Higher Education Review of East Durham College

March 2015

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at East Durham College. The review took place from 2 to 4 March 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Debbie Lockton
- Mr Mark Langley
- Miss Emma Palmer (student reviewer)

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by East Durham 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 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 4.

In reviewing East Durham 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 2014-15 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/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 web pages:
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about East Durham College

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

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at East Durham College.

- The developmental approach to ensure that staff deliver effective higher education learning and teaching (Expectation B3).
- The strategic approach to the provision of bespoke support for all of its higher education students (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

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

By September 2015:

- ensure that unsuccessful applicants are informed in writing of their right to appeal (Expectations B2 and B9)
- formalise and monitor the higher education student representation structure to ensure the College is working in partnership with students (Expectation B5)
- adopt a strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to strengthen oversight of higher education through the establishment of a Higher Education Group (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

There are two main drivers at a strategic level for increasing student employability. East Durham College (the College) works closely with the North East Entrepreneur Group to identify training needs for local industry and services. There is a College Employer Engagement Strategy, which sets out clear processes for working with employers. Through the Foundation Degrees and the education programmes, the College provides curricula that have embedded knowledge and skills relating to student employability.

Staff bring their own professional experience to learning and teaching, and assessments emphasise work-related skills. Work placements are well organised, and close links with employers are significant in providing students with employability. The College works with its degree-awarding body, the University of Sunderland, and through the Gateway facility, Peterlee campus, to make career advice available for students. The review team found that the College's efforts to increase student employability demonstrates that it is fulfilling this cornerstone objective in its Higher Education Strategy.

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

About East Durham College

The College is a medium-sized further education college. It is based on two main centres, in Durham and Peterlee. There is also a satellite campus, based in Peterlee's South West Industrial Estate.

A key challenge for the College is to promote access to higher education in an area with a traditionally low experience of higher education.

The College offers programmes from entry level to higher education. There are 5,564 learners, including 5,280 classroom based and 284 apprentices. There are 106 higher education students studying on franchised programmes of the University of Sunderland (the University). The provision includes Foundation Degrees in Sport Coaching, Performing Arts, Music, Education and Care, and education programmes for the Certificate in Education and Postgraduate Certificate in Education.

The College's mission is to offer an outstanding and inclusive education, and provide individuals, the community and the local economy with every opportunity to succeed. There is a Higher Education Strategy, which includes aims to develop a research community that informs and enhances the provision; and to develop Higher National Certificate/Diploma programmes, as well as professional qualifications and a dedicated higher education science and professional programmes centre.

The College has continued to evolve since the last review. Although there have been no major changes to the higher education provision, in 2012 the College opened its Sixth Form Centre and the Apollo Studio School.

The College has been successful in addressing the good practices and recommendations of the last review: Integrated Quality Enhancement Review (IQER), September 2010. Eleven examples of good practice were identified, relating to: the appointment of a Senior Vice Principal responsible for higher education; the relationship with the University; the annual monitoring process; student engagement (including their contribution to the prospectus); the quality of learning and teaching, and student support (including the Gateway, operated with the University); and the virtual learning environment (VLE). In all cases, the College has maintained these practices. There were four desirable recommendations made relating to increasing awareness of the Foundation Degree Benchmark Statement; developing a strategy for employer engagement; information for part-time students; and providing advice for financial support. All the recommendations have been addressed.

Explanation of the findings about East Durham 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 East Durham College

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies

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

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* are met by:

- **positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications**
- **awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes**

b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics

c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework

d) consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.1   The University is responsible for the academic standards of its programmes. The College benefits from being part of a series of larger collaborative networks and the wider process of consultation these provide.

1.2   The University approves and validates all programmes within its collaborative network. Programme specifications, programme frameworks and learning outcomes align with the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and with the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*. Each level of each programme corresponds to the relevant descriptors and embeds employability within it. Through its Assessment Boards and collaborative partner meetings, the University ensures that providers observe the precepts of the FHEQ. The format of each foundation degree programme reflects the content of the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*, and Ofsted confirms that the postgraduate teacher training programme reflects national guidelines.

1.3   The review team considered documentary evidence, including the memorandum of agreement and policies for programme validation, to determine the College's responsibilities in this area. The team also reviewed programme handbooks and operation manuals in order

to consider the specific requirements at programme level. Meetings with staff and students explored the level of teaching at the College and the employability focus of programmes.

1.4 The College's understanding of the FHEQ and observance of the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* is well considered. This is in part the result of the maturity of the relationship with the University and staff training initiatives. Liaisons with other collaborative partners further underpins this practical understanding. Students are clear about the sense of progression from level to level of their studies. Postgraduate students, some of whom have studied at the College from further education onwards, are clear about the sense of development from level 4 through to level 7.

1.5 The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation. The support of the University over 20 years enables the College to secure threshold academic standards. The College has a clear understanding of each level of study, and the characteristics of foundation degrees and postgraduate courses. Engagement with a wider collaborative network also ensures that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.6   The College defers to the University's academic regulations, but its own policies and procedures maintain academic standards.

1.7   The University provides clear guidance in its academic regulations and individual programme operation manuals. This framework maintains the academic standards of each programme. Assistant Programme Leaders at the College interact with University Programme Leaders to maintain ongoing oversight of the programmes and any regulatory matters arising. The University's Partnership Liaison Officer in the Gateway at the College is an onsite resource from whom College students and staff can seek advice.

1.8   The review team considered the policies and procedures of both the University and College, as well as the memorandum of agreement and Quality Handbooks. During the review meetings with the College staff, the Partnership Liaison Officer and students provided further clarification.

1.9   The College's policies and procedures appropriately reflect the comprehensive academic framework of the University and national guidelines. Where University policies take precedent, College policies state this. While the College does not currently operate a differentiated approach for higher education, its College-wide processes do accommodate the specific needs of higher education. The College is considering expanding its higher education provision. The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation of securing academic standards. It observes the comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding university, and ensures that its own policies and procedures govern how the College supports the award of academic credit and qualifications. University oversight ensures that the associated level risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.10   As part of the partnership agreement and collaborative networks around the area, the University is responsible for programme development, approval and modifications, while the College is responsible for running the programmes. All programmes are reviewed every six years unless an issue arises, in which instance they will be reviewed on a different timescale. The programme specifications are the University's responsibility. The University ensures the College meets the requirements of the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and assessment regulations. It also provides information relating to credits and learning outcomes, which is accessible to both staff and students. The College is responsible for considering the Annual Monitoring Reviews of its programmes, as well as undertaking Curriculum Reviews internally. It also provides action plans from these reviews and includes responses to external examiner reports and student feedback. The University provides students with transcripts for each level.

1.11   Both the University and the College work collaboratively to ensure records of programmes are in alignment with policies and procedures, and to ensure that all programmes meet the FHEQ, appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements, assessment regulations, and information on credits and learning outcomes of programmes and modules. The College provides Annual Monitoring Reviews to the University, which involves an action plan identifying areas of good practice. The College produces its own internal Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document, which includes information based on the Annual Monitoring Reviews, Curriculum Reviews and action plans. In theory, the Expectation is therefore met.

1.12   The review team tested the how the College deals with the Expectation through reading the partnership agreement, minutes of meetings, transcripts, programme handbooks, Curriculum Reviews, Annual Monitoring Reviews and operation manuals. The team also read the Higher Education Quality Handbook and Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document. The team met senior staff, academic staff and students of full-time and part-time programmes.

1.13   The College maintains records of programmes and qualifications in cooperation the University. Students and staff were able to identify the learning outcomes and breakdown of credits per module, which are available from the programme handbooks. Academic staff informed the team that they also work in liaison with Programme Leaders at the University regarding assessments, especially in subjects that hold practical assessments, to ensure these meet the learning outcomes of the module.

1.14   The College meets its responsibilities and works in accordance to the University's regulations and processes. The review team concludes that the College has effective internal processes in place to ensure the regulations of the University and its programmes are met; the Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.15   The College has a number of franchised programmes with the University. The University is responsible for programme development, approval and any modifications. The University Faculty Quality Management Subcommittee approves any modifications.

1.16   The University undertakes a periodic review process every six years, which the College successfully went through in 2012, with actions arising from that review having been completed and signed off by the University by August 2013. The periodic review panel included an external member.

1.17   The operation manuals for each programme state that the University is responsible for assessment, with the College being responsible for first marking. The University is also responsible for appointing external examiners and moderating student work. The University operation manuals also state that University assessment regulations apply, and that management and Assessment Boards are held at the University and contain a calendar of when moderation and boards take place. In addition, the College has its own internal validation process.

1.18   The processes in place allow the College to meet the Expectation in theory.

1.19   To test the effectiveness of these procedures, the review team looked at the Periodic Review Report, the Higher Education Quality Handbook, programme handbooks, the University marking policy, the University process for moderation of programmes, external examiner reports, and the University operation manuals. The review team also met senior staff, teaching staff and staff involved in academic quality.

1.20   The College has not had any recent programme approvals. However, it does contribute to programme development as part of a larger collaborative network. Colleagues from all partner colleges assist the University in making amendments to programmes, particularly in the form of assessment activities. This process is secure and provides College staff with opportunities to ensure programmes continue to meet UK standards.

1.21   The College has its own internal validation process. This runs alongside the University process, but in sympathy with it. It ensures that any new programme the College chooses to run fulfils its internal quality requirements. The process is clear and demonstrates a focus not only on the financial viability of a programme, but also ensures its academic standards. The process is thorough, requiring liaison with the potential awarding body. Assistant Programme Leaders take the lead in this process, working with curriculum area managers at the College and colleagues at the University. Any new programme is approved by the Vice Principal Curriculum and Performance, before going to the Board of Governors for final internal approval.

1.22   The University has a marking policy, which states that all exams and assignments are internally moderated, and marked work is moderated or blind second marked where the module is a dissertation or is worth more than 20 credits. Exams are also moderated by the

external examiner. It also states the samples that should be sent to the external examiner. The University also has a document outlining the role of the external examiner. One external has commented that the university should let partners do their own moderation. External examiner reports state that standards are met.

1.23 The review team saw a number of programme handbooks, which contain programme outcomes and module descriptors, and module learning outcomes.

1.24 There is a university feedback sheet, which draws the student's attention to the relevant learning outcomes, and the review team saw evidence of marked student work linking feedback to module learning outcomes.

1.25 The review team concludes, in light of the College's limited responsibilities for setting academic standards through programme approval processes, that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.26   The University has a marking policy which states that all exams and assignments are internally moderated, and marked work is moderated or blind second marked, where the module is a dissertation or is worth more than 20 credits. Exams are also moderated by the external examiner. It also states the samples that should be sent to the external examiner. The University also has a document outlining the role of the external examiner. One external has commented that the university should let partners do their own moderation. External examiner reports state that standards are met.

1.27   The processes in place allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.28   The review team looked at the Higher Education Quality Handbook, programme handbooks, the University marking policy, the University process for moderation of programmes, external examiner reports, the University operation manuals, and minutes of an Assessment Board. The review team also met senior staff, teaching staff and staff involved in academic quality.

1.29   To test the effectiveness of these procedures, the review team saw a number of programme handbooks, produced by the University, which contain programme outcomes and module descriptors, and module learning outcomes. The University operates the programmes across a collaborative network and manages assessment at all partner institutions.

1.30   Through its collaborative network, the University makes adjustments to assessment at moderation days or through its Assessment Boards. These are Chaired by the University Programme Leader, and Assistant Programme Leaders from each institution attend. All assessment activity receives clear consideration because of the network-wide approach.

1.31   University Assessment Boards ensure parity across the collaborative network. External examiners comment on the clarity of assessment processes and affirm that qualifications are only awarded where assessments reflect learning outcomes and where students meet UK threshold standards. Within the collaborative network, College staff are supported and also enabled.

1.32   There is a University feedback sheet, which draws the students' attention to the relevant learning outcomes, and the review team saw evidence of marked student work linking feedback to module learning outcomes. Students confirm that assessment processes are clear and enable them to develop.

1.33   The review team concludes that the processes and mechanisms for ensuring the awards of qualifications are aligned to the Expectation because the College is supported

by the University and its collaborative partners; the Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.34   The University has a periodic review process, which the College successfully completed in 2013.

1.35   The College's Higher Education Quality Handbook states that Assistant Programme Leaders prepare an annual monitoring report for the University based on a University template. The annual monitoring reports given in evidence addressed issues raised by external examiners. Annual monitoring reports feed into an overall internal College Self-Evaluation Document, which is presented to the College Leadership Group by the Vice Principal Curriculum and Performance, and from there to the Board of Governors.

1.36   The College's process of monitoring and review allows the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.37   To test the effectiveness of these procedures, the review team looked at the University's periodic review documentation, annual monitoring reports, minutes of the Higher Education Forum, and minutes of the College Leadership Group. In addition, the review team met senior staff, teaching staff and staff from the quality team.

1.38   University quality processes require an annual monitoring report from each partner college. These are written at College-level by the Assistant Programme Leader after discussion with the programme team. They are then approved by the Chair of the Higher Education Forum and the quality team, before transmission to the University Programme Leader. Annual monitoring reports include student feedback and external examiner comments, as well as statistical data and staff reviews. Assistant Programme Leaders are responsible for any action plans arising from the reports. The reports are monitored by the Higher Education Forum and through termly Curriculum Reviews. Curriculum Reviews are conducted by the quality team and attended by two Vice Principals. These reviews look at all of the curriculum but also specifically report on higher education. Curriculum Reviews are discussed at the College Leadership Group and then go to the Curriculum Quality and Standards Committee, in relation to quality matters, or the Board of Governors, in respect of strategic matters. Any decisions taken at these committees are then fed down to the College Leadership Group and the quality team or Curriculum Managers as appropriate.

1.39   The self-evaluation document, written by the College for this Review, was approved by the College Leadership Group. The review team was told that the College has now decided to produce an internal Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document each year. In addition, the College has introduced specific higher education teaching observations with a report to the Curriculum Quality and Standards Committee. The report was due to be presented in the week following the review team's visit.

1.40   The review team concludes that the College's processes for monitoring and review of programmes fully engage with University processes in addition to its internal processes. The team concludes that the processes are sound, and that the Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.41   In line with University requirements, the College benefits from engagement with external examiners and collaborative partners. The College also draws on its connection with the North Eastern Local Enterprise Partnership and local employers.

1.42   The University writes all programmes, but consults with external advisers and employers during the programme development process. Through the collaborative networks for each programme, the College draws on the shared experience of each delivery partner. The University also appoints external examiners for all programmes, who report on the delivery at each partner college. Examiners give a verbal report to the relevant Assessment Board. Assistant Programme Leaders from each college attend this meeting, Chaired by the University Programme Leader. A written report follows. This enables the Expectation to be met.

1.43   To test the effectiveness of these procedures, the review team read the programme operation manuals and College Higher Education Quality Handbook, as well as academic regulations and examiners' reports. During the review visit, the team discussed the quality processes in a meeting with the quality management team; this included discussion of external examiners' reports.

1.44   The College meets the requirements of the University to ensure that external and independent expertise ensures transparency and accountability surrounding academic standards. The College tracks actions raised in external examiner reports through the University's annual monitoring reports, the action plans of which demonstrate the College is responding to external examiner comments. The input of different collaborative partners provides a further level of externality in the setting of assessment activities and programme review.

1.45   The College also recognises its regional role as a provider of education. The College's suite of foundation degrees reflects the strong employability focus of its higher education portfolio. The College works with the North Eastern Local Enterprise Partnership, which defines key skills gaps for the region, enabling the College to maintain its awareness of regional educational needs. Ongoing communication with local employers further ensures the portfolio is relevant to the regional market, evident in the College identifying key areas for future development.

1.46   The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation by engaging fully with the requirements of the University. The overview of the University, and the additional support provided by the wider collaborative network, employers and regional bodies, means that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.47   In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.48   The College is clear regarding its responsibility to maintain academic standards of awards on behalf of its degree-awarding body. It relies on the procedures in the Quality Handbook provided.

1.49   All Expectations are met and the associated level of risk is low. Therefore, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes

Quality Code, *Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval*

Findings

2.1　　The College states that its higher education programmes are franchised from the University and that programme development and approval, modifications, and setting assessments are the responsibility of the University. This is confirmed by the operations manuals provided by the University.

2.2　　The University also has a modification procedure, which distinguishes between minor and major modifications, and specifies which modifications can be approved by the University faculty or Academic Development Committee, or requires a validation event.

2.3　　The Higher Education Quality Handbook describes the process of internal validation approval for programmes. This involves the relevant Programme Leader consulting with the Curriculum Manager. The application is presented by the Curriculum Manager to the College Leadership Group, and approval to seek validation is given by the Vice Principal Curriculum and Performance. There have been no new programme approvals at the time of the review visit, although the College Leadership Group has looked at the potential for five extra foundation degrees. However, the College does contribute to programme development as part of a larger collaborative network. Colleagues from all partner colleges assist the University in making amendments to programmes, particularly in the form of assessment activities.

2.4　　These processes provide College staff with opportunities to ensure programmes continue to meet UK standards and the Expectation in theory.

2.5　　To test the effectiveness of these procedures, the review team looked at the Higher Education Quality Handbook, the University's operation manuals, the modification process, Higher Education Forum minutes, and minutes of the College Leadership Group. It also met senior staff, teaching staff and the quality team.

2.6　　The College engages with other colleges in the University's collaborative partnerships, including moderation, discussions on resources, modifications and the sharing of good practice. In addition to taking part in collaborative processes, the College has its own internal validation process. This runs alongside the University process. It ensures that any new programme the College chooses to run fulfils its internal quality requirements. The process is clear and demonstrates a focus not only on the financial viability of a programme but ensuring its academic standards. The process is thorough, requiring extensive liaison with the University.

2.7　　Overall, the review team considers the College's processes to align with the Expectation. The College's programme design process demonstrates a clear understanding of the principles of programme design, with oversight from the University. The team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation:　　Met
Level of risk:　　Low

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

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

Findings

2.8   There are alternative routes for students applying for the programmes of their choice. Full-time students apply through UCAS, while part-time students apply directly to the College. The responsibility for admissions lies with the University, however, the University sends information of applications to the College so that it can conduct interviews and monitor recruitment and enrolment of students onto programmes. The University provides guidance to the College on entry requirements as well as annually reviewing recruitment, selection and admission processes with the College. The College has an internal admissions policy in addition to the University's policy and procedure on admissions. Students are sent information relating to their offer, rejection and progression on the programme. The College has internal progression activities to encourage students from level 3 studies to progress to higher education, especially at the College.

2.9   As the procedures are set out by the University, the College ensures these are aligned to its own admission policy. There are processes to ensure information is up to date, and for supporting students through each level of their application. Therefore, in theory, the College meets the Expectation.

2.10   To test the Expectation, the review team reviewed and looked into the College's and University's admission policy and procedures; interview forms; letters of rejection, offers and progression; and prospectuses. The team also held meetings with academic staff, support staff and students of both full-time and part-time programmes.

2.11   The review team considers that, in practice, the recruitment, selection and admission processes are effective. Students noted that the process from application to enrolment was clear and informative throughout, even for those who enrolled into the College at a later stage. Students who were progressing onto the next level of their degree informed the team that the academic staff kept them up to date throughout the summer period before the start of the next academic year, which they found positive. Students who progressed from level 3 studies at the College spoke of their positive experience of taster sessions. Feedback from current students on the degree programmes encouraged them to apply for the degree programme. The College Careers Adviser provides additional support for students applying through UCAS with their personal statements and application process, as well as working with those who have not been offered a place on the programme.

2.12   The review team identified that there was inconsistent information between the College's Admissions and Complaints Policies should a student wish to appeal against an unsuccessful application. In addition, the rejection letter provided no information on their right to appeal should they wish to, although they could contact a member of staff to address any questions. Although the review team saw no records of complaints or appeals in regards to admissions, the team **recommends** that the College should ensure that unsuccessful applicants are informed in writing of their right to appeal (see also Expectation B9).

2.13   The College makes extensive efforts to ensure that there are progression activities and comprehensive support for students when recruiting, selection and enrolling onto a

higher education programme, in accordance with the University's procedures as well as the College's internal process. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated 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

2.14   The College systematically reviews the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, ensuring that every student develops as an independent learner. Its own policies and procedures reflect policy guidelines set by the University.

2.15   One of the College's strategic aims is to develop a strong and vibrant teaching and learning culture. The College strategy does not refer to higher education directly, but the Higher Education Strategy is directly related to the overall Strategic Plan. The College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Procedure, and its draft Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, cover further and higher education. These harmonise with University requirements and define a detailed approach to learning and teaching. The College's Staff Training and Development Policy ensures that staff receive support to continually develop their teaching practices. A rigorous process of teaching observations has maintained a high standard of teaching to date. The College has recently initiated a system that specifically focuses on higher education teaching and learning, and this should improve the process even further. This enables the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.16   To test the effectiveness of these procedures, the review team considered a range of documentation about teaching, learning and staff development prior to the review visit. The team determined how senior managers and delivery staff view strategic and operational approaches to learning and teaching in several meetings. Meetings with students confirmed their satisfaction with the teaching they receive at the College.

2.17   Teaching and Learning action plans ensure that the College realises its strategic aims. These reflect the findings of the College's robust system of full lesson observations and 15-minute drop-in learning walks. Presently, the College grades staff on the Ofsted rating, with most being rated two or above. Advanced Teaching Practitioners support staff development in those areas noted in observations. New staff also receive teaching support as a part of their induction. Annual staff reviews enable staff to identify training and development needs. The College also provides a small amount of money to support staff research activities. The College recognises that if it is to offer other higher education qualifications it will require staff with higher degrees, and therefore offers bursaries to pay for some research costs.

2.18   As noted in the IQER report, the College requires all members of staff to complete 30 hours a year of continuing professional development. The good practice noted in that review continues. Staff have access to a range of training opportunities at both the College and the University. Several events have focused on higher education-specific issues, such as the Quality Code. All staff have relevant qualifications for delivering higher education, and the University monitors this too. The College has added arrangements to its continuing professional development programme enabling staff to use their time to focus on research-based activities. These interconnect with the regional Collaboration Action Research Network, supported by a series of templates that enable staff to focus and track their research. The College has therefore developed the good practice identified in the IQER report.

2.19   Students and external examiners confirm that teaching is strong, and that delivery is appropriate to the level of study. Use of the College's VLE has increased, with staff uploading information, handbooks and lecture notes to support learning. Students consider this an invaluable resource. The College monitors the impact of these developments. Students are equally positive about the impact of work-based learning on their development. The College's ongoing developmental approach towards ensuring staff deliver effective higher education learning and teaching is **good practice.**

2.20   The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation as a result of its proactive approach to learning and teaching, its material-rich VLE and its use of relevant work-based learning activities. The development since the good practice identified in the IQER indicates that 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

2.21 The College has in place arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The College monitors and evaluates these through its internal quality processes.

2.22 The IQER report considered the support offered to students to be good practice. The College has sustained this practice. The College is committed to providing all students with a personal learning coach who develops and monitors the personal learning plan for each student. The College offers access to a range of support services, such as counselling, financial support and learning support. The Gateway, a student support system supplied by the University at the College's Peterlee campus, is a higher education space, staffed by a University-appointed Partnership Liaison Officer for part of the week. This complements services provided by the College. Students and external examiners affirm the benefit of these support services. This enables the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.23 To test the effectiveness of these procedures, the review team looked at a range of polices, student feedback, external examiners' reports, programme handbooks and the college website. During meetings with students, senior managers, teaching staff and support staff, the team confirmed its initial findings.

2.24 Higher education students benefit from further education support systems. Students, both full-time and part-time, and at foundation degree and postgraduate level, confirm that support enables them to develop as independent learners. The Director of Learning Support tracks all applications from students with registered disabilities, ensuring that support is in place upon commencement of the programme. During induction, all students have an initial assessment for literacy skills to enable them to engage fully with the academic demands of their programme. The College tracks any equality and diversity issues through its Equality and Diversity Strategic Targets process. The College's strategic approach to providing bespoke support for each of its higher education students is **good practice**.

2.25 The College monitors the effectiveness of its systems through the termly learner consultation process and Curriculum Reviews, and the annual monitoring report and Higher Education Self-Evaluation processes. These also identify resourcing needs. All programme-based expenditure comes directly from programme budgets, but curriculum leaders identify capital funding needs across their combined further and higher education provision. They ensure that resources are fit for purpose and enable students to achieve the learning outcomes. For example, when equipping computer software for music students, the College purchases licenses for the higher levels of the software. The library has a distinct budget, and ensures that it stocks at least one copy of all texts on higher education reading lists, often in electronic format.

2.26 The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation through its well-established support mechanisms and budgetary systems. Continued good practice since the IQER indicates that 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

2.27   The University has a policy on student representation, but the College recognises that it does not have its own formal structure of student representation, with no recognised training for students who are informally elected as student representatives. The College does, however, hold regular learner consultations and surveys to gather feedback from students, which contributes to the Annual Monitoring Reviews, Curriculum Reviews and action plans that follow these. Students receive feedback from learner consultations as part of the College's You Said, We Did posters, which are displayed in all areas. Students are members of the Students' Union at both the College and University. Currently, there are two Student Governors; neither are higher education students.

2.28   Despite the lack of a formalised student representation structure, which is highlighted in the programme handbooks by the awarding body, the College engages with students to gather feedback. This is acted on as part of the review processes and shows that the College values student contributions to these processes. You Said, We Did is a process of responding to students' evaluations and a means of closing the feedback loop. Students are aware of the student charter at the College. Therefore, the College meets to the Expectation in theory.

2.29   To test the effectiveness of these procedures, the review team looked at the effectiveness of the Expectation by analysing and reviewing the student submission, student charter, module evaluation questionnaires, and learner consultation meetings minutes. The team also tested the Expectation through the Annual Monitoring Reviews, Students' Union information, Student Mentor information, Quality Handbook, programme handbooks, and You Said, We Did posters. The team met the Principal, senior staff, academic staff and students of both full-time and part-time programmes.

2.30   On a practical level, the College engages with the students effectively in regards to gathering feedback from both full-time and part-time students. There is an informal student representation model, which was explained in meetings with staff and students. However, the student representatives do not receive formal training to fulfil their roles. Students gave a mixed response on the understanding of the role of the student representative. However, they expressed that they can approach the student representative of their programme should they have any concerns or feedback for the programme. Full-time programmes also have a Student Mentor, whose role is for students to help with the transition of first year students from further to higher education studies. Students indicated the value of these posts, which are supported through the Students' Opportunity Funding. There is positive engagement throughout by both full and part-time students, who work well with the academic staff.

2.31   As well as not having a higher education Student Governor, there is only one committee that has a student representative. However, at the time of the review, this committee had not yet met. Although the Quality Handbook states that students are members of the two Students' Unions, it is unclear how this works in practice. As the College has expressed interest in expanding its higher education provision, and is currently working towards this, a formalised student representation structure would ensure that the College matches the University's policy on student representation. The review team **recommends** that the College should formalise and monitor the higher education student representation structure to ensure the College is working in partnership with students.

2.32   The College values the contribution of student feedback, which is implemented within the monitoring and review process. However, there is no formalised or consistent student representation within the College equivalent to that in the University. The quality assurance process with student engagement is working, but the shortfall is within the structure of the student representation structure. The review team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.33   The College has a draft Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and an internal verification and moderation procedure. The College states that it operates an initial assessment to check students' current literacy skills and to ascertain when extra support may be needed. The University is responsible for setting assessments, with programme handbooks giving the assessment titles. The handbooks provide clear learning outcomes. The University provides a feedback sheet for staff on which they can note how students can improve their work. The University is responsible for Accreditation of Prior Learning and has an Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy.

2.34   The student submission submitted for this review states that students receive tutorials to help them understand grading criteria. Students met by the review team said that these are helpful, especially when they are one-to-one tutorials on assessment.

2.35   The processes in place allow the College to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.36   To test the effectiveness of these procedures, the review team looked at programme handbooks, the College's draft Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, the College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment procedure, and the internal verification and moderation procedures. The team reviewed completed feedback sheets and minutes of the Assessment Board. The team also met teaching staff and students.

2.37   The College conducts assessments in accordance with the Assessment Policy articulated in the University's regulations. The College's draft Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy requires staff to engage in rigorous processes for the setting and marking of assignments, coupled with timely formative and summative feedback to aid learning. Strong partnership arrangements with the University and, where appropriate, other partner colleges facilitate this. Following a recommendation from the IQER report, the College has now ensured that its full-time prospectus, website and information leaflets explain more fully the assessment processes.

2.38   Induction sessions introduce students to their selected programme, including providing assessment schedules. Programme handbooks explain plagiarism and the penalties involved. Students fully understood the regulations regarding academic misconduct. Students use a standardised assignment submission form that includes a plagiarism declaration; they submit work through an online plagiarism-detection service.

2.39   The University is responsible for ensuring that all appropriate guides and handbooks are issued to students. The College issues handbooks to students in e-copy and print copy; these outline the rules, regulations, expectations and support provided during the programme.

2.40   The College works effectively with the University on all assessment issues. The University is responsible for setting assessments in consultation with College staff. The University writes and designs all assessment guidelines, but some module leaders write

module-specific guidance, which the University then approves at its moderation days. The College conducts assessments in accordance with University guidelines, specifically the University's Assessment and Marking policies. Assistant Programme Leaders attend development meetings and moderation days, both internally and across the partnership network. There are programme study meetings, which are held at least twice every term. These ensure parity across the network but also enable the sharing of good practice, and are evidence of the close working relationship among the collaborative partners. Marked work is moderated by the University. Assessment Boards are held at the University.

2.41   Moderation sessions consider quality and consistency of feedback, as well as sharing good practice. The Assistant Programme Leaders are committed to the continuous improvement of the programmes, and set timely improvement targets to address areas for improvement detailed in their annual monitoring report. The IQER noted that the College committee structure and staff interface with the University and other collaborative partners is a robust and effective mechanism for verifying assessment activity. This practice has been maintained. There are some University-led joint marking exercises, for example, performance on the Foundation Degree Performing Arts and Music programme.

2.42   As joint franchise programmes, lecturers benefit from rigorous moderation involving University staff, or staff from partner colleges, who moderate assessment and feedback decisions, which are then confirmed by the University-chaired Programme Assessment Board, which the Assistant Programme Leaders attend. External examiners cite the internal and external moderation as good practice.

2.43   Feedback sheets are consistent with the sector, and staff provide clear summative and formative feedback. Student feedback in the annual monitoring reports comments favourably on assessment, and students met by the review team confirmed that feedback was timely and gave advice as to how their work could be improved. However, the external examiner for Foundation Degree Performing Arts and Music questions the parity across programmes where the amount of written feedback differs from module to module and in some instances from student to student. The external examiner also notes that staff give more detailed feedback for practical work than written work.

2.44   The University is fully responsible for approving or declining non-standard entry applications in accordance with its Accreditation of Prior Learning Procedures.

2.45   The review team considers the College's processes for the assessment of students to be sound and in alignment with the University's processes. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.46   In fulfilling University requirements, the College makes scrupulous use of its external examiners. Further internal tracking of College responses to, and dialogue with, examiners consolidates the process.

2.47   As noted under Expectation A3.4, the University appoints external examiners. The College engages with external examiners as part of a collaborative network, so in most cases reports span several colleges. The University sends the full report to the Assistant Programme Leader and the Head of Higher Education at the College. The College programme teams respond to the report through the University's annual monitoring report process, which subsequently tracks responses through formal programme meetings. Informal dialogue between University Programme Leaders and College Assistant Programme Leaders support the process further. The College makes scrupulous use of external examiner comments. The processes allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.48   To test the effectiveness of these procedures, the review team considered external examiner reports and minutes from University-led programme meetings and policies. During the visit, the team confirmed its initial findings in discussion with senior managers, the quality team, teaching staff and students.

2.49   Internally, the external examiner reports also go to the Quality Manager. The quality team scrutinises the report and tracks progress against action plans and external examiners' logs, and evaluates these during the termly Curriculum Reviews. The College complies with the requirement to complete annual monitoring reports for each programme, but following the University decision to discontinue the need for an annual report across all programmes at the College, the College now produces an internal annual Higher Education Self-Evaluation. This ensures that key action points from all external examiner reports feed into the College's overarching action plans for higher education, although presently this report does not go the Curriculum Quality and Standards Committee like the equivalent Further Education Self-Assessment Report. Where external examiner reports do not provide College-specific detail, staff ask for further feedback from the examiner. In the case of the Music and Performing Arts Programmes, where there is no collaborative network, the external examiner second marks performances. Both examples indicate a thorough and conscientious approach.

2.50   The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation, as it fully complies with the requirements of the University. The fact that the College establishes clear communication with its external examiners indicates that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.51   The University has a periodic review process, which the College successfully completed in 2013. The College's Higher Education Quality Handbook states that Assistant Programme Leaders prepare an annual monitoring report for the University. All of the annual monitoring reports address issues raised by external examiners.

2.52   In addition to the University requirements, the College has a termly Curriculum Review process. This looks at achievement, actions against the previous review, attendance, at-risk students and student feedback. The Higher Education Quality Handbook says that the Higher Education Group (which has yet to meet) will monitor actions arising from such reviews. The Higher Education Group monitors outcomes from curriculum self-evaluation documents, and consequent Quality Improvement Plans and actions from programme committees. Curriculum Managers produce the Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document and action plan for their area. The Curriculum Quality and Standards Committee monitors the College Further Education Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan. The University used to require the College to produce an annual college Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document. The University has now dropped this requirement, however, the College has decided to continue to produce an annual Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document as part of its quality systems.

2.53   The review team considers that the College's processes allow it to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.54   To test the effectiveness of these procedures, the review team looked at annual monitoring reports, Curriculum Reviews, minutes of the Higher Education Forum, and minutes of the College Leadership Group. In addition, the team met senior staff and the quality team.

2.55   The College's process of monitoring and review of programmes fully reflects University requirements. The University processes centre on annual monitoring reports and six-yearly periodic review. The College's quality process fully engages with any action points raised by University processes. The Higher Education Forum monitors that actions arising from annual monitoring reports are completed and signed off by the University, and the termly Curriculum Review process ensures that any weaknesses arising from that process are addressed in a timely manner.

2.56   In addition to the University processes, the College has recently introduced a system of peer observation specific to higher education, a review of which was to be presented to the Curriculum Quality and Standards Committee and Board of Governors. The review team was told that the Higher Education Forum would feed into the Higher Education Group and that part of the remit of the group was to monitor and inform the College's Higher Education Strategy. The team was also told that the Higher Education Group would report to the College Leadership Group and through that group to the Board of Governors. The College Leadership Group had received the self-evaluation document produced for this Review, and would receive the proposed internal annual Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document. The team queried why the Higher Education Group would report to the College Leadership Group and not the Curriculum Quality and Standards Committee.

It was told that the Vice Principal Curriculum and Performance will Chair the Higher Education Group and currently presents higher education matters to the College Leadership Group. The team noted, however, that part of the terms of reference of the Curriculum Quality and Standards Committee in the Higher Education Quality Handbook was to receive the College Further Education Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan and to 'advise the Board on matters concerning the quality and effectiveness of the 16-19 and the 19+ curriculum'. The review team is therefore unclear how the committee could perform that function when it does not receive the internal Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document.

2.57   The College ensures that it fully engages with University processes for the monitoring and review of programmes. It uses its own internal processes to ensure that the College meets the required academic standards. The review team considers the College's processes to be aligned to the Expectation; it therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and that the University's overview ensures the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.58   The College has a Complaints Policy internally, as well as being in alignment with the University's Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedures. These are included in the programme handbook for students should they wish to make an academic complaint or appeal. The College provides clear information about the stages of the process, including the Office of Independent Adjudicator procedure should this not be resolved, as well as the grounds of the complaint or appeal and the timeframe. There has been no record of complaints or appeals from higher education students.

2.59   The processes are in place for academic complaints and appeals by the awarding body; it is the University's responsibility to deal with academic issues arising through the processes. The University's procedure and policy is accessible on the VLE and within the programme handbooks. The College has a process for internal matters, which is reviewed every two years by the College Leadership Group. The design of the processes theoretically meets the Expectation.

2.60   To test the Expectation, the review team looked at the complaints and appeals policies and procedures of both the University and the College, programme handbooks, and the letter of rejection from admissions. The team also met senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students of both full-time and part-time programmes.

2.61   Although there has been no record of complaints or appeals, students are fully aware of the processes and where to find relevant information, as well as being able to identify the difference between a complaint and an academic appeal. It was brought to the review team's attention by both staff and students that informal complaints are dealt with effectively and included within the action plans for the Annual Monitoring Reviews.

2.62   As identified in Expectation B2, the review team identified that there was little information on appeals should a student be rejected. Despite references being made to rejections within the interview, and appeals within the admission policy, there is no reference to appeals within the Complaints Policy. Therefore, the team **recommends** that unsuccessful applicants be informed in writing of their right to appeal (see also Expectation B2).

2.63   Overall, the College complies with the University's policy and procedures, and ensures that students have access to relevant information should they put in a complaint or appeal on academic grounds. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met 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

2.64   The College arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively. However, the College could do more to recognise how such relationships enable it to meet this Expectation.

2.65   The College made no reference to this Expectation in its self-evaluation document. The Gateway is an active link with the University within the College, that ensures College students benefit from a range of University resources. Students consider more delivery at the University as an area for improvement, as they regard this as good preparation for progression to their top-up year. Performing Arts students already attend classes at the University and regard these sessions highly. University collaborative networks also provide further learning opportunities with other organisations. Teaching staff are clear about the benefits of discussing programme content with colleagues at other providers, sharing moderation and assessment duties.

2.66   Because the self-evaluation document did not refer to this Expectation, the review team was provided with little information during its desk-based review. It was able to draw out some information about employers and regional agencies from the College's Strategic Plan and other parts of the self-evaluation document. However, during the review visit, the team discussed the Expectation in more detail with staff and students.

2.67   The College plays a central role in the local community, both at its Peterlee and Houghall campuses. The former is a landmark building that provides a range of resources for the wider community, including theatre and sports venues. The imminent refurbishment of the Houghall campus will create equally essential local resources and reflects the College's commitment to the region, further exemplified by its engagement with the North Eastern Local Enterprise Partnership. The College's engagement with local employers is equally strong. Employers praise the College's commitment to producing industry-ready students. They regard placement provider meetings as an excellent way of linking students to appropriate placements. Employers who provide live briefs for students regard the briefs on a professional level. An Employer Engagement Strategy is ready for approval by the College Governors, which can only improve recognition at College-level of the value of employer relationships. With the development of the College's Houghall campus and higher education provision, the College will need to consider relationships with external organisations more strategically.

2.68   The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation, because of the guidance provided by the University and through ongoing positive relationship with local employers. Current success indicates that the associated level of risk is low, but the College might want to develop its approach if it increases its higher education portfolio.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

2.69   The College does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.70   In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.71   There are two examples of good practice relating to the delivery of learning and teaching, and the strategic approach to student support. The review team made two recommendations relating to providing unsuccessful applicants with written information about appeals and formalising the system for student representation.

2.72   All Expectations are met and the associated level of risk is low for nine Expectations, with a moderate level of risk for Expectation B5. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, *Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision*

Findings

3.1   Information in relation to the higher education provision at the College is the responsibility of the University, which checks and verifies information before publication. The content is the responsibility of teaching staff and service areas, who send the information to the University to check the accuracy and factual information. The College provides information for all stakeholders through various mechanisms, such as the website, prospectuses, VLE, flyers, You Said, We Did posters, progression activities and programme handbooks. The College is also part of a collaborative network of other college provisions around the region and shares some common information.

3.2   The College works effectively alongside the University to ensure information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The College also reviews its information, such as policies and procedures, on a regular basis. This includes the website, which recently gathered feedback from prospective students on the information available online. The responses were then used to redesign the website in September 2014. These processes meet the Expectation in theory.

3.3   To test the effectiveness of these processes, the review team looked at the website; programme handbooks; operation manuals; VLE; flyers; prospectuses; policies and procedures; transcripts; letters of information; You Said, We Did posters; and external examiners reports. The team also met senior staff, academic staff, support staff, employers and students from both full-time and part-time programmes.

3.4   The review team regards the College's practice as effective and consistent throughout the processes. Staff and students are well informed, and the information is fit for purpose, accurate and accessible. Staff and students are able to access external examiner reports, and if staff are unclear of comments made in the reports, they have the opportunity to speak to the University for clarification. The College produces evaluative Annual Monitoring Reviews, Curriculum Reviews and the Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document. In addition, staff and employers share clear information on student placements. The College produces accurate destination data, including a record of students' progression to higher levels of study or employment. There is well documented information about progression routes from foundation degrees.

3.5   Students receive high quality information before starting the programme and at induction. Students are able to identify where they can get the relevant information regarding learning outcomes, assessments and procedures, especially on the VLE and in programme handbooks.

3.6   As highlighted in Expectations B2 and B9, the review team identified that prospective students who have been rejected from a programme did not receive information on their right to appeal with their letter of rejection, however, they could speak to the Programme Leader for feedback. Therefore, the team **recommends** that the College should

ensure that unsuccessful applicants are informed in writing of their right to appeal (see also Expectations B2 and B9).

3.7   Overall, the College works effectively with the University to provide robust checks on information shared and information it produces itself. The information provided is factual, accurate, accessible and clear for all stakeholders of the College. The College ensures that it gathers stakeholder's feedback on information. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.8   In reaching its judgement about the quality of information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.9   The College works closely with the University to ensure that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. It is clear about its own responsibilities and there are systems in place for approving all types of information.

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

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College self-evaluation document does not refer to enhancement. However, when detailing responsibilities between the University and the College, the responsibilities checklist states that the College is responsible for enhancement. During the visit, the College provided the review team with a document, written during the visit, detailing enhancement processes. Two of the aims in the Higher Education Strategy refer to enhancement.

4.2 Within the committee structure, one of the terms of reference for the Higher Education Group is 'to identify areas of focus for quality enhancement activity', and within the terms of reference for the Higher Education Forum there is reference to the focus on 'further development of student enhancement', and the identification and dissemination of good practice. These processes have the potential to meet the Expectation.

4.3 To test the effectiveness of these procedures, the review team looked at the new document on enhancement, the College's Student Enhancement Statement, and minutes of the Higher Education Forum. The review team also met senior and teaching staff, and students.

4.4 The review team was informed that ultimate responsibility for enhancement lies with the Board of Governors. A member of the Board of Governors will also be a member of the newly formed Higher Education Group, providing a link between that group and the Board.

4.5 One initiative provided by the College to demonstrate enhancement was in relation to student employability. The Vice Principal Curriculum and Performance received the University's student Opportunity Funding, which allocated funding to the College. The Vice Principal invited bids to receive funding to support student employability and developed a rationale, together with the Chair of the Higher Education Forum, to decide which bids to fund. This is supporting a strategic decision made to promote student employability.

4.6 When the review team asked staff about enhancement, many of the examples given were of programme and curriculum enrichment, rather than enhancement as defined by QAA. While recognising that in the College there are some areas of enhancement, and that both the Higher Education Forum and the Higher Education Group have enhancement as part of their remit, the minutes of the Higher Education Forum did not demonstrate this in line with the QAA definition. This refers to deliberate steps being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities, an approach that links strategy and initiative.

4.7 The Higher Education Group has yet to meet and it has the potential for developing a strategic approach to enhancement. The review team **affirms** the intention of the College to establish the Higher Education Group, chaired by the Vice Principal Curriculum and Performance. However, the College has yet to formally agree an enhancement policy that unifies the separate elements taking place, and fully embeds enhancement within the College's management processes and quality systems. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College adopts a strategic and unified approach to enhancement.

4.8   The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met, but that the associated level of risk is moderate, because of the introduction of the Higher Education Group, its terms of reference and its potential to adopt a strategic approach.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.9   In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.10   The self-evaluation document did not refer to the enhancement of student learning opportunities, although there are statements in the Higher Education Strategy and in the terms of reference for the Higher Education Group about enhancement. During the visit, a new document, the College's Student Enhancement Statement, was presented, which has the potential to develop a strategic approach to enhancement. Nevertheless, the College's processes so far require improvement to meet the QAA definition of enhancement.

4.11   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

Findings

5.1   Student employability is a cornerstone of the College's higher education strategic aims. The College recognises that programmes must meet the specific needs of local employers, so it concentrates on four core curriculum strengths, which align with three of the four strategic priorities identified by the draft constitution of the North Eastern Local Enterprise Partnership.

5.2   The College's Employer Engagement Strategy defines work-specific training as a broad term covering placements, work-based learning and apprenticeships. This strategy is comprehensive and reflects the College's strategic aims, although it does not specifically identify higher education. In particular, it does not focus on the characteristics of foundation degrees, which are the main focus of the College's higher education portfolio; if the College expands that portfolio, as it intends, clearer articulation at the strategic level will enable more efficient delivery.

5.3   The College is located in an area of high unemployment. Self-employment remains lower than the national average, indicating the negative impact of the current economic climate on entrepreneurship. The College's two full-time foundation degrees respond to this by developing independent entrepreneurs, while still providing training for the sports, music and performing arts industries. Local employers confirmed that these are significant within the local market, including one who employs students for major concert tours and another who employs sports coaches. Current higher education programmes at the College connect directly to the local and regional market.

5.4   Part-time programmes mirror this approach. Students on the Foundation Degree Education and Care must be in service prior to starting the programme, and the postgraduate courses both require students to work on placement. Again, employers are clear about the quality of the students they receive on placement. The perception of employers is that the smaller student groups at the College are more effective than larger groups at other providers.

5.5   In keeping with the foundation degree or teacher training nature of the programmes, all programmes feature some element of work-based learning or placement. For example, the Foundation Degrees in Performing Arts and Music have live performance briefs at local performance venues. Two employers spoke enthusiastically about the quality of the work students produce and the impact their performances have across the region. The experience of working to a brief also develops an entrepreneurial approach, enabling students to create their own work.

5.6   Students affirm the benefit of the employability focus of their programmes. They particularly admire the additional support the College offers by way of individual skills training for Music and Performing Arts students or additional professional qualifications for Sports Coaching. Students talk clearly about the way their assessment and teaching constantly relate back to employment scenarios, be they in sport, performance or education. External examiners concur in their commentary about programme and assessment content.

5.7   Employers compliment the balance the College strikes in terms of its informal contact with them and through more formal placement provider meetings. Employers also express their willingness to complete work experience feedback where appropriate, for example, for Sports Coaching. Where employers provide a live brief, they are equally happy to meet students to discuss the need of the brief and the changes it requires as the brief progresses. Many employers give talks to students. Employers recognise the great

development and improvement students make in terms of confidence gained; knowledge, skills and self-esteem are also high. College staff are ultimately responsible for monitoring and assessing all work, but benefit from the close working relationship with employers.

5.8   The College shares its focus on careers with the University. Recently, it received funding from the University to develop student employability. The Gateway provided at the College by the University provides links to University careers service, while the College careers team provides ongoing support for generic employability skills. Given the specialist nature of the provision on all higher education courses, the teaching staff and liaisons with employers ensure that students receive industry-specific detail about potential career routes. Overall, the College's approach to student employability is responsive to regional needs and provides professional levels of preparation. The response to the desirable recommendation in the IQER has initiated a process of identifying and consolidating the College's approach to employer engagement, which the College will want to continue as it grows its higher education provision.

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 29-32 of the Higher Education Review handbook.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

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

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

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