students, who say that they have grown in confidence over the course of their programme. Early indications show that embedding study skills and personal development planning into the Higher National curriculum is making students more confident in progressing with their dissertations. Students told the review team that this is especially useful for those who are mature returners to learning.

2.27   The team acknowledges that many staff are current practitioners, providing students with contemporary industry knowledge and forming part of the heavy emphasis on employability in programmes and industry relevance in assignment briefs. Staff also attend external events to maintain their subject currency. Work-related experience is articulated in

many programmes, with opportunities for students to benefit from external expert advice in the form of critiques and to develop their business skills in undertaking work for a variety of external clients.

2.28   There is an established College process for the allocation of physical and teaching resources. Students are mostly satisfied with their access to current learning resources apart from a request for hard copies of journals. Students say that they are not disadvantaged during the 'teach-out' process for the FdA Public Services and are clear about the arrangements for re-submissions should these be required.

2.29   The review team finds that the College effectively enhances the quality of the learning opportunities sufficiently for the review team to conclude that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*

Findings

2.30 The College Higher Education Committee is responsible for the strategy and management of higher education provision and is supported through a number of policy objectives that contribute to enabling students' development and achievement.

2.31 The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy is a key document reflecting the objectives in the Student Charter, which are to provide a learning environment that is welcoming, safe, inspiring, appropriate to the subject and responsive to student needs. The Careers and Higher Education Policy and Personal Tutoring Policy are both essential elements in all programmes, supporting and enabling student development from induction to progression. Central to the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy is the graded higher education Teaching Observation Scheme. The scheme uses experienced higher education practitioners and requires them to feed back to the observee on the quality of the students' learning and the measure of success in developing the students' knowledge, understanding, subject or professional skills and cognitive skills. Course design and assessment are also aligned with the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and employability skills are developed during work-based learning and community projects.

2.32 The Plymouth University Academic Partnerships Student College Handbook focuses on students as partners. It provides guidance and covers many aspects of access to College and University resources including support services. There is an agreed inter-library loan system, which students report on both positively and negatively in terms of access. Lead student representatives attend Higher Education Committee meetings, Plymouth University Joint Boards of Study and partner institutional forums. However, in the last two years student engagement has been an issue.

2.33 Wherever possible, the College has invested in industry-standard resources and there is also a dedicated higher education centre.

2.34 Programme teams liaise with the College Information, Advice and Guidance team, who facilitate and support internal students' academic transition from further to higher education within the College and to other appropriate higher education institutions. Progression onto year three of related university degrees is subject to successful completion of the foundation degree. All of these opportunities are clearly explained in the degree-awarding body handbooks.

2.35 The newly introduced policies, procedures, processes and established support enable students' personal and academic development and achievement, which would allow this Expectation to be met.

2.36 The review team considered a range of documents and data from student surveys and tested its findings in a series of meetings with students, alumni, employers, and academic and support staff. These included the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy; Careers and Higher Education Policy; Student Charter; Progression Promotion; and Tutorial Policy.

2.37 The needs of the students have been paramount during the recent College difficulties, creating an open, transparent and continuing relationship with staff at all levels. In support of this, there is a shared understanding and close commitment between the

College and the degree-awarding bodies and Pearson to enable student development and achievement.

2.38   Staff have scoped student progression from further to higher education and to higher degrees and are seeking an agreement with the main degree-awarding body to secure best-fit option routes to higher degrees. Students are well supported through the transition to higher-level degrees and employment and appreciate being able to understand more challenging grade boundaries. Generally staff and students agree that the higher education resources are accessible and, wherever possible, are up to industry standard.

2.39   Students were unanimous in their praise of staff practitioners and the strong engagement with employers and industry. Effective opportunities for students to develop skills are enhanced by the expertise of staff and employers, who have established active working links in building contemporary practice into the curriculum. This has been achieved extensively in various programmes through critiques by employer panels; the involvement of alumni and industry liaison panels; community volunteering; participation in live theatre productions; and students setting up their own agencies. Students spoke highly of their engagement in these activities and alumni showed how their experience had helped them to develop post-College independent business. Coupled with this, many staff, as industry practitioners, introduce appropriate challenge and rigour to develop students' academic, personal and professional potential. However, the monitoring and evaluation of the impact on students are not yet fully captured.

2.40   The established and active employer engagement in a wide range of provision, which enables access to practitioners and supports the development of students' academic, personal and professional potential, is **good practice**. This is linked to Expectation B10.

2.41   Staff look at other programmes at similar institutions to determine future trends and developments. They ensure that they develop relevant programmes that reflect the needs of industry and make a clear difference in assessment opportunities between the levels of further and higher education.

2.42   Students were enthusiastic in telling the review team that the well supported work experience, sometimes in different types of placements, had enabled them to explore their preferred sector specialism to determine their preferred future career choice. As a direct result of the taught programme, one student had been promoted within their current employment.

2.43   The extensive opportunities for students to engage with employers in developing their professional practice and the support for work experience is good practice. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of associated 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

2.44   The College has a range of opportunities for students to provide feedback. These encompass student perception surveys; module evaluations; meetings; lunchtime surgeries with the Assistant Principal Higher Education; the National Student Survey (NSS); and the 'you said, we did' scheme.

2.45   Each programme has a student representative who is elected by their peers and who communicates with teaching staff and Programme Leaders about issues, concerns and good practice on behalf of the cohort. The student representative also acts as a channel of communication, keeping their peers updated with information. The College does not have a formal students' union but student representatives work closely with their degree-awarding body's students' union.

2.46   The student handbooks outline the student charter and this acts as a statement of mutual expectation between the College and the student body. The student handbook details student enhancement; student liaison; student voice and representation; and what students can do should they wish to raise a concern or complaint.

2.47   There is student representation on the Higher Education Committee and informal discussions with Programme Leaders take place. The Boards of the degree-awarding body that meet periodically throughout the academic year require student representatives to feed back the views of their programme groups.

2.48   The College is taking deliberate steps to engage with students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their education experience, which would allow the Expectation to be met. However, this process is in the early stages of development and is not yet fully consistent or embedded throughout all higher education provision.

2.49   The review team met with staff and students. Students spoke positively about the open channels of communication between the College and the student body. They were able to give examples of the development of the student voice in the College. These include the introduction of lunchtime drop-in surgeries with the Director of Higher Education; changes to avoid the bunching of assessments; and the relocation of the smoking shelter. Students also feel that the College is moving forward with responding to student feedback.

2.50   The College does not provide formal training for course representatives; however, this is provided by the outreach coordinator from one degree-awarding body. Some courses are not fully engaged with course representatives due to the perception of the role. Staff and students raised the issue of the 'over surveying' of students as this seems to be the main mechanism the College uses to collect student feedback. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College develops more effective opportunities for student engagement and representation to support students as partners in the enhancement of their educational experience.

2.51   Although there are limitations to a formal structure of student engagement, the range of mechanisms for engagement allow issues to be raised and discussed. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.52   The College is responsible for setting assessments that test the stated learning outcomes and for marking and internal moderation for each awarding body and Pearson, as set out in partnership agreements or approval documentation. All assignment briefs are internally verified before being confirmed by the awarding body where required. The College's Higher Education Assessment Policy covers the principles of assessment, design of assessments, feedback and return of work, mitigating circumstances and academic offences. The College, supported by staff from the awarding bodies, provides staff with support on the design and setting of assessments.

2.53   The procedures for Assessment Boards are defined by the awarding bodies with each providing detailed guidance on the assessment and award board processes. Issues in relation to the procedures for Pearson programmes are covered in Expectation A3.2.

2.54   The design of the procedures governing the setting, marking, moderation of assessments and the associated examination board and institutional processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.55   The team explored the application of the College's processes through reviewing policies and their implementation, scrutiny of assessments and feedback across a range of courses, the views of external examiners expressed in documentation, and in discussions with staff and students.

2.56   In discussions with the team, teaching staff were clear about the assignment-setting process in relation to the requirements of their awarding body or organisation. The College has in place developmental workshops to share best practice.

2.57   Assessment formats follow those prescribed in approval documentation. Frequently these provide for the development of both the academic and professional skills required for future employment. Students are provided with detailed assignment briefs and criteria, which make the expectations clear. External examiners confirm that standards are met and are positive about the assessment tasks and associated College processes.

2.58   Students raised some concerns about the bunching of assignments on some programmes. The review team heard from both staff and students of the steps that were taken to address this issue when it occurred. Students confirmed that the assessments became progressively more challenging and were positive about the helpful and supportive feedback they received, which enabled them to improve their practice.

2.59   In meetings with the College, students had commented on delays in receiving feedback which meant that they could not benefit when completing later assessments. College policy states that feedback to students should be within three weeks, although the review team heard that there can be some variation across the awarding bodies. In discussions with the review team students indicated that although in many areas feedback was prompt, in some areas it was beyond the next submission date and in one area there

had been a three-month delay in obtaining feedback. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College should ensure that College and awarding body policies relating to the timely provision of feedback are consistently applied.

2.60   Students are given guidance on correct academic practice and the College is implementing the use of text-matching software across most of its provision at the instigation of its awarding bodies. The team concluded that the College has in place processes to deal effectively with issues of poor academic practice and plagiarism.

2.61   The recognition of prior learning is not widespread across the College's higher education provision, but there are procedures in place and the process is understood by staff.

2.62   The review team concludes that the arrangements for assessment are equitable, valid and reliable, enabling every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes. Thus the Expectation is met but the risk is moderate because the arrangements for providing timely feedback have some shortcomings in the rigour with which they are applied, which affects the quality of the learning experience for some students.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.63   The College nominates its preferred external examiners, whose applications are scrutinised before being formally appointed by the degree-awarding bodies, who retain responsibility for their activities. Pearson appoints its own subject verifiers.

2.64   External examiners for the degree-awarding bodies are required to attend the College twice each year. Pearson require one annual subject verifier visit to the programme, mirroring that of the first visit by the degree-awarding bodies' external examiners, meeting staff and students and scrutinising assessments, assignment briefs, exam papers, examples of marked work, videos of performance or audio work. The second external examiner's visit is to attend subject assessment panels to comment on their content and assessment.

2.65   Following Pearson centre approval, the Higher National programmes rely on the College internal systems of assessment and verification. Although external examiners ratify final marks at Assessment Boards, subject verifiers are not required to attend Assessment Boards. However, they receive Assessment Board minutes, verify assessments and ensure that an appropriate level of sampling takes place during their visits to the College.

2.66   Evidence of external examiners' and subject verifiers' findings on all programme areas are collated into a formal report from which the College produces action plans. Actions arising from the Higher National programmes are monitored and addressed by the College Performance and Delivery team and supported by the College Lead Quality Assurer. The intention is that the newly instigated 'live' Higher Education Development Plan is updated with actions, arising as a result of external examiner and subject verifier recommendations.

2.67   All external examiner reports provide ample opportunity to make comments and recommendations about the way the College discharges its responsibilities. Draft examination papers are sent to external examiners well in advance. Good practice in the variety of assessment methods has been identified by external examiners in several programme areas. The reports are available to staff, students and management on the College VLE. Instructions about student access to external examiner reports are highlighted in the Plymouth University Academic Partnership Student Handbook.

2.68   College Programme Leaders are accountable for responding to external examiner and subject verifier reports, and actions are the direct responsibility of the course teams. The Terms of Reference for the Higher Education Committee include consideration of external examiner and subject verifier reports and agreement of emerging action plans, known as Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs).

2.69   There is sufficient evidence to confirm that the College has processes in place to act on information, advice, guidance and constructive criticism from the external examiners and subject verifier reports to enable this Expectation to be met.

2.70   The review team considered a range of documentation to assess the extent to which the College makes scrupulous use of its external examiners. This was further tested in meetings that included degree-awarding body representation, senior and academic staff, and students. The College previously had no expectation to produce annual reports on Higher National programmes and therefore to produce a QIP. The College is addressing this and will have both processes in place during the academic year 2015-16.

2.71   External examiners and subject verifiers state that they are provided with sufficient evidence at all stages of the process to enable them to fulfil their role. There is convincing documentary evidence that the evidence required for external examiner and subject verifier visits is well organised by the Programme Leaders. The role of external examiners in Assessment Boards is clearly articulated in the degree-awarding bodies' agreements with the College.

2.72   Not all students are aware of, or have read, external examiner or subject verifier reports, although some have given feedback to the external examiner at the visit about their programme experience and know where to find the reports.

2.73   Staff find external examiner and subject verifier reports and feedback helpful in developing assignments, in assessment and in raising awareness of good practice from other institutions. There are instances where the Programme Leaders have benefited from external examiner and subject verifier comments within the reports that have supported their good practice, such as the effective variety of assessment opportunities provided. This was expanded upon by staff, who spoke about how industry experts supported the development of module content and the external examiner suggested changes to assessment feedback.

2.74   The monitoring of external examiner report recommendations for degree programmes is through the programme committees, which feed into the Annual Programme Monitoring process. Subject verifier recommendations for Higher National programmes are acknowledged and actioned at programme level and, like the degree programmes, eventually feed into the ongoing Higher Education Development Plan. It is the College's intention that all actions are audited through the Higher Education Quality Audit mechanism. This process is underway and, although it is not fully embedded, it is evidenced and formally documented.

2.75   The review team concludes that the processes for consideration of, and responses to, external examiner comments are robust. Issues raised are tracked through the College processes and staff find external examiner and subject verifier comments helpful in developing the curriculum. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of associated 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

2.76   The College is required to adhere to the procedures of the awarding bodies and Pearson for programme monitoring and review as set out in relevant documentation. Pearson is responsible for monitoring and reviewing its awards and makes decisions about amending the individual units that comprise the programme.

2.77   The College has a new Higher Education Quality Policy which covers annual monitoring and requirements for a five-yearly periodic review. The College's Higher Education Committee is charged with receiving annual monitoring reports and action plans as part of its oversight of higher education provision. A newly instigated Higher Education Quality Audit process is used to monitor the operation of programmes and to ensure that adequate and appropriate mechanisms are in place to guarantee the quality of educational provision. This involves Programme Leaders undertaking an analysis of how the Expectations of the Quality Code are met in their programmes, with independent auditing taking place by a senior management group. This process also enables the identification and dissemination of good practice and the outcomes feed into the College's Higher Education Development Plan. The design of the College's arrangements for annual monitoring and periodic review would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.78   The team reviewed a range of documentation relating to annual monitoring and discussed the arrangements for annual monitoring and periodic review with Programme Leaders, members of the Higher Education Committee and senior management.

2.79   Annual monitoring reports, compiled according to awarding body requirements, are considered at programme committees and joint meetings. The outcomes are used to inform University and College actions. No overarching annual monitoring report is produced for higher education provision but the review team was informed that the outcomes of monitoring are considered by senior staff and feed into the College's Higher Education Development Plan.

2.80   Pearson programmes are monitored annually through external quality assurance and Centre visits. Outcomes and actions from these visits are considered and addressed by the Performance and Delivery team, supported by the College Lead Internal Quality Assurer. The College states that there is no requirement to produce an annual report for the awarding organisation; however, it intends to introduce one from September 2016. While there is no requirement for an annual monitoring report to the awarding organisation, the BTEC Centre Guide requires the College to monitor, review and evaluate Pearson operations, policies and procedures and keep auditable records, and to monitor the approval and accreditation period for all of the qualifications approved and seek re-approval as and when required. QAA's responsibilities checklist for providers without degree awarding powers makes it clear that the provider is expected to have appropriate processes in place to routinely monitor and periodically review the programmes. While the Higher Education Quality Audit for Pearson programmes indicated that aspects of quality monitoring were completed, the College was unable to provide evidence of any annual report for Pearson provision covering, for example, retention and attainment and providing an action plan for this provision. Without a clear annual monitoring report and action plan, it was not clear how the College was meeting the requirements in its Higher Education Quality policy for an annual report or how the Higher Education Committee could fully complete its remit to receive such reports.

2.81   For the periodic review of its provision, the College relies on the procedures of its awarding bodies. Through the documentation provided, the review team was able to confirm that this process occurred, although it was less clear how the outcomes were considered by the College. At the time of the IQER in 2011 the College had no Pearson provision. The review team was informed that the first approval had taken place in September 2011, although no documentation could be provided to support consideration by the College at that time. Under the requirements of the College's Higher Education Quality Policy, this provision was now due for periodic review; however, the College had no defined procedures for such a review or plans to review this provision. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College should ensure there are effective and systematic annual and periodic review processes for all programmes.

2.82   The College's Higher Education Committee is the senior higher education deliberative committee and has been established for a year with revised terms of reference. The review team notes the central role of the Higher Education Committee in the College's quality assurance and enhancement arrangements. However, through consideration of its agendas and papers, the team could see limited evidence that the Committee is, as yet, fully discharging its responsibilities for monitoring, including that for considering the outcomes of student surveys; receiving annual monitoring reports and action plans; discussing and agreeing actions arising from annual course reviews and external examiners' reports; or monitoring actions arising from reviews by awarding bodies. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College should ensure that the senior higher education deliberative committee fully discharges its objectives and responsibilities for quality monitoring and enhancement.

2.83   As part of the Higher Education Audit process, all areas produce a self-evaluation document against the Expectations of the Quality Code. This is then audited by senior managers and areas for improvement or good practice are identified. The outcomes also inform the rolling College-wide higher education self-evaluation document. The review team was informed that the Higher Education Audit process provides useful information to senior managers on important aspects of the operation of higher education programmes. The review team noted that considerable work is required to produce the audit reports for each area and that these provide useful baseline information but less valuable annual monitoring information. The team considered that, as processes evolve, the Audit might provide additional information; for example, on the extent to which strategic enhancement initiatives are being embedded in practice across its higher education provision. This is linked to the recommendation made in the Expectation on Enhancement.

2.84   Where courses are being closed, the review team was able to confirm that appropriate steps are taken by the College and the appropriate awarding body to ensure that the quality of the learning experience is monitored and maintained.

2.85   Evidence from the last full round of annual monitoring indicated that there had not been full annual monitoring process covering all of the provision in line with the College's Higher Education Quality policy. The new annual monitoring process was in its first year of operation, thus the team was unable to judge its effectiveness in meeting the Expectation. Furthermore, there are no clear procedures for the periodic review of Pearson programmes by the College and limited evidence that, as yet, the Higher Education Committee is fully discharging its responsibilities for monitoring. Thus the review team concludes that the Expectation is not met. Since this represents a weakness in the College's governance structure and a lack of clarity about responsibilities, the 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

2.86   The College has a Higher Education Student Complaints Policy and a Higher Education Appeals Policy. The Higher Education Appeals Policy applies to Pearson and University awarding bodies. Students studying on University-awarded programmes who wish to appeal against academic decisions use the relevant University appeals procedures. For programmes awarded by Bournemouth University, all academic appeals and complaints are coordinated by the University and students are required to contact the relevant Link Faculty in the first instance. For students at Kingston University and students studying on Pearson programmes, they follow both stages of the Complaints Policy. If any student remains dissatisfied, they can refer their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). All these policies are included in the programme handbooks and are made available on the VLE.

2.87   The policies and procedures in place for dealing with academic appeals and student complaints would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.88   Staff informed the review team that there had been no incidents of students making academic appeals against assessment decisions, thus this has made it difficult to analyse the action and monitoring of academic appeals. However, the students whom the review team met had a good awareness of the process of academic appeals and complaints, and information is available to them in a variety of places and formats, such as the VLE and programme handbooks. Students also stated that the majority of complaints can be resolved without initiating formal processes and were able to give examples of enhancement because of issues they had raised.

2.89   The College has a range of formal and informal opportunities for students to comment on their educational experience. The Higher Education Committee has oversight of student complaints and the Terms of Reference of this group clearly outline this responsibility. Students were able to comment on the information available to them should they wish to make a complaint and give examples of when change has happened because an issue has been raised. Information is available to students on the College's academic appeals process; however, the effectiveness of this is difficult to evaluate as there has never been an appeal raised as part of the process.

2.90   The review team concluded that the procedure for handling student complaints is fair, transparent and timely, although it was difficult to analyse the action and monitoring of academic appeals due to none being raised. Nonetheless, the team has confidence that as academic appeals are dealt with by the degree-awarding bodies, this would have no bearing on the quality of the learning experience. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met, with a low risk.

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

2.91   The College states that work experience activities within the undergraduate programmes are ultimately the responsibility of the degree-awarding bodies who validate those programmes. There is no structured or assessed work-based learning as part of the Higher National programmes as this is not a requirement of the Pearson awards. However, some students do arrange work experience as part of their own organised development.

2.92   The centrality of work-based and work-related learning definitive module records within the degree programmes is described in the approved specifications handbooks. At induction students are made aware of the modes of assessment for work-based learning and provided with the skills and knowledge to prepare assignments that provide appropriate reflection and evaluation. All students on the degree programmes are expected to maintain a comprehensive work-based learning portfolio and reflective journal, and complete a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis.

2.93   Other programmes offer students the benefits of participating in a variety of work placements. The FdA Actor Training programme enables students to audition for a position in theatre company work that will mirror industry practices and expectations. A College work-based learning tutor is the main contact for liaison with industry, having responsibility for managing, delivering and monitoring work-based learning placement during the identified degree modules.

2.94   In degree programmes, work placements are recorded and managed through the use of two handbooks to record the placement experience. One handbook is for the use of the student; the other is for the use of the employer, being sent to the placement provider by the student prior to the start of employment. However, this is not prescriptive and programme leaders can customise or amalgamate the two, as with FdSc Health and Social Care, who only have one handbook. Students log their work experience on College-devised templates.

2.95   Employers are asked to provide a Work-Based Learning Industrial Supervisor who guides and advises the student; monitors progress; verifies the learning; and compiles a short performance report at the conclusion of the placement.

2.96   The Work-Based Learning Handbooks are fit for purpose, with clear indications of roles and responsibilities, and aims that include expectations of what the student will be able to demonstrate as a result of the achievement of specific learning outcomes. The assessment guidelines indicate how the student will self-assess in line with their assignment brief and also what is expected from the employer in the form of an appraisal or feedback.

2.97   The management of work-based learning placements, and the contents and processes described within the work placement handbooks and associated materials, are appropriate evidence to allow the Expectation to be met.

2.98   The review team spoke to staff, students, alumni and employers to ascertain the overall nature and benefits of the work experience placements. In degree placements

a detailed agreement between the College, student and employer is formally signed and dated.

2.99   The College provides two appropriate and comprehensive formal work placement booklets detailing the College programme aims, assessment expectations, and the employer and student responsibilities. Handbooks are customised accordingly for each programme area and qualification. The employer booklet details where the academic and health and safety responsibilities lie. Employers are requested to provide an induction and a work placement supervisor to guide and advise students, and most do this.

2.100   Students mostly find their own placements but can access College support if there are any difficulties in gaining a placement. Staff liaison officers visit the students during this period in the workplace. All agreed that the work placements were positive and helpful in underpinning industry knowledge and confidence and students said they liked to have a variety of placements to develop their own career direction further. This is linked to the good practice identified in Expectation B4.

2.101   At the completion of the placement, the employer and student are expected to appraise the student attainment. A College feedback form is used for this purpose, as is a personal development planner and reflective journal. The well planned, clearly structured and supported opportunities for work experience, which enable students to clarify their career choices, are **good practice**. This is linked to Expectation B4.

2.102   It was very clear to the review team that the employers to whom they spoke are very supportive of the College and find the process of work experience placements well organised and beneficial to all involved. Employers added that if they had limited confidence in the student placed with them, a tutor would observe the student's workplace performance and agree any additional support needed.

2.103   Academic staff said that they find that students returning from work placements have often changed in attitude and are equipped with more employability skills. They also found that some students progressed into employment within the work placement organisation. Alumni especially praised their work experience placements, agreeing that a steep learning curve taught them a lot about their chosen industry, into which they have now progressed. Across all degree programmes the review team found that students are encouraged to take part in relevant work placements and that they are clearly benefitting from the experience. This is linked to the good practice identified in Expectation B4.

2.104   Although the College currently does not measure and monitor the impact, quality and relevance of work experience placements, overall it has a wealth of collected information from which to draw should it so wish.

2.105   The College provides sufficient structures to confirm formal oversight of work placement activities. There are proven opportunities for the College and employers to interact on the quality of the placements for the benefit of the student experience. The team concludes that this Expectation is met with an associated low level of risk.

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

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

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.107   In determining its judgement on the quality of student learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met with the exception of Expectation B8. The level of risk is considered low in all Expectations, apart from B6 and B8, where the review team considers there to be a moderate risk to the quality of learning opportunities. The review team identifies two areas of good practice in Expectations B4 and B10 and a total of four recommendations for action pertaining to Expectations B5, B6 and B8 where there are two recommendations. There are no affirmations in this area.

2.108   The College offers considerable support for students in developing their potential and future employability. In particular, the established and active employer engagement in a wide range of provision, which enables student access to practitioners and supports the development of students' academic, personal and professional potential is recognised as good practice for the positive impact this has on the student experience. The review team also notes as good practice the well planned, clearly structured and supported opportunities for work experience which enable students to clarify their career choices.

2.109   The College has a range of opportunities for students to provide feedback, which encompass formal surveys, informal feedback through surgeries and discussion with Programme Leaders. Student representatives are elected by their peers and act as a channel of communication between students and the College and there is student representation on the Higher Education Committee. However, the College does not provide formal training for student representatives and engagement with students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of the student experience is not formally structured or consistent. The team therefore recommends that the College develops more effective mechanisms for student engagement and representation to support students as partners in the enhancement of their educational experience.

2.110   The College has responsibility for setting, marking and internally moderating assessments in line with the requirements of the awarding bodies and Pearson. The College's Higher Education Policy sets out the principles and procedures for assessment, including those for feedback and return of work. However, students commented that in some instances delays in feedback occurred that went beyond the submission date of the next assessment, thus preventing them from learning from feedback on previous work. The review team therefore recommends that the College should ensure that College and awarding body policies relating to the timely provision of feedback are consistently applied. The level of risk within this Expectation is moderate due to shortcomings in the arrangements for providing timely feedback and the rigour with which they are applied, which impacts upon the quality of the learning experience for some students.

2.111   The College is required to adhere to the procedures of the awarding bodies and Pearson for the monitoring and review of programmes. In line with the College's Higher Education Quality Policy, the Higher Education Committee receives annual monitoring reports and action plans as part of the oversight of higher education provision. For the periodic review of provision, the College relies on the procedures of the awarding bodies, but it is unclear how the College considers the outcomes of this process. The College had no procedures or plans in place for the periodic review of Pearson provision. The review team recommends that the College should ensure that there are effective and systematic annual and periodic review processes for all programmes.

2.112   The review team noted that the Higher Education Committee had been established for one year under revised terms of reference and its central role in the College's quality

assurance and enhancement arrangements. However, the team saw limited evidence that the Committee was, as yet, discharging its responsibilities for monitoring, discussing or agreeing actions from student surveys, programme annual monitoring, external examiner reports or reviews by awarding bodies. The team therefore recommends that the College should ensure that the senior higher education deliberative committee fully discharges its objectives and responsibilities for quality monitoring and enhancement. The review team considered that Expectation B8 was not met as there were no clear monitoring processes in place covering higher education provision in line with the College's own policies; no clear procedures for the periodic review of Pearson programmes; and limited evidence that the College's senior higher education deliberative committee was fully discharging its responsibilities for monitoring. The level of risk within this Expectation is moderate as there are weaknesses in the College's governance structure and a lack of clarity about responsibilities for higher education.

2.113   After consideration of the criteria for judgements set out in Annex 2 of the published handbook, the review team concludes that, overall, the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The College provides information on its website for prospective students and has social media platforms keeping students up to date with information. The prospectus is available in print and online and supplies students with all relevant information including course information, student support and funding, and the student voice. Information on the degree-awarding bodies and relevant policies, such as complaints, appeals and assessments, are accessible in programme handbooks and on the VLE.

3.2 Students receive a student handbook which includes information on the programme, support services available and a range of information that relates to the student experience. The College also has a higher education student charter that acts as a statement of mutual expectations between the College and the student body and which is provided to students as part of the induction process. There is additional information relating to equality, diversity and inclusivity and College governance available on the website.

3.3 The team reviewed the College website and social media platforms, and accessed documentation provided by the College including programme specifications and student handbooks. The team met staff who confirmed the process for publishing course materials and met with students to seek their opinions about the information provided to them as both prospective and current students. In addition, the team was provided with a demonstration of the VLE by staff and students. The design of these arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.4 The team heard from professional support staff that Programme Leaders have oversight of information related to their programme and additional support is given by the Higher Education Registrar and the Marketing Officer; however, no information is publicly available without agreement from the degree-awarding body. There are different information formats for the degree-awarding bodies and Pearson programmes. The information is consistent for all students albeit presented in a different way.

3.5 Information about higher education programmes on the website is inconsistent between programmes. The team also noted inconsistencies between course titling on the website and the title of the qualification students would receive on completion. This issue related to one Pearson programme and while this was clarified by staff and students, the team **recommends** that the College provide prospective students with programme information that is fit for purpose to ensure that they can make informed choices.

3.6 Students that the team met were satisfied with the level of information they had received pre-course and on programme, and students spoke positively about their interaction and the information available on the VLE. However, it was unclear from discussions with teaching and professional staff who had overall responsibility for the monitoring and updating of information in the College.

3.7 The team considers that prospective and current students generally have the appropriate information to enable them to make decisions. While there is a need to amend

and update information, the team considers that this would not require major structural, operational or procedural change. Although this Expectation has received a recommendation, the team feels that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.8   In determining its judgement on the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team considers that the Expectation in this area is met and the risk to student learning opportunities is low. There is one recommendation in this area and no affirmations or areas of good practice.

3.9   The College produces information through a range of mechanisms and media and there are processes in place for checking the accuracy of information available to students and the public. Students were satisfied with the level of information they received both prior to their programme commencing and while on programme, and they were positive about their interaction and information available on the VLE. The review team noted inconsistencies in the information provided on the website and, in particular, differences between the titling of one programme and the title of the qualification that students would receive upon completion of the award. The team therefore recommends that the College provides prospective students with programme information that is fit for purpose to ensure that they can make informed choices.

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

4   Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1   The College's arrangements for quality enhancement have undergone significant recent revision. The College's Higher Education Strategy establishes priorities and the quality enhancement procedures describe areas for enhancement being identified through the College's higher education framework, and awarding bodies' processes. To inform this, evidence is gathered from a number of different sources, including external examiners, engagement with awarding bodies, students and the Higher Education Quality Audit process. The Assistant Principal Higher Education sits on the Senior Leadership Team and ensures that areas for enhancement are considered at the highest level. Decisions are fed back to Curriculum Managers through the Higher Education Committee meetings, to Programme Leaders and the Higher Education Registrar. The College's Higher Education Development Plan provides an overview of enhancement activities. The arrangements the College has in place for enhancement would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.2   The team explored the College's approach to enhancement through the College's strategies and procedures, committee papers and annual monitoring processes, and in discussions with staff at all levels.

4.3   In its new Higher Education Strategy the College sets out a range of objectives and curriculum principles. These include developing a higher education offer that includes flexible modes of delivery and different entry and exit points; reviewing the higher education curriculum to ensure that it is viable and that it supports employability, social inclusion and lifelong learning priorities; ensuring that progression pathways exist; and providing first-class higher education teaching, learning and support that is a model of excellence. The strategy also sets out plans to increase the use of online learning and assessment technologies. The Higher Education Strategy, Higher Education Enhancement Procedure and Higher Education Development Plan had all been developed and approved within the current academic year, thus the review team was not able to see them operating throughout the full cycle. However, the team was able to see examples of the College taking deliberate steps at the provider level to enhance the student experience. These included the decision to ensure that every student has the opportunity to experience a high quality learning opportunity within a working environment appropriate for their course, the steps being taken to refresh the VLE and the embedding of study skills units in much of the provision. Staff spoke positively about ways in which they were encouraged to consider and improve the quality of learning opportunities at programme level and of the mechanisms in place to help share effective practice.

4.4   The College's new Higher Education Enhancement Procedure states that strategic enhancement initiatives are monitored and evaluated for effectiveness through quality and improvement plans. However, monitoring reports seen by the review team were more likely to comment on local enrichment activities or awarding body priorities than the implementation of strategic enhancements, and this focus was also evident in discussions between the review team and programme leaders.

4.5   The review team considers that the current structure of the College's Higher Education Development Plan, based on sections of the Quality Code and derived from monitoring processes often defined by external bodies, represents a reactive, externally

referenced approach to enhancement rather than a College-driven strategic approach. As its quality enhancement arrangements develop, the review team **recommends** that the College should ensure closer alignment between its Higher Education Strategy, Higher Education Quality Audit process and Higher Education Development Plan to enable more effective monitoring of enhancement activities.

4.6   The review team concludes that the College has in place the elements of an effective process for taking deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities, but these are not yet systematic, fully embedded in practice or effectively monitored. Thus the Expectation is met but the risk is moderate because of weaknesses in the operation of the current governance structure.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.7   In determining its judgement on the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team considers that the Expectation in this area is met but the risk to student learning opportunities is moderate because of weaknesses in the operation of the current governance structure. There is one recommendation in this area and no affirmations or areas of good practice.

4.8   The review team noted that the College's arrangements for quality enhancement have undergone substantial recent revision and there was evidence that the College is taking deliberate steps to enhance the student experience. However, these steps are not yet systematic, fully embedded or effectively monitored. The team therefore recommends that the College should ensure closer alignment between the Higher Education Strategy, Higher Education Quality Audit process and Higher Education Development Plan to enable more effective monitoring of enhancement activities.

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

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   Employability, its associated skills and employment are a key part of the objectives within the College Higher Education Strategy. The College Careers and Higher Education Policy underpins the commitment to enable progression into employment through careers, education, information, advice and guidance. The Higher Education Strategic Plan aims to transform lives and economic prosperity by providing access to high quality learning in skills that match local growth sectors and address skills gaps. Curriculum planning guidance within the Strategy commits to developing College provision in subject areas that align with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), and College priorities that include those for Information and Communications Technology (ICT), digital media, engineering areas and heritage skills.

5.2   Employability activities are apparent in the qualification frameworks described in programme handbooks and associated further guidance, and provide sufficient information and guidance about employment opportunities. Extracurricular activities that focus on the development of professional vocational skills and student employability are offered to some students who undertake community and voluntary work.

5.3   The College has a wide range of work experience providers who are integral to all degree programmes. Employers are extremely supportive of the College and students, whom they found to be well prepared for work placements. Employers contribute to programme-led industry liaison panels, provide work placements and enrich the curriculum by participating in guest speaking, setting live assignment briefs, formal critique panels and impact on programmes by informing and professionalising practice. Employers showed an in-depth interest in the programmes and were interested in directing students to a wide range of potential sector employability opportunities.

5.4   Alumni confirmed that study skills and personal development planning had contributed to their skills development and confidence, and helped them survive in the working world by enabling a seamless transition to employment. Alumni were keen to describe the benefits of work placements and employability threaded throughout their studies at the College. All students met by the review team spoke of their involvement with industry and the beneficial impact on their studies.

5.5   Programme modules/units are designed in all programme areas to enable either work experience, paid internships, work opportunities or work-related projects, community initiatives, live projects and tours. Where students encounter difficulties in finding work placements, programme staff seek placements in appropriate related industry settings. A new programme business plan specifically addresses employability and the relevance of developing entrepreneurial flair and leadership.

5.6   Good use is made of online resources that include library and inter-library loans and learning resources. However, resource implications in some technically high-cost programmes are clearly an expensive commitment for the College. All allocations are carefully considered and align with new programme approval requests to meet current industry standards closely. Students said that the physical resources are very good but that some computers run slowly.

5.7   Recent initiatives further underline the College commitment to embedding employability throughout all programmes. These include 'Industry Week' and programme-level Industry Liaison Panels. One student is to be an 'artist in residence' at the College for the coming summer term. It was suggested by alumni that they would like to

deliver workshops in the College that reflected their post-College experience in relation to accepted working practices, such as shorter deadlines and very tough critiques.

5.8   The Performing Arts Department hosts an 'in-house' drama company, Local Emerging Artists Platform (LEAP), as part of its provision for alumni, whom the College mentor for one year post College. Current first-year students are encouraged to engage with LEAP alumni as technical support for their productions.

5.9   Employers are very clear that students are a strength of the College, and that staff are current practitioners, well qualified and totally committed to practice. Employers also clearly understand to whom they should communicate within the College Senior Leadership Team regarding new initiatives such as inviting sports students to work in their school to enhance the skills of their teachers and to showcase young talent.

5.10   Overall, the College takes its responsibility for promoting student employability seriously, both academically and strategically. Students commented very favourably on their ability to benefit from work placements supported by many staff who are current practitioners. This benefits students studying on the College's programmes by keeping the curriculum up to date with industry developments.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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