

# Higher Education Review of Loughborough College

March 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 Loughborough College. The review took place from 18 to 20 March 2014 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Miss Maxina Butler-Holmes
- Emeritus Professor Richard Allen
- Dr Marie Stowell
- Mrs Sala Banda-Khulumula (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Loughborough 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 threshold academic standards
  - the quality of 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 Loughborough 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,<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/qualitycode](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode).

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx).

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

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Loughborough College

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

- The engagement with employers and sector bodies to develop and deliver a national, innovative, industry-led programme in Space Engineering (Expectation A5).
- The commitment to developing programmes that are responsive to the needs of learners and employers (Enhancement).
- The introduction of the Academic Tutor role which is effective in improving students' success (Expectation B4).
- The varied range of opportunities available to students to enable them to develop employability skills (Enhancement).

### Recommendations

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

By March 2015:

- review the operation of the College's impaired performance procedure to assure equity for students (Expectation B6)
- ensure the completeness and consistency of course information for applicants on the website (Expectation C)
- clarify the specifically regulatory elements of the policies linked to assessment for which it is responsible, and communicate these and the complementary regulations of the awarding body to all students for any given programme (Expectation B1).

By July 2015:

- ensure there is more consistent provision of course-related information in LearnZone (Expectation C)
- develop and formally document a detailed process that codifies the College stages, principles and requirements for planning, academic scrutiny and approval of new courses (Expectation B1)
- establish formal College mechanisms, which make appropriate use of external expertise, to approve and periodically review Pearson programmes (Expectation B8)
- formalise College requirements and expectations regarding the quality management of placements, and foundation degrees which include work-based learning delivered or supported by employers or other organisations (Expectation B10)

- ensure appeal hearings are fully minuted to provide a clear record of process, decisions and their rationale at each stage (Expectation B9)
- further develop the self-assessment review process to provide more effective evaluation of the higher education provision and promote enhancement (Enhancement).

## **Affirmation of action being taken**

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

- The introduction of the Higher Education Academic Board committee structure enables further development of higher education strategies and stronger oversight of higher education provision (Enhancement).
- The College's plans, as articulated in the student involvement strategy, to further engage students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5).

## **Theme: Student Employability**

The College proposes a wide range of actions that develop employability skills in students, from project-based learning, internships and placements to employment and skills modules. The College has strong partnerships with various employers and students greatly appreciate the opportunities they are presented with.

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

## About Loughborough College

Loughborough College (the College) is a general further education college located in Leicestershire. It moved to its present site in 1966 and now shares a large educational campus with Loughborough University.

The College currently offers full-time higher education provision at HND, foundation degree and honours degree level in sport, engineering, music, leisure, travel, tourism, food manufacturing and hospitality management, and leadership and management, and part-time higher education provision in sport, engineering, leisure, travel, tourism, food manufacturing and hospitality management, childcare and teacher education, and franchised provision from Aston University in power engineering. The College works in partnership with six validating bodies - Pearson, Loughborough University, Nottingham Trent University, Derby University, Aston University and Warwick University - to offer programmes in identified niche markets.

Most of the College's higher education activity takes place on the main campus, but some provision occurs in community venues and partner universities and increasingly on business premises both locally and nationally.

The current student numbers are around 1,000 students, equating to 706 full-time equivalents under the current HEFCE allocation. In 2012-13, students from 34 different countries enrolled at the College, including over 100 international fee-paying students. International students are enrolled onto mainstream College courses.

The College has been through a recent change in the senior management and leadership team. The current Principal and Chief Executive was appointed in September 2012 following the retirement of the previous Principal. The scope of the senior leadership team has widened with the new roles of Vice Principal Curriculum and Delivery and Assistant Principal Quality and Standards. There is a sharper focus on all aspects of the College's work to increase quality and growth. The management team has been restructured to promote the responsiveness, consistency and quality of provision throughout the organisation. There has been a particular focus on strengthening the academic governance arrangements for higher education. The new committee structure will support a stronger higher education focus and enable more effective oversight of higher education matters. Working with the six validating bodies poses a significant challenge to the College as it needs to accommodate the various requirements. However, the College is making use of this experience, and has recently established or reviewed a number of policies and procedures specifically in relation to its higher education provision.

The College has made progress in addressing the recommendations from its Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2009.

## Explanation of the findings about Loughborough 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 Foundation degree and bachelor's degree qualifications are offered by the College in partnership with five universities, and the College indicates that approval and review are ultimately the responsibility of those universities. Approval in all cases requires completion of a proposal form, which is then the basis of a programme specification and associated module specifications, and is subject to a validation process. Partner universities are ultimately responsible for ensuring the continuing match between qualifications and the FHEQ, and reports by external examiners are key to this. These reports are formally the property of the validating institution but they are made available to the College and details within them - including the match to the FHEQ - considered at programme and College committee level. Annual monitoring and periodic review processes provide a further layer of monitoring for qualifications offered in partnership with universities.

1.2 Higher national qualifications are offered by the College within the framework of the Pearson system. This system ensures that a qualification sits appropriately within the FHEQ, largely through the use of core and optional modules allocated which must be used within a framework laid down by Pearson. The continuing effectiveness of this system is ensured annually through the use of external examiners.

1.3 The review team investigated the working of these processes. It found that guidance on the use of the FHEQ in the development of courses was freely available to College staff via the websites of the validating universities and Pearson. All the awarding universities require that proposals be allocated to the FHEQ, as part of the information submitted in a proposal form and/or a draft programme specification, and module specifications. Evidence was provided to show interactions between the College and one of its awarding bodies in the development of a programme. Programme specifications and module specifications show the match to the FHEQ. All external examiners must report on the match to the FHEQ and identify mismatches. Periodic programme reviews provide a further check, and similarly identify mismatches. (These processes are discussed further under Expectations B1, B7 and B8.)

1.4 The team found no evidence that the College provides its own formal guidance to staff on alignment with the FHEQ in the design and development of programmes. Scrutiny by the awarding university and the structure of the Pearson system ensures standards are set for a new course, and ultimately the work of external examiners ensures that these standards are maintained in final results. However, the review team did consider that the absence of College guidance still constituted a measure of risk that could be removed through codification of the College principles and requirements for planning, academic scrutiny and approval of new courses (see recommendation under Expectation B1).

1.5 Overall, the review team found that rigorous processes set by the validating universities and Pearson, and followed by the College, ensure that qualifications are

allocated to the appropriate level in the FHEQ. The principles and procedures also correspond with the Expectations of *Chapter B1: Programme design, development and approval* and *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code.

**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**

1.6 Approval processes of partner universities and the Pearson framework ensure that the design of all programmes offered by the College takes account of relevant subject and qualification benchmarks. Annual review of match to benchmarks is carried out in all cases by external examiners, and this is supplemented by annual monitoring and periodic programme review of university qualifications. (These processes are discussed further in relation to Expectations B1, B7 and B8.)

1.7 The team found no evidence that the College provides its own formal guidance to staff on the use and monitoring of relevant benchmarks either in the development phase or later, for example to guide setting of assessment. Scrutiny by the awarding university and the structure of the Pearson system ensures standards are set for a new course, and ultimately the work of external examiners ensures that these standards are maintained in final results. However, the review team did consider that the absence of College guidance still constituted a measure of risk that could be removed through codification of the College principles and requirements for planning, academic scrutiny and approval of new courses (see recommendation in Expectation B1).

1.8 Overall, the review team found that rigorous processes set by the validating universities and Pearson, and followed by the College, ensure that relevant benchmarks are considered. The principles and procedures applied also correspond with the Expectations of *Chapter B1: Programme design, development and approval* and *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code.

**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**

1.9 The approval processes of partner universities and the Pearson framework ensure that the design of all programmes offered by the College takes account of and makes available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study. This information is carried through into programme specifications and module specifications. Annual review to test that current teaching and learning practice enables students to display appropriate learner achievements is carried out in all cases by external examiners, and this is supplemented by annual monitoring and periodic programme review of university qualifications to ensure programmes of study remain up to date. (These processes are discussed further in relation to Expectations B1, B7 and B8.)

1.10 The team found no evidence that the College provides its own formal guidance to staff on the use and monitoring of relevant benchmarks either in the development phase or later, for example to guide setting of assessment. Scrutiny by the awarding university and the structure of the Pearson system ensures standards are set for a new course, and ultimately the work of external examiners ensures that these standards are maintained in final results. However, the review team did consider that the absence of College guidance still constituted a measure of risk that could be removed through codification of the College principles and requirements for planning, academic scrutiny and approval of new courses (see recommendation under Expectation B1).

1.11 Overall, the review team found that rigorous processes set by the validating universities and Pearson, and followed by the College, ensure that definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements is made available for all higher education programmes of study offered by the College.

**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**

1.12 The responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards is addressed within the agreements between the College and each of its validating partner universities. Approval reports include a significant number of conditions, recommendations and comments to develop and amend documentation, so it is only through the final approval meetings convened by the University that the programme and module specifications are approved.

1.13 Programme approval, development and review processes are overseen by the awarding universities. Programme and module specifications are approved at final approval meetings convened by the University. The College provided several examples of programme specifications and module specifications authored by its subject teams. Approval reports confirm that programme specifications set out learning outcomes for awards that are appropriate to levels of the framework for higher education qualifications and the foundation degree benchmark statement; however, they also contain a significant number of conditions, recommendations and comments to develop and amend documentation. The reports also evidence the inclusion of external academics and commendations relating to programme design. Examples of the latter include the introduction of 'long thin modules to support creative practice' in Music and the flexibility of programme structure to meet student and employer needs in Engineering (see good practice under Enhancement). In all cases, College staff work collaboratively with either a named individual or departmental staff at the relevant university. Staff recognise that there is some 'compartmentalisation' with this subject-level approach to approval and validation arrangements which have not enabled the sharing of cross-disciplinary practices; the higher education committee structure and staff development activities are anticipated to encourage a culture of continuous improvement and enhancement.

1.14 The initial course approval system within the College is largely a business case model, with underdeveloped focus on academic scrutiny. During meetings the team explored the academic approvals route and lines for exercising responsibility. Heads of department support proposals with the final decision being taken by the Vice Principal. Given that the higher education committee structures are in their infancy, there is little formal evidence of programme design and approval discussion to demonstrate appropriate academic scrutiny. These committees do not include colleagues from partner universities in the membership. The emerging Higher Education Academic Board will, however, provide the forum for more formalised academic discussions and approvals in the future. The terms of reference for the Higher Education Academic Board state that a key responsibility is 'to validate new programmes of study'.

1.15 The review team considered the use of externality and found that the College makes effective use of external representation in many aspects of the assurance of academic standards, including approval and review activities. Examples included: representation from academic institutions on approval panels; employer and professional sector body input into programme design; staff development delivered by university colleagues on the production of module specifications; and gathering feedback from former students on the most appropriate modules for incorporation into the level 6 Leadership and Management degree structure. The design of the programme on Space Engineering involved a multi-party working group and resulted in an innovatively designed foundation

degree incorporating higher-level apprenticeships (see Expectation A5). The College worked with the University of Leicester to achieve approval which confirmed that the programme was tested against the University's regulatory framework. The two approval panels rigorously tested the aims of the curriculum and intended learning outcomes.

1.16 There is effective engagement in university-led periodic reviews; for example, the 2011 Loughborough University panel noted the 'robustness of structure' to support the academic partnership in sport. The College has enjoyed devolved responsibility for a range of quality assurance approaches, particularly with Nottingham Trent University, where decision making for minor modifications takes place at College level without prior approval of the awarding body. There is, however, no analogous College-led mechanism involving external opinion for the periodic review of programmes linked to Pearson awards.

1.17 Programme monitoring and review is well established through the differing university requirements; these systems ensure that programme standards are maintained. For the 2012-13 reporting cycle, the College introduced a higher education self-assessment report model which has been accepted by all but one of the partner universities (the University of Derby) as suitable for annual reporting purposes. Programme self-assessment reports become part of the relevant departmental self-assessment report prior to submission to the Quality Standards Committee. Feedback from partners into the College committee structures currently rests at departmental level. There is variation, in practice, relating to qualitative and evaluative commentaries within these reports. Students are not currently involved in the self-assessment process; however, the College acknowledges that student involvement represents an area for improvement.

1.18 The team concludes that the self-assessment reporting cycle allows the College to effectively evaluate processes. Emerging structures have the potential to ensure that continuous improvement principles are applied to other aspects of approval and periodic review contained within the Quality Code.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

### **Quality Code, Chapter A5: Externality**

#### **Findings**

1.19 The College demonstrates a clear commitment to developing programmes which are responsive to the needs of employers and students (see good practice under Enhancement). The curriculum priorities in the higher education strategy focus upon those identified by the Local Enterprise Partnership. Programmes have been designed and are being planned in the subject areas of: engineering, especially power; sport; and leadership and management. The College is engaging with national governing bodies in sport and major employers to expand the science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) and business-related portfolio.

1.20 The vocational relevance and currency demanded by employers is matched to appropriate academic standards as defined in the FHEQ and through the approval processes with the awarding bodies. The Nottingham Trent University panel commended the changes made to programmes which had involved consultations with a range of key stakeholders. The University of Derby approval panels for music and engineering had external panel members drawn from vocational sectors. In engineering two units were centre-devised, and approved by the awarding body to be tailored to the specific requirements of a significant employer in the power industry. During the review of the foundation degrees in business and management, external business partners were consulted to map the national occupational standards to the aims and intended learning outcomes of the awards. The development of the level 6 leadership and management studies was informed by reference to local market intelligence as part of the rationale for higher-level qualifications within the region. The teaching team also consulted with two former students in the selection of modules for the programme and their perceived usefulness to the world of work.

1.21 The College positioned the development of the Foundation Degree in Space Engineering as a model of good practice in externality. This initiative was the result of the College's successful bid to a government-funded project to develop the national framework for higher apprenticeships in space engineering. The review team studied the comprehensive papers documenting the work of the Steering Group, the validation and approval papers and discussed the programme in meetings with staff and employers. The project, which took some considerable time to complete, involved significant employer and sector skill council as well as several external academic contributions. The intended learning outcomes are aligned to the Engineering Council specifications. The academic development team included academics from the University of Leicester and industry specialists from the National Space Centre. Two of the industrial experts whom the review team met have been extensively involved in writing intended learning outcomes and will play a role in the formal assessment of students. The engagement with employers and sector bodies to develop and deliver the national, innovative, industry-led programme in space engineering is **good practice**.

1.22 The emerging higher education committee structures will provide a more coherent strategic focus to ensure effective independent and external participation in quality assurance processes. The Higher Education Academic Board and its subcommittees do not include university staff in the membership, nor has there been any involvement by external academics in the validation of the self-assessment reports. There is clear involvement of external academics in the development and review of programmes. External examiner reports endorse that programmes engage with the FHEQ and that staff understand threshold

standards; however, the team did not establish any instances of the use of external examiners in the academic thinking processes leading up to validation and approvals or periodic review. Several external examiners attend formal examination boards which are held at the College under the devolved model of responsibility. There are sections in each individual self-assessment report covering externality; the new infrastructure arrangements are anticipated to provide a secure academic platform to enable further institutional approaches towards externality.

1.23 Overall, the review team concludes that the College is meeting the Expectation to assure externality, particularly in relation to the currency of programmes.

**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**

1.24 The assessment of the achievement of learning outcomes takes place within an appropriate academic and regulatory framework, composed of a series of policies. The generic College Assessment Policy is approved through the Quality and Standards Committee; this contains generic principles that relate to further and higher education students. Given the nature of the multi-university partnership in addition to the Pearson programmes, there are several sets of academic regulations in operation.

1.25 The areas of assessment for which the College is responsible require clarification, particularly in light of the differing relationships with awarding institutions. The College provided examples of assessment regulations for the review team. There is significant devolved responsibility to the College with two of its awarding bodies. For Nottingham Trent University awards, many aspects of the regulations are devolved. For example, the College is permitted to develop its own regulations for academic appeals and irregularities. The College has developed an assessment strategy and regulations especially for foundation degrees validated by Loughborough University. The University of Derby, however, retains total responsibility for assessment regulations. For example, the approval report for music noted that the assessment process is totally 'in accordance with' the University regulations. It was not clear to the review team which regulations apply to students on Pearson programmes. The review team **recommends** that the College clarify the specifically regulatory elements of the policies linked to assessment for which it is responsible, and communicate these and the complementary regulations of the awarding body to all students for any given programme.

1.26 Programme specifications, along with module handbooks, articulate a range of assessment approaches with criteria aligned with intended learning outcomes. Reports of several validation and reapproval events by partner universities have contained conditions relating to the revision of assessment strategies, to which the College has responded at the programme level. Most recently, the development team for the Space Engineering Foundation Degree have been required to rigorously ensure that intended learning outcomes are constructively aligned to the assessment strategy for the award.

1.27 The design of assessment strategies takes place at departmental level. Assessment is mapped to intended learning outcomes during the preparations for validation. Student involvement in these design processes is not embedded, although isolated examples of influence were provided by students. Students whom the review team met felt clear about grading criteria and assessment requirements, including grading criteria.

1.28 Employability skills are explicitly assessed through placements, work-based and personal development modules, making assessment relevant to the world of work and vocational sectors.

1.29 External examiners confirm the effectiveness and appropriateness of assessment as academically progressive in enabling students to achieve the intended learning outcomes at the relevant level of the FHEQ. University verifiers and link tutors consistently note the effective and thorough moderation of standards.

1.30 The review team was able to identify several examples of experiences of assessment being shared across disciplines through staff development. New staff are supported by programme leaders in their understanding of levels and of ensuring that feedback is appropriate. Additionally, the review team was provided with examples in sport of where new staff had been able to instigate a change in assessment strategy or become involved in producing assessment guidelines with rubrics.

1.31 There are effective examples of peer assessment among the student population, usually as formative assessment. Students find this useful, leading to a 'positive understanding of assessment'. The external examiner for business and management programmes commented that this practice should be extended.

1.32 Overall, the review team concludes that there are effective mechanisms in place for the assessment of achievement of learning outcomes. Currently, actions take place predominantly at department level; however, it is anticipated that once the higher education committees are more established this will provide a strategic forum, along with the new self-assessment reporting, to promote a culture that liberates and synthesises effective subject-level practices to realise a strategic, enhancement-led approach towards assessment.

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

## Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.33 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area were met and the associated levels of risk were low, bar Expectation A4 where the identified risk was moderate. Expectations A1, A2 and A3 are cross-referenced to the recommendation detailed under Expectation B1, where the College is recommended to consider the development of formal guidance for staff involved in course design and approval. The review team also formulated a recommendation under Expectation A6 which urges the College to achieve better clarification of assessment regulations. There was one feature of good practice which is explained more fully under Expectation A5. The team identified no affirmations for this judgement area. The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding bodies at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme design and approval**

### Findings

2.1 New course developments are discussed between College departments and the executive as part of the annual business planning rounds, and are developed in outline on a standard form which is then sent for approval to institutional managers and members of the College executive. The stated aim of the process is to ensure the 'viability' and 'highest quality' of the proposal. Liaison and consultation with awarding bodies and employers where appropriate as well as reference to their requirements are generally key aspects of the process of programme development.

2.2 The College does not currently have a document setting out the course design and approval process or written guidance for staff on programme design. Final academic approval for a new course lies with the Vice Principal, although in the future the College Higher Education Academic Board will have a role in validating and revalidating programmes.

2.3 The review team tested the operation of processes for the design and approval of programmes by considering the outline proposal forms for three new programmes, notes of course development meetings, reading a number of validation and revalidation reports, and talking to staff and employer representatives who had been engaged in course development.

2.4 The College regards responsiveness to, and engagement with, employers in the design and development of its programmes as a strength. The review team saw extensive evidence of employer engagement in the design and planning of new programmes and with modules intended to develop student employability. In particular, the work with the space engineering industry to develop a national framework linking a foundation degree to higher apprenticeships was considered to be a model of good practice in developing an employer-led curriculum (see Expectation A5).

2.5 Completed course proposal forms seen by the review team provide only limited information about the potential demand, intended structure, curriculum and arrangements for learning and teaching of a programme to inform decisions about viability and course quality. Although there was data to assess the financial case for a new course proposal, and it was clear that members of the College executive were involved in decisions, the information provided about the course proposal does not permit detailed academic scrutiny to assure the quality of new programmes before formal presentation for validation.

2.6 For foundation degree and honours degree programmes the College's partner university approval processes provide for rigorous quality assurance involving the use of external expertise in the design and approval of programmes. The review team noted, however, that three of the four reports of course validations with partner universities included a significant number of conditions regarding curriculum design.

2.7 In the case of Pearson programmes, the College confirmed that there is no internal course approval or reapproval/periodic review process that draws on independent external academic advice to ensure that the design of Pearson programmes and arrangements for their delivery are appropriate.

2.8 Overall, the review team considered that the College's current arrangements for course design and approval are not sufficiently rigorous to assure the intended aim of guaranteeing new course proposals are of the highest quality. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is not met and there is a moderate risk. The team **recommends** that the College develop and formally document a detailed process which codifies the College stages, principles and requirements for planning, academic scrutiny and approval of new courses.

**Expectation: Not 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**

2.9 The College has in place a student recruitment policy and is currently working on a higher education-specific recruitment policy scheduled for 2015-16 academic year. The College has an accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) policy which stipulates all curriculum teams have a lead person in place. The College also uses trained recruitment advisers in assessing the eligibility of the applicants. The team were informed of the working relationship between the recruitment advisers and curriculum departments regarding UCAS applications and clearing processes in supporting the College to meet set targets and allocations. Full-time students apply via UCAS while part-time and distance learners apply directly to the College.

2.10 The College also has in place a standard complaints procedure that applicants can use to dispute or query a decision on their application, and evidence was provided to show how the student recruitment policy allows for fair admission for local and international students. The policies governing the recruitment process are reviewed annually to allow comments from students and staff to be taken on board and to allow the College room for improvements and changes.

2.11 As potential applicants, students told the team they accessed information in a variety of ways: via the prospectus, online, walk-ins, current students, phone, open days and visits to the campus. The admissions process was explained as they were then directed to the right person to attend to their query. A recruitment adviser who works closely with the curriculum department would then advise the applicant on the best fit using APEL policy.

2.12 The team concludes that the College has in place a system with policies and procedures that are clear and fair regarding student admissions. Students agreed that they were given sufficient information and appropriate advice, and that requirements for entry were clearly stipulated.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.13 The College has a learning and teaching strategy, but indicates that a new bespoke higher education strategy is an area for development. Nonetheless, the current strategy sets out basic principles regarding student learning, independence and development. Initially students are made aware of requirements during the recruitment process which is further expounded upon at induction and articulated in the handbooks.

2.14 A combination of teaching and learning methods are employed mostly online and face to face to cater to the diverse nature of students; lectures, webinars, seminars, practicals, workshops and blended learning. There is evidence of effective use of technologies in learning, teaching and assessment, as evidence by student feedback and external examiner comments. For most programme areas, students submit assessments online through the virtual learning environment (VLE) and Turnitin as per College policy.

2.15 There are currently around 100 student studying in FDL mode, across business, engineering and sport. The College has a team of eight qualified learning technologists who work closely with curriculum and subject specialists to ensure content, development of the resources and the underpinning pedagogy are of high quality. Expectations and standards for the use of FDL are monitored by the E-learning team to ensure consistent quality and student experience. The E-learning audit conducted internally included a physical quality check of the LearnZone as well as scrutiny of student activity within course areas, the design and navigation of the courses, the active resources, activities and features being used on the course, and evidence of teaching and learning; for example, assessment and feedback.

2.16 Lecturers' qualifications, knowledge and experience are diverse, and this is supplemented by experienced visiting lecturers. The staff are provided with training and ongoing support. The College has a staff training policy and all staff have individual learning and teaching development plans and are allocated continuing professional development (CPD) hours which are monitored. The College also has a strong teaching observation policy and practice that applies to all provision, which includes graded observations undertaken by trained managers; these teaching observations feed into annual appraisals. External consultants used in the 2013 observation round commented that higher education teaching was of high quality. The staff told the team that they meet across departments and share good practice at team meetings and in conferences. The team found there are strong systems for monitoring teaching quality and engaging staff in CPD.

2.17 Peer grading takes place among students, with grade attributes representing a small percentage of the final grade. The students find this positive as it gives them a better understanding of what the lecturers and the course are looking for and how the grading process works.

2.18 There are many opportunities for placements and work-related learning in the College's higher education programmes. Despite this, some students queried the value of placements and felt they did not take place at the right time of their learning and were not sufficiently monitored/supported by College staff. Staff indicated that the College does not

have in place a generic work-based policy across the departments; rather, it is indicative per course/department (see recommendation under Expectation B10).

2.19 Overall, the team found that the College has in place systems and processes that enable students to develop as independent learners in their chosen field, with some developments still to occur in the area of work-based learning.

**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**

2.20 The College invests considerably in academic and personal student support, with all higher education students provided with a structured tutorial programme for their period of study, involving group tutorials and one-to-one progress reviews.

2.21 Skills development is embedded in the curriculum through workshops and student development weeks. The College's learning resource spend is allocated according to student numbers. Programme leaders ensure essential reading material is in place by consulting the awarding body and listening to student feedback. The College has also implemented a strategy to invest more in e-resources.

2.22 The College holds events that encourage employability through the employability week, enterprise conferences, young enterprise, internships and placements. As the largest department, the team noted the emphasis placed on development and employability of students within the sports department. Employability skills that rate highly with students are core to the curriculum at the College. These skills translate into employment in places such as Manchester City FC, Arsenal and Walsall, which in turn benefit current students as graduates from the College return as guest speakers.

2.23 The academic progress of students is monitored by regular progress tutor meetings between the lecturers and academic tutor. The introduction of the academic tutor has been hailed a success by both staff and students. The role of the academic tutor is pastoral in nature and provides a one-to-one opportunity to speak with the student. Their main aim is to identify students who need support academically and assist them through a series of meetings and tutorials and follow up on their progress. This initiative has been noted by one of the College's awarding universities who plans to introduce it in their own university. The introduction of the academic tutor role which is effective in improving students' success is **good practice**.

2.24 The College invests in specialist resources for sport, music and engineering students, and shares some resources with awarding bodies. Students have different degrees of access to awarding body physical libraries, online resources, intranet and other facilities as per agreements with the College.

2.25 The higher education centre was opened in 2011 and is specifically tailored to cater for the learning and teaching needs of higher education students. The centre is equipped with reading materials and access to computers, and is still being developed. Students noted that currently there was still a shortage of reading materials, and a need for a wider range of module-specific reading materials. Students also indicated that the number of computers was inadequate, and the opening times for the library needed to be adjusted to better accommodate the needs of part-time and distance-learning students. However, students expressed confidence that the College was considering these aspects and would address them as part of the continuous development of the centre.

2.26 Overall, the team concludes the College has a strategy in place for resources and is continuously evaluating and monitoring ways to enhance and develop students' learning by listening to their needs.

**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**

2.27 The College defines student engagement as essential in developing the student experience in its involvement strategy, which focuses on students being involved and consulted on a wide range of development initiatives, achieving a student-led community and providing students with opportunities to develop skills. The document puts in context: the course representative structure; a calendar of surveys, conferences, focus groups and forums; student involvement in the review and evaluation of courses; and a web-based student voice platform, where students can be kept informed and actions closed. In policy and principle there are many opportunities for students to be involved or engaged. The strategy defines the scope of student involvement as well as the physical structures that enable this involvement.

2.28 The College developed a Student Charter in 2012-13, in consultation with students, setting commitments and expectations of students. This is publicised through the website, LearnZone, Student Handbook and student calendars. The College plans to evaluate the Charter annually.

2.29 The College has made provision for student representatives on all the higher education committees; Academic Board; the Quality Standards Committee; and the Teaching and Learning Committee. There is a higher education student governor and students sit as advisers on a number of other College committees. Student views are also represented on Equality and Diversity; Health and Safety; and Health and Wellbeing. Student representatives are voted into post by their peers and receive training through the LSU, and are invited to course team meetings at least once per term. However, available minutes of team meetings do not indicate attendance of student representatives or discussion of elections. As part of training and ongoing support, the College has planned a higher education student representatives' conference for 2013-14.

2.30 The College uses 'you said, we did' feedback and focus group meetings with the student development team and College managers to capture the student voice. Student feedback is both formal and informal; there are feedback process in place through focus groups, questionnaires, interviews and emails. Programme areas conduct end-of-module evaluations and focus groups, as well as a range of different surveys, which together with other forms of feedback feed into annual self-assessments.

2.31 The College has monthly and quarterly compliance reviews and an annual report on complaints, student satisfaction and engagement presented to the College Board of Governors. Students told the team they felt their complaints are dealt with appropriately, and they are generally satisfied.

2.32 The College has in place different methods of student engagement that allow for student feedback to be listened to and ultimately actioned. Staff and student committees act on timetables, IT and general improvements.

2.33 Overall, the team confirmed that the student voice is being heard and acted upon. The student involvement strategy specifically sets out to ensure consistent engagement of students in quality assurance and quality enhancement processes. The team **affirms** the College's plans, as articulated in the student involvement strategy, to further engage

students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (see also Expectation A4).

**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**

2.34 The College has a generic Assessment Policy which sets out a number of principles, including access to information, marking, turnaround times, and rights to reassessment. There are also policies and procedures for impaired performance, plagiarism and assessment malpractice; the latter two are linked to the student disciplinary procedures.

2.35 The review team looked at assessment documentation, including policies, procedures, strategies and information available to students in handbooks and via the VLE. The team also talked to students and staff about assessment policy and practice, and reviewed evidence from course documentation and external examiner reports.

2.36 Course and module assessment strategies are approved through the validation process of partner institutions. There is a systematic process of annual review and, where appropriate, presentation of proposed modification of assessment for approval by awarding bodies. Assessment criteria are linked to threshold standards and are contextualised into assessments for students. Across the different subject areas, staff make use of a wide range of assessment methods and the linking of criteria and feedback to learning outcomes is commended by external examiners and validating partners. Similarly, external examiner reports confirm the rigorous processes for the moderation of assignments including examinations and for internal verification of marking. Retention and achievement rates for higher education programmes at the College are generally above benchmark, and any falls in success rates are identified in the annual self-evaluation process.

2.37 The College has a strong commitment to effective assessment design through validation, course planning, course and module documentation, and the use of external examiner feedback. Students with whom the team met confirmed that they are given clear information about plagiarism and assessment malpractice, and requesting extensions at induction, and that they are required to sign a statement to confirm awareness of the processes. Students also confirmed that the provision of assessment schedules is helpful, and that feedback on assignments is within specified time limits and is constructive; they have welcomed the use of electronic submission and feedback. The College is developing guidance for staff on the provision of feedback, and staff stated that there are appropriate CPD opportunities in relation to assessment matters; a recent College CPD conference for higher education staff focused on formative assessment and feedback.

2.38 Depending on the programme, examination boards are held either at the partner university or at the College. Examination boards are held for all higher national programmes and the review team were informed that external examiners are expected to attend. As indicated under Expectation A6, the College has a policy and procedure framework which operates in relation to the governance of student assessment, rather than a single set of generic assessment regulations. This includes the Assessment Policy, impaired performance procedure, assessment malpractice and plagiarism policies as well as academic appeals and complaints procedures. The College explained how through the processes of centre and course approval the regulations of the College and the validating university are aligned. In reviewing the information on regulation of assessment available to students in handbooks or on the VLE, the review team found this was sometimes partial or incomplete, and it was unclear where College or awarding body/Pearson regulations applied.

2.39 The team reviewed minutes of Impaired Performance Board meetings, which are chaired by the Head of Higher Education but convened at departmental level, and noted that the outcome of a successful claim could result in a decision to uplift the mark awarded for the module, or reassessment as a first attempt. The impaired performance procedure makes no reference to possible outcomes of successful claims, or criteria for decision making. The review team considered that the departmental nature of the Board meetings and the lack of specific criteria for determining outcomes could potentially give rise to inequity, and **recommends** that the College review the operation of the impaired performance procedure to assure equity for students.

2.40 Overall, the team concludes that the College has policies and procedures in place which positively contribute to the effective management of assessments. The areas of regulations for which the College is responsible require some further clarification in relation to the awarding bodies (see Expectation A6).

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.41 While external examiners are nominated by the College, responsibility for the appointment, management and briefing of external examiners lies with the College's University partners, or with Pearson in respect of higher national awards. An induction is arranged for new external examiners to familiarise them with the College and meet staff. External examiner reports are received by the Head of Higher Education who circulates them to the Principal and other relevant members of the executive, and to course leaders. Responses to external examiner reports are managed by the College according to the requirements of validating partners.

2.42 The review team read a number of examples of exam board minutes and external examiner and external verifier reports and responses, and reviewed curriculum team and institutional self-assessment reports, student handbooks and the VLE, together with committee minutes and associated papers. In addition, the team discussed external examiner processes with students and staff.

2.43 From the evidence reviewed, the team found that external examiners attend meetings of examination boards, including those for higher nationals, and external examiner reports are systematically considered through the annual self-assessment process. Recommendations for development feed into action plans which are monitored at departmental level. Common themes, good practice and areas for improvement are summarised by the Head of Higher Education and considered at the Quality and Standards Committee for assurance and enhancement purposes. The review of 2012-13 reports resulted in an action to provide development for staff on assessment practices. The Head of Higher Education and Vice Principal (Quality and Standards) ensure that all external examiner reports have an appropriate and timely response.

2.44 The College self-evaluation document (SED) stated that students are made aware of the role of external examiners in the moderation and quality process and external examiner reports are shared with students at Student Committee meetings and saved to LearnZone. Students with whom the review team met varied in their awareness of external examiners, and some did not recall having seen or discussed reports. The team also found some inconsistency in the availability of external examiner reports on LearnZone (see Expectation C). The College's plans to further engage students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience as articulated in the recently approved student involvement strategy will potentially strengthen student awareness of external examiner reports (see affirmation under Expectation B5 and also the recommendation under Expectation C).

2.45 The team concludes that overall the College has in place systematic processes for the consideration of external examiner reports and makes appropriate use of reports for enhancement purposes.

**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**

2.46 College courses are monitored and periodically reviewed in accordance with the requirements and procedures of partner universities, and the College itself makes use of a range of mechanisms and processes to monitor the health of its programmes. These include student surveys and module evaluations, quarterly quality monitoring meetings, annual self-assessment processes and teaching observations.

2.47 The review team tested the periodic review procedures by reading reports of recent periodic reviews and annual course, programme and institutional self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans as well as reviewing committee minutes and other evaluation data.

2.48 The review team noted that the new Academic Board committee structure provides stronger oversight of the College's higher education provision, and that the College also revised its annual self-assessment process for 2013-14 to better align with external higher education quality systems and processes. The focus now is on the production of course and programme area self-assessment reports, and an overall higher education self-assessment report and rolling action plan. This annual process is underpinned by a comprehensive system of graded teaching observations together with Quarterly Quality Review meetings involving the College senior managers meeting with each departmental management team to review data and key performance indicators.

2.49 From reviewing a sample of self-assessment reports, the review team concludes that there are comprehensive and robust procedures in place for annual monitoring which draw on a range of quantitative and qualitative evaluation data, including data on progression, retention and achievement, student feedback and external examiner reports. Although there is some variability in the evaluative response to data on, for example, retention and achievement, and some action plans are relatively brief, the self-assessments and action plans are generally complete, and the review and validation of reports and plans by the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee has the potential to further strengthen the evaluative nature of reports for enhancement purposes. All reports have rolling action plans.

2.50 The processes for periodic review of foundation degree and BA/BSc programmes are set and conducted through the partner university procedures, and from the evidence reviewed the team confirm these operate effectively and include independent external participants. However, the College does not currently conduct periodic reviews of its Pearson programmes, and the review team **recommends** that the College establish formal College mechanisms, which make appropriate use of external expertise, to approve and periodically review Pearson programmes.

2.51 The review team noted that within the terms of reference of the newly established Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee, there was significant emphasis on monitoring and review activity, including consideration of revalidation and other external reports and monitoring of a range of institutional-level performance indicators, with a view to the identification and dissemination of good practice.

2.52 The team concludes that the College has annual and periodic review processes that operate effectively, with the only exception being in relation to the periodic review of Pearson programmes.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

## **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**

2.53 The College approved new complaints and appeals procedures in September 2013. Procedures are made available to students via the College website, VLE and student handbooks, and are also brought to the attention of students through the induction process. Both documents refer to higher education students' right to refer complaints or appeals to the awarding or validating organisations at an appropriate point.

2.54 The review team tested the operation of processes for handling complaints and academic appeals by talking to students and their representatives and scrutinising reports and associated documents, including an anonymised audit trail of an academic appeal.

2.55 Students with whom the review team met were all aware of the procedures, although information did not appear to be systematically available or referred to in all course handbooks.

2.56 The complaints procedure document was clearly articulated and made use of staged processes, as did the appeals procedure, although the review team found the procedures less clearly articulated, particularly the grounds on which academic appeals are permitted.

2.57 The audit trail of an academic appeal seen by the review team which progressed to the third and final stage of the process also raised concerns for the review team. The audit trail consisted of emails between the appealing student and members of staff responsible for the appeals process, plus a very brief statement relating to the final stage meeting, rather than a complete set of formal documentation and records of all meetings held. This meant it was not possible to confirm the proper composition and operation of the appeals process or the decisions and rationale for outcomes at each stage.

2.58 The review team **recommends** that the College ensure appeal hearings are fully minuted to provide a clear record of processes, decisions and their rationale at each stage.

2.59 The Quality and Standards Unit is responsible for monitoring complaints and appeals. Complaints are reported and reviewed by Curriculum Managers and the Senior Management team through the Quarterly Quality Review process. The number of complaints and appeals is reported in the higher education annual self-assessment report, and a more detailed analysis of complaints is included in the complaints and learner feedback annual report to the Board of Governors. The arrangements for monitoring procedures are robust.

2.60 The review team concludes that the College has in place procedures for handling student complaints and appeals and also has processes for monitoring and reporting on these. However, the team were not able to confirm the effective operation of the appeals procedure because of poor records of the process, therefore the risk in this area is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others**

## **Findings**

2.61 The majority of full-time higher education programmes at the College include a significant industrial placement or work-based learning, and there is extensive engagement with employers in the design and delivery of programmes, particularly foundation degree programmes.

2.62 The review team tested the College's arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with employers in the workplace by reviewing the guidance and information provided for employers and students, and through discussion at meetings with students, staff and employers.

2.63 Responsibility for managing placement experiences and communicating with employers or mentors in the workplace lies with course and departmental teams, and there is no central guidance or requirements beyond those relating to health and safety on the quality assurance and management of work-based learning and placements.

2.64 The review team explored the availability of guidance and support with employer representatives involved in providing placement opportunities and with students undertaking placements, and found this to be variable across different programmes. Employer representatives with whom the team met were very positive about working relationships with the College and the arrangements in place for supporting students through work-based learning. The College makes use of a range of different formal and informal arrangements in relation to the provision of placement opportunities both within and outside of the formal curriculum. They also work closely with independent local organisations in the training of mentors. The team also saw two examples of employer guides, which provided statements of the relative responsibilities of employers, students and the College.

2.65 Some students expressed disappointment about the support available in finding placements, while others felt this was an important aspect of developing employability. The team heard from two subject areas of the arrangements in place for managing placements, including how students are prepared and how reflective assessments are used to review the quality of placements. The team also explored the information available to students via the VLE, and saw positive examples in the provision of guidance and documentation, particularly in the areas of sport and business.

2.66 The College acknowledged that it had not considered the implications of *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code in relation to work-based learning and placements. Given the extensive involvement of employers and other organisations in relation to work-related learning, the review team considered that the quality of learning opportunities would be strengthened by articulating College-level policy in this respect. The team **recommends** that the College formalise requirements and expectations regarding the quality management of placements and foundation degrees that include work-based learning delivered or supported by employers or other organisations.

2.67 The review team concludes that overall the College meets the Expectation, although in the absence of explicit College policy on managing learning opportunities delivered with others, there is a moderate risk to the quality of learning opportunities.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

### **Findings**

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

## Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.69 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. Nine Expectations were met, of which seven pose a low risk (B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, B8), and two pose a moderate risk (B9, B10), as detailed under the respective sections. One Expectation (B1) is not met and is associated with moderate risk. Good practice was highlighted regarding the use of the Academic Tutor role. Recommendations were formulated to tackle: the impaired performance procedure; the planning, academic scrutiny and approval of new courses; approval and periodic review of Pearson programmes; work-based learning; and the appeals process. One affirmation was formulated which acknowledged the positive plans to further develop student engagement. The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations and is confident that the recommendations will be addressed appropriately.

### **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 front page of the College's general public website contains a link to 'About the College' pages; these set out the mission, values and strategy of the institution as a whole. A further link to 'Policies and Documents' enables the public to review a range of information, including the minutes of unrestricted business of governors' meetings and the Audit and Risk Committee. Students' documents and parents' documents sections here provide further readily accessible information. The review team explored these sources of information. In many cases information is provided which describes the College as a whole rather than the specific higher education programmes, but the review team judged that the ethos and practices of the higher education programmes were in keeping with the College as a whole, and that the documents reviewed give a good indication of the learning experience students are likely to enjoy.

3.2 Information for prospective students is available in a printed prospectus which can also be downloaded from the College website, and through a series of webpages. Both sources of information provide details of courses and other matters such as finance and accommodation; the links available on the website provide somewhat fuller information in most cases. The webpages also show the Key Information Set data for courses. An 'Apply Now' tab on the College website sets out the application process; the information is also included in the printed prospectus (p. 21). A 'Live Chat' dialogue box on the website takes advantage of the medium to encourage applicants to interact with College staff. The College's SED provided a flowchart for the production of the prospectus with an indication of how accuracy and completeness are assured. An analogous table shows how the College aims to ensure the integrity of its website.

3.3 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's information for prospective students by reviewing the information and processes described above, and through meetings with existing students and relevant staff. Although students can only access all the items in the indicative list of information for prospective students set out in the Quality Code when they are registered, current students confirmed to the review team that they had been able to access sufficient information and that this had - with hindsight - proved accurate. A number spoke of the willingness of staff to respond to telephone enquiries. The Head of Student Services expressed confidence that these telephone enquiries were dealt with by trained staff in her area.

3.4 Through meetings with staff, the review team was able to establish that academic staff were involved in the development of content for the prospectus/webpages; that Heads of Department signed off this text; and that further security was provided by the requirement that the prospectus be signed off by the Marketing and Communications Manager and ultimately by a member of the College Executive. The review team judged the process for production of the prospectus sound and effective. However, the process for production of the webpages was found to be less secure as almost half the pages for foundation degrees and almost all the pages for bachelor's 'top-up' degrees omitted details of the validating body, thus risking giving prospective students a false understanding of the College's awards.

The review team **recommends** that the College ensure the completeness and consistency of course information for applicants on the website.

3.5 Definitive information for current students about courses and modules at the initial approval stage is contained in programme specifications and module specifications. Information from these specifications is then embodied in course handbooks which are the main means whereby the College provides information to students. These have been, and in some cases still are, provided to students in printed form, but the policy is to move increasingly to the use of electronic formats and to integrate information alongside teaching and learning materials on LearnZone. ('Printed' documents are in fact usually available to students as downloads within LearnZone.) In this context, the handbook for the sport programme seems likely to offer a model which the College will adopt more widely. Module handbooks (most often available as downloads from LearnZone) work parallel to course handbooks to provide the information students need for their studies. The content of these handbooks is created and updated by academic staff who are appointed as either programme leaders or course leaders. Planning and performance managers and curriculum managers provide administrative support within departments. These staff work within an informal matrix structure where an awarding body (with varying degrees of prescription) may set templates for module and course handbooks, while the College sets expectations across subjects.

3.6 The review team had access to LearnZone and to a sample of programme and module specifications, and a sample of course and module handbooks. They also met with groups of full-time and part-time students, and with staff responsible for the development of LearnZone. It was clear that the College does provide the basic information students need, for example relating to timetables, rooms and assessment due dates, although some students felt that the information sometimes came too far for them to make arrangements for childcare etc. LearnZone is still in development, and the College is balancing a desire to engage staff with the system and develop things for themselves against standardised College procedures. Students were not always immediately clear that they did have access to particular items of information relating particularly to the administration of their study, but equally they expressed no dissatisfaction about LearnZone or the information there. This may be a reflection of the support they get from teaching staff and academic tutors who are available and ready to answer questions. The review team found that taking course handbooks and module handbooks together, current students did generally have access to the categories of information listed in the Quality Code, i.e. learning outcomes, curriculum details, reading lists, the study environment, assessment, arrangements for work-based learning (where appropriate), information on the administration of teaching, learning and assessment, and regulations. Within a subject area the information is likely to be presented in a consistent way from module to module and level to level. The review team judged, however, that there would potentially be advantages to the College increasing the degree of consistency across programmes and subject areas since this would enable those responsible for the management of quality to ensure an equitable student experience and equal opportunities across its higher education provision. In two areas, namely external examiners' reports and academic regulations, however, the review team judged, prompted by student comments and confirmed by its scrutiny of LearnZone etc, that provision of information was particularly patchy. Taken with the degree of inconsistency from subject to subject and from course to course in LearnZone, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure there is more consistent provision of course-related information in LearnZone.

3.7 The College has established a Student Charter which is available via the Student Services link on the College public website. There are also links there to College Policies and Procedures, and to an annually updated Student Handbook. The Student Charter sets out broad aims for its provision (by which implicitly students can judge its performance), and

a set of expectations it has of its students. The Student Handbook follows this up in more detail and has embedded links to the College Policies and Procedures. Some course sites within LearnZone also contain links to, for example, the Assessment Policy and the Disciplinary Policy. Where study is directed to a qualification made by a partner university, these College policies need to be read in conjunction with the relevant regulations of the awarding university.

3.8 The review team found that the Student Charter and Student Handbook are clearly written, comprehensive and up to date. Students who the team met seemed initially unfamiliar with the Charter but it became clear this was a matter of nomenclature and that they know of its existence and are broadly familiar with its contents. Review of course handbooks showed a mixed picture and perhaps the majority of students would need to access the College website to be sure of the details of the College policies governing their studies. Those who did consult the policies, especially to confirm a precise issue in the regulatory framework within which they were studying, might also feel an element of uncertainty as to whether the policy expressed simply the aims of the College or set explicit rules. Equally, the review team felt they might still be unsure as to the relation between the College policies/regulations and those of the awarding university.

3.9 The College has established an Information Strategy supported by an annual Information Operational Plan which covers the full range of course-related and administrative information with targets for enhancement. Within that environment the College collects a wide range of information, which in the case of higher education programmes mostly feeds into the higher education self-assessment report. This report is designed to be used on a number of levels but is considered ultimately by the Higher Education Academic Board and the Governors. The College also cites examples of current developments which it sees as beneficial; for example, the development of a Student Dashboard and an Employer Dashboard.

3.10 The review team concludes on the basis of the evidence available to it and meetings with staff that the College is committed to the effective use of information, and intends to carry through the projects it identifies within its Strategy and Plan. Working as it does, subject by subject, with different awarding bodies potentially creates a 'silo' effect. Processes to manage information which can be the basis of discussions of how good practice in one area is taken forward to provide institutional advantage would be beneficial.

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

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

3.11 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk low. Two recommendations were formulated relating to completeness and consistency of course information for applicants on the website and LearnZone. There were no affirmations or features of good practice. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information produced about its higher education provision **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 Proactive leadership has resulted in new structures specifically for higher education, which have the potential to realise an enhancement-led culture. The Principal spoke enthusiastically about bringing the higher education community together but also acknowledged that there is some distance to travel along the 'journey'.

4.2 The preliminary stage of the most recent higher education strategy used an external consultant to advise on the introduction of an appropriate academic committee infrastructure. The Higher Education Academic Board and its subcommittees, the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee and Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee, were introduced for 2013-14. Reporting to the senior leadership team, this forms the Higher Education Directorate which is beginning to provide coherence. This has been welcomed by staff as providing more effective and focused committee structures to concentrate on the higher education portfolio. Although in the early stages, the Directorate is encouraged to develop a proactive approach in the selection of aspects or themes for enhancement. The review team **affirms** that the introduction of the Higher Education Academic Board committee structure enables the further development of appropriate strategies and stronger oversight of the higher education provision.

4.3 The College sees the higher education strategy, E-learning Strategy and Quality Strategy as providing the tripod to promote institutional learning. There are a range of initiatives either in place or in development which aim to improve the student learning experience.

4.4 The E-learning Strategy, which forms an integral part of the Teaching and Learning Strategy, remains under development but it is planned to contain a separate operational plan for higher education when approved by the Higher Education Academic Board in June 2014. Senior staff and departmental heads expressed a commitment to providing enhancement through a strategic approach towards blended learning; the pedagogic strategy to underpin this aspiration is progressing. Teaching staff and students are engaging positively and the Nottingham Trent University validation event commended the level of staff development being committed towards preparing for this initiative. This demonstrates a maturing strategy aimed towards the enhancement of learning opportunities.

4.5 Good practice is disseminated across the higher education community through the well-established CPD conferences for higher education which promote the enhancement agenda. Recent topics have discussed teaching, learning and assessment practices. The SED noted the need to evaluate the impact of CPD on the higher education strategy; this remains an area for development.

4.6 Students are represented on the new key committees and the College continues to consider how to increase the effectiveness of feedback to the wider student body. Students have not yet been involved in the development of the self-assessment reporting cycle.

4.7 The summary judgements resulting from the higher education self-assessment report noted the need to improve the effectiveness of management information systems for higher education. The review team found that student survey data is gathered in many ways,

including the National Student Survey, internal surveys and module evaluations, but the opportunities for using such data effectively to enhance quality assurance processes to promote a culture of enhancement across the higher education community are to be further developed.

4.8 The College's move to a higher education self-assessment process has been positively received as presenting the platform to build, develop and ultimately embed an effective cross-disciplinary approach towards continuous improvement and enhancement. This model was informed through learning from one of the awarding body's approaches to annual review. There is early evidence of sharing good practice through peer review of other subject area reports. There are inconsistencies in the depth and levels of evaluation across the individual reports which the College is planning to address through higher education staff development. The review team **recommends** that the College further develop the self-assessment review (SAR) process to provide more effective evaluation of the higher education provision and promote enhancement.

4.9 The higher education committees, through which the SARs are validated, provide the 'space and time to evaluate' (VP), agree priorities for the following year's development plan and ensure alignment with the higher education strategy. As acknowledged by the Principal, there is more work to do. The rolling action plan, for example, includes action points and intended outcomes relating to the judgement sections and staff now need to engage with this composite action plan. The higher education self-assessment cycle represents a progressive step which is yet to be fully embedded into everyday practice.

4.10 The College's commitment to employability is exemplary. This agenda is characterised by placements, graduate assessment days and enterprise conferences. Employability units have been written and embedded into many programmes, often as a result of consultation with employers as with Space Engineering. Students and employers with whom the review team met all clearly rated the quality of this aspect of the portfolio in making a positive contribution to the students' learning experiences. The varied range of opportunities available to students to enable them to develop employability skills is **good practice**.

4.11 The College identifies 'responsiveness' as one of the strategic imperatives informing the higher education strategy towards 2016. Strategic goals beneath that cover developing blended learning versions of all programmes, developing higher-level skills pathways and continuing to grow programmes in alignment with regional priorities. The examples described earlier in this report demonstrate how effectively the College has and is continuing to develop programmes to meet the needs of both students and employers. This may be to achieve temporal flexibility in the case of distance or block delivery models; it may be to customise units in response to a particular employer or to use student feedback on programme design. The lead on the government-funded project to develop the national framework for higher-level apprenticeships in Space Engineering provides the most powerful illustration of the commitment to developing programmes that are responsive to the needs of learners and employers, which is **good practice**.

4.12 The team concludes that the College is taking appropriate steps towards the enhancement of learning opportunities which are becoming part of a deliberate strategy.

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

## Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.13 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk low. One recommendation was formulated regarding the SAR processes and one affirmation regarding the introduction of the higher education board committee structure. Two features of good practice were highlighted: commitment to developing programmes that are responsive to the needs of learners and employers, and the varied range of opportunities available to students to enable them to develop employability skills. The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The College chose employability as its theme, as its higher education programmes are vocational in nature and it offers students an extensive range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities to enhance their employability skills and prospects. This includes specific focus on building employability skills into the curriculum alongside and in preparation for work-based learning and/or professional placements. The majority of full-time higher education programmes include a work placement. Strong support for developing enterprise skills is also a source of pride for the College, and there is good support for careers guidance and advice including a jobshop located in the new central higher education hub building. Students with whom the team met and the student written submission confirm that these elements of student programmes are highly valued.

5.2 The College has built credit-weighted professional development or employability modules into the curriculum across all discipline areas. These include the introduction of project-based learning in engineering, compulsory placements, employment and skills modules in sports and business, and professional skills development modules in music, as well as internship opportunities.

5.3 Assessments, particularly for foundation degrees, are work related or work based, and can involve live projects where industry professionals are involved in supporting the assessment process and in guiding students in the development of appropriate evidence for their projects. Evidence from external examiner reports seen by the team confirmed that assessments were often both relevant and innovative, enabling students to demonstrate a range of applied skills.

5.4 Employers with whom the team met indicated strong relationships with the College built up over a number of years. Some of these were founded on informal and extra-curricular activities, including for placements in some cases, while others related directly to the curriculum. There was clear evidence of courses being developed to meet employer needs and of employer engagement in the design and development of programmes. In the case of the development of the Space Engineering programme, this type of approach was exemplary (see Expectations A4 and A5). However, opportunities for employers or other bodies providing placements to engage with the College in reviewing the curriculum or in providing formal feedback on student progress and the management of placement opportunities appeared to vary.

5.5 The team followed up with the College progress in relation to the publication of a set of information that could be routinely provided for the wide range of employers who are involved in the management of work-based learning for students on foundation degrees. The College originally planned the production of an employer guide on foundation degrees, work-based learning and all aspects of the employer role in programme delivery and evaluation. However, this had not been taken forward in the way planned. The team saw some very comprehensive information for employers and work-based mentors in relation to the sports programmes, but such information was not systematically available to employers for all programmes (see recommendation under Expectation B10).

5.6 The College has developed partnerships with a number of national and international employers such as: Michael Page International; Sports Recruitment International; RWE Npower; and awarding bodies SCUK and CIMPA. External speakers make significant contributions to programmes and also provide input on job-seeking skills. A range of enterprise initiatives are promoted by the College, including Young Enterprise, Enterprise Conference associated with Global Enterprise Week, Employability Week focused on guest

speakers and Aspire to Enterprise to promote individual business start-up ideas. Students with whom the team met valued these opportunities and felt well supported in relation to employability and job seeking.

5.7 The College reviews at institutional level the destination of leavers of higher education (DLHE) data it receives from HEFCE and has concluded that overall students are performing well. From 2014-15 the College will conduct the DLHE survey itself and anticipates it will be able to obtain more meaningful data. This would enable analysis of DLHE data at course and programme level as an appropriate addition to the annual self-evaluation process.

5.8 The College provided much evidence of the importance given to the development of students' employability skills across programmes, and as part of the enrichment opportunities provided by the College. It was clear that students appreciate and value this dimension of their experience at the College. There are plans to further strengthen the opportunities available to students, as well as to make better use of DLHE data. The team considered there was also potential for sharing good practice in employer engagement, and that there would be benefits from formalising expectations and requirements in relation to managing learning opportunities delivered with others (see paragraph 2.66).

## 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 to 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](http://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](http://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* (FHEQIS).

### **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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