Higher Education Review of Chelmsford College

May 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 Chelmsford College. The review took place from 7 to 8 May 2014 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Paul Brunt
- Miss Sarah Crook (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
    - the setting and maintenance of 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 6.

In reviewing Chelmsford 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/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review webpages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Chelmsford College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following feature of **good practice** at Chelmsford College.

- The proactive and comprehensive academic, learning and pastoral support provided to students from initial application through to completion of their studies (Expectations B2, B3 and B4).

Recommendations

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

From October 2014:

- formalise student representation and develop ways to encourage consistent student engagement at relevant academic committees (Expectation B5 and Enhancement)
- work with its awarding body to ensure that students have access to information that sets out the overall programme aims and intended learning outcomes (Expectations A1, A3 and C)
- ensure that the formal committee responsible for the oversight and management of higher education pathways meets regularly in accordance with its Terms of Reference (Expectations A4, B5, B8 and Enhancement).

By January 2015:

- work with its awarding body to consider how external examiners' reports for awards offered across a number of providers can be made more specific to the needs of the College (Expectation B7).

By September 2015:

- develop an institutional strategic approach to enhancement so that higher education initiatives can be integrated in a systematic and planned manner (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The College involves its higher education students in quality assurance and enhancement through formal representation, more informal mechanisms such as conversations in a cohort tutorial, and the effective use of both modular and wider College surveys. The College recognises that its higher education students are of a distinctive type, and that the provision is very small and amounts to a limited proportion of the College's student population. Therefore, the cohort tutorial is also the main means by which higher education students receive feedback on actions in response to their issues. There were few examples of the student voice leading to specific enhancements in the College. Students are formally represented at the Curriculum Management Committee, which had not met in the current academic year. Student representatives are not given specific training or dedicated time with their cohorts for them to gain an understanding of issues.

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

About Chelmsford College

Chelmsford College (the College) opened in 1962. It is a medium-sized general further education college, located in Essex and operating from three sites within the town. The higher education courses are provided at the Princes Road site.

The College is governed by the Board of the Corporation. The small higher education provision is managed within the existing management structure. Its policies and procedures are generic and relate to provision across qualification levels.

The College's mission statement is 'Chelmsford College will enable success for all learners through the provision of high quality, flexible teaching and learning opportunities across a broad range of vocational and academic disciplines'.

The College has a student population of approximately 4,050. Of these, 49 are part-time higher education students. At the time of its Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2009, the College had a total of 4,222 students, 130 of whom were on higher education programmes. The reduction in the number of higher education students is largely due to Anglia Ruskin University's (the University's) decision to close its teacher training provision and therefore the College stopped offering the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) in 2012.

The College has been in partnership with the University for 14 years and has had a franchise agreement with them since 2007 to run two Higher National Certificates (HNCs) in Construction and Civil Engineering.

In recognition of its strength as a niche provider, the amount of competition locally, and the desire to offer progression opportunities for its further education students, the College would like to increase the number of students on its existing HNC programmes but has no firm plans at this stage to expand its overall higher education provision. However, the Employer Engagement Manager continually monitors the local labour market to identify any areas where the College might consider expanding its provision.

The College has made satisfactory progress in addressing the recommendations from its IQER in 2009. Significant developments have included the setting up of the Curriculum Management Committee (CMC) with the University to address higher education issues, the strengthening of the Student Adviser role, and ensuring that a given proportion of higher education classes are now routinely observed.

Explanation of the findings about Chelmsford 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 Chelmsford 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*

Findings

1.1   The College's higher education programmes have been developed by Anglia Ruskin University (the University), and approved to be delivered by the College on a franchised basis. The University, through its approval and review procedures, is responsible for ensuring that the qualifications are appropriately aligned to the FHEQ. The University produces the course specification and the College adheres to the University's procedures through its own internal approval processes. The College's processes meet the Expectation in *Chapter A1: The national level* of the Quality Code.

1.2   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining relevant handbooks and validation and review reports, and by talking to senior staff.

1.3   The evidence reviewed shows the practices and procedures to be effective in practice. The regulatory framework of the University determines the academic standards of the award. The College is effective in adopting the University's policies and procedures for the management of standards in its higher education provision. The University oversees and manages the approval and review events that the College attends. The University carries out an institutional review of the partnership at regular intervals, with satisfactory outcomes leading to a renewal of the Memorandum of Agreement. The most recent institutional review report in 2009 demonstrates that programme outcomes are suitably matched to the FHEQ qualification descriptors.

1.4   Moreover, the College's programmes are subject to a wider periodic review with the relevant University department, in which the panel (with external representation) confirmed that adherence to appropriate standards had been maintained. Programmes are also accredited against the frameworks of professional bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Building and Joint Board of Moderators (for organisations associated with highway engineering) which align with the FHEQ. Evidence from external examiners' reports confirms that programmes are appropriately matched to the FHEQ and that, in general, students are undertaking an appropriate volume of study to demonstrate their achievement of the required learning outcomes. Students whom the team met had not been issued with a copy of the course specification or any other appropriate document that outlined the programme aims and alignment with the FHEQ. This is explained more fully in paragraph 1.12. The team **recommends** that, from October 2014, the College work with its awarding body to ensure that students have access to information that sets out the overall programme aims and intended learning outcomes.

1.5   Overall, the College effectively manages its responsibilities within its partnership agreement to help ensure that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. The University has ultimate responsibility for ensuring alignment with the FHEQ and this is carried out through its own regulatory framework. Alignment is confirmed through a variety of mechanisms including regular institutional and periodic reviews by the University,

professional body accreditation, and the conclusions from external examiners' reports. There is a recommendation for the College to work with its awarding body to ensure that students have access to information that sets out the overall programme aims and intended learning outcomes. The team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A1: The national level* is met both in design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.6   As the awarding body, the University is again responsible for taking into account the relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements during programme design and approval. This is monitored through the external examination process, and by annual and periodic review activities. The statements are used in association with the FHEQ and the SEEC credit-level descriptors in defining the programme learning outcomes. Course specifications demonstrate which subject benchmarks the programmes have considered in their design. The procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level* of the Quality Code.

1.7   The review team tested the procedures by examining relevant handbooks, revalidation reports and course specifications, and in meetings with academic and senior staff.

1.8   Reference to the subject benchmark statements is detailed in the requirements for curriculum approval and review of the awarding body. Scrutiny of approval and periodic review/revalidation reports demonstrates that this was the case for the programmes delivered by the College. However, senior staff at the College demonstrated a lack of awareness of how subject benchmark statements featured in the College's programmes. Therefore, the College might wish to make it clearer to all staff their responsibilities in relation to subject benchmark statements.

1.9   Overall, the review team considered that the awarding body has responsibility for taking account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements and this is clearly evidenced in approval and review processes. The College would benefit from making clear to all staff their responsibilities in relation to subject benchmark statements. The team concludes that the College meets the Expectation in *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level* of the Quality Code and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: The programme level*

Findings

1.10   The College makes available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes, and expected learner achievements of programmes through module guides and the virtual learning environment (VLE). The agreement with its awarding body clearly specifies the mutual responsibilities for the production of this information. Module guides are provided initially by the University, and the College then adds relevant local information to them. The VLE provides students with additional module information. The University makes available its VLE to College students, and this includes similar module information and links to regulatory information. The University produces course specification forms that provide details regarding the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements at the programme level. The College's processes meet the Expectation in *Chapter A3: The programme level* of the Quality Code.

1.11   The team met with students, academic staff and senior staff, and read all the relevant handbooks that were provided to the team. It also scrutinised the VLEs to determine where and how definitive information on the programme aims, intended learning outcomes, and expected learner achievements are communicated to students.

1.12   While the College provides students with information that is of assistance with their studies at the module level, there is a lack of accessible information for students which specifies the aims and intended learning outcomes at programme level. The information at programme level is available in the form of course specifications which are produced by the University and provide detailed information on the programme aims, intended learning outcomes, learning, teaching and assessment strategies, modules and credits. However, it was clear to the team that the course specifications had not been issued to students and that staff at the College were not aware of the existence of such a document despite this being a requirement of the awarding body. Not until after the review visit was the team provided with copies of the relevant course specifications. Intended learning outcomes of the individual modules are provided in the module guides, and the guides themselves are comprehensive and helpful. Students whom the team met were satisfied with the information they received as this related to matters of immediate concern. Students were also aware of how their programme was located within a portfolio of awards run by the awarding body and how they might progress to another award on satisfactory completion of their studies at the College. The team **recommends** that, from October 2014, the College work with its awarding body to ensure that students have access to information that sets out the overall programme aims and intended learning outcomes.

1.13   Annual reviews and external examiners' reports provide the College with a means to oversee the extent to which intended outcomes are being achieved. Evidence from both these sources revealed that the College follows the University's requirements when it updates information through its monitoring process.

1.14   Despite the recommendation regarding the accessibility of information at a programme level, the team concludes that, overall, the College's procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter A3: The programme level* and the associated level of risk is low. This is because the College has a sound process for updating and monitoring its information on aims and intended learning outcomes. In addition, students are content with the comprehensive information they receive at module level through the VLE and module

guides. The College and its awarding body need to work together to ensure easier access for students to programme-level information.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A4: Approval and review*

Findings

1.15   The awarding body determines the arrangements for programme approval and review, and these have to some extent informed the College's Strategic Plan and Teaching and Learning Improvement Strategy. Pivotal to the College's own oversight of the validity and relevance of programmes is the operation of the CMC which is a requirement of the awarding body. The continuing relevance and validity of the College's programmes is ensured by the processes of periodic review and revalidation undertaken by the University in accordance with its procedures for ensuring the currency of its programmes.

1.16   The monitoring of programmes is undertaken by two parallel processes reflecting the systems used by the College and its awarding body. Within the College, the Curriculum Team Leader prepares an annual self-assessment report, which is informed by student feedback gathered in tutorials, module evaluations and student surveys. In addition, performance data and feedback from external examiners are also analysed. Both the Performance Review Board and Quality Standards Committee subject this report to further scrutiny. The report contributes to a College Quality Improvement Plan, which is agreed by College Governors. For the University, the Curriculum Team Leader completes an annual monitoring report which is informed by a similar data set. The relevant University department scrutinises this report and this informs action planning within the University. This subsequently informs, where relevant, the College's own action planning. In addition, the programmes are subject to periodic review at the same time as each subject area is reviewed at the University. An institutional review occurs every five years for the University to assure itself that the College is appropriately delivering its awards. These processes provide a clear and comprehensive framework for the validation and review of higher education provision at the College. Collaboration, externality and oversight are incorporated in this framework. Respective responsibilities of the College and its awarding body are clearly defined. Therefore, the processes meet the Expectation in *Chapter A4: Approval and review* of the Quality Code.

1.17   The team examined handbooks, codes of practice, and approval and review reports, and met with senior staff, academic and support staff, representatives of the awarding body, and students.

1.18   The evidence shows that the College has effective processes to approve and regularly review its higher education provision. The team saw evidence that programme teams regularly review the provision, drawing on data from module-level feedback, student performance, and feedback from external examiners and presenting this through the annual programme review processes.

1.19   The CMC is responsible for ensuring the College's own oversight and management of academic standards and quality in its higher education provision, but the team heard that the Committee had not met in the 12 months prior to the review visit, and was therefore unable to fully discharge its responsibilities. The team **recommends** that, from October 2014, the College ensure that the formal Committee responsible for the oversight and management of higher education pathways meets regularly in accordance with its Terms of Reference.

1.20   The team found that the evidence confirmed that the procedures work effectively. Drawing on a wide range of data, the College's systems for programme monitoring and review supplement those of its awarding body and include regular review of its provision from module level to the senior levels within the College. However, the College should, in conjunction with the University, ensure that the committee with responsibility for higher education pathways meets regularly to provide formal management and oversight of these programmes. Therefore, the team concludes, overall, that the Expectation in *Chapter A4: Approval and review* is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality*

Findings

1.21   The University is responsible for the approval, assessment and quality assurance of the programmes. This extends to ensuring a level of externality for the approval of programmes in the College, and the appointment of external examiners. The Anglia Ruskin Senate Code of Practice on Curriculum, Approval and Review states that all approval and periodic review processes involve persons who are external to the design and delivery of the provision. The College acknowledges the role of external subject expertise, both academic and professional, in the setting and maintaining of standards, and refers to the involvement of external examiners and of external panel members at approval and within periodic review. The College's procedures meet the Expectation of *Chapter A5: Externality* of the Quality Code.

1.22   The team examined handbooks, codes of practice, and approval, review and external examiners' reports, and talked to senior staff, academic and support staff, representatives of the awarding body, and students.

1.23   The team found staff are able to clearly identify the value of external expertise in the development and operation of their higher education provision. They show understanding of procedures for approval and review, involving external advice through the development phase to the validation event. The documentary evidence, supported by responses in meetings, shows that the College takes account of external input to assure delivery, curriculum content and assessment.

1.24   External examiners are appointed by the awarding body, and are associated with specific subjects and report at the module level. Hence there are several examiners who view the Colleges' programmes, each with different module-level responsibility. Actions arising from external examiners' reports feed into the annual monitoring processes required by the College and its awarding body. Periodic review reports show external representation among the panel membership. The external examiners' reports, as determined by the awarding body, vary in the amount of detailed comment given that relates to modules delivered by the College. The recommendation to work with its awarding body to consider how external examiners' reports for awards offered across a number of providers can be made more specific to the needs of the College by January 2015 is outlined more fully under Expectation B7.

1.25   The team considered that the procedures adopted by the College work effectively and it is evident that there is externality within programme approval and review processes as well as assessment. Although effective use is made of external examiners' reports in annual monitoring processes, the team have made a recommendation for the College to work with its awarding body regarding the usefulness of external examiners' reports. Overall, the team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A5: Externality* is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.26   Assessments are designed by module leaders at the University for implementation in the College as part of the franchise arrangement. Departmental Assessment Panels are run by the University to confirm student achievement. Student assessment is seen as being a key instrument in ensuring standards, and the University takes direct responsibility for setting assessments, with some input from College tutors. The College has a generic Assessment Policy, outlined in its Quality Assurance Manual, which states that the College will comply with the regulations of its awarding body, which are outlined in the University codes of practice. The College has responsibility for first-marking and internal verification within standardisation meetings. The University's module leaders then moderate marked assessment samples to ensure appropriate standards are being achieved. The additional moderation and standardisation meetings between College and University staff, along with specific comments by external examiners, further secure the assessment process. The College's procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes* of the Quality Code.

1.27   The team examined handbooks, codes of practice, and external examiners' reports, and held meetings with academic and senior staff, representatives of the awarding body, and students.

1.28   The team saw evidence that appropriate assessment practices are in place. Internal moderation, moderation activities with University staff, and Departmental Assessment Panels confirm the standards achieved in assessment. This is backed up by external examiners' reports which suggest that appropriate standards are being achieved in terms of the consistency of marking and appropriateness of methods, and that the examiners have confidence in the assessment process. Students whom the team met commented positively on the information they receive from tutors, module guide information concerning the academic standards expected on the module, and the level of support from individual tutorials, briefing sheets, and study skills sessions.

1.29   Overall, the review team saw evidence that appropriate assessment practices are in place. This is confirmed through various moderation processes and through comments made in external examiners' reports. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes* of the Quality Code is met and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.30   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. All of the Expectations relating to the College's maintenance of threshold academic standards are met and the associated levels of risk were low. The team also noted that ultimate responsibility for academic standards rests with the degree-awarding body and that, in all cases, the College discharges its responsibilities in respect of the maintenance of threshold academic standards competently and professionally. Nevertheless, the team did identify areas for improvement and made recommendations in the following areas: improving accessibility for students of information about overall programme aims and intended learning outcomes; ensuring that the formal committee responsible for oversight of its higher education pathways meets regularly; and working with its awarding body to make external examiners' reports more specific to the needs of the College. Previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally. The review team concludes that, overall, the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1   The College operates a franchised provision with the University, the terms of which are clearly articulated in the partnership agreement. The College therefore does not participate in the design or approval of programmes. With respect to how the College adheres to and participates in the University's quality assurance procedures, the Expectation in *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval* of the Quality Code is met.

2.2   The team looked at the minutes and Terms of Reference of the CMC and held meetings with the Principal, academic staff and senior staff.

2.3   The evidence shows that the College has effective relationships and communication with its awarding body at course and module level. In addition to comprehensive monitoring and review processes, the Curriculum Team Leader has regular communication with the University's Pathway Leader. In theory, the relationship with its awarding body and the discussions about the higher education pathways should be further enhanced by the CMC. However, as noted under Expectation A4, this Committee had not met in the current academic year due to staff absences.

2.4   Overall, the team concludes that the College fulfils its obligation effectively within the terms of the partnership agreement. The Expectation in *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval* of the Quality Code is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions*

Findings

2.5   The College is responsible for the selection, admission and registration of students, although this is done under the terms laid out in the partnership agreement with its awarding body. The College follows the University's Code of Practice on Admissions and also its terms for the accreditation of prior learning. The University sets the entry requirements and students are enrolled online through their system. Students receive information about the application procedures through the College's prospectus and website. For any additional information or advice, the College encourages students to contact the Information, Advice and Guidance Team and/or the Curriculum Team Leader. The College's procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B2: Admissions* of the Quality Code.

2.6   The review team examined the operation of the admissions procedures in meetings with students and teaching and support staff, and by scrutinising the guidance given to staff.

2.7   The information about application and enrolment procedures in the prospectus and online is clear and comprehensive. The prospectus outlines the entry requirements, duration of study, start dates and fees, and clearly indicates that the University is the awarding body. The information provided online is similarly robust, detailing course fees, days of study, modes of assessment, and eligibility. The website directs students to contact the College directly for further information. Students whom the team met commented that the admissions process was clearly articulated and straightforward, and that the information and support available was clear and comprehensive.

2.8   The Information, Advice and Guidance Team and the Curriculum Team Leader offer effective support for prospective students throughout the application process. Applicants are invited to meet with the College's Curriculum Team Leader and, through this system, the College builds links with the students and their employers. The College also hosts open days for prospective applicants. The Information, Advice and Guidance Team maintain strong links with their counterparts at the University, and they provide support and are available at information evenings for prospective applicants. Students reported that they contact the team for guidance on a variety of important issues and they find this service invaluable. All prospective students, including those progressing internally, are interviewed by course staff. Upon enrolment to the College, students are screened for literacy and numeracy learning support needs using a diagnostic assessment tool. The team found that this was part of the proactive and comprehensive academic, learning and pastoral support provided to students from initial application through to completion of their studies and considers it to be **good practice** (see also Expectations B3 and B4).

2.9   The College has not received any appeals against admissions decisions for higher education students but, if they did, they would refer the applicant to the awarding body's admissions and appeals policies. The team heard examples of how unsuccessful applicants continue to be supported by the College in their pursuit of more appropriate courses either within the College or with alternative providers.

2.10   The review team concludes that the College has effective mechanisms in place for the admission of students and that these are consistently implemented by staff. The College is committed to supporting students through the application process. Therefore, the Expectation in *Chapter B2: Admissions* of the Quality Code is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*

Findings

2.11   The College has a generic Professional Development Policy and a Teaching and Learning Improvement Strategy, with the implementation of the Strategy being discussed at the College's Quality Standards Committee. The Teaching and Learning Improvement Strategy states that the College seeks to support effective teaching and learning through its self-assessment procedures; peer mentoring and coaching; effective leadership and management; the Learner Voice; the use of data (such as Student Perception of Course (SPOC) surveys); and the Teaching and Learning Observation System. The College has a Teaching Qualifications Policy which states that teaching staff must undertake a minimum of 30 hours' continual professional development per annum, and gain Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills status within five years of appointment, as well as registering with the Institute for Learning. Any academic staff engaging with assessment must also undertake a Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) award within one year of appointment. Students sit on the interview panel when new teaching staff are appointed. At induction, new staff are required to attend a variety of sessions including ones on additional learning support, management information systems, the learning centre, careers and course information, and equality and diversity. Staff teaching on higher education courses are also invited to undergo an informal induction and tour at the University. The College's policies and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* of the Quality Code.

2.12   To determine whether this Expectation had been met in practice, the review team tested the evidence by speaking to academic and support staff, senior staff, the Principal and students, and by scrutinising relevant policies, procedures and meeting minutes.

2.13   The College has an effective Teaching and Learning Observation System whereby all teaching staff are reviewed at least once a year. The System has externality embedded in it as all observers undertake an annual joint observation with an observer from outside the College. The team heard that the College seeks to ensure that higher education staff are observed by other staff experienced at the same level although, due to the size of the provision, this is not always possible. The Teaching and Learning Observation System grades for staff are recorded, and reports sent for approval by a validation panel. Once the online report has been approved, the line manager, observer, and observee are notified via the System. The achievement of development points is overseen by Heads of Department and a report is sent to the Senior Management Team, Quality Standards Committee, CMC and Quality Corporation Committee. This process helps to identify issues for individual and overall staff development, and the System also feeds into the staff appraisal process. The institutional review carried out by the University in 2009 praised the Teaching and Learning Observation System. The College uses the System to identify and support staff who are deemed to require improvement in their teaching, as well as those seeking to further their skills. For these members of staff, the College offers Pedagogy Partners and Subject Learning Coaches. Staff whom the team met reported that the System is an effective system for improving the quality of teaching.

2.14 The development and appraisal process feeds into cross-College professional development weeks and staff away-days. The team saw evidence to confirm that staff are qualified to teach at higher education level and heard that they are supported to undertake relevant professional development which informs their teaching. The awarding body reviews teaching staff annually to ensure they are qualified to a suitable level. In addition, the Professional Development Policy, although predominantly orientated towards further education, is fit for purpose for higher education teaching.

2.15 The College offers effective support to enhance learning and has a range of processes in place to monitor student satisfaction. Student views on the quality of teaching and learning are gathered through the SPOC survey. The data from this survey is a key performance indicator and is discussed at relevant committees. The team found the collation and use of SPOC data to be robust and to support effective teaching and learning. The College also monitors student satisfaction through the weekly tutorial meetings. University module evaluations are undertaken and collected by the University at the end of each semester. Students reported positively on their experiences of the quality of teaching and learning. The team heard that the College supports students to become independent learners, and effectively responds to their learning needs. For example, the College is flexible in providing appropriate individual learning support and study skills workshops. The College seeks to identify student needs at enrolment and through individual meetings with the Curriculum Team Leader. The team regarded the proactive and comprehensive academic, learning and pastoral support provided to students from initial application through to completion of their studies as being **good practice**.

2.16 The team concluded that the College has effective policies and processes in place to deliver and monitor learning and teaching. This happens through effective systems of observation and support for staff development, and a range of processes in place to monitor and act upon student feedback about the quality of teaching and learning. The proactive and comprehensive support provided to students is recognised as good practice. Therefore, the Expectation in *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* of the Quality Code is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement*

Findings

2.17   At a strategic level, the University is responsible for the oversight and monitoring of resources as part of its institutional review procedures. Within the College, higher education resources are overseen at committee level by the CMC and also by the Quality and Standards Committee and Senior Management Team. Staff also have the autonomy to make decisions about resources on a less formal basis to respond quickly to students' needs. Class representatives gather feedback from students about resources and they then have the opportunity to present these views at the weekly tutorial meetings. The College also seeks to gather views through an online forum and via a student satisfaction survey of the Learning Resource Centre.

2.18   The College provides academic support to its students primarily through the individual attention given to each learner by the course teams, by weekly group tutorials, and through the provision of study skills and maths workshops. The tutorials are an additional opportunity for staff to inform students about the support available to them. The College also provides information about student support though its external website. The College's procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement* of the Quality Code.

2.19   The review team tested the support and resourcing for students by meeting with students, senior staff, teaching and support staff, and through examining the related documentation discussed in this section of the report.

2.20   The review team found clear evidence that students are satisfied with the material, electronic, and teaching resources available to them. When necessary, students make use of their access to the University's library and they clearly understand how and when they can make use of University resources. Students whom the team met confirmed that resources at the University are of industry standard and thus provide effective support for their learning at the College. Texts that are available as e-books are now marked as such in the Learning Resource Centre, and a link on the College's library website directs students to the University's VLE. Information about resources is clearly highlighted both in module guides and in the College's Quality Assurance Manual. Students have access to the VLEs of both the College and its awarding body. The team heard evidence that students consider it to be an appropriate level of provision. Students make particular use of the College's VLE and can easily access the information off-campus. The most recent survey reveals that students are satisfied with the Learning Resource Centre and find staff helpful. Students whom the team met confirmed that the College is responsive to their needs and has in place sufficient resources to support their learning.

2.21   The College has an IT strategy that supports its Strategic Plan. This strategy, valid from 2012-15, is not specific to the College's higher education provision but the team did consider it fit for purpose. The Head of Information Strategy and Services is responsible for this under the stewardship of the Senior Management Team.

2.22   Tutors and the Information, Advice and Guidance Team provide good support for students. This is also discussed under Expectations B2 and B3. In addition, the College tracks students' progress and support is quickly and appropriately tailored to meet individual needs. The College supports student induction and transition between levels through the

clear articulation of assessment aims and learning outcomes at module level and the clear advice and guidance provided by individual members of staff. The targeted support given to learners is regularly discussed at course team meetings. Students whom the team met felt they were effectively supported to achieve their learning outcomes, in particular through the strong relationship they have with the Curriculum Team Leader. The proactive and comprehensive academic, learning and pastoral support provided to students from initial application through to completion of their studies is regarded by the review team as **good practice** and is outlined more fully under Expectation B3 (see also Expectation B4).

2.23   The review team concludes that the College effectively allocates resources and supports students to reach their potential. The latter was considered to be good practice. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement* of the Quality Code is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student engagement*

Findings

2.24   The College has a variety of mechanisms through which it gathers feedback from students. Students are able to feed back as a group about their experiences through weekly tutorials with the Curriculum Team Leader; and through end-of-module evaluations and SPOCs, and these are analysed by both the College and the University. The College has a student representation system and students are invited to attend the CMC and other College committees. The review team found that, in theory, the College's procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B5: Student engagement* of the Quality Code.

2.25   The review team tested student engagement by meeting with students, the Principal, teaching and support staff, and senior staff, and by examining documents relating to the gathering and oversight of student views.

2.26   The College gathers and makes robust use of feedback from students for quality assurance purposes, primarily through weekly tutorials, end-of-module evaluations and the SPOC survey. The results of the SPOC survey and end-of-module evaluations are considered in the Self-Assessment Cycle and at the CMC. Outcomes are then fed back to students through the tutorial system and in some module guides. As reported under Expectation A4, the Committee had not met in the current academic year. However, students are confident that their feedback is acted upon within the College, and that module feedback is used.

2.27   The College has a student representation system but this is not fully developed or consistently supported with training to enable student representatives to engage fully with quality assurance and enhancement at committee level. While recognising the part-time attendance of students, most of whom are working full-time for the rest of the week, the team also heard that students have not yet been able to consistently take up opportunities to participate in key committees, in part due to their other commitments but also as a result of the inconvenient timing of these meetings and the lack of CMC meetings during the current academic year. The team also heard from student representatives that they had not received formal training. The College invites all students to attend Learner Voice meetings but again this had low take-up among higher education students. The team **recommends** that, from October 2014, the College formalise higher education student representation and develop ways to encourage consistent student engagement at relevant academic committees. In addition, from October 2014, the team **recommends** that the College ensure that the formal committee responsible for the oversight and management of higher education pathways meets regularly in accordance with its Terms of Reference (see also Expectation A4).

2.28   The review team concludes that the College gathers student views and values the student contribution. Students feel that the College is responsive to their suggestions and feedback. However, while recognising the part-time nature of student attendance, there are weaknesses in the student representative system which have been compounded by the CMC not meeting in the current academic year. Therefore, for these reasons, the team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B5: Student engagement* of the Quality Code is met but the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: 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*

Findings

2.29   The College uses the University's assessment procedures. Information is outlined in module handbooks including assessment methods, intended learning outcomes, marking criteria and grade boundaries. The College has a generic Assessment Policy, outlined in its Quality Assurance Manual, which states that the College will comply with the regulations of its awarding body which are outlined in the University codes of practice. The process for first and second-marking of assessments is explained under Expectation A6. The College provides provisional marks to students prior to them being ratified at Departmental Assessment Panel meetings. Finalised marks are made available to students online. Any changes to regulations that may affect assessment are considered at the panel meetings. The College follows the University's policy on feedback to students and information about what students can expect regarding the availability and timeliness of feedback is provided in module guides. The policy and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning* of the Quality Code.

2.30   The review team met with senior staff, teaching and support staff, and students. The team also reviewed module guides, codes of practice, external examiners' reports, and staff development events.

2.31   Students whom the team met knew where to look for information about assessment and understood how to both achieve programme outcomes and reach grade boundaries. Assessment information is clearly articulated in module handbooks. Students are confident that they understand plagiarism and again the information about this is made readily available by the College. External examiners' reports also indicate that the College's assessment procedures are robust, and that information about intended learning outcomes is communicated clearly to students and assessors.

2.32   Students expressed satisfaction with assessment procedures and found the production of the online learning plan to be particularly helpful. Students gave an example of how the College was able to respond to their needs regarding an assessment that was adjusted from being performed online to being paper-based. The support offered to students to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes is described more fully under Expectations B3 and B4. Feedback mechanisms work satisfactorily, with students confirming that work is returned in a timely manner and, where appropriate, the quality of the feedback is sufficient to inform subsequent work. Students also confirmed that they understand the nature of provisional marks.

2.33   Overall, the review team concludes that the College's approach to assessment is robust. Grading and marking criteria are clearly communicated to students and external examiners. The College has suitably robust mechanisms in place for the internal moderation of assessments and has effective oversight of student experiences of assessment. Therefore, the College's policy and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning* of the Quality Code and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External examining*

Findings

2.34   The University is responsible for the appointment of external examiners. The College receives external examiners' reports and is responsible for responding to them. The reports are discussed as part of the annual monitoring report. The College's procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code.

2.35   In testing the College's procedures, the review team met with students, senior staff, and teaching and support staff, and reviewed documentation including external examiners' reports and the College's responses to these reports.

2.36   Students are aware of external examiners' reports and how to access them on the VLE via hyperlinks in module guides. None of the students met by the team had looked at reports via these links but they did confirm they were satisfied with receiving verbal feedback about reports from teaching staff during regular tutorials. They were also aware that information about external examiners is available to them in module guides.

2.37   In their reports, external examiners express satisfaction that the College is supportive, informative and responsive to their role. The College's response to external examiners is timely. External examiners' reports are discussed at Departmental Assessment Panel meetings and form an important part of annual monitoring reports and the University's periodic review process. The review team heard that comments in external examiners' reports relating to local delivery are not made sufficiently clear to College staff. The team **recommends** that, by January 2015, the College work with its awarding body to consider how external examiners' reports for awards offered across a number of providers can be made more specific to the needs of the College.

2.38   Overall, the review team considered the College's processes to be robust for responding to and monitoring issues from external examiners' reports. Students receive verbal feedback about reports and know where to access the reports if required. Despite the recommendation about working with its awarding body to make reports more specific to the needs of the College, the team concludes that the College's processes meet the Expectation in *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.39   The processes for programme monitoring and review are explained fully under Expectation A4. The processes meet the Expectation in *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* of the Quality Code.

2.40   In testing the College's processes, the review team met with senior staff, teaching and support staff, and students. In addition, it reviewed the processes in the College's Quality Assurance Manual, monitoring and review reports, and minutes of relevant committees.

2.41   Staff whom the team met had a clear understanding of the College's procedures relating to programme monitoring and review. The team was provided with clear evidence of the effectiveness of the College's processes for monitoring and review, both its own and also how it feeds into those of its awarding body. The team saw evidence that a range of appropriate data feed into annual monitoring and the subsequent action plans are overseen by relevant committees and have timescales and responsible persons identified. However, as noted under Expectation A4, the CMC, responsible for ensuring the College's own oversight and management of the quality of learning opportunities specific to its higher education pathways, has not met in the current academic year. The team therefore **recommends** that, from October 2014, the College ensure that the formal committee responsible for the oversight and management of higher education pathways meets regularly in accordance with its Terms of Reference.

2.42   Overall, the review team saw evidence of annual monitoring and the monitoring of action plans and how this was ensured by the awarding body. The use of data is rigorous and staff whom the team met had a clear understanding of the processes and purposes of the monitoring and review processes at both course and senior levels. However, the College should, in conjunction with its awarding body, ensure that the committee with responsibility for higher education pathways meets regularly to provide formal management and oversight of these programmes. Therefore, the team concludes that the College processes meet the Expectation in *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* of the Quality Code and the level of risk 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*

Findings

2.43   The College has an internal Complaints Procedure which is overseen by the Senior Management Team and can be found in the Quality Assurance Manual. The procedure involves the initial discussion of complaints with the department concerned. Students are then referred to the Deputy Director of Quality and Learning who has 10 working days to make an initial response. The College also provides information to students about external bodies that may be approached about complaints. The Complaints Procedure also details that students should contact the Examinations Office who will explain the procedure for complaining about external assessment conducted by an awarding body. Information about how to make a complaint to the University is made available on the University's website. The College tracks complaints for quality assurance purposes with data and details relating to complaints being overseen annually by the Governors at the full Board of the Corporation. No recent formal complaints have been made regarding higher education provision. Therefore, the team reviewed older cases relating to higher education and also a complaint made by an Access to HE student to assure itself that the procedures were effective in practice. The College's Appeals Policy is contained within the Complaints Procedure which can be found in the Quality Assurance Manual. The Policy directs students to the intranet and the Student Handbook for information about appeals. The Policy explains that appeals against external assessment decisions are resolved in accordance with the awarding body's regulations. The University's intranet has student regulations which include reference to complaints and appeals. The College's procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals* of the Quality Code.

2.44   To test the effectiveness of the College's policies and procedures, the team scrutinised the Complaints Procedure, Appeals Policy and also documents relating to how complaints had been dealt with in the past. The team also met with senior staff, academic and support staff, and students.

2.45   Although module guides reviewed by the team did not contain information about the formal complaints and appeals processes, students are confident that they would know how to access information regarding complaints or appeals, mainly by initially asking their tutors or the Curriculum Team Leader. Students whom the team met understood the difference between complaints and appeals. The College's relatively small higher education provision and its strong relationship with its students means that many issues are dealt with informally, usually through the weekly tutorial system, before they become formal complaints. Although there have been no formal higher education complaints in recent years, examination of previous cases and documents relating to a recent Access to HE case suggests that the College's procedures for dealing with formal complaints are fair and rigorous.

2.46   Overall, the team found that the complaints and appeals systems operated by the College are effective and the level of understanding of the process by staff and students satisfactory. The team therefore concludes that the processes and procedures in operation at the College meet the Expectation in *Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals* of the Quality Code and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.47 The College has no current formal arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with bodies other than its awarding body and therefore, in the context of this review, this Expectation is not relevant. Although nearly all of the students are in work, being in employment is not a pre-requisite for entry onto the course. In addition, neither learning outcomes nor assessments are dependent on workplace activities. Information is available to employers online and the College maintains regular contact with them throughout the student's time at the College. For those in employment, the College produces a brief progress report for employers each year. The College has developed an Employer Links Action Plan. Although not specific to higher education, the plan does take into consideration the needs of its higher education students. The intention of the plan is to embed College links with employers for the HNC candidates through more site visits. The staff with whom the team met were keen to maintain strong links with local employers and encourage them to engage with the College. Therefore, the Expectation is met in *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research degrees*

Findings

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

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.49   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. All of the Expectations relating to the College's quality of student learning opportunities are met. Apart from Expectation B5, where the level of risk is moderate, the associated levels of risk for the Expectations were low. The team makes one new recommendation in this section, also repeating two from the previous section. The new recommendation relates to the formalising of student representation and the development of ways to encourage consistent student engagement at relevant academic committees. There was one feature of good practice: the proactive and comprehensive academic, learning and pastoral support provided to students throughout the process. The review team concludes that, overall, the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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

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

Findings

3.1 The College's partnership agreement with its awarding body clearly states the respective responsibilities for the production of information and the requirements for approval prior to issue or publication. The College uses the University's information wherever possible. Responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of information relating to higher education provision at the College rests with the Director of Management Information Systems. While the University retains oversight and management of information, the College has acknowledged *Part C: Information about higher education provision* of the Quality Code and has aligned its procedures to it for managing the production of information relating to its higher education programmes.

3.2 The College's website is the initial channel of communication for the dissemination of information about provision, the College's mission, strategic priorities and corporate information. The website has limited information relating to higher education, but includes programme details for applicants. Prospective students are guided by the website to make personal contact with the College to receive further information and guidance. Two student-facing intranet sites support the needs of students after they enrol at the College. The College also maintains a VLE which hosts a range of module-related information. Students also have access to the University's VLE and this includes similar module information and links to regulatory information.

3.3 Students receive module guides which are produced by the module leaders at the University, and are then added to by the respective module leader at the College. The Curriculum Team Leader is responsible for ensuring that the information in the module guide and the associated VLE folder is accurate, consistent with other modules and meets the requirements of the awarding body.

3.4 The review team tested that information was fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible by speaking to the Principal, senior staff, academic and support staff, and students, and by scrutinising the documents outlined above, and the relevant sections of the website and VLEs.

3.5 Students whom the team met confirmed that the information provided by the College prior to enrolment was satisfactory and that they had been able to find out what they needed to know about the College via the website and by visiting the College to attend open evenings, speak to staff and collect written information. Students were complimentary about the module guides and commented on the extensive information contained in them including details of learning outcomes, assessments, student support and learning resources. Students reported that they were able to easily access the VLEs remotely, and found them helpful. However, students are not issued with information relating to the overall programme aims and intended learning outcomes. Further details of this can be found under Expectation A3. The team has recommended that the College works with its awarding body to ensure that students have access to information that sets out the overall programme aims and intended learning outcomes.

3.6   Overall, the team found that the College, in conjunction with its awarding body, has effective procedures in place for producing and monitoring information about its higher education provision to ensure that it is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Students commented positively on the information they receive from the College. Although students have not been given information about the overall programme aims and intended learning outcomes, they are content with the comprehensive information they receive at module level through the VLE and module guides. Programme-level information is available on the University website so it is more a case of the College and its awarding body working together to ensure easier access for students to this information. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Part C: Information about higher education provision* of the Quality Code is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.7   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk was low. The team makes no new recommendations in this section, but repeats one from Expectation A3 regarding making information about programme aims and intended learning outcomes more accessible to students. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information produced about its higher education provision at the College **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College does not have a distinct strategy for the enhancement of its higher education provision. The Strategic Plan, Teaching and Learning Improvement Strategy, and College Improvement Plan cover the range of provision at the College. These plans and strategies are overseen and managed within the College's existing management structure and are discussed at various levels, including by the Principal, the Senior Management Team, and the Quality and Standards Committee. The Curriculum Team Leader manages the collaborative partnership with the University and therefore, at a course team level with the support of Heads of Department, the higher education provision at the College. The committee with responsibility specifically for the oversight and management of higher education is the CMC.

4.2 The team tested this Expectation in meetings with the Principal, senior staff, academic and support staff, and students. The team also examined a number of documents including the minutes and Terms of Reference of relevant committees, annual monitoring reports, and the plans and strategies outlined in the previous paragraph.

4.3 While the team considers the College's quality assurance procedures to be generally robust, and saw evidence of improvements being made at course level, it saw insufficient evidence of deliberate steps being taken at a provider level to promote the enhancement of students' learning opportunities. The College had difficulty articulating the meaning of enhancement within a higher education context, both in the self-evaluation document and in meetings with the team. The CMC, who are responsible for the oversight and management of the higher education pathways, had not met in the 12 months preceding the review visit due to the absence of key staff. This Committee offers the ideal opportunity to discuss both the assurance and enhancement of quality. The team has recommended that the College ensure that the formal committee responsible for the oversight and management of higher education pathways meets regularly in accordance with its Terms of Reference (see also Expectation A4). The Quality and Standards Committee monitors all areas of educational provision but the minutes of the meetings scrutinised by the team suggest that this Committee is not responsible for driving the enhancement of higher education provision at the College.

4.4 The College has a student representation system but this is not fully developed or consistently supported with training to enable student representatives to engage fully with quality assurance and enhancement at committee level. This is explained more fully under Expectation A5, along with some of the reasons why students and their representatives have not been able to take up these opportunities. The team recognises the difficulties faced in engaging part-time students and also accepts that the College does use other methods effectively to obtain feedback from students, and there is evidence to suggest changes being made at course level as a result of this feedback. However, with the CMC not meeting in the current academic year, there are limited formal mechanisms for students to participate in discussions and decisions in relation to the identification of enhancement themes or other actions arising from annual monitoring of standards and quality. Also, improvements in the College are generally driven by concerns raised by individual students rather than the collective higher education student voice. The team has therefore recommended that the

College formalise its higher education student representation and develop ways to encourage consistent student engagement at relevant academic committees.

4.5   While useful documents in their own right and informed by robust annual monitoring procedures, the College's key strategic documents are generic in nature and therefore do not relate in any detail to the enhancement of higher education. Given the relative numbers, the College's approach to enhancing student learning opportunities is not surprisingly informed by its further education provision. Due to the size of its provision, the College took the decision after its IQER not to produce a separate Higher Education Strategy. The team saw evidence that the College has a range of procedures designed to support and strengthen teaching and learning in higher education but, while its commitment to doing so is beyond doubt, particularly through the Curriculum Team Leader at course level, these procedures do not derive from an overarching institutional-level approach to enhancement. Therefore, the team **recommends** that by September 2015, the College develop an institutional strategic approach to enhancement so that higher education initiatives can be integrated in a systematic and planned manner.

4.6   While there is no doubt that the College, in conjunction with its awarding body, is committed to supporting and strengthening teaching and learning and its procedures for quality assurance are robust, there is a lack of strategic oversight regarding the enhancement of its higher education provision. Its current strategies are very generic and the College had difficulty throughout the process consistently articulating what is meant by enhancement at higher education level. These difficulties were compounded by the key formal committee responsible for the oversight and management of higher education not meeting in the preceding 12 months. While recognising the difficulties in engaging this type of student population, the team also felt there were weaknesses in the current student representation system. Therefore, the review team conclude that the Expectation is not met and the level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.7   In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. The Expectation in this area is not met and the level of risk is moderate. The College, while its ethos supports students and while it is clearly committed to improving the quality of their learning opportunities, was unable to provide convincing evidence of deliberate steps being taken at a provider level. The team makes one new recommendation in this section, also repeating two from previous sections. The new recommendation concerns the development of an institutional strategic approach to enhancement so that higher education initiatives can be integrated in a systematic and planned manner. The repeated recommendations refer to the formal committee with responsibility for higher education not meeting in the academic year, and the weaknesses in the student representation system. Using the criteria in Annex two of the handbook, the failure of the key committee for the oversight and management of higher education to meet in the current academic year suggests a weakness in the operation of part of the College's governance structure. The recommendations in this section also relate to insufficient emphasis or priority given to enhancement of higher education in the College's planning processes and strategic approaches. Finally, the College's priorities suggest that it may not be fully aware of the significance of enhancement at higher education level, even taking into account the context of its franchised provision with the University and small scale of higher education provision. The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Findings

Innovations in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

5.1 The College involves its higher education students in quality assurance and enhancement through formal representation, more informal mechanisms such as conversations in a cohort tutorial, and the effective use of both modular and wider College surveys. There were few examples of the student voice leading to specific enhancements in the College. The student body has formal representation at the College Board of Governors where it has two elected student representatives, neither of whom is a current higher education student. Students are formally represented at the CMC, which had not met in the current academic year. Student representatives are not given specific training or dedicated time with their cohorts for them to gain an understanding of issues.

Staff experience of/participation in student involvement in quality

5.2 The College has invested resources into ensuring that the student voice is gathered and their views and needs are documented. This includes module evaluations and student perception surveys. The College dedicates staff time to weekly group tutorials to informally gather feedback.

Acting on student contributions and 'closing the feedback loop'

5.3 This is also the main means by which higher education students receive feedback on actions in response to their issues. Email communication is also used for feedback, and the College makes use of 'You said, we did' posters showing where changes have been made or where changes are not possible and the reasons why.

5.4 While the College appreciates that student needs are continually changing, it recognises that its higher education students are of a distinctive type and that the provision is very small and amounts to a limited proportion of the College's student population. It feels that the needs of part-time adult learners who are in employment and come to the College one day per week are best served by the group tutorial mechanism. Staff at all levels of the College are knowledgeable about the importance of involving students in quality processes.

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.