



# Higher Education Review of Yeovil College

May 2016

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Yeovil College. The review took place from 17 to 19 May 2016 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Glenn Barr
- Ms Tessa Counsell
- Dr Dave Dowland
- Miss Bhavika Patel (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Yeovil 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)<sup>1</sup> setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review, 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 Yeovil 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,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)<sup>4</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code).

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859).

<sup>3</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Yeovil College

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

- The relevance and currency of curriculum delivery achieved through the extensive support for professional development and updating of teaching staff (Expectation B3).
- The extensive opportunities for students' professional development provided by employers' widespread engagement in curriculum delivery and employability support (Expectation B4).

### Recommendations

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

By September 2016:

- establish secure institutional oversight of the College's process for the approval of new programmes (Expectation B1)
- revise the wording of the procedures for appeals and complaints in order to ensure clarity of terminology (Expectation B9)
- establish more effective editorial control of public information on the College's website (Expectation C).

By January 2017:

- strengthen the student representation system to further engage students as partners in quality assurance and enhancement, and introduce a system to monitor its effectiveness (Expectation B5)
- identify and embed clear enhancement priorities in order to secure effective dissemination and implementation of the College's enhancement strategy (Enhancement).

### Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to achieve consistency with institutional standards of course content on VLE pages (Expectation B3).
- The steps being taken through active monitoring to ensure consistently timely feedback on student work (Expectation B6).

## **Theme: Student Employability**

Strong relationships with local and regional employers enable the College to develop and enhance its vocationally focused provision with a view to embedding strategically integrated employability skills into the curriculum. Feedback from employers informs reviews of curriculum structure and the development of new programmes. Collaboration with employers has led to opportunities for Higher Apprenticeships through Trailblazer programmes particularly in healthcare, computing and engineering. The College provides platforms such as the Future Forward programme, which allows students to develop through workshops and insights into various professions. Some programmes require students to undertake work placements, which make an effective contribution to students' professional development.

The college has a wide range of mechanisms for students to reflect on their progress and develop their skills. It encourages students to form personal development plans, which enables them to recognise their current skill sets, to produce action plans to enhance and develop them, and to recognise how these skills fit into the curriculum they are studying. Although personal development planning is not implemented across the College's provision, students confirmed that they find it to be useful and that it is most effective when embedded in their curriculum.

Students receive career development and guidance through their interaction with teaching staff and employers rather than through the services of a designated careers service. The College's data show that, in 2015, 63 per cent of its graduates progressed to employment and a further 20 per cent to further study.

The College has embedded student employability into its provision, and there is clear evidence of student progression as a result of initiatives implemented by the College and arising from the strong relationships that the College has with employers.

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

## About Yeovil College

Yeovil College (the College) is a provider of post-compulsory education based at two centres in the town of Yeovil and a further centre at Shaftesbury. Of its student population of more than 5,000 students, about 600 are studying on higher education programmes at Levels 4 to 7. The College aspires to offer outstanding teaching, learning and assessment, and thereby to raise the aspirations and enable successful progression of its students. Additionally, the College's mission includes the goal of offering a curriculum to meet the needs of local, regional and national priorities.

The College's higher education provision leads to awards from four universities and from Pearson. The greater part of its provision is validated by the University of Gloucestershire; in addition, some provision leads to awards of Bournemouth University, of the University of the West of England, Bristol or of the University of Wales Trinity St David.

Since the previous QAA review, the College has undergone significant changes to its management structure, and in particular to arrangements for the management of its curricula, with Curriculum Area Managers now being responsible for the design of higher education within their discipline area. Since 2009, the College has formed relationships with the University of Gloucestershire and the University of the West of England, Bristol, allowing it to deliver programmes leading to awards of those universities to replace the reducing number of programmes offered on behalf of Bournemouth University. During this period the College has significantly increased the volume of its higher education provision, particularly in respect of a greater number of programmes being offered for study on a full-time basis.

The College has, in 2015, relocated its higher education provision in the newly built Yeovil College University Centre, offering a learning environment dedicated to higher education students as well as specialist subject-based resources.

Challenges within the College's higher education provision arise from its plans to continue to grow its provision, particularly in a range of priority subject areas, and to support new forms of programme delivery. The College also intends to further strengthen employer engagement in programme design and to explore opportunities for the development of further postgraduate provision.

The College had an Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) carried out by QAA in 2011, whose outcomes were positive and which resulted in reviewers identifying two features of good practice and six recommendations. Changes and development within the College since then have largely been effective in addressing the recommendations.

## Explanation of the findings about Yeovil 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/or other awarding organisations**

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

**a) ensure that the requirements of The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland 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 programmes of higher education validated or franchised from four awarding universities, together with six Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes awarded by Pearson. The validated/franchised provision comprises 10 foundation degrees, three full honours degrees, three Level Six top-up programmes and Postgraduate Certificate of Education and master's programmes, with a total of 624 higher education students in 2015-16. The College has formal agreements in place with each its awarding bodies, namely Bournemouth University; the University of the West of England, Bristol; the University of Gloucestershire; and the University of Wales Trinity St David.

1.2 The proportion of the College's students who are enrolled on courses offered on behalf of its awarding partners is: Bournemouth University 9.5 per cent, University of the West of England 14.3 per cent, University of Gloucestershire 42.9 per cent, University of Wales Trinity Saint David 4.8 per cent and Pearson 28.6 percent. The agreement with University of Wales Trinity St David is about to cease, with the single remaining programme currently being phased out.

1.3 Within its 2014-17 Higher Education Strategy the College aims to 'maintain and further develop a range of higher education programmes which reflect the higher level skills strategies and priorities of the region, and to provide a high quality, student focused, higher

education experience which meets the needs and aspirations of the local, regional, national and international community'.

1.4 While the awarding bodies are responsible for setting the academic standards of the awards, and have overall responsibility for the maintenance of those standards, the College is responsible for delivering and assessing the programmes of study, and for maintaining the academic standards of the degree-awarding organisation. The higher education programmes delivered by the College are placed at Level 4 to Level 7 on *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), confirmed by the awarding bodies and organisation, the former through the approval and validation processes, the latter by Ofqual. The validation and approval processes, both internal to the College and through the awarding bodies and organisation, ensure that the programmes adhere to the FHEQ characteristics and use Subject Benchmark Statements appropriately. Minutes of validation meetings indicate consideration of Subject Benchmark Statements and of Foundation Degree Characteristics, and the positioning of the programmes correctly on the FHEQ. The processes in place at the College and the awarding bodies and organisation would allow this Expectation to be met.

1.5 The team tested the Expectation by further scrutiny of documentation, including programme master documents, awarding body approval and validation processes, and minutes of the Internal Academic Scrutiny Group (IASG) and the Learner Experience Group (LEG). The team also met senior and academic staff to test the operational aspects of the processes.

1.6 The recently updated Higher Education: Quality Assurance, Programme Monitoring and Review Operational Handbook is of particular use to staff involved in the planning of new programmes, with clear references to the requirement to 'refer to the SEEC Level Descriptors, appropriate Frameworks relating to Higher Education and Subject Benchmark Statements'. By this process it is ensured that learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor on the FHEQ. The team heard that any changes to external reference points, for example the Quality Code or Subject Benchmark Statements, are disseminated by the Higher Education Director, who works with other staff to ensure continuing alignment. Teaching staff confirmed their understanding of the use of the Foundation Degree Characteristics and the SEEC level descriptors in informing the level of programmes at validation and also in delivery and assessment.

1.7 The review team found that the processes in place for validation and approval of programmes, together with overarching documentation and management structures, are effective in maintaining the academic standards of the awards offered at the College. 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**

1.8 The College is responsible for maintaining academic standards through its academic frameworks. It has a range of policies and processes in place, together with a higher education management structure, which together aim to secure academic standards.

1.9 All higher education programmes, regardless of the awarding body, are monitored by the College's Higher Education Management and Strategy Group (HEMSG), the Learner Experience Group, and the Performance and Impact Group (PIG), and are subject to specific guidance set out in the Higher Education Quality Assurance, Programme, Monitoring and Review Operational Handbook, which details the annual timeline for the processes of reporting from, and responding to, management groups, students, external examiners and awarding bodies. This handbook sets out processes which aim to 'ensure that all higher education provision within the College, regardless of the awarding body, is managed and follows the same processes and procedures in managing Quality Assurance' and 'to annually monitor and periodically review the academic standards of the College's programmes and the quality of learning opportunities for its students'. The handbook includes key processes and templates involved in assurance of academic standards, including Annual Programme Monitoring Reports, Unit Monitoring Reports, Module Evaluations, Programme Approval, external examiner appointment and reporting, Annual Monitoring of Academic Standards and Quality and Periodic Review.

1.10 The HEMSG is the senior group considering regulatory, quality, developmental and experiential matters relating to higher education provision within the College. Chaired by the Director of Higher Education, this group considers and approves amendments to regulatory policies and procedures relating to higher education; considers the findings from the Higher Education Action Group (HEAG) and from programme reviews; approves the compilation of annual reviews of higher education provision; academic appeals; and student satisfaction. It reviews and identifies actions arising from external examiners' reports, and has oversight of reviews of curriculum provision, and of reports from the Internal Academic Scrutiny Group. The HEAG is responsible for focusing on continual improvement to higher education and evaluating quality mechanisms.

1.11 The College's Academic Regulatory Framework (ARF) forms a comprehensive and effective overarching document for the academic management of all the College's higher education programmes. Recognising the potential for variance between the College's regulations and those of its awarding bodies, it aims to ensure that 'subject areas where multiple academic regulations exist operate under a consistent set of protocols'. Links to the academic regulations of awarding bodies are provided in course handbooks, in the External Examiner Handbook and from the Higher Education Student Arrivals Lounge. The review team found that the academic framework and processes in place at the College would enable this Expectation to be met.

1.12 The team tested the Expectation through further scrutiny of documentation, including minutes of the HEMSG, the HEAG and the Internal Academic Scrutiny Group. The team also met senior and teaching staff to discuss the effectiveness of the processes.

1.13 The review team found that the College's processes are effective overall, and noted that the College's arrangements are checked and verified by the requirements of the validating bodies and by external examiners. Awarding body partnership boards oversee the operation of arrangements and provide detailed partnership reports and periodic reviews of the partnerships with the College, and formal links with programmes through link tutors and other members of staff. The awarding bodies also oversee the assessment processes and issue academic awards/transcripts and certificates. For its Higher National programmes the College incorporates the awarding organisation guidelines into the overarching Higher Education: Quality Assurance, Programme Monitoring and Review Operational Handbook and the Academic Regulatory Framework.

1.14 Members of staff expressed a clear understanding of the academic framework and the academic regulations of the awarding bodies and organisation, including the role of the overarching Academic Regulatory Framework and the availability of links to the awarding bodies' regulations in that document and in the programme handbooks on the Higher Education Arrivals Lounge on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Students confirmed the easy accessibility of the regulations relating to their programmes and assessment on the VLE.

1.15 The College has a secure academic framework for the award of credit. The Expectation is met, and the 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**

1.16 The College meets the requirements of its validating bodies for the maintenance and use of definitive documentation, through the use of validation documentation, programme specifications and module specifications. The team reviewed this documentation and had meetings with students and with senior staff and teaching staff.

1.17 Programme and module specifications are comprehensive and contain clear links to appropriate external reference points. The specifications are available to students and staff on the VLE, with programme handbooks produced to a central specification. Programme specifications for HND programmes were introduced in September 2015 in line with the requirements of Pearson: the review team was unable to see the pro forma for HND programme specifications.

1.18 Students expressed awareness of how to access programme and module specifications through the VLE. Teaching staff were aware of specifications and their links with the College's regulatory framework. The annual reviews of programme specifications carried out by the IASG show careful oversight of the content of, and changes to, specifications.

1.19 The College's awarding bodies are responsible for issuing or overseeing the award transcripts and for producing award certificates.

1.20 The College has effective processes for managing the preparation and use of records of its programmes. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.21 The College's awarding bodies have responsibility for the approval of programmes in line with external reference points; this arrangement would enable the Expectation to be met. The team scrutinised documentation relating to programme validation and the minutes of validation meetings and held meetings with senior staff and teaching staff to confirm that the College follows the requirements of awarding bodies, through validation processes and partnership review arrangements. The College's Higher Education Quality Assurance Operational Handbook sets out processes for the design, operation and review programmes in line with the FHEQ and with Foundation Degree Characteristics, as well as with qualification descriptors, Subject Benchmark Statements and other reference points. External examiners have given consistently positive feedback on the College's use of the external reference points. The team noted evidence of examples of the involvement of students in programme design and approval.

1.22 The College meets the requirements of its awarding bodies with regard to use of external reference points in programme approval. The Expectation is met, with a low level of risk.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.23 The awarding bodies and the organisation retain ultimate responsibility for setting and maintaining the academic standards of the College's awards. The College delivers programmes in accordance with its institutional agreements with its awarding bodies and organisation.

1.24 The College's Academic Regulatory Framework 2015-16 establishes processes for ensuring that assessments demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. The framework contains direct links to relevant awarding body assessment policies, including those for the recognition of prior learning. The document also references the Quality Code and the FHEQ.

1.25 External examiners provide confirmation that assessments conform to national threshold and awarding body standards. Boards of examiners confirm the award of credit for the achievement of learning outcomes. Internal verification and moderation procedures check that assessments allow students to achieve the learning outcomes for their programme. Staff making internal verification judgements receive appropriate assessor and verifier training.

1.26 The processes and procedures of the awarding bodies, organisation, and the College ensure the award of credit for achieving learning outcomes at the appropriate level. The Expectation would be met.

1.27 The team examined assessment documentation, verification and marking records, external examiner reports and minutes of boards of examiners. Meetings with senior and teaching staff and students confirmed that assessments are made against learning outcomes and at the appropriate level.

1.28 Assessment design, marking and moderation processes ensure the award of credit and qualifications for the achievement of learning outcomes aligned to threshold and institutional academic standards. Actions taken by the College as part of the verification process and in response to external examiners' reports show that its processes are effective. The College's response to issues of marking and moderation on its programmes in business and management illustrates the effectiveness of the processes to ensure that assessment practice is robust.

1.29 In accordance with the Foundation Degree Characteristics the College assesses work-based and work-related learning for its foundation degree programmes. External examiners and employers confirm the vocational relevance of assessment activities. External examiners' reports and minutes of assessment boards provide evidence of the effective operation of the assessment processes.

1.30 The College makes effective use of its own assessment regulations and procedures as well as those of its awarding bodies. Its quality assurance arrangements take account of threshold and institutional academic standards, allowing students to demonstrate learning outcomes through assessment. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

## Findings

1.31 Each awarding body requires annual monitoring reports from the College in accordance with its institutional agreement. In addition, the College has its own procedures for internal monitoring and review to assure that it meets appropriate academic standards. Although periodic reviews are the responsibility of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation, the College also has its own templates and process for internal periodic review of programmes.

1.32 The College Quality Assurance Handbook and the College Academic Regulatory Framework 2015-16 govern academic management and review within the College. Mechanisms for quality assurance, such as internal verification of students' work and the extensive processes of module, programme, area and institutional review, maintain the academic standards required by its awarding bodies and organisation. The College's arrangements for internal processes of monitoring and review and for external monitoring by its awarding bodies, organisation and external examiners, enable it to establish that academic standards have been achieved and maintained. The Expectation would therefore be met.

1.33 The team met the Principal, senior staff and teaching staff in order to discuss the application of review processes in ensuring the achievement and maintenance of academic standards. It examined documentation relating to programme monitoring and review and external examiners' reports to check conformity with the processes set out in the policies and procedures.

1.34 References in documentation for validation and review to external sources, including the FHEQ, the *Foundation Degree Characteristics* and the Quality Code, ensure that review processes align appropriately with national standards.

1.35 Awarding bodies and external examiners confirm that programmes meet threshold and institutional academic standards. The College's processes for gathering and analysing achievement data provide extensive information to support the process of monitoring and review. Its monitoring processes are effective in requiring analysis of external examiners' reports to confirm that programmes achieve appropriate academic standards. Effective internal moderation procedures confirm that assessment judgements are at appropriate academic levels.

1.36 Comprehensive College, awarding body and awarding organisation processes of review and monitoring at programme and institutional level secure the maintenance of academic standards. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.37 The College uses independent external academics and employers in its processes for programme approval and review, in order to advise on the appropriate setting and maintenance of academic standards. The College is part of two regional higher education groups, Higher Education in Somerset and the regional Higher Education Academy Strategic Partnership, sharing practice and strategy relative to quality and good practice.

1.38 Representatives of relevant industry sectors, drawn from local and regional businesses, are consulted as part of the process of curriculum design when considering new higher education programmes, in order to align with the College's strategy of developing relevant, vocational higher education. By these means the College aims to ensure that programmes remain current in terms of supporting the ambitions of students to progress, and in supporting local and regional economic growth, as stated in the College's 2015-18 Strategic Plan.

1.39 The composition of validation panels for new higher education programmes includes independent external academics as well as an independent panel member from industry or from professional practice. New Higher National and degree programmes are subject to an internal process of approval overseen by IASG prior to implementation, including the requirement for evidence of demand from industry. External examiners are in place on all higher education programmes, with the awarding body and organisation being responsible for their appointment. External examiners are a major source of external verification and guidance; the use of their external expertise is effective at the College, with external examiners' reports indicating that correct processes are used by the College.

1.40 The processes in place for ensuring the use of external expertise at the College would allow this Expectation to be met.

1.41 The team further tested the Expectation by scrutiny of documentation including documentation relating to the approval of new programmes and external examiners' reports, and met senior staff, teaching staff, support staff and employers. Senior staff confirmed that employers are involved in the development of all programmes, and this was further confirmed in the meeting with employers, where examples were given of co-design and co-review of curriculum with detailed and specific collaboration, including for Higher Apprenticeships.

1.42 Some programme validation documents demonstrate extensive consultation with the relevant sectors prior to validation. For example, the validation document for the FdA Sport Coaching and Fitness in 2014 demonstrates considerable employer engagement in the development phase to ensure its validity. However, the College accepts that the extent of employer involvement has not been consistent to date across all validations, and reviewers heard that the College aims to ensure comparable levels of employer engagement for all programme approval processes.

1.43 Employers are also involved in informing student assessment where appropriate, by means of live projects, placements, final year projects and Employer-Learner Engagement Events (see also Expectation B6). The Employer Ambassador programme is a new development at the College, aiming to 'engage local employers to empower students with a skillset and mind-set that will allow them to know what awaits them, and what is expected of them when they arrive at local businesses seeking employment; it will also support the opportunity for local employers to influence the offerings of Yeovil College to match the demands and dynamics of the local employment market', and employers met at the visit were supportive of the initiative, finding that it enabled the spreading of links beyond the degree subject, for example into procurement and accounting.

1.44 The College's processes for identifying and using external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards are effective, particularly in respect of the use of awarding bodies' processes for programme validation and the extensive use of employers to guide programme design and to inform programme delivery. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

1.45 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this judgement area are met with a low level of risk.

1.46 There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area.

1.47 The College has secure frameworks to ensure that standards are maintained at appropriate levels and that the definitive record of each programme is used to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications.

1.48 The review team concludes that the maintenance of academic standards 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 Its awarding bodies oversee the College's arrangements for the design and approval of programmes, providing independent assurance of the arrangements for programme design, development and approval especially with regard to the use of external reference points, including the FHEQ, as described under Expectation A3.1.

2.2 The College's internal approval process includes scrutiny through a number of management groups, including the IASG, the LEG and the HEMSG, and finally the Senior Management Team. The College aims, through this process, to test the alignment of proposals to external reference points, market demand, College strategy issues and resource availability. The College acknowledged the potential for streamlining its management groups and has begun a review of their structure with a view to reducing the time taken to reach decisions.

2.3 The validation of programmes is conducted under the oversight of the relevant awarding body according to its requirements. The team sampled validation documentation and confirmed that the quality of the student experience was assured through the processes. These arrangements, if implemented securely, would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.4 The team considered the Expectation through scrutiny of documentation relating to programme approval events and through meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

2.5 The College acknowledged that there had been 'significant shifting of the curriculum' since 2011, with a number of programme approvals and programme closures. While the College affirmed its view that it had shown a sustained commitment to the interests of students remaining on programmes which were moving towards closure, it confirmed that the latest date of closure of a programme due to lack of viability had been after the first five days of the clearing period.

2.6 In respect of the operation of its internal approval process, the College was unable to provide examples of the current process in action because of a lack of recent programme developments that had made use of the process. However, the College approved the HND Business and the HND Business (Law) early in 2016, following the unexpected closure by Bournemouth University of the Foundation Degree in Business and Management. While acknowledging that these approvals had not operated fully through the College's processes for new programme development, the College confirmed that the proposal had been considered through HEMSG in order to ensure that student needs were met, and that the HND programmes would be subject to an early periodic review in 2017. The review team was unable to establish the degree of rigour with which the College had tested the proposal for the creation of these programmes or with which it had considered the issues of risk arising from the suspension of its normal approval processes.

2.7 The review team also noted the acknowledgement by the Higher Education Review Group in 2014 that some validations had been incorrectly carried out and that the College must ensure that all future validations go through internal academic scrutiny. The evidence of continuing lack of rigorous scrutiny of proposals for new programmes led the team to **recommend** that the College should establish secure institutional oversight of its processes for the approval of new programmes.

2.8 The lack of secure oversight of processes for approval of new programmes indicates a weakness in the operation of the College's academic governance structure. The Expectation is not met and the level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

2.9 The College's Pre-Entry Advice and Guidance Policy forms part of its Academic Regulatory Framework and is used in approaching the recruitment of prospective students. While entry requirements are pre-determined by awarding bodies, the College has the lead role in reviewing these requirements. The higher education admissions processes and policy are reviewed annually as part of the Academic Regulatory Framework and are published on the website alongside the Student Terms and Conditions for Entry.

2.10 Prospectuses clearly shows details of entry requirements, support provided, and general information as set by the Higher Education Admissions Policy. The College holds a to inform potential applicants about its provision. A range of standardised documentation, including application forms, interview and offer letters, supports the admissions process.

2.11 The responsibility for admission and selection of prospective students is carried out by the Higher Education Administration Team, working with the Student and Customer Services Team and with Curriculum Areas and Programme Teams. Admissions staff are trained through a number of activities both internally and externally, such as the toolkit Supporting Professionalism in Admissions.

2.12 The Learning Support Team provides support for students with additional learning needs and encourages applicants to notify the College at early application stages to facilitate early support or reasonable adjustments.

2.13 The Admissions Policy clearly sets the basis for effective recruitment, selection and admission. The review team tested the evidence through scrutiny of the policy and supporting documents showing its application, and by examining evidence available on the College's VLE, its website and social media platforms. The team also met students and staff to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of the College's processes.

2.14 The College has sound processes for the selection and admission of students. While it has no specific policy towards the admission of students from under-represented groups, it regards it as part of the College's ethos to take steps to do so. Through engagement with employers at open events there are opportunities for students to have an insight directly into future careers and the student experience. Additionally, the College offers helpful advice to parents of potential applicants on higher education and application processes.

2.15 Applicants typically engage with the admissions process through speaking with teaching staff or with employers who are partners of the College. Students told the review team that information for applicants about the College's provision is generally accurate, but drew attention to a small number of courses for which information is either out of date or incorrect. Informal feedback from current students is used to inform the College's marketing strategy.

2.16 The College's public website does not set out the procedure by which an applicant may make an appeal or a complaint in relation to the admissions process. Nevertheless, the Academic Regulatory Framework makes clear that an appeal against an admissions decision may be made by using the College's Academic Appeals Procedure and thereafter by using any appeals procedure of the relevant awarding body. Complaints in respect of the admissions process are initially to be directed to the Higher Education Administration Team, which is itself responsible for admissions processes; the review team noted the possibility of a conflict of interest in handling such complaints.

2.17 Policies for the recruitment, selection and admission of students adhere to the principles of fair admission. The Expectation is met. Shortcomings relate to minor omissions or oversights and to the need to amend details in documentation, therefore the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.18 Teaching and learning on all higher education programmes, regardless of the awarding body, are monitored by the College HEMSG, the LEG and the PIG. The Senior Management Team has overall responsibility for higher education teaching and learning.

2.19 The College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy is specific to higher education and is aligned with *Chapter B3* of the Quality Code. The strategy outlined the aims, core themes and performance indicators relevant to higher education teaching and learning within the College. Core themes identified in the strategy include connectivity with relevant industry sectors, embedding innovation and research and ensuring that teaching and learning is informed by scholarship. Performance indicators include student retention, achievement and success together with student satisfaction, destinations and employability.

2.20 The College's Higher Education: Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy sets out core themes in support of its teaching, learning and assessment structure, and acknowledges the College's objective of improving students' learning opportunities. A key principle of the College's Higher Education Strategy is 'developing ways of managing higher education which recognise the distinctiveness of the teaching, learning, and resourcing strategies needed to achieve success', while the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Guidelines (Levels 1-7) identify how this approach is operationalised. The evidence provided by the College would enable this Expectation to be met. The review team further explored the effectiveness of the College's approach by scrutinising evidence in documentation, and in discussion with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

2.21 The provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices is evaluated at the College in a number of ways, including student feedback via module evaluations and at meetings of Programme Teams, as well as in formal teaching observations and learning walks, peer observation, tutor unit monitoring, thrice-yearly Higher Education Course Reviews, annual programme monitoring and self-assessment at curriculum and cross-College level, as set out in the Higher Education Quality Assurance, Programme, Monitoring and Review Operational Handbook. Teaching practice and performance are formally reviewed on an annual basis through the generic Observation of Teaching, Learning and Assessment procedure, with all staff having a graded observation at least once a year. The process is the responsibility of the Director of Teaching, Learning and Quality. Observations result in the identification of actions for improvement and development, and of areas of good practice for dissemination. This is supported by student feedback through the Learner View Score for the lesson observed. Implementation is monitored by the Director of Learning and Teaching, Learning and Quality.

2.22 Observation of teaching feeds into the thorough system of annual Staff Appraisal and Performance Reviews. Observation scores, learner feedback and information learning technology (ILT) observations inform the teaching and learning aspect of the appraisal, alongside feedback to students and the use of appropriate teaching techniques and resources.

2.23 The peer observation process, as set out in the Peer Development Guidelines, requires each member of teaching staff to undertake classroom observation of another member of staff at least once in every two or three years. It is productive in enabling the identification of good teaching practice, and teaching staff noted in particular the value of seeing progression in sessions from Level 3 to degree level, and the value of peer observation for staff who are new to teaching. The professional development of staff is based on an annual theme, currently the use of information and learning technology in teaching; support staff noted that the peer observation process had identified particular strengths in the use of technology by some staff, who had subsequently disseminated their expertise in professional development sessions for other members of staff. Observation findings are supported by student feedback through the Learner View Score for the lesson observed.

2.24 Staff are qualified for their roles, with all staff qualified (academically or professionally) at a level higher than that of their core delivery. Thirty-five per cent of current higher education staff hold qualifications (other than postgraduate teaching qualifications) at or above master's level, with a further eight per cent presently studying towards a master's qualification. The majority of teaching staff delivering on higher education programmes are qualified teachers, and some more recently appointed staff are completing teaching qualifications on a part-time basis in line with the College contract for academic personnel. Most staff have relevant industry experience and also undertake professional updating, for example sessions on employment law, child protection, IT updating and data protection. The College is a subscriber institution of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and staff are supported in work towards HEA accreditation.

2.25 The review team heard from all levels of the College how support for the development of higher education staff is prioritised, including formal, graded teaching observations, the matching of staff competencies to the UK Professional Standards Framework and the development of a culture of peer observation. The topics of staff development sessions specific to higher education for 2014-16 include the use of Subject Benchmark Statements to inform programme development and teaching practice, the UK Professional Standards Framework and the Quality Code. The College's Scholarly Activity policy defines scholarly activity relevant to the College's higher education provision and outlines the staff entitlement as up to five days' scholarly activity per academic year. Regional research conferences held at the College, led by the Director of Higher Education, have resulted in the establishment of the Journal of Research in Higher and Further Education. The relevance and currency of curriculum delivery, achieved through the extensive support for professional development and updating of teaching staff is **good practice**.

2.26 Higher education at the College is based in its University Centre located on the main College site, with teaching taking place within curriculum areas in appropriate teaching environments. The University Centre comprises a study centre with IT resources, social space and quiet study areas. The University Centre was established in 2015; its impact on levels of student satisfaction will be monitored by the Learner Experience Group.

2.27 Students report that 'the University Centre promotes a self-centred method of learning, and promotes independent learning, and emphasis on learning outside the classroom, which is a staple for any Higher Education environment'. Students also expressed satisfaction with resources, including library and IT resources, together with online and e-library access from the awarding bodies. This view was supported by the National Student Survey outcome for 2015, which showed a level of satisfaction with learning resources of 85 per cent.

2.28 Responsibility for learning resources for the higher education programmes rests with the Director of Higher Education and the HEMSG. The continuing currency of online resources is the responsibility of the Learning Resource Team, which takes part in Programme Team meetings in order to gather particular requirements, for example updates to core and primary texts. This team has combined subject-specialist resources with enhanced accessibility by investment in electronic books, journals, and the sourcing of peer-reviewed open access journals, which are directly accessible through the online library catalogue and through the Learning Resource pages accessible from the VLE.

2.29 The College's VLE has a specific higher education section, with a page for each programme, and the College acknowledges the view, expressed in the student submission to this review, that further monitoring of the VLE is desirable to ensure student satisfaction. The College ILT Group, chaired by the Director of Teaching and Learning, has oversight of the development and monitoring of course content on the VLE. It has established a Bronze-Silver-Gold medal scheme for each VLE area, together with a three-monthly review by assessors from IT Services and feedback from student surveys. Peer and formal observations are used to identify and disseminate good practice on the VLE. While not all pages have yet met the lowest criteria of Bronze, students recognise that progress has been made, and that generally the course pages on the VLE have satisfactory content and are well maintained by staff. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to achieve consistency with institutional standards of course content on VLE pages.

2.30 Professional support staff met at the visit were fully aware of the College's growth strategy, with, for example, an increased library budget for e-resources, journals and books. IT growth has been similarly recognised, with the annual budget increased.

2.31 Student engagement in learning is a key aspect of the Higher Education Student Service Standards, formed and reviewed in partnership with the learner body through the Student Council. The Service Standards outline the commitments of both the University Centre and Learner Body as a partnership within the learning community to facilitate the success of both. It defines the expectations of learners, and what is expected of the University Centre, with clear reference to the engagement with classes, attendance, assessment, and general participation. The Higher Education Student Charter further affirms this, and although students expressed little awareness of either the Charter or the Student Council, the Charter is reviewed annually through the Student Council.

2.32 The College's policies and practices provide a sound basis for secure learning opportunities and teaching practices. The Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

**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**

2.33 The College has a number of processes in place to enable higher education students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Its approach to enabling student development is incorporated in the 2015-18 Strategic Plan and supported by investment in learning resources and student support services. Supporting the Strategic Plan are a range of policies and processes designed to enable the College to fulfil its commitment to student development. The College's Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy contains a core theme of 'a focus on the learner experience, throughout all aspects of their journey'. The Higher Education Growth Strategy notes an emphasis on the role of employment, student progression and employment in the development of higher education programmes. In addition to the Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, the cross-College 2015-16 Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Guidelines Levels 1-7 confirm the College's approach to teaching and learning.

2.34 The College's Senior Management Team, chaired by the Principal, has overall responsibility for the academic work of the College and the quality of learning and teaching. The Board of Studies, chaired by the Director of Higher Education, is responsible for the student experience and for making recommendations for its enhancement, and reports to the HEMSG and the Senior Management Team. These groups are supported by the LEG and the PIG. The process for annual self-assessment at course, curriculum area and College level, articulated in the Higher Education Quality Assurance, Programme Monitoring and Review Operational Handbook, enables the effectiveness of the policies to be evaluated. Students report that their programmes 'prepare them for the next steps'. The College's processes and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.35 The team considered the Expectation by scrutiny of further documentation, including the minutes of meetings of the Senior Management Team and the HEMSG, Higher Education Course Reviews, Programme Committee meetings and the Student Council, and in discussions with senior staff, teaching staff, professional support staff and students.

2.36 The Higher Education Student Charter and the Higher Education Student Service Standards-Revised 2015 set out what students should expect from the College, including clear information about the available student support services and their own responsibilities. Advice and support are available through the Higher Education Arrivals Lounge on the VLE, supported by information in course handbooks, including that for the Additional Learning Support team. Prior to entry, and in line with the College's Pre-Entry Advice and Guidance Policy, students are advised as to the relative costs associated with their programmes of study, and in particular (where relevant) costs associated with specialist equipment that will be required. In addition, the College does manage a small hardship budget for higher education students where individual applications are reviewed on a needs basis by the Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality.

2.37 Induction for all first year students includes a Learning Centre Induction, Induction into the VLE and the Higher Education Arrivals Lounge (including Meta-Notices from the University Centre), academic writing (and offences), the Students' Union and Student Representation, Personal Development Planning and the online portfolio system. Students confirmed that in general they found their induction to be useful and informative. They also

confirmed that they received a further induction on commencing subsequent years of study. Induction activities are followed by a programme induction with an introduction to the programme specification, course documentation, core texts and the teaching team. Timetables are released, and induction tasks are set locally by the Curriculum Areas. Course handbooks are comprehensive and provide detailed information on all aspects of the programme and resources, and direct new students to the Higher Education Arrivals Lounge on the VLE, from where central communications to all higher education learners are conducted using the Meta-Notice service. The 2015 induction survey noted high satisfaction levels (84-98 per cent) with a higher average satisfaction rate (95 per cent) than in the previous three years. The College has adjusted arrangements for blended learning students, ensuring the same access to support services and the VLE as other students together with their own individual learning plans.

2.38 All students are encouraged to undertake personal development planning in order to develop autonomy and set incremental targets for their time at the College. They are introduced to personal development planning at induction and through one-to-one tutorials. Personal development planning has been facilitated with a focus on integration with the portfolio system on the VLE; although students reported dissatisfaction with the system, senior staff confirmed that they recognise the difficulties and are working with students to resolve them. Students and staff recognise the value of undertaking personal development planning, and are using methods other than the portfolio system to record students' personal and professional objectives, strengths and areas for improvement, such as portfolios of achievement.

2.39 Careers advice is provided by the National Careers Service at key points throughout the academic year, with advisers visiting the College and being available to higher education students. Students reported that, although they understand that this service has been reduced, careers advice is nevertheless readily signposted and available, and that practitioner advice from guest speakers is very well received. Students and alumni may additionally use the services of awarding bodies, but the review team heard that this is not well used.

2.40 The Higher Education Student Liaison Officer, working within the College's Student Experience Team, is charged with providing informal and formal support (including workshops on debt, student finance, learning needs, and other pastoral opportunities). The Student Charter and Student Service Standards provide additional support in student development and achievement by outlining the expectations and actions of working as part of the learning community within the University Centre. Where specific additional learning support is required following diagnostic assessment or self-referral this is put in place by the Additional Learning Support team.

2.41 The success rate in 2013-14 for higher education students at the College was 89 per cent across all of its programmes, although four Higher National programmes and one foundation degree were regarded by the College as being of concern, with success rates between 38 per cent and 58 per cent. Measures to aid student retention include support and counselling, with additional learning support offered to all students. Measures taken to further pastoral support, and hence retention, include the relocation to the University Centre and professional development activities specific to additional learning needs, and mental health support undertaken by staff. Personal tutorials are timetabled at least once a term, with more available if required. Students reported positively on the open-door approach of staff and the helpfulness of the tutorial sessions, both academic and developmental.

2.42 Work-based and work-related learning form part of the majority of the higher education programmes at the College, linked to the strategic aim of integrating academic rigour and context with high level vocational skills. Work placements, live project briefs and

the development of entrepreneurial skills develop students' awareness and preparation for progression to employment. Students confirmed the usefulness of experience in the workplace, and assessment linking theory to practice, and noted the support they receive from the College's Employer Engagement staff in finding an alternative placement if that becomes necessary. Employers noted examples of students' personal and professional development during their time at the College, including students' demeanour, holistic thinking, understanding the impact of what they do, the growth from student to employee, taking responsibility and developing confidence. The extensive opportunities for students' professional development, provided by employers' widespread engagement in curriculum delivery and employability support is **good practice**.

2.43 While the College's programmes include no particular areas of weakness in relation to student progression to employment after completion, graduate destinations data for 2015 shows some areas of particular strength, including business (81 per cent progression to relevant employment); teacher training (88 per cent); early years care (74 per cent); creative industries (76.7 per cent); and computing (70 per cent). Data for 2014 and 2015 show an increase from 80 to 84 per cent of students successfully progressing following graduation.

2.44 The impact of the College's policies and processes associated with student development and achievement is assessed through student and staff feedback at Higher Education Course Reviews and Programme Team meetings, as well as through the Student Council and through the College's self-assessment process. As the Higher Education Course Review process and annual monitoring are monitored by the HEMSG, the outcomes of the assessment inform the College's Higher Education Strategy and Higher Education Growth Strategy, in turn monitored by SMT and the Governing Body.

2.45 The College has strategies and processes in place which are effective in enabling students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, and therefore this Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

**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**

2.46 College strategy documents place students at the centre of their own learning experience and the strategy of the College. The Higher Education Strategy demonstrates that there is an overall aim to enhance and develop the student experience through enabling 'students to contribute to the shaping of their learning experience, and strategic direction of the University Centre Yeovil'. The Student Charter outlines the expectations of students and those that students should expect from the College. Responsibility for the student experience lies with the Student Experience Manager, who works with the Higher Education Student Liaison Officer to provide support and guidance to students. Via the VLE, students are able to access and use the student representation system (such as the Students' Union) of their awarding body.

2.47 The College's Higher Education Strategy details the mechanisms to engage students in developing their academic experience. Student engagement within the College comprises student representation at programme levels as well as representation on two College-level committees, the Board of Studies and the Board of Corporation. There is a Student Council whose monthly meetings, inconsistently known as Student Shouts, are open to all students, and a recently developed Students' Union. The review team heard that minutes of the Council are made available on the VLE. The Chair and Vice-Chair of Student Council are members of the Board of Studies. Although reviewers heard that a Student Governor is a member of the Board of Corporation, evidence from its meetings showed no indication of the effectiveness of this representation.

2.48 Changes brought about as a result of student feedback through the representative system include improvements to the darkroom for students on the Foundation Degree in Photography, improvements to technical facilities for students on the Foundation Degree in Graphic Design, and improved equipment and IT access for students on the Foundation Degree in Sport Coaching and Fitness.

2.49 For most programmes, the composition of the Programme Team includes student representatives, and during induction students are made aware of the student representation system. The Higher Education Student Liaison Officer provides training for student representatives, who may also benefit from the Guide to Student Representation. The student representatives' template for Programme Team Meetings provides an effective structure for eliciting student views.

2.50 Core information on student engagement is communicated to students through the VLE, the HE Arrivals Lounge and social media platforms. The Higher Education Arrivals Lounge, an online resource for students, enables anonymous feedback to the College. The Wider Information Set, available through the Higher Education Arrivals Lounge, offers key policy and supporting information. The College has a number of initiatives to engage students. The design of the College's student representation system would, if effectively implemented, be sufficient to enable the Expectation to be met.

2.51 The review team tested evidence in relation to student engagement through scrutiny policy documents and minutes and papers of committees. Additionally, the team studied evidence available on the VLE, the College website and social media platforms.

The review team further met students, teaching staff and support staff to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of the College's processes.

2.52 Students expressed the view that they have built good relationships with teaching staff, and that they are more likely to raise any concerns with Programme Leaders than through student representatives. While students expressed satisfaction with the support that they receive, nevertheless the College's representational system contains a number of weaknesses. There is no formalised and consistently used system to gather the views of student representatives, to formulate and communicate responses and to monitor actions. Some programmes do not have student representation on Programme Teams. Students expressed a low level of awareness of the Student Charter and of the committees of which students are members, including the Student Council and Student Shout. Although the College wishes to further develop the Students' Union and to seek student views to inform its development, there is currently no forum for all students to gather, without the presence of staff, to voice their opinions. There is evidence of engagement from students but this varies on a year-by-year basis.

2.53 Training for student representatives is provided in the form of a training handbook and a presentation offered by the Student Liaison Officer. Although the materials indicate an informative and helpful approach to training, not all representatives have undergone training, there is no system to monitor take-up, and there are inconsistencies between the information in the handbook and that in the presentation.

2.54 There is little evidence to show that students' views inform the strategic direction of the College. Although the composition of the Board of Studies and of the Board of Corporation includes student membership, there is no evidence of the effectiveness of this representation. Minutes from Student Council meetings show that there are opportunities for students to express views regarding the learning environment, but the issues discussed do not relate to the strategic direction of higher education in the College. Issues discussed at meetings of the Board of Corporation are more operational than strategic.

2.55 The lack of fully effective and formalised systems to gather and to respond to the student voice leads the review team to **recommend** that the College should strengthen the student representation system to further engage students as partners in quality assurance and enhancement, and introduce a system to monitor its effectiveness.

2.56 The College has only partially effective systems to engage students as partners in enhancing their educational experience, therefore the Expectation is not met. Shortcomings are indicative of weaknesses in the College's governance structure. The level of risk is moderate.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.57 The College's agreements with its awarding bodies establish its responsibilities for applying regulations and assessment procedures to secure valid and reliable assessment outcomes. The College's own assessment regulations and procedures complement those of its awarding bodies and meet the requirements of its awarding organisation, including the establishment of protocols for late submission and referral.

2.58 Programme specifications provide a definitive course record of the programme structure and outcomes assessed, communicated to students through programme handbooks and the VLE Arrivals Lounge.

2.59 Responsibility for setting, marking and moderation of assessments varies according to the agreement with the awarding body or organisation. The College develops most assessment instruments, except for the franchised Foundation Degree in Forensic Science and the Postgraduate Certificate in Post-Compulsory Education and Training, for which the awarding body sets the assessment.

2.60 A wide range of supporting documentation assists teaching staff in designing and improving assessments. The Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, Guidelines and the Academic Regulatory Framework establish the framework within which assessments are designed, while the Assessment and Feedback Good Practice Guide and the A-Z of Assessment Methods encourage improved practice.

2.61 The College has clear procedures for the electronic submission of assessment. It internally moderates all assessments and awarding bodies and external examiners approve assessments prior to issue. College staff mark assessments, and samples of student work undergo moderation and second marking by staff of the College and the awarding bodies.

2.62 Support for the development of secure assessment practice in students starts at induction, continuing through drop-in sessions and support from the Learning Resource Centre. The College uses electronic plagiarism-detection software to support good practice in academic writing.

2.63 The College has clearly articulated and easily available guides and procedures on the VLE for the recognition of prior learning, whether credited or due to relevant experience, and how this should be implemented.

2.64 The College operates under agreements, regulations and with its own policies and procedures providing a clear framework for equitable, valid and reliable assessments. Its procedures for recognition of prior learning, avoidance of academic misconduct, moderation and conduct of assessment boards are thorough. The College would meet the Expectation.

2.65 The review team met with senior staff, teaching and support staff to test the application of assessment regulations and procedures. It read documents including the Assessment Regulatory Framework, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Guidelines, and the Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. The team held meetings with students and employers to confirm the range and vocational relevance of assessments, the application of assessment regulations and feedback practice.

2.66 The College's VLE, programme handbooks and specifications contain clear guides for staff and students on policies, procedures and regulations relating to assessment. Students' knowledge of the nature of their assessments and of programme learning outcomes commences with attendance at College higher education open events, interviews and pre-application advice and guidance. The Transition to University resource for new entrants to higher education prepares students for new types and levels of assessment. Steps to encourage good academic practice are thorough. The College supports academic writing and referencing at induction and during the year. Handbooks and the VLE contain guidance on assessment regulations and academic writing. Induction programmes introduce specific assessment methodologies, assessment schedules and module guides, together with an introduction to the VLE for access to all assessment materials, guidelines and regulations. Personal development planning also supports assessment literacy through the Student Self-Assessment Form and the Student Feedback Action Plan. Students confirmed familiarity with using anti-plagiarism software, and with assessment regulations relating to extensions, late submission and applying for consideration of mitigating circumstances in assessment.

2.67 Staff provided examples of how the assessment design process uses programme documentation, external reference points and external expertise to provide vocationally relevant and varied assessments. Students and employers confirm the variety and vocational relevance of assessments. The College makes reasonable adjustments to assessments for students with protected characteristics, in consultation with awarding bodies. The College has clearly articulated statements on the recognition of prior learning and staff provided examples of applying this appropriately.

2.68 Internal verification processes ensure that assessment instruments enable all students to demonstrate that they have met the intended learning outcomes. A panel independent of the subject area scrutinises examination question papers before issue to ensure fitness for purpose. Records of the panel show it to be effective in securing clarity and consistency without interfering in academic decisions. Second marking and moderation records document the respective processes and regulations applying to the awarding body or organisation. The College has a single template for monitoring internal assessment and moderation, although the document does not record the detail of the process of arriving at the agreed mark. External examiners verify the processes of detailed second marking whether internally or by awarding bodies.

2.69 The College's policy is to provide written feedback on assessments within either three weeks (for programmes leading to awards of Bournemouth University, Pearson, and the University of Wales Trinity St David) or four weeks (for programmes leading to awards of the University of the West of England, Bristol; and the University of Gloucestershire). The team heard of instances of feedback not being received within these timescales and noted low scores in the National Student Survey for timeliness of feedback in some curriculum areas. The College is addressing the issue of providing timely assessment feedback: centralised gathering of data on assessment and feedback, and consideration of this data in programme reviews, have led to improvements in assessment turnaround time. The team **affirms** the steps taken through active monitoring to ensure consistently timely feedback on student work.

2.70 Students report overall satisfaction with the assessment process, including the information, deadlines and quality of feedback. Examples of feedback on assessed work show helpful and supportive comments with clear advice on how to improve. Electronic submission through plagiarism detection software supports assessment monitoring.

2.71 End-of-year assessment boards take place for all programmes and include external membership. Pearson programmes additionally have interim award boards at which student achievement and progression are recorded. Minutes of boards of examiners show that procedures for fair and appropriate decisions for the award of qualifications are followed.

2.72 The College's management of assessment allows students to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes for their programme of study. Processes for conducting assessments are valid and reliable. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

### **Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

#### **Findings**

2.73 The College sets out the role of the external examiners for its higher education programmes in the External Examiner Handbook. The responsibility for responding to external examiners' reports lies with the College, or is shared with the awarding body in the case of the University of the West of England, Bristol.

2.74 For HNC/D and franchised programmes external examiners and verifiers are appointed by the awarding body and organisation, while for validated programmes the College nominates suitable individuals, who are approved in principle by the HEMSG prior to approval by the relevant awarding body.

2.75 The College adheres to the regulations of its awarding bodies and organisation regarding the role of external examiners, as set out in the External Examiner Handbook. While lacking detail on some aspects of processes, the Handbook includes links to the awarding bodies' regulations, where the relevant processes are available. External examiners' reports indicate that they are able to carry out their role satisfactorily. Induction and briefing of newly appointed external examiners is shared between the College and the awarding body. The curriculum area has the responsibility to provide all material relevant to assessment, to advise external examiners of the arrangements for examiners' meetings and to brief external examiners on all relevant aspects of the operation of the course/programme. The evidence provided by the College would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.76 The team assessed the use that the College makes of external examiners' reports by scrutiny of minutes of meetings at which external examiners' reports were discussed, of programme action plans, College self-assessment reports, higher education self-evaluations and action plans, and the external examiner action plan, and in discussion with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

2.77 The majority of external examiners' reports for 2014-15 acknowledge satisfactory receipt of assessment material sufficient to enable them to carry out their role. All reports state that the assessment enables students to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes at a satisfactory standard, and note some aspects of good practice in the FdA Educational Support and the FdA Fine Art.

2.78 Upon receipt by the College, external examiners' reports are initially reviewed by the Director of Higher Education. Reports are then distributed, with first-look commentary, to the Vice-Principal Curriculum and Quality, Director of Curriculum, Curriculum Area Manager and Programme Leader. The reports, with responses written by each Programme Leader informed by input from the Programme Team, are made available to students in the Higher Education Arrivals Lounge. The Director of Higher Education reviews responses to external examiners' reports prior to sending them to the external examiners and uploading them to the VLE. These responses are also shared with awarding bodies and are monitored through Partnership Boards.

2.79 Actions and observations arising from external examiners' reports inform the external examiner action plan, which is monitored by the HEMSG. Any actions identified through these reports, in addition to feedback from awarding bodies' link tutors, are recorded in the Programme Action Plan for monitoring by both the Programme Team and, through the programme student representative, by students. External examiners' reports and the action

plan are further discussed at Board of Studies and feed into annual programme monitoring and the self-assessment process.

2.80 Students expressed awareness of the role of external examiners for their programmes. Some second year students confirmed that they had met the external examiner and that they knew where to find the external examiners' reports on the VLE.

2.81 The processes in place at the College to review external examiner reports, detailed in the External Examiner Handbook, are effective in identifying, responding to and monitoring issues raised, and for the dissemination of good practice identified. Mechanisms include the evaluation of reports across a range of monitoring stages, including at unit and programme level and in curriculum area self-evaluation documentation and the whole-College self-evaluation document. These processes are well understood by staff the review team met. They were able to give examples of input from external examiners additional to their reports, for example observation of student presentations.

2.82 The processes in place at the College and the awarding bodies are effective in ensuring scrupulous use of external examiners. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review**

**Findings**

2.83 The College's Quality Assurance Handbook sets out its processes for monitoring and review. Awarding bodies require Annual Monitoring Reports from the College; module-level reviews use module evaluation templates (METs) to evaluate module structure, teaching, assessment and resources. Students complete METs, which inform programme and curriculum area monitoring. Unit module reviews (UMRs) are reviews made by module leaders, which are informed by external examiners' reports and students' views.

2.84 Periodic programme reviews are the responsibility of the awarding bodies and organisation, although the College has its own internal periodic review process. No College programmes have been subject to periodic review, but the Quality Assurance Handbook contains templates and procedures for internal Programme Periodic Review.

2.85 Programme level review operates through Programme Team meetings (PTMs), which implement rolling programme action plans (PAPs). Student representatives' reports feed into PTMs, whose composition includes student representatives. The meetings also consider reports from external examiners, link tutors and the Learning Resource Centre, which culminate in annual monitoring programme reports (AMPRs). Further programme-level review takes place at Higher Education Course Reviews, conducted three times a year by senior staff with Programme Teams. PAPs and AMPRs feed into these reviews, which include feedback from student representatives, the National Student Survey results, employer feedback and a reflective summary of programme performance. The reviews also monitor individual student performance.

2.86 Programme-level monitoring through the AMPR process contributes to the development of annual curriculum area self-evaluation documents and the annual Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document, which is reviewed by the Senior Management Team and presented to the Board of the Corporation.

2.87 A wide range of groups conduct regular monitoring and management of higher education programmes. The HEMSG manages higher education affairs through meetings five times a year. The HEAG focusses on process and progress on higher education programmes. The LEG meets weekly to manage operational issues across all College programmes, including higher education. Pre-Learner Experience Groups prepare the ground for the LEGs. The PIG meets termly to analyse data across all College programme levels, identifying targets. The College intends to review its procedures for monitoring and review of programmes and is currently reviewing its present committee structure in recognition of concerns that decision making may be taking longer than is necessary.

2.88 The College's systematic processes for frequent monitoring and regular review at programme, curriculum area, College and awarding body levels, with inputs from students and external examiners, and the gathering and analysis of data, lead to regularly monitored action plans and would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.89 The review team scrutinised documentary evidence of the College's processes in action and met the Principal, senior managers, teaching staff and support staff and

employers in order to understand how groups and individuals contribute to the processes of monitoring and review.

2.90 The College's processes for review and monitoring are thorough, albeit somewhat complex. Although they provide analysis and supervision of higher education provision which is extensive, detailed and regular, the College has acknowledged that some processes are not being followed. Unit module reviews are detailed and reflective, identifying key strengths and areas for improvement. Programme action plans are clear with measurable outcomes, targets, monitoring and assessment of risk. AMPRs are thorough, reflecting on student performance data, and inputs from students, external examiners, employers and other stakeholders. Full implementation of curriculum area self-evaluation documents, introduced for 2015-16, is incomplete but allows identification and comparison of trends and common issues between programmes within a cognate area, except in the curriculum area for computing, which has a single programme. The Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document (HE SED) from 2013-14 is comprehensive, with detailed statistical analysis combined with reflections on performance actions and trends. The document clearly identifies areas of under-performance at programme level and addresses steps to achieve improvement. The use of the Higher Education Review Self-Evaluation document in place of the College's own 2014-15 HE SED limits the depth of analysis provided compared with the 2013-4 document. The College recognises this limitation and will return to the normal review template for 2015-16. The team heard that statistical analysis and, in particular, the identification of, and actions relating to, programme under-performance were sufficiently robust in other elements of the review process.

2.91 The action plan in the Higher Education Review Self-Evaluation, used as the 2014-15 HE SED, recognises that review documentation does not explicitly identify enhancement initiatives or practice. While the extensive processes of monitoring and review have led to improvements in the quality of student learning opportunities and the generation of the eight enhancement themes, it is unclear how they allow the College to identify its enhancement priorities.

2.92 Many examples of improvements to student learning opportunities resulting from monitoring and review are evident in the documentary evidence and from meetings with staff and students. Students identified improvements to module assessment and delivery resulting from module review and teaching staff explained how programme reviews provide evidence for resource improvements. Senior managers explained how monitoring processes were leading to improvements in assessment and feedback.

2.93 Regular monitoring of the College by its awarding bodies takes place through annual monitoring reports (University of Gloucestershire), partner quality reports (Bournemouth University) and partnership lead reports (University of the West of England, Bristol). Additionally, the awarding bodies carry out regular institutional reviews of the partnership. The College has yet to implement a process for internal periodic review; documents show a process involving a review panel, external subject specialists, and meetings with students and appropriate stakeholders.

The College's monitoring and review processes are extensive, effective, regular and systematic and result in actions to secure improvements. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.94 The Academic Regulatory Framework sets out procedures for handling complaints and appeals against academic decisions through the College's own published systems and as published in the Higher Education Arrivals Lounge. This framework is annually reviewed. Students may approach the Student Experience Manager and/or Programme Leaders for guidance and support on making a complaint or an appeal. The College shares responsibility for handling academic appeals and complaints with its awarding bodies.

2.95 Complaints and appeals are monitored through the LEG and the HEMSG, although minutes of their meetings show little evidence of consistent monitoring and evaluation of outcomes of complaints and appeals. The College subscribes to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

2.96 The review team tested the evidence through scrutiny of policies and procedures and of minutes and papers of meetings. The review team met students, teaching staff and support staff to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of these processes described in documentation.

2.97 The evidence shows that there are generally sound practices for appeals and complaints. Students expressed the view that they are well supported and informed on where to find information about the appeals and complaints process, and expressed awareness that they should also follow the procedures of the relevant awarding body.

2.98 The review team identified some omissions or oversights in the complaints procedure. The use of the word 'appeal' in the context of this procedure is potentially misleading. The reference to the Skills Funding Agency instead of the OIA appears to be an oversight. The review team **recommends** that the College should revise the wording of its procedures for appeals and complaints to ensure clarity of terminology.

The College's procedures for handling complaints and appeals are generally sound. The Expectation is met. Weaknesses relate to minor omissions or oversights in documentation. The level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.99 The College's provision includes work-based learning, particularly work placements, as well as the involvement of employers in the design and development of the curriculum, building employability networks. It regards work-based learning and its relationships with local and regional employers as central to the development and delivery of much of its provision. Work placements are integral to the foundation degree provision and significant to the HND curriculum across the College.

2.100 There are explicit and appropriate policies and guides to cover all aspects of work placement provision, together with guidance in the definitive programme and module specifications. The work placement guides and policies include provision for the allocation of work-related learning tutors based with the College and supervision at the work place; guidance on how to apply for placements; provision for induction; arrangements for personal development planning, appraisal and assessment; provision for the termination of placements; feedback and complaints; and health and safety, insurance and other legal arrangements.

2.101 There are arrangements to ensure that students have access to a variety of work-based placements and Programme Teams, led by programme leaders and curriculum area managers, are responsible for overseeing the effective operation of these arrangements. The College carries out due diligence checks on employers and has agreements with employers defining the responsibilities of each party and safeguarding the interests of students with regard to personal safety and the quality of their experience on placement. These arrangements are sufficient to ensure that the Expectation would be met.

2.102 The team scrutinised documentary evidence, including policies and guides on work-placements and module and programme specifications, and held discussions with students, senior staff, teaching staff, support staff and employers.

2.103 Although students are responsible for finding their own work placements, the College offers guidance and support and, although it does not have a policy in this regard, has occasionally offered placements within the College itself for students who have failed to find their own placements.

2.104 Students on work placements have regular review meetings with their work-based supervisors and tutors based in College, which fit into the wider arrangements for personal development planning and assessment. Teacher trainees are assigned trained mentors, with regular observations and mentoring meetings. Students taking Higher Apprenticeships have performance reviews every six weeks, involving their employer, training support officer, and the Programme Leader, to consider their progress against the framework. Students expressed appreciation of the level of support in respect of their placements from employers and from the College, including the College's Employer Engagement Staff, and spoke in positive terms about the value of their work-based learning. Employers referred positively to the professional development of students during their studies at the College and their time on placement.

2.105 Employers of placement students are not directly involved with summative assessments on student work, but inform the assessment process by contributing to the provision of feedback to students. For example, employers are involved in live work-based briefs; approval of initiation documents for student work-based projects, and the evaluation of student presentations. Programme Teams carry out briefings of employers about assessment organisation and expectations.

2.106 The College's relationships with employers for work-based learning are managed securely and, by making an effective contribution to students' professional development, support the good practice identified in Expectation B4. The Expectation is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees***

2.107 The College does not offer research degrees.

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

2.108 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Two Expectations (B1 and B5) are not met and are associated with a moderate level of risk. The level of risk was judged to be low for all other Expectations.

2.109 There are two features of good practice in this judgement area, relating to the relevance and currency of curriculum delivery and to the extensive opportunities for students' professional development.

2.110 The review team made three recommendations in respect of the quality of student learning opportunities. The first relates to the need to secure institutional oversight of the College's process for the approval of new programmes. The second follows from the lack of formalised policy for engaging students as partners in quality assurance. The third arises from lack of clarity in the wording of the College's procedures for appeals and complaints.

2.111 The review team made two affirmations of actions being undertaken by the College. The first arises from the need for consistency with institutional standards for content on VLE pages. The second relates to the steps being taken to achieve consistently timely feedback on students' assessed work.

2.112 The review team concludes that 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's publicly available information, obtainable electronically, addresses each aspect of the student experience in the College. The College's website is managed by the Marketing Department under the oversight of the Head of Marketing and with the Director of Higher Education being responsible for approving information relating to higher education, including information about the admissions process and about the Wider Information Set and the Key Information Set. The College states that it has an annual process of updating programme information involving Programme Teams, with information verified by Curriculum Area Managers and the Director of Higher Education.

3.2 The team tested the expectation through meetings with students and with professional support staff, and by scrutinising the College's electronic and paper-based information.

3.3 The College has made a substantial investment in the development of its VLE, including resources for students through the Higher Education Arrivals Lounge and for staff through the virtual staff room and the Higher Education Washing Line. The VLE is the primary source of information about regulations and quality. Students expressed wide awareness of programme and institutional information available on the VLE and spoke in mostly positive terms about its usefulness.

3.4 The review team heard mostly positive feedback from students about the information available to them and its accessibility. Students expressed satisfaction with the quality of the information available at the time of admission and beyond. The website provides clear information about the College's relationships with its awarding bodies, and about its external examiners; the VLE offers access to external examiners' reports and responses. The College has secure arrangements with its awarding bodies for the provision of detailed records of student achievements and for the issue of award certificates.

3.5 The review team noted a number of broken links, omissions or lack of accessibility and inconsistencies in the College's web-based information. The team failed to find the Admissions Policy and the institutional terms and conditions on the external website. The version of the complaints procedure available on the external website was not consistent with the internal version. There were several instances of broken links in the Higher Education Quality Assurance Operational Handbook. Information on the VLE about the Students' Union appeared to be outdated and the page for Student Support was unavailable. The review team **recommends** that the College should establish more effective editorial control of information available on its website.

3.6 Programme handbooks are available only electronically and are produced to a standard template, the Director of Higher Education being responsible for approving materials produced by programme leaders. Students expressed varying levels of awareness of programme handbooks, although most spoke positively. Handbooks include variable levels of information on, for example, complaints procedures and the student representative

system, although the information is available to all students through the Arrivals Lounge on the VLE.

3.7 The College provides a substantial range of information, which is accessible to students and potential students. Shortcomings in editorial control are indicative of a need to amend or update details in documentation and will not require major change. The Expectation is met and the level of risk of low.

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

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

3.8 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The University manages its responsibilities for the production of information for its various audiences effectively. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

3.9 There are no features of good practice or affirmations in this judgement area. The single recommendation relates to the need to establish more effective editorial control of public information on the College's website.

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

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College's Strategic Plan establishes priorities for higher education provision at the College. Further growth of student numbers and breadth of programmes, coupled with vocational relevance of the curriculum offer to meet local employment needs and provide progression opportunities to students, are central to the strategy. The Higher Education Strategy seeks to provide an appropriately resourced environment for high quality student experience, engagement and enhanced learning opportunities.

4.2 The College recently consolidated the elements of its enhancement strategy into a single document, the Learning Opportunity and Enhancement Strategy 2015-16, with eight enhancement themes derived from the College's mission and its Higher Education Strategy. These themes are Student Partnerships, Technology Enhanced Learning, Assessment and Feedback, Transitions, Curriculum of Choice and Opportunity, Employability and Employer Engagement, Teaching, Academic and Professional Practice, and Equality and Inclusion.

4.3 Opportunities to share good practice are extensive through peer observation of teaching, teaching and learning breakfast meetings, Speed Dating, and Cake and a Date events and, in particular, the annual Review and Improvement Day and the best practice section of the higher education virtual staffroom on the VLE. The College has implemented effectively a recommendation from the 2011 IQER report to share good practice on a more formal and frequent basis.

4.4 Opportunities to identify enhancement activities in a planned and systematic manner are plentiful through the extensive range of groups and processes of management, review and monitoring. The HEMSG is the main forum for considering all matters related to higher education, which includes identifying improvements arising from student opinion, programme review processes and from external examiners' reports.

4.5 Opportunities for enhancement and sharing good practice arise from quality improvement processes. An ethos promoting the improvement of student learning opportunities is clear across the College. The Learning Opportunity and Enhancement strategy 2015-16 identifies deliberate steps to enhance student learning opportunities. The Expectation would be met.

4.6 To test the College's strategic and operational approach to improving the quality of students' learning opportunities, the review team met the Principal and senior staff and examined the College's Strategic Plan, Higher Education Strategy and the Learning Opportunity and Enhancement Strategy 2015-16. Meetings with teaching staff and support staff, and students, confirmed the commitment to improve. Minutes of meetings and review and self-evaluation documents provided evidence of where the College considered and implemented improvement opportunities.

4.7 The College's Learning Opportunity and Enhancement Strategy 2015-16 is operational as it is drawn from current practice, although the document has yet to be confirmed as College policy and not all staff are yet aware of it. The College has yet to identify clear priorities within the strategy in order to implement and disseminate systematic, planned and deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning experiences, although the review team identified a variety of priorities being expressed in meetings and

documents. The Principal identified enhancement priorities of improved assessment practice, IT enhancement and teaching and learning strategies. Senior staff provided examples of improvements to National Student Survey procedures but also identified a priority in improved in assessment and feedback. Teaching staff suggested that enhancement initiatives were different for each subject area but that employer involvement and student engagement were priorities. The self-assessment document, which serves as the HE SED for 2014-15, identifies a broad range of enhancement initiatives including improvements to premises, personal development planning and student participation. The document does not identify clear enhancement initiatives arising from the reflective review of higher education programmes and recognises in the action plan that review documentation does not explicitly identify enhancement initiatives or practice. The team **recommends** that the College identifies and embeds clear enhancement priorities in order to secure effective dissemination and implementation of its enhancement strategy.

4.8 As described in Expectation B8, the extensive processes of monitoring and review allow the College to improve the quality of student learning opportunities. The team heard how the College identifies priorities for improvement arising from the observation of teaching. The theme identified by this process for 2015-16 is to improve the use of technology-enhanced learning, a clear enhancement theme articulated in the enhancement strategy. The team also heard how quality processes lead to improvements through changes to module evaluation templates to capture student opinion more effectively for module content and delivery. A major enhancement to student learning opportunities in previous years was moving the University Centre to the main site. This provided students with improved physical space, learning resources and feeling of identity within the wider College. This enhancement initiative derived from student surveys, meetings and programme review processes. Teaching staff confirmed the effectiveness of systems for the sharing of good practice, providing examples of improvements to teaching, feeding forward on assessment, the use of technology and use of the virtual staffroom to discuss improvements.

4.9 The College has a clear commitment to encouraging improvements to the quality of learning opportunities. The College identifies and shares good practice and has a range of documented enhancement initiatives. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low

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

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

4.10 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The College takes deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The single Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

4.11 There are no features of good practice or affirmations in this judgement area. The single recommendation relates to the need to secure effective dissemination and implementation of the College's enhancement strategy.

4.12 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 Much of the College's provision is vocationally focused and it recognises the need for strong structures to embed employability within its curricula. This is echoed in the College's Strategic Plan and Higher Education Strategy. The College uses the USEM Model of Employability to strategically integrate employability into the curriculum. Strong relationships with local employers help it to develop and enhance the curriculum at all levels.

5.2 The College provides a range of opportunities for students to develop their employability skills. These include production of portfolios through personal development planning and engagement of students in work-based placements and employer-led curricula, developed by employers and the College in partnership.

5.3 The College has strong and productive links with local and regional employers. Feedback from employers informs reviews of curriculum structure and the development of new programmes. Collaboration with employers has led to opportunities for Higher Apprenticeships through Trailblazer programmes particularly in healthcare, computing and engineering. The College provides platforms such as the Future Forward programme, which allows students to develop through workshops and insights into various professions.

5.4 The College's Personal Development Planning programme enables students to reflect on their progress, to produce an action plan to develop their skills, and to recognise how these skills fit into the curriculum they are following. Although personal development planning is not implemented across the College's provision, students confirmed that they find it to be useful and that it is most effective when embedded in their curriculum.

5.5 On some programmes, students have opportunities to undertake work placements, which, as described in Expectation B10, make an effective contribution to students' professional development.

5.6 Students receive career development and guidance through their interaction with teaching staff and employers rather than through the services of a designated careers service. The College's data show that, in 2015, 63 per cent of its graduates progressed to employment and a further 20 per cent to further study.

5.7 The College has chosen not to use Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) for its students, believing that the HEAR is not well understood by employers. It does, however, produce an alternative to the HEAR through the Personal Development Planning programme and its electronic resource, where students can create a profile or portfolio similar to the HEAR.

5.8 The College has embedded student employability into its provision. There is clear evidence of student progression into employment as a result of initiatives implemented by the College and the strong relationships that the College has with local and regional employers.

## 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](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality)

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

### **Programme (of study)**

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

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

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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