

Higher Education Review of Herefordshire and Ludlow College

February 2014

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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 Herefordshire and Ludlow College. The review took place from 4-6 February 2014 and is conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Christopher Clare
- Miss Sarah Riches
- Mr Joshua Wright (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review is to investigate the higher education provided by Herefordshire and Ludlow 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](#) (Quality Code)¹ setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
 - the setting and maintenance of threshold 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 5.

In reviewing Herefordshire and Ludlow 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 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.³ A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#) of higher education providers in England and Northern Ireland⁴ and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Herefordshire and Ludlow College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **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 Herefordshire and Ludlow College.

- The design of programmes enables students to acquire additional vocationally relevant accreditations (Expectation B1).
- The effective preparation of students for higher level study (Expectation B4).
- The utilisation of a dynamic register enables the monitoring and support of students at risk (Expectation B4).
- The effectiveness of the extensive embedded academic and pastoral support systems (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Herefordshire and Ludlow College.

- Devise a formal mechanism, which makes appropriate use of external expertise, to approve the design and delivery of its higher national programmes, before the commencement of any new programmes (Expectation B1).
- Further develop and implement its procedure for module evaluations for higher national programmes by the end of the 2013-14 academic year (Expectation B3).
- In consultation with its partners, make external examiners' and verifiers' reports available to higher education students, by the start of the 2014-15 academic year (Expectation B7).
- Ensure that the Quality Summit process clearly identifies actions in response to external reports and monitors them through subsequent meetings, by the summer term 2014 (Expectation B8).
- Provide clear, timely and accurate information on opportunities for progression to, and application for, further study, by the summer term 2014 (Expectation C).
- Develop a central process for assuring the quality and completeness of programme handbooks, by the start of the 2014-15 academic year (Expectation C).
- Develop a detailed and comprehensive manual to codify quality assurance procedures for higher education programmes, by the start of the 2014-15 academic year (Expectation C).
- Identify a mechanism to ensure strategic oversight and integration of enhancement initiatives, by the start of the 2014-15 academic year (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The extension of the use of plagiarism-detection software across all higher education programmes by the end of the academic year (Expectation A6).
- The further development and adoption of virtual learning environments across all programmes (Expectation B3).
- The instigation of a higher education student focus group (Expectation B5).

Theme: Student Employability

Employability forms a core part of Herefordshire and Ludlow College's (the College) mission, and programmes are designed to prepare students for employment. Work-based learning plays an integral role in many programmes at the College, including the use of live briefs on some programmes. A Work-based Learning Manager and an Employer Engagement Manager oversee and support these activities within the College. Employers are engaged in both the design and delivery of programmes, of which there are numerous examples in the College's higher education programmes.

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

About Herefordshire and Ludlow College

The College is a medium-sized general further education college located in Herefordshire and Shropshire. The College operates from three main campuses and a number of small community-based venues across the two counties. The College shares its Hereford Campus with an art college and a sixth form college.

The College has more than 2000 full-time students studying subjects from all 15 subject sector areas. The College provides full-time education to both 16 to 18 year-old learners and adults on programmes ranging from entry level to degrees. Around 250 students are studying on higher education programmes within the scope of this review. The College employs approximately 500 individuals on a full and part-time basis, equating to approximately 280 full-time equivalent posts.

The College's mission is 'Success for our students'. This is underpinned by a vision statement setting out the College's intention to give its students the best possible education, training and personal support so they may gain employment in their chosen vocation, further develop their career, progress to higher education, realise their full potential, and make a positive contribution to the community.

In 2012-13, the College became an associate partner college of the University of Worcester, with whom it delivers a number of degrees. The College has maintained a longstanding association with the University of Warwick to provide courses in Initial Teacher Training. This partnership forms part of the West Midlands Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training, initially established in 2007. The College runs one Foundation Degree in Information Communication and Technology, validated by the University of Gloucestershire. Following a strategic review the University is withdrawing this provision from the College due to its small size. Provision is in place to protect and continue those students already on the programme, and a new Higher National Diploma (HND) qualification will be introduced in 2014-15 to

replace it. As part of the College's higher education strategy, two new Higher National Certificate (HNC) qualifications in Music Technology and Business Management were launched in September 2013 to expand higher education opportunities for local learners. These new BTEC programmes are delivered using existing specifications from Pearson education. It is the College's intention to further expand its HNC offer in coming years.

The College's quality management framework was reviewed during 2012-13 to integrate and streamline existing processes to ensure that self-assessment is a dynamic, regular and ongoing process. Under the revised arrangements, curriculum team leaders complete subject reviews each term detailing key performance indicators and areas of strength and weakness, using a single document which draws together student feedback, external examiner and verifier reports, self-assessments and key statistical data. Academic managers prepare a Quality Summit position statement drawing on the subject reviews for which they are responsible in preparation for termly Quality Summits meetings with senior staff. It is intended that the actions recorded in the minutes of the Quality Summit meeting will form the basis for follow-up discussions at the next term's Quality Summit. At the end of the academic year the Deputy Principal and Assistant Principals prepare a whole-College self-assessment report and action plan ready for implementation at the start of the academic year.

The College has maintained and built on the good practice and has addressed the recommendation from the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review report published in 2009. It has improved assessment briefs and feedback on assessment. Students are satisfied with the quality and timeliness of feedback, which meets the requirements set out by its awarding bodies and organisation.

Explanation of the findings about Herefordshire and Ludlow 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: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

Expectation (A1): Each qualification (including those awarded through arrangements with other delivery organisations or support providers) is allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*.

Quality Code, Chapter A1: The national level

Findings

1.1 The College currently delivers degree programmes on behalf of three universities (awarding bodies) and has recently introduced Pearson (awarding organisation) higher national programmes. Inspection of documentation for validation and review revealed a number of explicit references to the use of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* in setting programme and module learning outcomes. Such documents include briefing statements for panel members, validation documents, periodic review reports and periodic review action plans. There is a considerable amount of variability in the presentation of these documents but this is accepted due to the differing requirements of the awarding bodies and organisation.

1.2 Inspection of programme specifications and module specifications confirm alignment of learning outcomes to the FHEQ. Learning outcomes are also clearly specified on assignment briefs and inspection of these confirms appropriate alignment with the FHEQ. External examiners are asked specifically whether the threshold academic standards set for the awards are in accordance with the FHEQ and applicable subject benchmark statements.

1.3 The College programmes all adhere to the standard credit framework in terms of learning hours per credit point and the number of credits for degrees or higher national programmes. These are clearly communicated to students through course handbooks.

1.4 Overall, the review team concluded that the College meets the Expectation, as defined in *Chapter A1* of the Quality Code, that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level in the FHEQ, and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2): All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

Quality Code, Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level

Findings

1.5 College higher education programmes take account of the relevant subject benchmark statements at the design and development stage. The review team saw evidence of the use of the appropriate subject benchmark statement explicitly referenced in the guidance to review panel members, in validation documents and in review documents. Students are informed of the subject benchmark statements relevant to their programmes in their course handbooks. Programme specifications contain a section that refers to the subject benchmark statement that has guided the course design. In the cases of the programmes awarded by the partner universities, the alignment with the relevant subject benchmark statements is the responsibility of those partners, although the College ensures that the documentation presented for validation and review makes the appropriate references.

1.6 In terms of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements, the only application for accreditation made by the College is for Institute of Outdoor Learning accreditation in respect of the BSc in Outdoor Adventure Leadership and Management. The application is subject to external assessment which confirmed the alignment of the course with the accreditation requirements. The application is under consideration by the Institute of Outdoor Learning and there are no plans for any further PSRB accreditation.

1.7 The review team concluded that the College meets the Expectation, as defined in *Chapter A2* of the Quality Code, in respect of the higher education programmes taking account of the relevant benchmark statements, and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3): Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study.

Quality Code, Chapter A3: The programme level

Findings

1.8 The College clearly specifies the programme aims and learning outcomes and module outcomes in programme specifications, module specifications and booklets and programme handbooks. These vary in structure and content due to the different awarding bodies and organisation that the College engages with. Review panels are asked to check that information on aims and learning outcomes are made clearly available.

1.9 The team reviewed assignment briefs and spoke to students about their understanding of learning outcomes. Assignment briefs clearly explain the learning outcomes to which they relate and/or the assessment criteria derived from those learning outcomes. Students are clear about where they are able to access information on aims, outcomes and assessment criteria.

1.10 Overall, the review team concluded that the College meets the Expectation, as defined in *Chapter A3* of the Quality Code, through making available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements, and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A4): Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter A4: Approval and review

Findings

1.11 All proposals for new programmes are considered by the College in accordance with its new programme submission process prior to formal validation by its university partners or in the case of higher national awards, by Pearson in accordance with its procedures.

1.12 The College's higher education assessment policy contains a brief guide for staff of the requirements relating to programme design, including the need for programme, level and module aims and outcomes which relate to programme level descriptors, the FHEQ and PSRB requirements. In addition, the College draws on guidance provided by its partner universities. The contribution of College staff to the design of programmes varies. For example, the College is fully involved in the design of the Foundation Degree in Information Communication Technology (ICT), validated by the University of Gloucestershire. It jointly developed the BSc Outdoor Adventure Leadership and Management with the University of Worcester, but had no involvement in the design of University of Warwick teacher education programmes. In the case of its higher national programmes, the College uses Pearson-devised and approved programme and unit specifications to construct programmes of study. It does not currently deliver any centre-devised units. The College states that it undertakes checks to ensure that the College's selection of units will allow students to achieve the intended award, but these checks are not formally documented.

1.13 To test the effectiveness of the College's approval and review processes, the review team read the reports of recent periodic review events and a selection of annual course reports for university-validated provision, and papers related to the College's quality monitoring processes.

1.14 The continuing relevance and validity of the College's programmes is ensured by the processes of periodic review and revalidation undertaken by the College's university partners or by Pearson in accordance with its procedures for ensuring the currency of its programmes. The reports provided evidence of the effectiveness of the universities' periodic review processes.

1.15 Programmes are monitored on a regular basis by partner universities, as part of their annual monitoring and evaluation processes, by the Pearson awarding organisation through its external verifiers, and by the College, through its own quality monitoring procedures which are described in detail in paragraph 2.58. At the time of the review, the Pearson higher national programmes are in their first year of operation and therefore no annual reviews are available.

1.16 The review team concluded that approval and review processes operated by the College's partners are effective in ensuring the validity and relevance of the programmes delivered by the College. In view of the College's limited responsibilities for programme approval, and review under the terms of the arrangements with its awarding bodies and organisation, the review team concluded that the Expectation in *Chapter A4* concerning programme monitoring and review is met and the risk to academic standards is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A5): Higher education providers ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards.

Quality Code, Chapter A5: Externality

Findings

1.17 The College's new programme submission process requires proposers to identify evidence of any consultation with external bodies, including employers and awarding bodies/organisations. The review team tested the operation of the process in respect of two recently launched HNC programmes by looking at the New Programme Submission Quality Assurance checklists and talking to relevant staff. While the documentary evidence provided little detail of external consultation, staff explained that they had consulted both employers and current Pearson external verifiers to assist in their selection of appropriate optional units.

1.18 Where the College delivers university awards, the partner university's approval and periodic review processes involve the use of external expertise in the design, validation and review of programmes. The review team examined validation and review documentation relating to two of the College's university partners which demonstrated the participation of external experts in the process.

1.19 Responsibility for appointing and managing external examiners and external verifiers rests with the university partners and Pearson respectively. Staff confirmed that external verifiers had been appointed for the recently launched higher national programmes. External examiner reports for university-validated provision confirm that the threshold academic standards have been set and maintained appropriately.

1.20 Overall, the review team concluded that the College meets the Expectation of the *Chapter A5* of the Quality Code in respect of the participation of external expertise in managing threshold standards and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A6): Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Quality Code, Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes

Findings

1.21 The College's policies and procedures relating to assessment are set out in two documents: the Higher Education Assessment Policy and Procedures and the Internal Verifiers' Handbook. The former provides guidance for those involved in assessment of the College's higher education programmes and includes specific appendices relating to its higher national awards. The Internal Verifiers' Handbook, which documents in detail the arrangements for internal verification of assessments, applies to both the College's further and higher education provision. Where the College's provision is validated by a partner university, that university's assessment policies and procedures also apply.

1.22 The review team looked at the College's assessment strategies for its different university partners and for Pearson programmes. The team also considered external examiner and external verifier reports to test the robustness of the College's assessment processes.

1.23 The assessment strategies for the College's university-validated programmes are approved, monitored and reviewed in accordance with the universities procedures. Higher national course teams are required to prepare Assessment and Verification Plans. The internal verifier is responsible for monitoring the quality and consistency of assessment strategy.

1.24 Assessment tasks are either designed by the validating university or by College staff in accordance with university guidelines and subject to approval by the university. Assessment tasks for higher national programmes are prepared by College staff and internally verified before being issued to students. Where possible, assessment tasks are contextualised to the workplace and on some programmes good use is made of live briefs from employers.

1.25 The College adheres to the policies and procedures of its validating universities and awarding bodies and organisation in respect of the recognition of prior learning.

1.26 The College's policies relating to academic misconduct are set out in the higher education assessment policy. Students who met the review team reported that they are made aware of the rules concerning plagiarism, including self-plagiarism, during their initial induction and in each module they studied. A recent external examiner's report for a foundation degree programme raised concerns about the risk of plagiarism and recommended the use of plagiarism-detection software. The software is available through the College's virtual learning environment but is not being used routinely by all programme teams. The review team **affirms** the extension of the use of plagiarism-detection software across all higher education programmes by the end of the academic year.

1.27 Any issues arising from the assessment process are identified in external examiners' reports and recorded with proposed actions in subject reviews and monitored at termly Quality Summit meetings and at higher education cross-College meetings. One external examiner made a number of recommendations relating to assessment practices, some of which specifically related to the College. The course annual evaluation report for the University included an action plan to address the concerns, but the review team is unable to identify how the actions are being monitored by the College through the

Quality Summit process or how external reports of this kind might be used by the College to improve its assessment practices across its higher education provision.

1.28 Notwithstanding these concerns about the College's quality monitoring procedures, the review team concluded that the assessment of students is valid and reliable and that the award of credit and qualifications is based on the achievement of intended learning outcomes, and therefore the Expectation in *Chapter A6* of the Quality Code is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of threshold academic standards: Summary of findings

1.29 In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations relating to the College's maintenance of threshold academic standards are met, and the risk is low.

1.30 The team identified that the new Quality Summit process is not yet fully effective in monitoring actions identified by external examiners and verifiers, but that these actions are effectively monitored by course teams and awarding bodies, and the awarding organisation.

1.31 The review team affirms the College's plan to roll out use of plagiarism-detection software across all higher education programmes by the end of this academic year, in order to further secure academic standards.

1.32 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of the awards offered at Herefordshire and Ludlow College on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: Quality of learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education provides have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme design and approval

Findings

2.1 The aims of the College's new programme submission process are to ensure that new programmes of study are of an appropriate standard and quality; are sustainable; have appropriate human and learning resources; and reflect the College's Mission and Strategic Objectives, as well as faculty operational plans. Curriculum developments are discussed at the higher education cross-College meeting, and the College Management Team meeting. Proposals must be approved by the Assistant Principal, Management Information Systems Manager and Finance Director before final sign-off by the Deputy Principal.

2.2 The review team reviewed the operation of the process by looking at the papers for two new programme submissions, reading the minutes of relevant meetings and by talking to staff. The evidence showed that the College's processes for considering new programme proposals do not meet their intended aims. The completed New Programme Approval Quality Assurance Checklists for two recently launched HNC programmes contained insufficient detail to assure those charged with giving outline planning approval that there is potential demand from students and employers; external bodies including the awarding body and employers had been consulted; and identified resource issues, including staffing and learning resources for higher level programmes, had been quantified. Although the higher education cross-College group receives information about proposed new programmes it does not undertake a detailed scrutiny of the proposals. The College's processes anticipate that the Quality Assurance Checklist will be followed by a detailed submission in the format required by the awarding body.

2.3 Following internal approval by the College, new programmes are validated in accordance with the procedures of its partner universities or Pearson. Where programme and unit specifications are devised by Pearson, there is no detailed scrutiny of the proposed programme at an event attended or informed by external experts. The College stated that checks are made to ensure that the combination of units will allow the students to achieve the intended award and there are internal discussions concerning resources and delivery prior to the commencement of the course. However, the College does not have a formal documented process which ensures that the design of its Pearson programmes and their intended delivery are appropriate. The review team **recommends** that the College devises a formal mechanism, which makes appropriate use of external expertise, to approve the design and delivery of its higher national programmes, before the commencement of any new programmes.

2.4 Validation process and support from partner universities ensures that programmes are designed to provide opportunities for students to progress to employment or further study. College destination data confirms that the College's foundation degrees provided opportunities for students to progress to degree programmes at local universities and to obtain relevant employment. Students stated that they had received confusing messages about potential progression routes from some foundation degrees and the need for additional qualifications in English and maths.

2.5 Several of the College's programmes provide the opportunity for students to acquire additional vocational qualifications. For example, students on the BSc Outdoor Adventure Leadership and Management are encouraged to acquire relevant National Governing Body awards, while students on the Foundation Degree in ICT can complete CISCO qualifications. The review team concluded that the design of programmes which enables students to acquire additional vocationally relevant accreditations is **good practice**.

2.6 Overall the review team concluded that the Expectation on the design and approval of programmes is met as the College's university partners have in place effective procedures to secure the quality of student learning opportunities. However, the limited information provided for the College's New Programme Submission procedure, and the absence of a formal College programme approval process for Pearson higher national programmes, presents a moderate risk that some aspects of delivery and resourcing are not resolved prior to the commencement of the programme.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (B2): Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

Quality Code, Chapter B2: Admissions

Findings

2.7 The College's Enquiries and Application Policy details every stage of the recruitment and admissions process, the procedures used and the delegation of responsibility. This policy also details the support and options available to applicants who are not successful. The admissions process, including interviews, is supported by a central admissions team who oversee and coordinate the process, including monitoring all applications. The overarching Students Complaints and Appeals procedures apply equally to admissions.

2.8 The review team tested the provider's approach to admissions by discussing the policies, procedures and processes with staff and students and where relevant requesting further documentary evidence and clarification. The review team explored the training and support available to staff to perform interviews, the role of the central admissions team, and the information provided to students at each stage of the process and whether they are adequately supported.

2.9 The central admissions team receive applications and have responsibility for sending formal offer letters, and have an overview of communications during the admissions process. Each faculty is designated an Admissions Officer who is responsible for providing administrative support and guidance. An interview checklist, signed by the applicant, is used to ensure that necessary information has been discussed with the applicant and that support needs have been identified. Staff receive development sessions on admissions processes and interview training. Students are sent a variety of information from different sources (centrally by the College, locally by tutors and by partner universities) and as such, the College does not have full central oversight of these communications to ensure consistency and accuracy.

2.10 Students apply through UCAS with the exception of the Foundation Degree in ICT and Pearson higher national programmes, for which prospective students apply directly to the College. University admissions processes and policies are outlined in the institutional course agreements, with responsibilities of the College clearly articulated. UCAS tariffs are agreed between programme teams and partner universities and adhered to by those who make decisions on course entry. Programme teams are required to thoroughly review all applications made to their programmes, as well as undertaking a series of bespoke assessments.

2.11 Information available to applicants, including entry requirements and details of how to apply is provided through published prospectuses and online marketing materials. The information provided is clear and unambiguous. Equality and diversity issues are identified in the application process. Clear diversity and equality policies exist at the College. Course commencement packs clearly detail necessary information about enrolment and induction.

2.12 Students have access to all of the relevant information required during the application process through to enrolment and induction. The students found open evenings very useful and commented positively on the amount of guidance from tutors and students services they had received during the admissions process. Students unanimously felt supported during the application process.

2.13 The College stated that they plan to analyse student achievement by entry qualification this academic year.

2.14 Overall, the review team concluded that the College has appropriate policies, procedures and processes in place, which are implemented effectively, and meet the Expectation in *Chapter B2* of the Quality Code. The College successfully and consistently applies its admissions processes, and maintains effective managerial oversight, therefore the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*

Findings

2.15 The College's strategic approach to learning and teaching is described in a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. The College processes used for monitoring learning and teaching are shared across the whole institution, encompassing higher education, further education, work-based learning, full-time and part-time provision. The quality of teaching and learning is discussed at all levels and there is a comprehensive approach to the observation of learning and teaching, which is outlined in the Observation of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Guidelines. Outcomes from observation, as detailed within the guidelines, include staff being asked to share good practice, access to a Teaching and Learning Mentor, additional support and capability procedures.

2.16 The review team tested the College's approach to teaching and learning by talking to students about their experience of teaching and the support received for learning, together with the opportunities to provide feedback and to undertake personal development. The team also discussed learning and teaching with senior management and teaching staff to understand how the approach previously described worked in practice. The team also reviewed the recruitment of staff teaching on higher education programmes and how the College ensures that staff are adequately prepared to deliver at the higher education level.

2.17 Approval processes for new programmes includes consideration of staff CVs to ensure that they have the relevant qualifications and/or experience. Advice is taken from partner universities to ensure that staff are adequately qualified, including consultation on detailed person specifications. Programme teams from the University of Worcester are also involved in relevant staff appointments. All new teachers are assigned a College mentor and where necessary, are given time to undertake further development and qualifications.

2.18 While there is no College-wide policy on minimum qualifications, there is an authorisation process which ensures that requirements are adequate for the post and these are ultimately signed off by the Deputy Principal. It is a general principle within the contract of employment that the staff member must have a teaching qualification or must work towards acquiring one.

2.19 The College maintains a strong focus on staff development and support. As well as offering internal staff development, the College encourages staff teaching higher education to undertake the many opportunities that come with Associate College Status and the training offered by the University of Worcester. Staff confirmed that they had access to, and had undertaken, development opportunities and scholarly activity offered by university partners. The College is also a member of the South West Peer Confederation of Colleges and Landex, further supporting the training of staff. Students comment positively on teaching and the support that students receive. External examiners comment positively on the quality of teaching which is described as being to a high standard.

2.20 There is no College staff development plan but continuing professional development activity is encouraged and actively undertaken. In response to higher education staff requesting more opportunities for collaboration with other higher education teachers,

the higher education self-support group is initiated. This group allows teachers to meet each half-term to discuss common issues and to share best practice. Teaching staff confirmed that this group offers peer support in relation to teaching methods, developing assignments and curriculum development. Those staff new to teaching at a higher level confirmed that they had received appropriate staff development and that university link tutors also support staff development.

2.21 Learning and teaching matters, including student feedback, are discussed routinely at the higher education cross-College group and as part of the Quality Summit process. The College Management Team also regularly discusses teaching, learning and assessment. The Observation of Teaching, Learning and Assessment process is one of the College's main mechanisms for discussing and improving learning and teaching, which has a clear focus on the outcomes for learners. The College's approach is thorough and there is a clear focus on reflection and improvement of learning and teaching. Programmes validated by the University of Worcester complete comprehensive annual evaluations, which discuss learning and teaching matters and student feedback in great depth.

2.22 The College also uses Learning Walks to improve teaching, learning and assessment. Learning Walks are unannounced, informal, ungraded observations carried out three times a year. They are themed and monitored through the Quality Summit process and outcomes used to inform staff development. Teaching staff confirmed that these Learning Walks are helpful and that they are provided with written and verbal feedback which feeds into staff development and appraisal. Some programme teams, such as in the Foundation Degree ICT, have an open-door classroom approach and openly offer peer to peer support within the teaching team.

2.23 The College has developed a draft procedure for the evaluation of modules on higher national programmes, which had not been finalised at the time of the review visit. Programmes validated by universities follow their policies on module evaluation which feed into the validating universities quality assurance processes. Students confirmed that while there is not a consistent approach to module evaluation across all of the College's higher education provision, there are opportunities to complete College-wide surveys on their experiences. Informal feedback to tutors is widely encouraged, and students felt listened to when discussing areas for improvement. The review team **recommends** that the College further develop and implement its procedure for module evaluations for higher national programmes, by the end of the 2013-14 academic year.

2.24 The College recognises that there is currently no consistent approach towards the virtual learning environment (VLE) across higher education provision, which is very programme dependent, with some tutors using it extensively and others not at all. Staff confirmed that there is a plan to develop a College approach to the VLE in the future. A member of staff had been given responsibility to develop the College's VLE and is coordinating developments to ensure consistency and to upgrade the VLE to improve accessibility and functionality. It is recognised that staff development would play an important role in this. The review team **affirms** the further development and adoption of virtual learning environments across all programmes.

2.25 Teaching staff confirmed that the approach to personal tutoring differed across programmes and that there is no standard expectation for the higher national programmes. Programmes validated by universities used their approaches to personal tutoring, often with scheduled sessions with students. It is emphasised that due to the small numbers of students, self-reflection with tutors often happened informally. Staff are always available to students whether in person or via email. Discussions with students confirmed that this

informal approach, which in parts works due to the low student:staff ratio, is working effectively and that they felt well supported.

2.26 Overall the team concluded that the Expectation in *Chapter B3* of the Quality Code is met. The College has a comprehensive approach to learning and teaching matters encompassing effective staff recruitment, development and evaluation. The College takes learning and teaching matters seriously and discusses such matters throughout a variety of processes and committees. Due to the nature of the College's approach the risk is deemed to be low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement

Findings

2.27 The College maintains a fully equipped Learning Resource Centre (LRC) at each campus and students are able to access the learning resources they require. Dedicated LRC facilitators are attached to specific curriculum areas ensuring that the College is responsive to student resource needs. The College supports learning through a dedicated Learner Services Team and students are identified who require dedicated support. External examiner reports confirm that programmes are designed to enhance and improve transferable skills, including employability, self-management, literacy and numeracy. The College employs a Learner Progression Advisor who offers dedicated careers advice to students and supports students' progression following College. Students also have access to all the resources and careers support offered by the University of Worcester.

2.28 The review team tested the College's approach by discussing student support, learning resources and careers education, information, advice and guidance in depth with students and staff. They explored how the College's approach works in practice, in particular how students are supported through their time at the College and the support available for disabled students.

2.29 Students are positive about the LRC and subject specific resources, for example, for ICT and Music. They are aware of the resources available at the College, and at relevant university partners. Students raised minor concerns over the lack of library resources for some programmes but confirmed that library staff are very positive in attempting to deal with problems.

2.30 Students who had used careers support commented positively on their experience, and those students who had not used it are aware of what is available. Support included being offered one-to-one sessions to talk through their CV and other queries. The careers service had also helped applicants choose the right course and further positive comments are received on careers information provided by the University of Worcester. Personal development planning is embedded into their programmes and tutors offer helpful guidance on future career or study prospects.

2.31 Students are offered support with applications for further study and preparing UCAS applications, as well as help with personal statements, CV and interview preparation. The Careers Advisor routinely visited classes to make students aware of the services available. College staff are proud of their success in comprehensively supporting students to progress to further study and employment. Mature students, and those who had been away from education for some time, commented very positively on the support they had received and the opportunities now available to them. The College's focus on employability supports students' progress successfully into further study or employment. Student destination and progression data confirm the success of the College's success in ensuring students' progress to higher study. The support and availability of tutors is fundamental to preparing students for further study and progression opportunities. The team concluded that the College's approach to effectively supporting and preparing students for higher-level study is **good practice**.

2.32 All higher education students have access to all College services. For students with disabilities, support is put in place following Disabled Student Allowance Assessments, usually before the funding is in place. Students are offered assistance in attending interviews and assessments, and these interviews will identify learning and support needs. An in-depth learning support profile is also completed which helps the College identify students that need academic and pastoral support. This profile is then passed to the relevant manager for implementation. The Learning Link drop-in facility can be accessed at any time by students in need of support.

2.33 Students are supported generously throughout every stage of their student journey. The processes and procedures that the College has in place for identifying and supporting students' needs, as well as the culture of support that clearly exists throughout the College, support students to succeed to the best of their abilities. The effectiveness of the extensive embedded academic and pastoral support systems is **good practice**.

2.34 The College has put in place an extended project to support independent learning, study skills and academic writing. Higher education-specific learning support assistants are available to support students with learning difficulties and academic support. Due to the small class sizes, support is often delivered in class through tutorial processes and staff open-door policies.

2.35 If students are deemed to be struggling and in need of extra support they are put on the 'at risk' register and support is put in place. This is a standard cross-College process which is used by curriculum teams and discussed at Quality Summits. The register is dynamic and is regularly reviewed and actions checked ensuring that both academic and personal risks are included. Once a student is identified as being at risk, this is fed back by the team manager to the Central Management Team, who then also provide weekly updates to ensure that support and progress is monitored. The learner support team have oversight of the learner profiles and provide specialist support where necessary. The College can also draw on the support of partner higher education institutions. The utilisation of a dynamic register that enables the monitoring and support of students at risk is **good practice**.

2.36 Overall the team concluded that the College meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter B4* of the Quality Code. The College has a comprehensive approach to ensuring that students have access to the resources they require and any support, whether academic or pastoral, they may need. There is a strong focus on careers information, advice and guidance and on the progression of students to further study or employment. The College is particularly adept at supporting at-risk students and ensuring all students receive dedicated support where necessary. Due to the complete nature of the College's approach to this expectation the risk is deemed to be low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student engagement

Findings

2.37 The College's approach to student engagement is captured in the Learner Involvement Strategy, which details how students are involved in shaping the learning experience. The College student engagement initiatives apply to all students in the College, not just to higher education students. The College recognises that as higher education student numbers increase they may require their own representative system. Students studying on programmes validated by university partners are involved in their student engagement activities, including course representation.

2.38 The team tested the provider's approach by discussing student engagement with staff and students and explored how the Learner Involvement Strategy worked in practice. The team also looked at minutes of meetings and reports where student feedback is discussed. The College provided a number of examples of where it had taken action in response to higher education student feedback, including the creation of quiet study space in the library and modification of delivery patterns for teacher education.

2.39 Students confirmed to the team that due to the small number of students studying on individual programmes, discussing issues informally with tutors is the best way of initiating any changes they felt necessary. All students commented positively on the approachability of staff and the willingness to make improvements. Examples of positive change included changes to the syllabus and extra support in academic writing. Course representatives on university-awarded programmes confirmed the active role they play in feeding back issues to staff and driving change. Students on some University of Worcester programmes also confirmed that they had attended periodic review events. It is clear from these discussions that there is a culture of open dialogue and active improvement at the College.

2.40 A systematic approach to student representation, including regular programme committees and the election of student representatives, is in place for those students on university-validated programmes. All other student groups have an elected student representative for internal processes. Students are largely unaware of focus groups, which are used across the rest of the College as detailed in the Learner Involvement Strategy. Staff confirmed that a higher education-specific focus group would be implemented later this academic year. Student feedback, from all sources including formal mechanisms used by university partners, feeds into subject reviews and the Quality Summit process.

2.41 The team concludes that the College has created a positive environment for student engagement and often this happens informally between students and staff. Students consistently confirmed that staff are responsive to their feedback and are actively encouraged to share their opinions. There are student representatives for all courses. The College has plans for the introduction of a higher education student focus group and the review team **affirms** the instigation of this group. For the reasons discussed the College meets the Expectation in *Chapter B5* of the Quality Code.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.

Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning

Findings

2.42 The College's approach to the assessment of its higher education programmes is set out in its higher education assessment policy and procedures. Assessment policies and practices are also determined by the requirements of the College's awarding bodies and organisation.

2.43 The team tested the College assessment processes with respect to the responsibilities placed on them by the universities and Pearson. They reviewed assessment documentation and spoke to staff and students to confirm their findings.

2.44 For university-validated programmes the nature and amount of assessment is approved at validation. Higher national tutors are required to prepare an assessment plan. Most students who met the review team confirmed that they received their assignment tasks at the start of the teaching period. However, students on the Foundation Degree in Health and Social reported that there had been delays in receiving their assessment tasks at the start of the academic as they are waiting for them to be finalised by the University.

2.45 Teaching staff use feedback on formative and summative assessments to support student learning. There are guidelines in place for University of Worcester programmes concerning the submission of draft work for feedback. Students on the Foundation Degree in Information Communication Technology, validated by the University of Gloucester, undertake project work and receive tutor feedback on an ongoing basis. Students confirmed that feedback is constructive and provided within the time limits specified by the University.

2.46 The academic regulations applicable to specific programmes are determined by the relevant awarding body or organisation and are made available to students through course handbooks.

2.47 Assessment tasks are marked by College staff with moderation and verification of student work is carried out in accordance with the requirements of the awarding body or organisation. The College has put in place special internal verification arrangements where there are small teaching teams.

2.48 Depending on the programme, examination boards are held either at the partner University or at the College. The College has plans to hold examination boards for its new Higher national programmes. Students confirmed that they understood that the marks they received are provisional until confirmed by an examination board, and that they received results from both the College and the partner university.

2.49 As an Associate College of the University of Worcester, College staff are able to access staff development activities delivered by the University. Recent sessions include differentiation and assessment for higher level learning.

2.50 The team concluded that the College meets the Expectation in *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code and that any risk to the quality of learning opportunities 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

2.51 The responsibility for the appointment and management of external examiners and verifiers rests with the College's university partners and with Pearson in respect of Higher national awards. External examiners meet staff and students.

2.52 The review team read relevant subject reviews, Quality Summit position statements, and the minutes of Quality Summits meetings for the autumn term preceding the review visit and of the higher education cross-College group, but found that the documents did not provide a systematic and detailed record of issues arising from external reports, the College's responses and proposed actions. The revised Quality Summit process has the potential to provide effective monitoring of external examiner's reports and programme teams' responses, but the system is not yet operating as intended.

2.53 At the time of the review no external verifier reports had been received for higher national programmes. External examiner reports for university programmes are received by the Quality Co-ordinator, who distributes them to team leaders. Until recently, the College used the Central Action Plan to record external examiners' recommendations and to monitor responses and actions. The College now uses the termly Quality Summit process to consider external reviews and monitor resulting actions. External reports are also considered by the higher education cross-College group.

2.54 The College does not make external examiner reports available to students on a routine basis. Student representatives on University of Worcester foundation degree courses, who attend course committee meetings where the external examiner's report is discussed, are able to feedback to other members of their cohort. Students who met the review team confirmed that they did not access to external examiner reports. The review team **recommends** that the College, in consultation with its partners, makes external examiners' and verifiers' reports available to higher education students, by the start of the 2014-15 academic year.

2.55 The team concluded that the Expectation in *Chapter B7* of the Quality Code is met and the risk to quality of learning opportunities is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review

Findings

2.56 The College's programmes are reviewed periodically and monitored annually in accordance with the procedures of partner Universities. Higher national programmes are subject to an annual Centre Review Visit carried out by the awarding body, which is due to take place later in the year.

2.57 The review team tested the periodic review procedures by reading reports of recent periodic reviews and annual course evaluations. The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's annual monitoring processes by reading examples of annual review reports prepared for partner Universities, the Central Action Plan and papers relating to the new Quality Summit process, and talking to staff.

2.58 The College employs a range of methods to monitor the health of the programmes it delivers. These include obtaining student views through module and course evaluations, student questionnaires and focus groups; scrutiny of external examiner reports and attendance, retention and achievement data. Until recently, issues arising from external reports, learner feedback and lesson observations were captured in the Central Action Plan. Under the new arrangements, actions are reported and monitored through the Quality Summit process.

2.59 The team was unable to track how the College had used recent external reports, such as external examiner reports and periodic review reports produced in 2012-13, in their Quality Summit process to capture issues requiring attention at either a programme or whole College level. While acknowledging that, at the time of the review, the revised Quality Summit had not completed a full cycle of operation, the review team concluded that the process is not yet operating effectively. The review team **recommends** that the College ensures that the Quality Summit process clearly identifies actions in response to external reports and monitors them through subsequent meetings, by the summer term 2014.

2.60 The College has a procedure for withdrawing programmes but it does not require any statement of how the College will enable students to complete their programme. The College stated that there are no recent examples of a course closure, although at the time of the review visit arrangements are in hand to terminate its partnership with the University of Gloucester in respect of the Foundation Degree in Information Communication Technology.

2.61 The team confirm that periodic and annual review processes operate effectively in accordance with the Universities' procedures. The review team concluded that the Expectation in *Chapter B8* is met but that the College's Quality Summit system is not yet fully effective and as such, presents a moderate risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals.

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals

Findings

2.62 The College has a clearly defined students' complaints procedure and also complies with partner procedures. The appeals procedure is a multi-stage process, with the stages clearly set out and covers appeals on admissions decisions and assessment outcomes.

2.63 The review team looked at student handbooks and other published information, and discussed the appeals and complaints processes with staff and students to test how well the procedures are implemented.

2.64 Students have access to the procedure via their programme handbooks. Guidance is available to students when making a complaint and this guidance is regarded as effective. Support is available to students during the complaint process. Student complaints are monitored via a complaints log which specifies, for each complaint, dates, details of the complaint, contacts with and responses to the complainant, and whether or not the complaint is closed. The complaints log is regularly monitored by the College Management Team. Complaints are also monitored through the Quality Summit process where there is a section on the Quality Summit meeting position statement (section 13) specifically for complaints, comments and accolades.

2.65 As with the complaints procedure, the appeals procedure is available via student handbooks. Although the documentation does not clearly set out the grounds for appeal, students are fully aware of the process and the areas covered. The appeals procedure refers students into the awarding body procedures where appropriate.

2.66 Overall, the review team regarded the design and operation of its complaints and appeals procedures as effective. The team concluded, therefore, that the Expectation in *Chapter B9* of the Quality Code is met, and that the 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

2.67 The College higher education awards are all through university partners or through Pearson. Consequently, the College has a responsibility to ensure that they maintain standards and assure quality on behalf of their partners. There are agreements in place that define the responsibilities of the partners. Many of the College programmes feature an element of work-based learning, and all programmes are designed to promote students' employability.

2.68 The team tested the College's arrangements for supporting students in the workplace through exploring the guidance given to mentors, and the arrangements for finding and monitoring the effectiveness of work placements as learning opportunities.

2.69 For university partners, academic links are maintained through a partner link tutor liaising with the College course leader. This can be through meetings and various forms of correspondence and contact. In addition, partner staff regularly attend course and faculty meetings at the College, and College staff are represented on partner groups and committees. For the higher national programmes, the main link will be through regular contact with the external verifier. There are also mechanisms for support staff to liaise with University of Worcester colleagues through the partnership groups.

2.70 Students are normally expected to secure their own placements (as part of the learning process) but support in finding placements is provided by tutors, the employer engagement manager or the work-based learning manager. Potential placements are identified from a number of sources, including employer links at the further education level and through the contacts of College staff. All placements are verified and monitored by College staff through visits to the students in their placements.

2.71 There are effective procedures in place for removing students from unsuitable placements and helping them secure alternatives. Comprehensive guidance for students is available via programme handbooks. Work-place supervisors are involved in the assessment of placements, feeding in comments to the tutors who complete the assessment.

2.72 Overall, the review team concluded that the College meets the Expectation, as defined in *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code, in respect of managing higher education provision with others, and that the 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*

2.73 Herefordshire and Ludlow College does not offer research degrees.

Quality of learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.74 In reaching its judgement about the quality of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All expectations relating to the quality of learning opportunities are met, and the risk is low in most cases.

2.75 The team found significant features of good practice in the area of student support, and teaching and learning. Students are effectively supported in their transition to studying at a higher level, whether they progress from level 3 courses at the College or return to study after a period of time outside of education. There is substantial pastoral and academic support available to students. Students 'at risk' of not achieving their course, whether for personal or academic reasons, are identified, monitored and supported effectively.

2.76 The College's processes for new programme approval and for annual and periodic review pose some moderate risks. The approval documentation for new higher national programmes is thin and does not in itself provide sufficient evidence to reassure the College that all the appropriate checks are made. The Quality Summit process is new, and has not yet completed a full academic cycle. While it has the potential to be an effective process, the documentation did not show that issues raised in the previous year's external examiners reports are being monitored through this process.

2.77 Overall, the team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at Herefordshire and Ludlow College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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 uses various communication tools to ensure that information is targeted and accessible to the relevant audiences. These include a specific higher education prospectus; a dedicated higher education section on the College's website; course-specific literature; higher education-specific advertising spreads in the local and regional papers; support for government initiatives such as Adult Learners' Week; promoting courses in specialised publications; publicity around students' achievements; and the active use of case studies and testimonials. The website includes general information about the College, policies, procedures and equality and diversity information. The higher education section of the website provides information about the higher education courses offered by the College and includes information about entry requirements, partner institutions, PSRBs, fees and financial support. The College provides course information to students through the student handbook, which also includes information on central College support. The College's strategic approach is captured in their Marketing Strategy.

3.2 The prospectus informs students about Hereford as a city, their partner organisations, the graduation ceremony, support, equality and diversity, financial matters, the qualification framework, as well as in-depth details about the courses themselves. Entry requirement information, course fees, progression and other key facts are all clearly stated.

3.3 The review team tested the College's approach in practice by speaking to students about the accuracy of the information they received, and by scrutinising processes and publications used by the College to ensure that the information presented is accurate and fit-for-purpose. The team also spoke to senior managers and other staff.

3.4 Students confirmed that on the whole, information they received is up-to-date, accurate and helpful. Some students raised concerns with the accuracy and timeliness of information on progression to further study. There had been some confusion over the rules and regulations for progressing from the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care to nursing and midwifery programmes, and students had received conflicting information from different sources. Foundation Degree ICT students were also unclear that they had to apply through UCAS in order to gain access to the top-up degree and as such had missed a key deadline. There is no consistent approach to ensuring that students receive appropriate information about progression opportunities, with a variety of different approaches used by different programme teams. The review team **recommends** that the College provides clear, timely and accurate information on opportunities for progression to, and application for, further study, by the summer term 2014.

3.5 The student handbook, available at programme level, is the main method across all programmes for explaining programme aims and module outcomes. Universities provide templates which can be personalised by the College. Staff confirmed that there is no central quality assurance of programme handbooks. Handbooks are produced by academic tutors and although they may submit them to Learner Services or the Marketing Manager to check

for accuracy this is not done routinely. A Learner Services Guide had been produced which ensured consistency of information for students. In light of these discussions, the team **recommends** that the College develops a central process for assuring the quality and completeness of programme handbooks, by the start of the 2014-15 academic year.

3.6 At the time of the review, the College's website noted that the University of Gloucestershire awarded the Foundation Degree ICT, although it had been confirmed that the University is withdrawing and that no new students would be recruited to this programme. The College confirmed during the review that the Foundation Degree ICT would be replaced with an equivalent higher national programme, but that as this change had just been approved, the website had not yet been updated.

3.7 The Marketing Manager has a role to ensure the accuracy of information on the website and liaises regularly with colleagues within the College and with university partners. There is a clear process in place for developing the prospectus, which involves gaining student feedback. Information is amended by course leaders and relevant managers and checked by Assistant Principals and returned to Marketing Team. Partner institutions are consulted to ensure consistency and, after any amends, the final copy is checked by the Principal, Deputy Principal and Finance Director.

3.8 The College publishes the Key Information Set in conjunction with its university partners. Access is via the university websites. The information in the Wider Information Set is available and the College is aware of its responsibilities for publishing it.

3.9 There are appropriate College policies for managing and quality assuring higher education provision. Some policies are higher education-specific and some are College-wide. While there is a clear deliberative and reporting structure within the College, responsibilities for individual staff members are not clearly codified. Discussions with teaching staff confirmed that they learn about their responsibilities in relation to quality assurance from induction with line managers, mentors and link tutors. The review team **recommends** that the College develops a detailed and comprehensive manual to codify quality assurance procedures for higher education programmes, by the start of the 2014-15 academic year.

3.10 Overall the review team concluded that the Expectation in *Part C* of the Quality Code is met. Due to the need to assure accurate and consistent information about progression, the need for a comprehensive quality assurance manual and the lack of centralised approach to the quality of assurance of handbooks the risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Quality of the information produced about its provision: Summary of findings

3.11 There is a clear approach to the publication of information and a method of assuring its accuracy. Students confirmed, on the whole, that relevant information exists and is accessible. However, some students had received conflicting or untimely advice about progression to further study.

3.12 Information is generally very clear, accessible and trustworthy. However, there is no single manual or handbook for the quality assurance of higher education. Teaching staff learn their responsibilities for this 'on the job'. Therefore, while the expectation overall is met, there is some moderate risk to the quality of information about learning opportunities.

3.13 The Team concluded that Information about learning opportunities produced by Herefordshire and Ludlow College **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: 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 Quality Summit process, resulting in annual whole-College self-assessment reports, are a vehicle for enhancement through the sections on actions for improvement. The self-assessment report covers all the College activities and does not isolate the higher education programmes for separate consideration. Course committees, student evaluations of their course, and student focus groups also provide opportunities for identifying enhancement. However, enhancement activities, specifically those at higher education level, are not formally identified as a role of the College's deliberative structures.

4.2 The terms of reference for the Board of Governors and its Quality and Standards sub-committee do not formally include discussion of enhancement of higher education student learning opportunities as a College-wide issue. Scrutiny of the minutes of the College Management Team and the higher education cross-College group does not show that enhancement directly appears as an agenda item or through the deliberations. There is potential for the College to adopt a more strategic and systematic approach through the Quality Summit process and through the higher education cross-College group (see findings under Expectation B8). External examiner reports, student feedback and management information inform the subject area reviews. These reviews are used to produce Quality Summit meeting position statements, which are considered at the three Quality Summit meetings, each year, held in each faculty. Although this process covers further education as well as higher education, there are sections on the position statements, in particular sections 3, 4 and 10, that can be used to identify problems or areas of good practice within the higher education courses. These could then inform discussions at the corresponding Quality Summit meeting on areas for enhancement, which in turn could be forwarded to the College Management Team and/or the Quality and Standards Committee. The review team **recommends** that the College identifies a mechanism to ensure strategic oversight and integration of enhancement initiatives, by the start of the 2014-15 academic year.

4.3 Students provided examples of where their feedback had led to improvement, and confirmed that the College is both receptive to and responsive to students' feedback. Improvements identified through course committees include changes made to the syllabus and to forms of assessment, which are applied with some variability, in the faculties.

4.4 Staff confirmed that the higher education support group is a forum for identifying and sharing good practice. Teaching observations and Learning Walks are also used for this purpose, as well as the identification of remedial actions for problems that have been identified through student feedback.

4.5 Overall, the review team concluded that the College meets the expectation that deliberate steps are being taken to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. However, there is a moderate risk to the articulation and integration of enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.6 The College takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. This is evidenced through a number of quality assurance processes, including the Quality Summits, the annual self-assessment report, responses to student evaluations and feedback on their courses, teaching observations and the College higher education support group. However, the College does not articulate its enhancement strategies at a strategic level, and it is not clearly discussed or evidenced through all of the College's senior deliberative structures.

4.7 The team concludes that the expectation is met but there is some moderate risk to the articulation and integration of enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner. The enhancement of student learning opportunities at Herefordshire and Ludlow College **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 Employability forms a core part of the College's mission and all programmes are vocational and are designed to prepare students for employment. The College sees employability not only as enabling students to find suitable work, but also to enable them to progress to a higher level of study. Work-based learning plays an integral role in many programmes at the College. Staff with industry experience are used extensively where appropriate and assignments are often related to work-place scenarios. All courses are designed to develop and embed wider transferable skills and student destination information demonstrates that the majority of students progress positively from their final year.

5.2 Where possible the College links to PSRBs to ensure that students can gain additional qualifications or accreditations. Examples include accreditation from the Institute of Outdoor Learning, and additional CISCO qualifications for students on the Foundation Degree ICT. The College also provides students with access to industry standard equipment and software, for example, in HNC Music Production. Extensive employability support is also offered through the Learning Resource Centre and the Learning Progression Advisor.

5.3 The College actively supports students in finding work placements. Tutors, business development officers and the Employer Engagement Manager help match students to employers and carry out the appropriate checks. There are regular tripartite reviews between the College, employer and learner, to monitor and record how the placement is working.

5.4 The Employer Engagement Manager works with the Foundation Degree ICT programme team to enable every student to undertake a live project with a company. The Employer Engagement Manager also engages employers to work with course teams on programme design.

5.5 Teaching staff further emphasised the role that employers play especially in assessment. For example, on the Foundation Degree ICT second year project, students have to solve an IT problem for an external client where the student acts as a sub-contractor and meets with the employer to solve the problem. On the BSc Outdoor Adventure Leadership and Management, the final-year dissertation is focused on employer needs. On the Foundation Degree in Counselling, work-based learning projects are discussed and created with the workplace mentor. Within Health and Social Care, a student is supported to set up a walking group for people with mental health issues as a project for the course, which has now been adopted and continued by the county. Higher National Business students have been given problems by their employers that need solving as part of the course. These numerous examples clearly demonstrate the importance of employability to the College.

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 27-29 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/assuringstandardsandquality.

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

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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