Higher Education Review of Wigan and Leigh College

March 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Wigan and Leigh College. The review took place from 24 to 26 March 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Phil Bassett
- Mr Brian Whitehead
- Mr Laurence McNaughton (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

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

The themes for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Wigan and Leigh College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **does not meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Wigan and Leigh College.

- The effective support and mentoring from personal tutors provided to all students (Expectation B4).
- The useful and accessible virtual learning environment (VLE) which provides a fit-for-purpose resource for both staff and students (Expectation C).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Wigan and Leigh College.

By September 2014:

- ensure that student representation and engagement on academic issues is facilitated at all levels of the organisation and fully reflect the diversity of the higher education student body (Expectation B5)
- develop and implement College processes to ensure that placements within programmes are appropriate, managed and monitored effectively and that they provide a quality learning experience and equity of learning opportunities for all students (Expectation B10).

By January 2015:

- ensure all aspects of the validation process are completed and recorded (Expectation B1)
- develop a more systematic approach to implementing and monitoring the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, including mechanisms at College level for recording and monitoring the impact of staff development activities on higher education teaching and learning (Expectation B3)
- complete the planned review of its portfolio of higher national programmes (Expectation B8)
- take deliberate and systematic steps, at provider level, to identify, disseminate, implement and monitor good practice and evaluate its impact on the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

The majority of programmes at the College are designed to support specific careers and the College ensures that all significant policy documents promote employability skills within the academic provision. To this end, the majority of programmes include a Personal Planning and Development module, which specifically focuses students on planning for future careers and developing skills to enhance their employability.

Most programmes also include a compulsory work placement and work-based learning activities such as live briefs for employers. Guest presentations from employers and alumni are incorporated into programme delivery where possible. Students receive support for skills development and career planning through their personal tutor and central support services. Links with employers tend to be managed at course level and the College has encouraged the use of Employer Forums at course level where possible to strengthen engagement with employers.

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

About Wigan and Leigh College

Wigan and Leigh College (the College) is a large general college of further and higher education operating from two campuses: one in the centre of Wigan and one in the neighbouring town of Leigh. The College has delivered higher education courses since 1946 and currently offers provision through franchise arrangements with regional awarding bodies and through a licence centre agreement with Pearson. The College predominantly offers vocationally based programmes to serve the local learning and skills needs in the areas of engineering, construction, education studies, business studies, public services, health and social care, early years, art and design and computing and technology. The College offers higher national certificates and diplomas, foundation degrees, bachelor's degrees and a small number of postgraduate certificates and diplomas. At the time of the review, there were over 700 students enrolled on higher education programmes with a roughly equal balance between full-time and part-time learners.

The College mission is 'to deliver high-quality, inclusive education and training to ensure all learners achieve their maximum potential and respond to the needs of our communities'. The Strategic Plan sets out the strategic aims for 2013-16 and is underpinned by the desire to improve the quality of provision, review the curriculum offer and ensure financial viability. These strategic drivers also underpin the approach to higher education provision as articulated in the Higher Education Strategy 2009-12, and the new version currently being drafted. The College makes a significant contribution to the local economy and has a critical role in supporting regional businesses and promoting engagement within local communities. The local demographic includes a higher-than-average proportion of residents in routine, intermediate and lower-managerial occupations and as a result, the College has a strong emphasis on widening participation to help address the regional skills agenda.

Since the last QAA review, the College has invested in the higher education resource infrastructure, notably through the new Professional Studies Building at Parson's Walk, which opened in September 2013 and provides a hub for the provision of higher education and professional programmes. There have been a number of management restructures over recent years and the committee arrangements for higher education have also been reviewed. Since February 2012, higher education provision has been managed by an Assistant Principal for Learner Responsiveness, Higher Education and Curriculum Efficiency and an Assistant Principal for Employer Responsiveness and Quality, who both report to the Vice Principal for Curriculum. The assistant principals are supported by a Higher Education Director and a Quality Manager, although the Director post has been vacant since November 2013. Following a review of the committee structure, the Higher Education Practitioners Group - commended at the previous QAA review - has been retained and two new higher education groups have been established; the Higher Education Quality Development Group and the Higher Education Group. The former Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee has been disbanded with the business being undertaken by a new cross-College Operational Quality Group which now has a remit for both further and higher education operational oversight.

The majority of programmes offered by the College are higher national diplomas and certificates delivered through a longstanding licence arrangement with Pearson. The University of Central Lancashire is the College's main awarding body, with whom it offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate awards. In addition, the College has separate foundation degrees franchised by Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of Salford and the University of Bolton, the latter of which is being discontinued. Each partnership arrangement is defined in a formal Memorandum of Cooperation. Strategic and managerial links are established between senior College managers and the partnership office within each University, with operational links being maintained at curriculum level by course teams with their University counterparts.

The previous Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2009 had identified a number of features of good practice, including the structure of committees and groups for higher education; the approach to staff development and support of teaching staff; the use of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy; and the excellent record in addressing widening participation. While it was evident that many of these features remained in place, there was less evidence of how the strengths identified had been maintained in practice since the last review. For example, the Higher Education Strategy and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, praised in the last review, were less prevalent frames of reference for the College with the former having lapsed and the latter not being widely used by staff.

There was also less clarity in the current committee structure and responsibilities as evidenced by the similarity in the terms of reference for various higher education groups and from staff explanations of the business conducted at each group. Furthermore, some features of good practice had been removed, such as the remission in hours given to staff teaching on higher education programmes. With regards to the recommendations for action from the last IQER, three of the four advisable recommendations related to improving employer engagement and reviewing the arrangements for work placements on higher education programmes. In this regard, the review team found little evidence to suggest that sufficient progress had been made to address the concerns of the previous review team and similar issues remained.

Explanation of the findings about Wigan and Leigh 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.

Explanation of the findings about Wigan and Leigh College

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*

1.1 Higher education courses are franchised to the College by partner Universities, including the Universities of Central Lancashire, Salford, Manchester Metropolitan and Bolton, or are delivered through a licence from Pearson. Memoranda of Cooperation are up to date for all partner Universities and are supported by documents which define the specific responsibilities of the University and the College in respect of issues relating to academic standards, assessment, student support and services. It is the responsibility of the College's awarding body to ensure that the qualifications awarded meet appropriate benchmarks, including FHEQ level descriptors, and that the volume of study is sufficient to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes.

1.2 The review team examined the Memoranda of Cooperation for each partner University and reviewed a range of programme specifications, course handbooks and module handbooks to verify that the programmes delivered in collaboration with University partners and Pearson meet the FHEQ requirements and provide all essential information to students. The team also met with students and staff to explore the approach to this area.

1.3 The students met by the review team understood the progressive demands of different academic levels and the team confirmed that these are clearly articulated in programme handbooks. The review team was assured through a review of the documentary evidence presented and through meetings with staff and students that the College has processes in place for ensuring that qualifications are allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ, and that these are adhered to and effectively implemented. The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter A1* of the Quality Code and that the level of risk to academic standards is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level*

1.4 The partner Universities are responsible for the design and validation of programmes franchised to the College. Subject benchmarks statements and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* are used in the design of new programmes and are approved by both the College and the relevant University. Higher national programmes are developed using modules that have already been mapped by Pearson to specific levels of the FHEQ. In such cases, the College uses an internal approval process to map higher national programmes against relevant subject benchmark statements to ensure that students have the appropriate knowledge and skills to progress to identified 'top-up' bachelor's degrees.

1.5 The review team examined the College's requirements for programme approval and validation, and a range of University and Pearson programme approval event records. The review team also met with staff from course teams and senior managers at the College to ascertain how the approach works in practice.

1.6 Staff confirmed that they have a sound understanding of the programme approval process and a good knowledge of all associated requirements for the design of programmes. The review team was assured that the College adheres to the requirements of the awarding bodies and has appropriate processes in place to ensure that staff understand and enact their responsibilities in this regard. The College has processes in place to ensure that all higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements. The team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter A2* of the Quality Code and that the level of risk to academic standards is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: The programme level*

1.7   The College provides information about its higher education courses to an external audience through a variety of means, including the College website, prospectus and the College's Facebook page. Divisional managers and course managers update course information annually, which is checked by the Marketing Team prior to publication. The Marketing Coordinator also ensures that the course information is updated onto UCAS Course Collect. Programme aims and intended learning outcomes are included in programme handbooks which are provided to current students and include the programme specification, module descriptions and information on assessment requirements.

1.8   The review team analysed marketing information made available to prospective students through the Higher Education and Professional Prospectus and documentation provided to current students mainly through programme handbooks. The review team also met with students to ascertain what information was provided at each stage of the learning experience.

1.9   The students met during the review confirmed that the information provided to them is accurate, useful and informative. The programme handbooks reviewed by the team provide a comprehensive overview of the programme design and requirements, and students were generally clear on what was expected of them during their studies.

1.10   The team confirmed that the College makes available to its students definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for its programme of study. The team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter A3* of the Quality Code and that the level of risk to academic standards is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A4: Approval and review*

1.11 Course development, design and approval processes are aligned with, and overseen by, the awarding bodies and Pearson. The College's Course Planning and Validation Procedures outline the approach for identifying and approving new programme proposals prior to development and also outline the validation procedures for final approval, or in the case of provision with universities, for approval prior to submission to the awarding body for validation. Divisional managers undertake a curriculum planning exercise in spring to evaluate current provision in terms of success, recruitment and relevance to the College strategic aims and student demand. At this point new provision is developed and arrangements are made for provision that is being discontinued. Procedures are in place to manage discontinued programmes to ensure that continuing students are not disadvantaged. New programme proposals are submitted via a Validation Approval Form and progressed from divisional managers to an Assistant Principal via the Higher Education Director. Proposals are considered by a number of committees and groups before the Senior Management Team makes a final decision to progress to an approval event. New programme proposals must demonstrate that all resource requirements have been considered and are reflected in the Course Resource Audit Form. Changes to existing programmes must also be approved in accordance with the Course Approval and Validation Procedures.

1.12 Routine monitoring is undertaken through the submission of annual Self-Evaluation Reports (SERs) by the course team, which are informed by three detailed course review and evaluation reports undertaken at specified times during the year. SERs are reviewed by a number of committees and groups, including the Higher Education Practitioners' Group, the Operational Quality Group and the Senior Management Team. A subgroup of the Operational Quality Group approves the SERs and also considers the separate annual reports required by the awarding bodies prior to submission to the relevant partner University. A composite annual monitoring report is also produced for the University of Central Lancashire providing an overview of issues and strengths across all programmes linked to this University.

1.13 The approach to periodic reviews is determined by the agreements with the awarding bodies. University partners conduct periodic reviews of their provision to consider the validity and relevance of programmes. Pearson does not require or undertake periodic review of higher national programmes.

1.14 The review team reviewed the self-evaluation document (SED) and supporting evidence outlining the College approach to the approval and periodic review of provision, annual monitoring and programme closure arrangements. The team also met with members of course teams and senior staff to explore the operation of the procedures, as well as questioning students on their experiences.

1.15 With regards to the maintenance of academic standards, the processes for proposing and approving new provision align with the requirements of the Universities and Pearson and generally operate effectively. The processes for the annual monitoring of provision are well established and rigorously implemented by staff within the College. The Business Review meetings that consider the course reviews are not minuted, but staff assured the review team that action points were provided as an outcome of these meetings, which the team reviewed.

1.16   Centrally provided statistical data relating to recruitment and retention is a major component of the self-evaluation process. Less attention is given to student achievement and the monitoring and comparability of standards data, although feedback from external examiners'/verifiers' reports are included in the annual reports.

1.17   Periodic review processes are conducted by the awarding bodies. While periodic review is not required under the arrangement with Pearson, the College acknowledges a need to undertake a review of its higher national provision and the team supported this intention (see Expectation B8).

1.18   Overall, the review team was satisfied that the processes in place to approve and periodically review programmes are satisfactory. The team concludes that the College meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter A4* of the Quality Code and that the level of risk to academic standards is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality*

1.19   The degree of external involvement in the approval, monitoring and review of programmes is determined by the awarding bodies and Pearson with whom the College works. University partners appoint panel members for approval events whereas Pearson programmes are validated through the College's internal process, which does not require independent or external membership of the panel. The College encourages employer involvement in programme delivery through visiting speakers and on some programmes uses external employer input in the assessment process, although not as formal markers. Where programme areas have developed links with employers, their views on new programme proposals are sought although this input is not formalised within the College procedures.

1.20   The University partners nominate, appoint and train external examiners and Pearson appoint external verifiers for the purposes of monitoring academic standards. The reports from these external examiners are reviewed by the Operational Quality Group for consideration of any issues raised and to ensure that actions planned from the previous reports have been addressed. A composite report of comments is also produced for this group. The awarding bodies are responsible for formally responding to external examiners regarding their reports although the course team also provide a commentary and note any actions through the annual SERs.

1.21   The review team analysed the SED and documentation pertaining to programme design, approval and delivery. The team also met with senior staff and course teams at the College, and met with employers and students to discuss the approach to external input into the management of standards at the College.

1.22   Although the College views the involvement of employers in the design of the curriculum as important, College procedures for new programme development do not require input from employers and not all programme areas have formal systems in place to engage with employers. The panel met with a number of employers who confirmed that they had no involvement with the design or monitoring of the programmes and meetings with staff and students confirmed that the approach by individual programme areas to the engagement of employers is variable. The team concludes that externality is restricted, in the main, to the awarding body, external examiners and external verifiers. Although the composite external examiner report by the College provides an opportunity for oversight of issues and strengths across higher education provision, it was not evident that the Operational Quality Group had fulfilled this responsibility during 2011-12 (see Expectation B7).

1.23   The College approach to externality is largely defined by the requirements of the partner institutions, and direct contact between the College and external participants is therefore limited in this regard. The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter A5* of the Quality Code with regards to independent and external participation and that the level of risk to academic standards is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.24   Assessment requirements, regulations and processes are covered within the separate awarding body agreements with the College and, in the case of higher national awards, within the College Internal Verification Handbook and Assessment Guidelines. The College also has an assessment policy that applies to all programmes and is updated regularly. The Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy aligns with this policy and was updated recently to map against the Quality Code. The College provides a number of documents designed to provide guidance on assessment strategies and practices to staff delivering higher education programmes. Members of staff attend moderation meetings with the Universities to verify the standard of marking and attend the award and progression boards of the awarding bodies. Staff also participate in professional development workshops organised by the partner Universities which include approaches to assessment. External examiners and external verifiers are appointed by the Universities and Pearson respectively to scrutinise work that has been marked by the College tutors. The College uses plagiarism-detection software for submitted assignments and detailed guidance on what constitutes academic malpractice is provided through course handbooks and the virtual learning environment (VLE). The College adheres to the University partner requirements on student applications for extenuating circumstances. For the Pearson programmes, the annual Higher National Exam Board adjudicates on such applications*.*

1.25   The team examined documentation pertaining to the assessment process including policies, procedural guidance and a number of programme specifications, external examiner and external verifier reports. In addition, the team met with staff and students to test the operation of the processes for managing the assessment of learning outcomes.

1.26   The assessment requirements are clearly articulated and staff and students are well versed on the processes that apply to their programmes. Guidance to academic staff on assessment is available and generally useful, although the team noted that the Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy cited by the College as a key frame of reference provided only higher-level expectations rather than assessment guidance to staff. Course handbooks contain information and guidance on how to apply for extenuating circumstances; however, the quality of information on this aspect was variable across the handbooks reviewed. The College has no formal process for the collection and comparison of student achievement data across the home and University programme and is therefore reliant on the external examiners to ensure the standards achieved by its students are comparable with those of the partner University. No evidence was presented to demonstrate that the College undertakes a systematic overview of student achievement on Pearson programmes; however, the external verifier reports indicate that standards are sound.

1.27   Overall, the team considered that the approach to the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the awards of qualifications and credit are based on achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter A6* of the Quality Code and that the level of risk to academic standards is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.28   In determining its judgement on the maintenance of threshold academic standards of awards at Wigan and Leigh College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex two of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is considered low in all cases.

1.29   The review team identified that the approach to maintaining academic standards at the College is largely defined by the respective awarding bodies, with the exception of higher national programmes for which the College has developed and implemented its own policies and procedures. University procedures are consistently applied and generally operate effectively. The College procedures are broadly sound, although there is scope for greater alignment with the Quality Code with regards to undertaking a more holistic quality review of its higher national portfolio (see Expectation B8).

1.30   Overall, the review team concludes that the maintenance of threshold academic standards of awards 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*

2.1   The College has an internal process for identifying new provision and approving programmes which conforms to the requirements of the awarding bodies and Pearson. The College's Course Approval and Validation Process is applied for the development of all new and modified higher education provision and the process for the design and approval of programmes is described in more detail under Expectation A4.

2.2   The review team analysed the SED and conducted an audit trail following the stated procedures which included examining minutes of meetings and validation documents. In addition, the team spoke to members of course teams and senior staff regarding their experience of the design and approval processes.

2.3   The team considered that the process for designing and approving a new programme is generally well understood by staff, although there was some confusion among staff regarding the formal committee/group-reporting mechanisms in this regard. Amendments and modifications to programmes are considered as part of the College's annual self-evaluation process and changes are managed within the agreements set out by the awarding bodies. Completed internal validation forms and minutes of meetings are not available for recently validated programmes and, in some cases, were incomplete. In the case of a programme that had been validated close to the start of the academic year, students indicated that some aspects had not been well planned. During the academic year 2013-14, the Higher Education Group had discussed whether to update the process for the design and approval of programmes, but decided against any revisions at the time. The team **recommends** that the College ensure all aspects of the validation process are completed and recorded.

2.4   Overall, the review team considered that processes for the design and approval of programmes are effective, although greater attention to recording is required. The team concludes that the College meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter B1* of the Quality Code and the level of risk to the quality of student learning opportunities is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions*

2.5   The College has a clear admissions policy for students applying to higher education programmes and documents relating to the admissions process are available on the staff intranet and the College website. The management of admissions falls under the remit of the Marketing and Admissions Manager who reviews and reissues the procedure and guidelines annually. All applications to higher education courses are made through UCAS and successful applicants will receive notice from UCAS and the College regarding a mandatory interview. All interviewers are required to undertake a staff training session prior to conducting interviews with prospective candidates and the procedure is discussed through the Higher Education Practitioners Group. All applicants are given a generic College-wide questionnaire to complete at interview. Complaints and appeals pertaining to the admissions process are dealt with by the Marketing and Admissions Manager before being considered by the Executive Director of Business and Student Services, although there have been no challenges to admissions decisions made during the last two years.

2.6   The review team analysed relevant documents pertaining to admissions and spoke to students regarding their experience of the admissions process. In addition, the team met with staff, including interviewers and senior managers, to discuss the operation of the stated policy and procedures.

2.7   The students met by the team confirmed that the guidance provided by the College in the application process was timely and helpful and that the admission and enrolment process had operated well. Some students particularly noted that the responsiveness of course managers, and the provision of upfront information, such as timetables, had compared favourably to other institutions and influenced their choice. The admissions process is discussed at the Higher Education Practitioners Group, and although there is no review report produced, the Marketing and Admissions Manager noted that annual amendments are made to policy and approved by the Senior Management Team. The review team saw evidence of the student questionnaires for certain courses but these did not form part of the admissions review as discussed at the Practitioners Group. From evidence provided to the team, the last training session provided to staff was in October 2012 and the associated PowerPoint presentation recorded a reflective, rather than instructive, approach to training.

2.8   The review team considered that the policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied. The team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter B2* of the Quality Code and the level of risk to the quality of student learning opportunities is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*

2.9   Under the arrangements with the awarding bodies, the College determines its own approach to developing the student experience and assuring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The College's Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy has been in place with regular iterations since 1999 and is a key part of this approach. The strategy identifies the distinctiveness of higher education delivery, identifies roles and responsibilities for course teams and provides guidance on appropriate methodologies for use across all higher education provision. Academic staff generally teach on both further and higher education programmes and the College requires all teaching staff to have a recognised teaching qualification, or achieve such a qualification within a year of appointment. The College provides three cross-College staff development days per year and the Staff Development Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that staff attend specific activities. In addition, staff are supported in other internal and external development opportunities, including those offered by the awarding bodies. The College has conducted informal and formal lesson observations for a number of years and has recently piloted a peer observation process specifically for higher education provision, although this has only been trialled in some areas and is not yet sufficiently advanced to be evaluated. Staff new to higher education delivery are assigned a mentor who is often a member of staff from the awarding body with arrangements overseen by the Divisional Manager. The College uses Moodle as its VLE which is used by all staff for uploading course information. The College is currently developing capability to use the VLE as a more interactive teaching and learning tool.

2.10   The review team analysed the statements made in the SED and reviewed evidence pertaining to the Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and staff development procedures. In addition, the team met with support staff and senior managers responsible for staff development and academic staff and students to discuss the approach to the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices.

2.11   Students met by the team understood what is expected of them in terms of learning and assessment and were satisfied with the delivery of their programmes. It was evident that staff partake in development opportunities offered by the College and University partners and the Annual Performance Review and Development process is well embedded across the College. The formalised peer observation process for staff teaching on higher education is still in its early stages, although the documentation provided clearly articulated the desired objectives and outcomes of the process. Staff who have participated in peer observation to date were positive about the experience and its potential for enhancing teaching practices. While the College makes reference to classroom observations, Performance Review and Development meetings and training plans for each member of staff, the team was not shown evidence of where this activity is centrally recorded and monitored, and was not provided with evidence of a clear overarching strategy for staff development and scholarship. The procedural document which details roles and responsibilities for the implementation of staff development is relatively new and the team did not see evidence that it is currently being acted on as a College-wide initiative. Furthermore, the Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy is not widely used as a frame of reference for academic staff, and although Divisional Managers did discuss elements of the implementation of the strategy through College meetings, this is not documented and there was no evidence

available of the formal reporting referred to in the Strategy. While it is evident that valuable staff development activity takes place, the team was not shown evidence of how this is planned, articulated and systematically evaluated at College level to enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The team therefore **recommends** that the College develop a more systematic approach to implementing and monitoring the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, including mechanisms at College level for recording and monitoring the impact of staff development activities on higher education teaching and learning.

2.12   The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter B3* of the Quality Code, but that there is a moderate risk to the quality of student learning opportunities due to the lack of planning, monitoring and evaluation of activities designed to enhance programme delivery.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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*

2.13   Support and guidance for higher education students is provided through a partnership of central support services and academic course teams. Central support services provide generic advice on admissions, finance and careers and course teams provide support through admissions interviews, induction activities and through pastoral and academic tutorials. All students undertake an induction into the College and materials supplied during induction are also available in course handbooks. All students have an initial interview to assess their learning needs and an extended interview is undertaken for students in need of additional support to ascertain their requirements. The College has an Inclusive Learning Team that provides specialist advice and guidance to students with special learning needs and their teaching staff. The team are experienced practitioners who operate in accordance with the Additional Learning Support Policy and Equality Scheme. All students are allocated personal tutors. Although the amount of time available to each student varies depending on the size of the cohort, there is a minimum requirement specified on each course.

2.14   The College has a number of dedicated workspaces specifically allocated for higher education use and a new Professional Studies Building which has been designed to meet the needs of higher education students. Students also have access to resources at the awarding body where this applies. Resourcing of programmes is a feature of the validation process for all provision and is also considered annually through the budgeting process which requires all divisions to produce a Curriculum Plan. An evaluation of learning resources is compiled annually by the Director of Quality through a Quality Improvement Plan and the Self-Assessment Report which includes statements on the adequacy of resources and an action plan for improvement.

2.15   The review team analysed the information in the SED and reviewed documentation provided by the College pertaining to this area. In addition, the team met with students from across a range of programmes and study modes, including some students with direct experience of the support provided for additional learning needs. The team also met staff at the College including those from central support services, members of course teams who acted as personal tutors and senior managers responsible for resourcing.

2.16   The students met by the team expressed satisfaction with the facilities available to them and noted how the library, learning support, IT resources and spaces for learning are fit for purpose. Students also highlighted instances where resource issues had been quickly and satisfactorily addressed by the College. The induction activities and information supplied are considered useful and timely by students. The extra support provided through the Inclusive Learning Team is well used and fit for purpose, and although a concern about sufficient access was raised in a meeting with students, the team confirmed that the ratio of specialist staff to students gave no cause for concern. Despite the development of a bespoke Computer Aided Design suite, employers involved in work placements and students noted that greater skills development in this area is required and that the available technology is not always fully used. Staff responsible for resources confirmed that sufficient information is available to monitor and continually improve the resource provision at the College. As an example, the team saw evidence that the Additional Learning Support policy and the Equality and Diversity policy are regularly reviewed and monitored with clear action plans in place to further improve the provision as necessary.

2.17	Both full-time and part-time students met during the review spoke highly of the personal tutor arrangements, with some students able to compare this very favourably with experiences at other higher education institutions. Staff who act as personal tutors are clear about their responsibilities and confirmed the value students obtain from a personalised approach to their learning and development needs, particularly with regards to personal development planning. The review team therefore considered the effective support and mentoring from personal tutors provided to all students to be **good practice**.

2.18	The team confirmed that the College has in place arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential and generally has processes in place for monitoring and evaluation. The team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter B4* of the Quality Code and the level of risk to the quality of student learning opportunities is low.

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

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student engagement*

2.19   The College aims to actively involve students in the development of the curriculum, governance arrangements and in learning, teaching and assessment. The College is currently developing a Learner Involvement Strategy and Plan, although this has yet to be completed and approved. There are also plans for a Learner Voice Group. The College currently employs a variety of mechanisms to gather student feedback and engage students which include the newly formed students' union, student focus groups, course representatives, the use of internal course and College surveys, module evaluations and the National Student Survey (NSS). The students' union has recently been affiliated with the National Union of Students (NUS) and is undertaking an NUS-funded Green Project, which includes an objective to develop the learner voice within the College. The students' union represents students both on further and higher education courses and the constitution includes an elected Higher Education Officer. In addition, the students' union also has a full-time member of College staff whose responsibilities include providing training for higher education student representatives.

2.20   The team reviewed the SED and analysed documents pertaining to this area, including a draft copy of the Learner Involvement Strategy and Plan. The review team met with full-time and part-time students from across different programmes, some of whom acted as course representatives and one of whom was the new Higher Education Officer within the students' union. The review team also explored student engagement activity with members of course teams and support services.

2.21   It was evident from the meetings with students that not all courses have a student representative, with small cohort sizes and part-time delivery being cited as reasons why student representation was not in place. Students were very complimentary of the personal tutor system and noted that the extent of direct contact with staff often removed the need for formal student representation. Students commented that issues are quickly addressed by staff once known. Of the student representatives met, not all had been trained and some were not aware of having been invited to course team meetings, or stated that these meetings were held on days when students were not due in College. There was limited awareness among students about the new students' union or the role of current student representatives within this new structure.

2.22   While student representatives are members of course team meetings, there is no student representation at other higher education committees or groups that have an academic focus. From the minutes of course team meetings provided to the team, it was not always possible to identify which, if any, of the members present were student representatives and where student issues were being raised and discussed. Staff explained that issues raised by students at course team meetings are taken to higher-level committees by course managers and are discussed at divisional meetings. Divisional managers will escalate issues to the Assistant Principal for action if required and issues may also be raised and discussed at the College Management Team meeting. It was evident from meetings that the review team had with staff that there was a lack of clarity within the committee structure with regards to the responsibilities and reporting lines for issues raised by students.

2.23   Feedback is gathered from students via a variety of different surveys including three course surveys and end-of-module evaluations, although students indicated that the application of the latter was inconsistent. The data from these surveys is collated and used in annual monitoring reports which are discussed at course team meetings and the

Operational Quality Group, with core findings being presented to the Governors. The College has a 'you said, we did' campaign for informing students of outcomes, but the team was unable to confirm from the meetings held with students that there is a consistent approach to communicating the outcomes from student feedback to the student body, and students were not aware of the different types of formal feedback that the College undertakes.

2.24   While students are generally satisfied that course teams act promptly and effectively in response to student concerns, the review team found that the formal mechanisms for capturing, addressing and evaluating issues raised by students are neither clearly defined nor operating effectively. The shortcomings in the current student representation system and the absence of clear reporting lines for student issues within the College committee structure inhibit a collective view of student feedback being taken across its higher education provision. Though the College recognises this is an area for development and is developing strategies to improve learner involvement, these had yet to be formally approved or fully implemented. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College ensure that student representation and engagement on academic issues are facilitated at all levels of the organisation and fully reflect the diversity of the higher education student body.

2.25   The review team therefore concludes that the College does not meet the Expectation as defined in *Chapter B5* and that the level of risk to the quality of student learning opportunities is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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*

2.26   As noted in detail under Expectation A6, the assessment requirements are outlined by the awarding bodies and Pearson and supported by internal College policies and procedures for managing the assessment process. Assessment plans are developed to ensure the volume and timing of assessments are appropriate and assignment briefs are internally verified prior to distribution for validity and to ensure the methods reflect the unit aims and learning outcomes. The Course Manager is responsible for managing the assessment process and ensuring all assessment plans and schemes of work are in place and up to date. Information on assessment, including briefs and marking criteria, is available to students in course handbooks, module information packs and the College VLE.

2.27   The College operates a turnaround time of three weeks for marking and providing feedback on assessments for higher national programmes. The College has an Additional Learning Support Policy and Equality Scheme and there are guidelines in place for marking work of students with specific learning needs. Marking of assessments is internally verified on a sampling basis and, where required by the partner, work is second marked prior to undergoing a moderation process involving the awarding body. Pre-examination board meetings are held within departments prior to the final exam board to confirm the completeness and accuracy of grades. Final exam boards for higher national programmes are managed at the College whereas for awarding bodies, College staff attend the exam boards held at the relevant University.

2.28   The College has a Recognition of Prior Learning process which applies to higher national programmes and the relevant University policy is adopted for programmes linked to awarding bodies. Achievement data is recorded on the College student record system once audited evidence is received from the awarding body. This data is then uploaded to the Pro-Achieve software to be used in the production of course reviews and SERs.

2.29   The review team reviewed the information in the SED and scrutinised documentation pertaining to this area including College procedures and guidelines, examples of marked students' work, external examiner reports and minutes of exam boards. In addition, the team met with students from across a range of programmes and study modes to explore their experience of assessment and met with College staff, including module leaders and course managers.

2.30   The review team found that the processes relating to assessment are generally well documented, secure and complied with by staff, although the statement that assignments are discussed in team meetings could not be verified. There is evidence that assessment plans and schemes of work processes are completed effectively. The students confirmed that feedback on marked work mainly meets the three-week service standard, although there were a few examples of significant delays without explanations to the students concerned. Assignments briefs, and feedback on assignments, are clearly linked to the learning outcomes of the module and students reported that assessment feedback is helpful. Students found the information regarding assessment useful and reported an awareness of the assessment regulations and grading criteria pertaining to their programme of study. However, assignment calendars are not provided in all cases.

2.31   Overall, the review team was satisfied that students have appropriate opportunities to show achievement of the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or

credit. The team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code and that the level of risk to the quality of student learning opportunities is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External examining*

2.32   The awarding bodies nominate, appoint and train external examiners and this responsibility is set out in the relevant partnership agreements. External verifiers for higher national programmes are appointed by Pearson although the College undertakes the training and regular briefings in adherence with guidance provided by the awarding organisation. Divisional managers are also responsible for meeting and briefing external verifiers on College matters. Within the College, external examiner/verifier reports are discussed at course team level and made available to students through the VLE. The awarding bodies are responsible for contact with the external examiner and for the initial response to examiners after receiving the report, although course managers also provide a response which is recorded in the annual report and returned to the partner University. Normally, these responses are considered at the Higher Education Practitioners' Group and/or the Operational Quality Group but may sometimes be sent directly to the partner University. A composite external examiner/verifier report is produced for the Operational Quality Group to allow oversight of issues raised and as a checking mechanism for receipt of reports and responses to the awarding bodies.

2.33   The review team analysed documentation pertaining to the external examining process, including external examiner/verifier reports, the annual monitoring processes and minutes of available College meetings. In addition, the team met with students and staff to explore how the processes operated in practice.

2.34   The review team confirmed that external examiner/verifier reports are discussed at course team meetings and comments, with intended actions, are noted in SERs. Students are aware of the role of external examiners/verifiers and both staff and students confirmed that they have access to the reports through the VLE. In addition, aspects of the reports are shared with student representatives at course team meetings. In practice, a subgroup of the Operational Quality Group receives the composite report before reporting formally to the Operational Quality Group. The College was unable to provide evidence that external examiner/verifier reports had been discussed formally at College level during 2011-12 as there was no record of the Operational Quality Group having met between October 2011 and April 2012. However, this had been rectified for the 2012-13 academic year.

2.35   Overall, the review team concludes that the College makes scrupulous use of external examiners and therefore the College meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter B7* of the Quality Code and the level of risk to the quality of student learning opportunities is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review*

2.36   The key quality assurance mechanism for the College is the annual SER which is informed by three internal review meetings conducted in November, April and June in each subject area. In addition, separate reports are submitted to the awarding bodies and a composite annual monitoring report (AMR) is required for all University of Lancashire provision. As outlined in Expectation A4, the SERs are validated by a subgroup of the Operational Quality Group at which course managers present their reports prior to these being approved and, where relevant, sent to the awarding body. The College also produces an internal Self-Assessment Report annually which covers all further and higher education provision and is compiled through submissions from course managers. The Senior Management Team undertakes regular monitoring of key data using 'Pro-Achieve' reports relating to further and higher education courses. The relevant Assistant Principal is required to report on significant variances in ongoing student retention. A similar process is conducted by each Faculty Management Team. As stated in paragraph 1.13, the approach to periodic review is determined by the partner institutions.

2.37   The review team considered documentation pertaining to the annual monitoring process including SERs, the composite AMR and programme AMRs for University of Central Lancashire courses and minutes of meetings where these were discussed. The team also met with academic staff and senior managers to discuss the approach to monitoring and review.

2.38   The annual monitoring process is well established and the required components are understood and adhered to by course teams. External examiner/verifier reports are considered within the annual reports and, at module level, students are required to complete an end-of-module evaluation although the students informed the panel that this was an inconsistent and variable process. Periodic reviews are conducted by the partner Universities and evidence pertaining to the most recent review by the University of Central Lancashire in 2009 confirmed satisfaction with the operation of programmes at the College. Pearson do not undertake or require periodic review and therefore monitoring of higher national provision has been enacted through the annual monitoring process and through the annual curriculum planning exercise, which considers the currency and demand for higher education programmes. However, the College acknowledges that a more comprehensive review of programmes within its current portfolio would be advantageous. Considering the volume of such provision and extent of delegated responsibilities from Pearson, the team strongly supported this view. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College complete the planned review of its portfolio of higher national programmes.

2.39   Notwithstanding the absence of periodic review for higher national programmes, the review team concludes that the College has effective procedures to monitor and periodically review programmes. The College therefore meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter B8* of the Quality Code and the level of risk to the quality of student learning opportunities is low.

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*

2.40   The College has detailed procedures for complaints, which state that students should never experience disadvantage if they lodge a complaint in good faith. The internal College procedure is used initially, although the relevant University's procedure is also available should the student need recourse to the awarding body. Clear guidance is available for College staff outlining the procedures, criteria and responsibilities for handling complaints. With regards to academic appeals, the College operates an internal procedure for the higher national programmes and students are directed to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome. Students studying on courses linked to a partner University will follow the relevant University's appeals procedure. Information and guidance on the complaints and appeals procedures are available in the student handbook, with posters and information leaflets displayed in the College. The College maintain an overview of complaints through the Quality Manager and through reporting by the Assistant Principal at Senior Management Team meetings. The College's annual Self-Assessment Report and regular Business Review meetings provide opportunities to monitor complaints, although no formal complaints have been registered in the last two years.

2.41   The review team analysed the SED and documentation pertaining to complaints and appeals which the College makes available for staff and students. The team also met with staff and students to explore awareness and understanding of the process and how it operates in practice.

2.42   The review team considered the guidance to be clear and concise, with the process explained through a supporting diagram for the complaints procedure, and timeframes within which issues must be addressed. Students confirmed their awareness of the complaints procedures and where to find information on appeals. The College aims to resolve issues swiftly and without recourse to the formal complaints procedures, and students confirmed that the College is responsive and cited examples of quick responses to student issues. The complaints procedure is currently under review and the quality team are looking to update procedures in the light of legal advice, although no draft procedures were available to the team.

2.43   The review team confirmed that the procedures for handling student complaints and appeals were fair, effective and timely. The team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation as defined in *Chapter B9* of the Quality Code and that the level of risk to the quality of student learning opportunities is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

2.44   The College is not a degree-awarding body and delivers programmes through arrangements with regional awarding bodies and a licence agreement with Pearson. In the case of University awards, the College makes extensive use of the policies and procedures specified by the partner and for higher national programmes, the College has developed its own internal procedures in some areas. The overall responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards rests with the partners. Terms are clearly defined in the partnership agreements and managed through the annual monitoring process, assessment moderation activities and the use of external examiners/verifiers. Within the College, responsibility for academic standards is largely delegated and managed initially by divisions based in academic faculties and overseen by the Operational Quality Group.

2.45   The College's main partnerships with regards to delivering learning opportunities are with employers who provide work placements for students and other work-based learning activities. Work placement opportunities have increased in recent years and the majority of programmes include a compulsory work placement, which contributes to formal assessment tasks. Due to the diversity within curriculum areas, placement opportunities are sourced locally by course teams although students are also encouraged to find their own placements as part of their employability skills development. Where students experience difficulties in securing a placement, the College consults with employers to find alternative workplace opportunities. Health and safety checks are undertaken prior to all placements which may be undertaken by a central College team or by staff within the divisions who are qualified to complete such appraisals. The College have a procedure for such checks which has been recently revised to simplify the approach in light of employer feedback.

2.46   The review team studied the documentation pertaining to the collaborative arrangements with awarding bodies and institutions, including the partnership agreements and responsibilities checklists. The team also reviewed the documentation regarding the arrangements for learning opportunities provided through work placements including College-wide documents as well as specific work placement guidance information provided at course level. The team discussed placement arrangements with course teams, support staff and senior managers and met with students and employers to discuss their experience of work placements.

2.47   Students confirmed that finding a suitable placement is their responsibility, but that there is help available from staff if required. Not all students were clear on the vetting process for placements and had variable experiences with regards to agreeing appropriate activities and learning outcomes while on placement, with some students not aware of any discussion of this kind. The length of placement varied greatly and staff confirmed that there was no minimum requirement and students on the same course could experience anything from one day to many months of placement activity depending on the employer need. Some students had contact with staff during their placement through visits or emails, although this was not always the case. The meeting with employers confirmed that contact with the College was variable, with some reporting excellent informal links with the Course Manager and some reporting minimal contact and a lack of guidance. There is no standard approach or requirement for obtaining feedback from employers. Staff confirmed that there is no formal policy or procedure for managing work placements, with the exception of the requirement for health and safety checks, and that relationships with employers are

managed and monitored by course teams. While the College previously had a central database of work placement providers, this has been discontinued with the exception of information pertaining to childcare and teacher education. The review team did not see any evidence that the College has processes to oversee the appropriateness and management of learning undertaken while on placement. There is therefore the potential for students to be engaged in placement activity that does not support the achievement of the intended learning outcomes for their programmes of study.

2.48 Although the College stated that they had addressed all actions from the previous IQER visit, the review team did not find evidence of how the recommendations pertaining to work placements had been significantly progressed. The IQER had found that relationships with employers were predominantly managed at course level and had advised the College to review and where necessary improve its links with employers. A second advisable recommendation had also been made to review arrangements for securing placements for students to ensure quality and equity across provision. The review team found the issues raised at the last review to be extant and therefore **recommends** that the College develop and implement College processes to ensure that placements within programmes are appropriate, managed and monitored effectively and that they provide a quality learning experience and equity of learning opportunities for all students.

2.49 The review team found that the relationship with the awarding bodies and institutions appeared to work well and that the College is enacting its responsibilities competently within its defined agreements. With regards to the College's management of learning opportunities with placement providers, the review team concludes that responsibility for managing and monitoring work placement experience is delegated to course teams without any institutional policy or reference points, and that there is no effective oversight at College level of this area of activity. The review team concludes that the Expectation as defined in *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code is not met and that the lack of College oversight and progress on addressing the advisable recommendations from the last IQER report meant that the level of risk to the quality of student learning opportunities is serious.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

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

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

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.51   In meeting its judgement on the quality of student learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria outlined in Annex two of the published handbook. Of the Expectations within this section, two are considered not met, namely Expectations B5 and B10 (with an associated recommendation arising in each area). All others are considered met and low risk, with the exception of Expectations B1 and B3 which are met but with recommendations to address the moderate risks regarding the validation process and College oversight of teaching, learning and assessment activities, respectively. In addition to the recommendations in Expectations B1, B3, B5 and B10, the review team also recommends that the review of the higher national portfolio be completed (Expectation B8) and noted the operation of personal tutoring as good practice (Expectation B4).

2.52   Of the Expectations not met, Expectation B5 is considered to pose a moderate risk as the arrangements for student representation and engagement, while broadly adequate, have some shortcomings in operation. Although the College has plans to develop student engagement activity within the College, these are not fully embedded in planning activities at this stage. The unmet Expectation B10 is considered to pose a serious risk to the quality of work placement learning opportunities due to the significant gap in the structures and procedures relating to the quality assurance arrangements for managing work placements. In addition, the College has not recognised a problem in oversight and has no current plans for addressing this issue, despite a concern regarding the arrangements for placements resulting in an advisable recommendation in the last IQER report.

2.53   On this basis, the review team considered that there is a major gap in the College's ability to meet Expectation B10 and that this presents a serious risk to the management of student learning opportunities in this area, with limited controls currently in place to mitigate this risk. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **does not meet** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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

Quality Code, *Part C: Information about higher education provision*

3.1 The College website, prospectus and other printed materials are used to provide information about the College and its programmes to prospective students and other stakeholders. There is also a course finder app on the College's Facebook page. Information is provided on the course content, length of the course, modes of study, assessment methods, entry requirements, awards offered, progression opportunities and cost of the course. Where required, course information is also supplemented by the Key Information Sets, giving students applying for courses an opportunity to access information on the performance of the programme. There is a specific section providing information for international students wishing to make an application. The website also provides information about the College management and governance arrangements, including details about the Senior Management Team, key College policies and a governing board section with relevant annual reports. The currency of course information is reviewed by subject leaders in close liaison with the marketing department. Publicity material is signed off by the Marketing and Admissions Manager. Official data for Higher Education in Further Education: Students surveys and UCAS is compiled and checked by the Higher Education Director, the College's Information and Technology Systems Directorate and the Business and Student Services Directorate.

3.2 More detailed course information is made available for current students in the course handbooks, which are available in hard copy and on the VLE. The information available includes learning outcomes, grading criteria, assessment timetables, academic regulations and generic information on referencing, academic services and plagiarism. The College VLE is also used to provide specific information about the delivery of the modules, including module outlines and lecture notes. External examiner reports are available on the VLE for staff and students to access. The College considered the 'How to Apply' section on the website had some shortcomings and noted that further work is being undertaken to provide clearer information for prospective students on the admissions process. This is currently being addressed by the Marketing Team for the 2014 prospectus. Additionally, the College is currently in the process of developing a Higher Education Student Charter.

3.3 The review team reviewed samples of documentation available to prospective and current students including the College website, the prospectus, the VLE, course handbooks, programme specifications and module specifications. The team also met with staff and students to test the usefulness, accessibility and accuracy of the information provided.

3.4 Students reported that the information made available by the College is accessible, accurate, clear and useful. In particular, the students were highly complimentary of the VLE, deeming it easily accessible on and off-campus and comprehensive in the provision of course information. In meetings with support staff, the team was told that there are plans for its further development, including the capacity to extend it beyond an information tool to facilitate greater interactivity in teaching and learning. The IT Manager also clarified that the College ensures the VLE reflects industry standards. The review team considered that the useful and accessible VLE provided a valuable resource for both staff and students and noted this as **good practice**.

3.5   The review team concludes that the College produces information on the courses offered which is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The College therefore meets the Expectation as defined in *Part C* of the Quality Code and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.6   In meeting its judgement on the quality of the information produced about provision at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria outlined in Annex two of the published handbook. The review team considered that the Expectation in this area is met and the risk is low.

3.7   The College provides information to stakeholders that is generally clear, accessible and useful. The VLE was particularly cited by staff and students as a valuable information tool and the reviewers' scrutiny of this resource confirmed this view. The accessibility and usefulness of the VLE was recognised as good practice.

3.8   Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of the information provided by the College about its 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.

4.1 The College states that the aims and objectives in the Strategic Plan and draft Higher Education Strategy demonstrate that it is taking a strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. All support areas produce an annual Self-Assessment Report together with a Quality Improvement Plan which cover both further and higher education development plans and identify actions being taken to enhance the student experience. The implementation of the College Property Strategy, which includes the creation of the new Professional Studies Building and capital investments in the Electrical and Mechanical Engineering subject area, were cited as recent examples of enhancement initiatives. While there is no group with a specific remit for enhancement, good practice in teaching and learning is shared between colleagues through the Higher Education Practitioners Group.

4.2 The review team analysed the SED and met with academic staff and senior managers at the College to discuss the approach to enhancement and how this is manifested within the College structures and practices.

4.3 Staff confirmed that the Higher Education Practitioners Group is a useful forum for raising and discussing good practice, although the team noted that the identification and dissemination of good practice is not reflected in its terms of reference. While the review team identified positive enhancement activity taking place in different parts of the College, the team did not see evidence of where enhancement across higher education programmes is being discussed in a strategic manner or where this is formally reported or monitored at College level. Enhancement opportunities are detailed as aims of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy although there is no clear indication as to how this should be sourced, recorded, monitored and disseminated to all relevant parties across the College. The examples of divisional Self-Assessment Reports and Quality Improvement Plans reviewed by the team were predominantly focused on further education improvements and required reporting against common headings for further education and higher education. The generic headings of the College's Quality Improvement Plans are edited by course teams to be subject specific, which means that issues arising cannot be objectively understood in the context of the College, consequently inhibiting opportunities for cross-College enhancement. While the annual monitoring process and the peer observation approach provide opportunities for good practice to be identified and shared locally, the team did not see evidence of how the College uses its quality assurance processes effectively for enhancement purposes. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College take deliberate and systematic steps, at provider level, to identify, disseminate, implement and monitor good practice and evaluate its impact on the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

4.4 The review team concludes that the College does not meet the Expectation that deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities and that the risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.5   In meeting its judgement on the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex two of the published handbook. The review team considered that the Expectation in this area is not met and that the risk to student learning opportunities is moderate.

4.6   The strategic approach to enhancement at the College is largely viewed in terms of capital investment in the College infrastructure, and quality assurance procedures are not used effectively to identify, support and disseminate good practice in a planned and systematic manner. While the College does encourage continuous improvement to its provision, there is little evidence of how this is implemented and overseen at College level. The review team therefore recommends that the College take deliberate and systematic steps, at provider level, to identify, disseminate, implement and monitor good practice and evaluate its impact on the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

4.7   Overall, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

5.1   The majority of programmes at the College are designed to support specific careers and the College ensures that all significant policy documents promote employability skills within the provision. The Higher Education Strategy acknowledges that 'virtually all HE provision is vocational, the role of the employer is pivotal'. The previous IQER review team made two advisable recommendations relating to employer engagement, namely to review and improve links to employers in all relevant programme areas and to ensure consistent employer engagement in the full promotion of work-based learning opportunities. The College has made some progress in this area as a number of programme areas have developed effective links with employers, but these are not formalised and the claim made by the College that it has established employer links for all higher education courses could not be verified. The team met with a number of employers who all expressed an interest in becoming more involved with their subject areas but none had been involved in curriculum design and all confirmed that there is no formal structure with which they could engage. Indeed, although the involvement of employers in the design of programmes is seen as important, the review team noted that programme approval documentation does not make specific reference to the inclusion of employers in the design stages of new programmes. However, where the programme areas have made links, employers' views on new programme proposals are sought.

5.2   The majority of programmes offer Personal Planning and Development modules to aid the development of employability skills. Although this is not a College requirement, all students met by the team have a Personal Development Plan and students attested to its value. Programmes use this module to support the development of specific skills which are tailored, as much as possible, to the area of future employment. All students confirm that they have a personal tutor who supports them in their academic development, as well as engaging them in their employability skill development.

5.3   The College sources opportunities where possible for students to work on live projects for employers. Many students undertake a work placement as a compulsory element of their programme. Course teams source placement opportunities and in most cases students are encouraged to find their own placements as part of their employability skills development. Students, employers and staff made clear during meetings that there is considerable variability in practice in the arrangements for securing a placement, the length of the placement, the quality of the learning opportunities available during the placement, and the monitoring of the placement experience.

5.4   The College has invested in its infrastructure to ensure that programmes have up-to-date and industry-standard facilities, and the team were given examples of where specific equipment was provided to programmes at relatively short notice in response to demand. In another instance, employers noted that students were not using particular software used by the setting, but the team clarified that this software is available at the College.

5.5   The review team was assured that students receive sound support for their employability skills development from tutors, central support services and within their College programme. The reviewers were not assured that the College has developed systematic processes to engage effectively with employers, although the employers met during the visit expressed a desire to engage more actively. Additionally, the team did not consider that the College has sufficient processes in place to assure itself of the quality or effectiveness of the placements undertaken across or within individual programmes.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

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

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

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

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

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