Higher Education Review of Amersham and Wycombe College

April 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 Amersham and Wycombe College. The review took place from 27 to 29 April 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Maxina Butler-Holmes
- Howard White
- Sarah Mullins (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Amersham and Wycombe 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 6.

In reviewing Amersham and Wycombe 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.

---

[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 Amersham and Wycombe College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **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 **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The use of staff experience and their professional networks to enrich the student learning experience and promote employability (Expectations B3, B4 and B6).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Amersham and Wycombe College.

By September 2015:

- produce and publish programme specifications for the Pearson provision (Expectations A2.2 and C)
- formally define, articulate and monitor the effectiveness of the opportunities for higher education student engagement (Expectations B5, C and Enhancement)
- improve the consistency of information for current students in course handbooks and on the virtual learning environment (Expectation C).

By November 2015:

- provide tailored training for all higher education student representatives to equip them to fulfil their roles (Expectation B5).

By January 2016:

- articulate a procedure for the internal approval of new programmes to strengthen consideration of the academic case through formal committee structures (Expectation B1)
- devise and implement procedures to mitigate the risk and impact of staff turnover (Expectation B3)
- extend the formal opportunities for all higher education students to provide feedback on modules/units (Expectations B5 and B3)
- formalise and articulate the principles of assessment design to provide initial guidance and promote continuous improvement in assessment practice (Expectation B6)

- review the committee structure to ensure more effective oversight of academic standards and quality, and a more reflective approach to the development of the higher education provision (Expectations A3.3, B8 and Enhancement).

By June 2016:

- establish and conduct a formal Assessment Board for Pearson provision (Expectation B6)
- develop a periodic review process for the Pearson provision (Expectations A3.3 and B8)
- make explicit and regularly evaluate enhancement-led actions within the Higher Education Development Plan (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The initiatives to share pedagogy and scholarly activity (Expectations B3 and Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

The College has a strong commitment to providing high quality vocational programmes which are skills-focused and employer relevant and which support employability. There is a strong emphasis on addressing local economic needs. Much of the College's higher education provision is centred upon a particular niche in the creative and performing arts in which it has a strong record of student achievement. The College has strong links with local employers who provide realistic assignment briefs and guest tutors, take placement students and recruit from the College. A particular strength of the College is that many of the teaching staff come from a relevant industrial background and some continue to work in industry. The use the College makes of these connections is highly valued by students. The College also places great emphasis on developing transferable skills and uses personal development planning to this end. Career skills are embedded in the curriculum, for example how to pitch a concept, deliver a project, build a professional website, and develop a freelance career.

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

About Amersham and Wycombe College

Amersham and Wycombe College (the College) was established in 1972 and has offered higher education provision since the 1980s. It is a medium-sized general further education college situated on two campuses in South Buckinghamshire, one in Amersham and the other in High Wycombe. The majority of higher education provision is located at the Amersham campus.

The College's mission states that 'we are here for our students, and will work relentlessly to help them succeed'. Their vision is to be 'an independent and distinctive College, very ambitious for its students and focused on a practical and technical Curriculum. We will specialise in subject areas which are important to our regional economy and which students want to study'.

At the time of its QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2011, the College had 227 higher education students. It now has 296 students on higher education programmes.

The College offers a range of foundation degrees, Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), a BA (Hons) Musical Theatre, and a Certificate and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (CertEd/PGCE). The bulk of its provision is in the Creative Industries. Programmes are delivered in partnership with Buckinghamshire New University, University of Westminster, and Pearson.

The College has identified a number of key challenges facing its higher education provision, including: promoting and maintaining a higher education ethos within a further education college; ensuring consistently effective quality assurance processes and support for Pearson programmes; creating more internal progression opportunities for level 3 students; further improving facilities; and maintaining adequate levels of staffing.

The College has made satisfactory progress with the recommendations made in its IQER. For example, the College's Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Committee now meets termly, but inconsistencies remain in course handbooks.

Explanation of the findings about Amersham and Wycombe College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.

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

Expectation (A1): In order to secure threshold 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 College is responsible for delivering the programmes offered through its partnerships with Buckinghamshire New University (BNU), University of Westminster, and Pearson. The responsibilities of the College for maintaining academic standards are set out in the relevant partnership agreements. Ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of programmes offered by the College lies with the awarding bodies and awarding organisation concerned, and therefore they ensure that the requirements of the FHEQ are met and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* are considered as part of their programme design, approval and review processes. Standards for HNC/HND programmes are embedded in documentation established by Pearson. For other provision, learning outcomes and threshold standards are identified in programme specifications. Programme content is mapped against the Framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and Subject Benchmark Statements during the revalidation process. The Director of Higher Education, Marketing and Admissions is responsible for alerting the Higher Education Curriculum & Quality Committee (HECQC) to any changes in Subject Benchmark Statements or the FHEQ. Additional professional reference points, such as the Creative Skillset, are consulted where appropriate. The College is committed to providing authentic

work-based learning as required by the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Standards are confirmed annually by external examiners. The College's processes meet Expectation A1 in theory.

1.2   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining programme specifications, course handbooks, module descriptors, and revalidation documents. The team also held meetings with students, senior staff, teaching staff, and representatives of the awarding bodies.

1.3   The evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective in practice. In a review of the partnership in 2014, Buckinghamshire New University (BNU) expressed confidence in the academic standards applied at the College. The University of Westminster expressed similar confidence through revalidating the CertEd/PGCE in 2013. Link tutors from both awarding bodies confirm they are in close and continuous collaboration with the College to ensure maintenance of academic standards and adherence to reference points. The team saw evidence that staff from the College attend revalidation events with their awarding partners. Reports produced by external examiners for 2012-13 and 2013-14 recorded satisfaction with threshold standards.

1.4   Members of the senior leadership team whom the team met demonstrated a clear understanding of their responsibilities for academic standards under their partnership agreements. These are set out in a College document entitled Quality Assurance Processes in Higher Education. Members of the team are in regular contact with counterparts at the main awarding partner, BNU.

1.5   Teaching staff whom the team met were familiar with the FHEQ and had a clear grasp of the distinction between provision at different levels. This is reinforced through internal moderation and verification of assessments and through teaching observation. Staff also attend relevant moderation meetings at university partners. Many staff in leadership roles have undertaken training at the University of Westminster which includes distinguishing levels of provision when conducting teaching observation.

1.6   The College's Strategic Plan and Higher Education Development Plan include commitments to providing 'work realistic' teaching and assessment which are a requirement of the Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark. The team saw evidence of these commitments through work simulations, 'live' assessment briefs negotiated with clients, professional practice modules, visits, guest speakers from industry, and reflection on current or previous employment including projects negotiated with employers.

1.7   While the awarding bodies and awarding organisation have ultimate responsibility through their own regulatory frameworks for ensuring that the relevant external reference points are adhered to, there is evidence that the College effectively manages its own responsibilities for doing this within its partnership agreements. This is confirmed through a variety of mechanisms including reviews by the awarding bodies and the conclusions from external examiners' reports. Therefore, the review team determines that the Expectation is met in both design and practice and 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

1.8   The regulatory frameworks of the awarding bodies and organisation determine academic standards and award of credit for each programme. In the validation, operation, monitoring and review of its higher education programmes, the College is required to work within the academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding bodies and organisation as outlined in the partnership agreements. BNU also provides the College with a detailed operations manual and reviews the operation of the partnership annually through its Strategic University Review and Enhancement procedure. For Pearson provision, the College also applies its local regulations for academic misconduct, internal verification, mitigating circumstances, and reasonable adjustments. A summary examination board consisting of senior staff is held at the College at the end of the year to confirm marks for Pearson provision. For other programmes, module and progression/award boards are held at the universities with College staff in attendance. The College's processes meet Expectation A2.1 in theory.

1.9   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining academic frameworks and regulations, partnership agreements, policies and procedural documents, partnership reviews, external examiners' reports, staff and student handbooks, and assessment board minutes. The team also met senior staff, teaching and support staff, and representatives of the awarding bodies.

1.10   The evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective in practice. The team noted evidence of the satisfaction of the awarding partners with its management of their processes in recent reviews of provision and this was confirmed by partner link tutors. The team found the local regulations which the College applies to Pearson provision to be clear and fit for purpose.

1.11   Staff whom the team met were clear about the respective responsibilities between the College and the Universities. The College's senior leadership team are aware and make use of relevant documentation provided by awarding partners. Teaching and support staff whom the team met also showed a good awareness of partner and local procedures. Programme handbooks draw attention to partner university or local regulations and procedures as appropriate. The team saw evidence from board minutes and external examiners' reports that assessment boards had been properly attended and conducted.

1.12   The awarding partners have responsibility for academic frameworks and regulations. Evidence such as external examiners' reports clearly indicate that the College operates effectively to uphold the frameworks and regulations. Therefore, within the context of the partnership agreements with its awarding bodies and organisation, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met both in theory and in practice, and the associated level of 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

1.13 Responsibilities for the development of definitive records, in the form of programme specifications, vary between awarding partners. It is the awarding bodies' responsibility to maintain programme specifications. It is the College's responsibility to make programme specifications available to students and to ensure they are used as a reference point for delivery and assessment of programmes, and for monitoring and review processes. For programmes awarded by BNU, programme specifications and module descriptors are produced by the College, using a template to ensure consistency, and are confirmed at validation. The University of Westminster produces programme specifications for the PGCE which are used by the College as a reference point for delivery, review and evaluation of programmes. Information about programme and module specifications is made available to students in course handbooks and on the VLE. For the Pearson provision, course handbooks contain information about course management and programme structure, as produced by Course Leaders, as well as the unit specifications produced by Pearson which are made accessible to students through links on the VLE. These approaches allow the College to meet Expectation A2.2 in theory.

1.14 The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by reviewing programme and module/unit specifications, and course handbooks, and discussing their accessibility and use with senior staff, teaching and support staff, and students.

1.15 Overall, the evidence reviewed shows the practices and procedures to be effective in practice. Programme specifications for the awarding bodies and module descriptors for BNU contain clear, consistent, relevant information and are made available to students in handbooks and on the College VLE. Students whom the team met were aware of these definitive course records and where to find them. Staff whom the team met discussed development of programme and unit specifications and provided examples of their use in the delivery, monitoring and review of programmes.

1.16 While information about the Pearson programmes is provided in handbooks and on the College VLE, the College has not produced overall programme specifications for its higher national provision. This is a requirement of the awarding organisation and was also highlighted by a Pearson external examiner. The team therefore **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College produce and publish programme specifications for the Pearson provision (see also Expectation C).

1.17 Within its partnership agreements with the awarding bodies, the College fulfils its responsibilities for maintaining definitive records. With regard to its Pearson provision, unit specifications are available to students and information about the courses can be found in course handbooks and on the VLE. The team did make a recommendation for the College to produce and publish programme specifications for the Pearson provision. The review team concludes that the College meets Expectation A2.2 in theory and in practice. However, the associated level of risk is moderate because of the lack of programme specifications for

HNDs which is a requirement of the awarding organisation. This suggests a lack of clarity about responsibilities in this area.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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 threshold 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

1.18   The College's awarding bodies and organisation are responsible for the setting and approving of academic standards. The College has been approved by its awarding partners, through institutional approval and review, validation and re-validation processes, to deliver the programmes. The BNU Academic Collaborative Agreement defines each party's responsibilities and the College follows the policies and procedures for programme approval as established by the University. A successful Collaborative Partnership Review took place in 2014 which approved the College for a further six years. This was followed by a periodic review of four foundation degree programmes in March 2014. There is a course amendment process (CASC) which the College may use this to effect minor modifications. The BNU Faculty Quality and Enhancement Committee oversees all approvals and revalidation events.

1.19   The PGCE/CertEd provision is approved by the University of Westminster and was revalidated during 2013-14. The University produces a Validation Approval document which includes all partner colleges within a geographical cluster. A Memorandum of Collaboration is signed with the College which defines the responsibilities of each party. Pearson has responsibility for the approval of Higher National awards and the College informs the awarding organisation of the chosen units within the rules of combination.

1.20   The oversight provided by these external processes enables the College to ensure that academic standards are set an appropriate level. The College, through the operation of its HECQC and Higher Education Board, provides the framework for the systematic maintenance of the processes for approval of taught programmes. The College has its own annual curriculum business planning process for the internal approval of both further and higher education courses. The terms of reference for the HECQC indicate a responsibility for checking programme approvals. These processes enable the College, in theory, to meet Expectation A3.1.

1.21   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining relevant university policies, partnership agreements, programme review and revalidation reports, approval processes, and minutes of meetings. The team also met the Interim Principal, senior staff including representatives from the awarding bodies, and teaching staff.

1.22   The team found that, overall, the processes for programme approval work effectively. The College understands its delegated responsibilities and operates appropriate procedures to comply with academic regulations. The team saw evidence of the College's active involvement in the successful revalidations in 2014 of BNU programmes. This involved the production by the College of an initial business case in preparation, followed by a more comprehensive Context document. Progress updates were subsequently provided to the Higher Education Board meetings. The team also saw evidence that the Course Leader and members of the programme teams participated in meetings with BNU on an iterative basis in advance of the formal approvals panel.

1.23   Within the context of the partnership agreements with its awarding bodies and awarding, the evidence from documentation and meetings shows that the College is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities for programme approval to ensure that learning outcomes are aligned with qualification descriptors and its qualifications are allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. To do this, the College works closely with its awarding partners and contributes effectively to the approval process. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met both in design and operation, 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 threshold 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

1.24　　The College relies on the frameworks of its awarding bodies and organisation for ensuring the validity of assessment and does not translate these into a specific higher education assessment policy. For BNU provision, the University's Assessment of Students document outlines the approaches towards assessment, covering the principles, policies and procedures. The Academic Collaborative Agreement confirms the responsibilities of both parties. Elements of assessment contributing to an award classification are approved by the external examiner. College staff attend moderation meetings with colleagues from BNU which ensures that the assessments are effective in terms of achieving the learning outcomes. The programme specifications for the BNU awards set out the assessment strategies to enable students to achieve learning outcomes at module and programme-level. The programme handbooks provide clear reference to the academic regulations along with guidance relating to academic conduct and practice.

1.25　　For the University of Westminster provision, the Trainee Handbook explains the academic framework and professional standards informing assessment. The College is a member of a network of colleges, led by a link tutor from the University. The design, approval and monitoring of assessment strategies lie under the awarding body's academic and regulatory framework. The Memorandum of Collaboration confirms the responsibilities of both parties.

1.26　　For Pearson programmes, the College relies on the awarding organisation's generic guidance documentation. It uses the BTEC Centre Guide for Assessment and Standards Verification as its central reference point but does not revise this into a document to reflect the College context. Standardisation takes place as required by Pearson. External examiners visit on an annual basis and complete the standards verification documentation. There is an Internal Verification (IV) Policy which defines the roles and duties required. External examiners comment on the effectiveness of internal verification practices. These procedures allow the College to meet Expectation A3.2 in theory.

1.27　　The team tested the effectiveness of assessment policies and procedures by examining documentation including partnership agreements and procedural documents, minutes of Course Committee and HECQC meetings, programme specifications, external examiners' reports, programme handbooks and collaborative provision reviews. The team also held meetings with students, teaching staff, and senior staff including representatives from the awarding bodies.

1.28　　The evidence reviewed showed the policies and procedures to be effective in practice. Teaching staff involved with University partners are kept up to date with assessment practices through attending meetings and staff whom the team met confirmed they are able to contribute to discussions about assessment. Within the University of

Westminster partnership, teaching staff work collaboratively and participate in moderation meetings organised by the awarding body. The link tutor appointed by BNU provides the conduit for effective working relationships between the two institutions. Students whom the team met confirmed that they understood the relevance and requirements of assessment, and appreciated the difference between the assessment experience at levels 5 and 6. Students also confirmed their awareness of the relationship between grading criteria and learning outcomes, the clarity of assignment briefs, and the willingness of teaching staff to provide guidance about assessment.

1.29   For Pearson provision, the team saw evidence that external examiners comment on the effectiveness of assessment procedures, including internal verification. For the majority of programmes, these comments positively endorse the relevance and validity of assessment practices. Assignment briefs are regarded as well constructed, challenging and, in Fashion and Textiles, as 'imaginative'. Internal verification practices are regarded as being thorough. The external examiner for Performing Arts, however, has made essential actions for the College in the most recent two reports to ensure that assessment and internal verification documentation 'complies with the requirements of the regulatory body'. The College attributed this to the recent staffing difficulties in the area and the team saw evidence that the concerns of external examiners are discussed and actioned at course team level, as well as during meetings of the Higher Education Board and at Quality and Performance Reviews (QPRs).

1.30   The evidence from documentation and meetings shows that the College is effectively managing its responsibilities for the award of credit and qualifications. The assessment methods and assignments provide appropriate opportunities for students to achieve the learning outcomes. Where problems have been raised in external examiners' reports, these have been appropriately dealt with. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met both in design and operation, 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 threshold 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

1.31   The College has collaborative agreements with its awarding bodies which define the responsibilities of both parties for monitoring and review. The responsibility for the overall monitoring and review, including periodic review, for awards lies with the awarding bodies. The BNU Operations Manual provides guidance on the procedures, while the Programme Review and Enhancement Policy (PRE) includes a requirement for a report to be submitted for each programme to the BNU Quality Enhancement Committee (QEC). The Director of Higher Education, Marketing and Admissions then completes the institutional level Academic Partner Achievement Report, as required under the Strategic University Review and Evaluation (SURE) framework, and attends the QEC.

1.32   For the University of Westminster, the process requires the Course Leader to produce an annual programme monitoring report for the School Quality Committee. The Course Leader attends programme committee meetings conducted by the University and the Link tutor visits the College throughout the year. The University's composite annual monitoring report is informed by the individual colleges' reports. The oversight provided at programme level through the awarding bodies' monitoring processes ensure that academic standards are met in alignment with their requirements. For Pearson programmes, the 'HE Quality Assurance Processes' document identifies the generic course review process as culminating in the annual report for the Higher Education Board. The College states that course leaders are guided by the BTEC Quality Assurance Handbook.

1.33   The College introduced a higher education committee structure in 2011 to strengthen 'quality enhancement arrangements. This structure includes the Higher Education Board and HECQC. During 2013-14, the College took the additional step to introduce the Quality and Performance Review model, adapted from the model used for its further education provision, to strengthen the oversight of higher education, in particular for the monitoring of key performance indicators. The College stated that quality mechanisms had been reviewed to ensure issues surrounding higher education were being explicitly heard at all levels of the self-assessment reporting cycle through the QPR, self-assessment reports (SARs) and quality improvement plans (QIPs). The Higher Education SAR and QIP extract relevant higher education content from the individual departmental SARs. The Higher Education SAR and QIP and Teaching and Learning Strategy provide the institutional framework for monitoring and review. The College's own processes and its adherence to those of its awarding bodies and organisation enable it to meet Expectation A3.3 in theory.

1.34   The team tested the effectiveness of the College's arrangements for programme monitoring and review by examining relevant documentation including SARs and QIPs, operations manuals and handbooks, partnership agreements, Teaching and Learning Strategy, BNU periodic review report, and minutes of committee meetings. The team also held meetings with the Interim Principal, students, senior staff, and teaching staff.

1.35   Overall, the team found that the processes for programme monitoring and review work effectively. The team saw evidence that progress updates are discussed at meetings of the HECQC and Higher Education Board. The team also evidence that the College meets

the requirements of its awarding bodies, for example through the production of the report and action plan which was subsequently presented to the BNU QEC by the Director of Higher Education, Marketing and Admissions. The action plan is then monitored at the HECQC. The team noted, however, that the update status columns in the action plan were sometimes blank or developmental actions were noted as being 'completed' well in advance of the timescale (see also Expectation B8).

1.36   A Collaborative Partnership Review day with BNU took place in March 2014 as part of the University's Collaborative Provision/Partnership Review process (CPPR). The report following the periodic review noted good practice in the College's response to aspects of Musical Theatre (as highlighted in PRE and SURE reports), and also contained several recommendations. The Collaborative Review action plan, however, contains no evaluative commentary to demonstrate how the College reflected on or developed areas for continuous improvement to inform the current year's development plan. The College participated in the University of Westminster's three-yearly periodic review of the Consortium provision in 2013. Despite there being several Pearson awards, there is currently no process within the College for the periodic review of this provision to ensure the continued relevance and currency of the programmes. Senior staff whom the team met stated that the College intends to review its whole higher national provision in the future. The team **recommends** that, by June 2016, the College develop a periodic review process for the Pearson provision (see also Expectation B8).

1.37   The HECQC is chaired by the Director of Higher Education, Marketing and Admissions and brings together Course Leaders and student representatives. It is not clear how the membership of the committee is agreed and some staff whom the team met were unclear whether they were members or not. The terms of reference state that a fundamental purpose is to review course development plans, annual reports, external examiners' reports and draft revalidation submission documents. Scrutiny of the minutes, however, show that reporting takes place but with little evidence of academic discussion, evaluative commentary, or of plans to enhance learning opportunities across the higher education population. Despite the HECQC terms of reference including the review of annual review and evaluation reports, it does not formally approve nor monitor progress of the PRE reports before submission to the University.

1.38   The team also noted that the terms Higher Education Board and Quality Performance Review were being used interchangeably and that there was evidence of duplication in the agenda items and areas of discussion. The College has recognised this duplication but, at the time of the review, had not determined a solution. Both meetings focus primarily on monitoring performance indicators with little evidence of discussion to inform academic development planning relating to aspects such as learning and teaching, learning resources, quality assurance, student engagement and enhancement of higher education. The team therefore **recommends** that, by January 2016, the College review the committee structure to ensure more effective oversight of academic standards and quality, and a more reflective approach to the development of the higher education provision (see also Expectations B8 and Enhancement).

1.39   The evidence from documentation and meetings show that, overall, the College is managing its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing its higher education programmes and is operating in accordance with the requirements of its awarding partners. This ensures that, overall, academic standards are being achieved. However, the team makes two recommendations here concerning a review of committee structure and the development of a periodic review process for Pearson provision. The College does recognise these issues but, at the time of the review, had no firm plans to implement changes. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met but the associated level of risk is moderate. The level of risk is moderate because of some weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's

academic governance structure, and an insufficient priority given to assuring standards in its planning processes.

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

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

1.40   The awarding bodies and organisation have ultimate responsibility for making use of external and independent expertise, through validation and revalidation procedures, to set and maintain academic standards. This includes drawing upon external examiners' reports during the revalidation of programmes. The College also makes use of external examiners, appointed by the awarding partners, to maintain academic standards. The College also consults industry representatives when planning new provision. Externality is enhanced by the experience of academic staff, many of whom have current or recent experience in the sectors in which they teach. These approaches allow the College's processes to meet Expectation A3.4 in theory.

1.41   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation on programme design and review, and external examiners' reports. The team also held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and employers.

1.42   Overall, the review team found these processes to work effectively in practice. The team saw evidence of external scrutiny during the revalidation of programmes and of the College's use of externally-produced guidance about programme design, including the importance of externality. The College maintains good links with local employers, and staff whom the team met stated that employers had been consulted in the design of new HNCs and HNDs. Although unable to meet with an employer who had participated in programme design, the team heard from employers associated with the College that they had been consulted about programmes regularly by questionnaire.

1.43   On the whole, external examiners' reports suggest satisfaction with the maintenance of academic standards. The team noted that the external examiner for the new HNC in Performing Arts had expressed concerns about the incorrect application of merit and distinction criteria which led to awards being temporarily blocked in 2012-2013, and which the examiner required further action to resolve in 2013-2014. In all other cases, the external examiners' reports state that academic standards are satisfactorily maintained.

1.44   The evidence from documentation and meetings shows that, overall, the College is effectively managing its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards and making use of external expertise. This is confirmed by external examiners' reports and the team saw evidence of productive relationships with local employers. Where issues have been raised in external examiners' reports, the team saw evidence that the College has satisfactorily addressed the problems. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met both in design and operation, and 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 and other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.45   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The review team makes three recommendations in this section: producing and publishing programme specifications for the Pearson provision (A2.2); reviewing the committee structure to ensure more effective oversight of academic standards and quality, and a more reflective approach to the development of the higher education provision (A3.3); and developing a periodic review process for the Pearson provision (A3.3).

1.46   All of the Expectations for this judgement area are met. All of the Expectations have low risk, other than A2.2 and A3.3 which have a moderate level of risk. The level of risk for these Expectations are moderate because of weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's academic governance structure, a lack of clarity about responsibilities, and insufficient emphasis being given to assuring standards in the College's planning processes.

1.47   The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisation at Amersham and Wycombe 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 and Approval*

Findings

2.1　The responsibility for the design, development and approval of programmes rests with the awarding bodies and organisation. The procedures, including the College's internal approval process, are outlined in paragraphs 1.18 to 1.20 in A3.1. The adherence of the College to the awarding partners' formal procedures for programme design, development and approval, and its own internal processes, allows the College to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.2　The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation including partnership agreements, minutes and terms of reference of key academic committees and meetings, and validation and re-approval reports and background documents. The team also held meetings with the interim Principal, senior staff, teaching staff, employers and students.

2.3　Overall, the team found that the processes for the design and approval of programmes work effectively in practice. The team saw evidence of proposal documents provided for BNU approval events including comprehensive business cases, followed by Context documents in the recent re-design of Musical Theatre and the foundation degree in Animation and Visual Effects. Programme team members were fully involved in the design stages which included the development of programme specifications and module descriptors in liaison with the University link tutor. The team saw evidence of external academic input into the curricular structures and heard of some involvement, through consultation, of foundation degree students providing feedback on the proposed degree structure. The validation and approval reports confirm that the College effectively discharges its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards considering the quality of learning opportunities. Teaching staff were directly involved in the design of the early stages of the PGCE. The University of Westminster revalidated the programme during 2013-14. The University produced a Critical Review, to which the course leader at the College contributed.

2.4　The team explored the role of the HECQC in promoting a proactive lead in programme development and approval processes. One of its terms of reference is to draft revalidation and submission documents. The College provided examples of business case proposals but not of where robust discussion and plans of academic approvals take place. For Pearson provision, the College's Quality Assurance processes document states that course validation is included in annual curriculum business plans. A range of new Pearson programmes have been introduced since 2011 and the development plan contains a strategic aim to grow higher education in all curriculum areas. The discussion of units to form a coherent programme structure for the Pearson provision takes place informally among subject teams. However, there is no evidence in the minutes of the HECQC, nor in meetings of the Higher Education Board, to demonstrate how a new Higher National programme would be critically appraised and approved. The team therefore **recommends** that, by January 2016, the College articulate a procedure for the internal approval of new

programmes to strengthen consideration of the academic case through formal committee structures.

2.5 Despite the need to articulate a procedure for the internal approval of new programmes to strengthen consideration of the academic case, the team concludes that the College is effectively discharging its responsibilities for the design, development and approval of its higher education programmes. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met both in design and operation, 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*

Findings

2.6   The College accepts applications directly and through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). The College's Higher Education Admissions Policy is available on the website and outlines the admissions process and support available to prospective students, including clear timeframes for actions. The policy also outlines a commitment to ensuring each application is dealt with individually and considered fairly, in line with the College's Equality and Diversity Policy and Widening Participation Strategic Statement. The policy was written following a review of guidance from UCAS, Supporting Professionalism in Admissions, and QAA, and approved for publication by the College Senior Leadership Team. The College states appeals against admissions decisions are accepted where there is evidence of prejudice or bias, and this is made clear to students in the Higher Education Admissions Policy. The College uses its prospectus, website and open days to recruit students. All prospective students are interviewed or auditioned, dependent on intended programme, as a way to aid selection and provide information. The admissions procedures are supported by an effective induction process which includes the provision of relevant information and additional support from the Learner Support Team. The College's policies and procedures enable the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.7   The review team examined the effectiveness of the recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures by analysing documentation including the Admissions Policy, and the information made available to prospective and current students. The team also held meetings with teaching and support staff, and students.

2.8   The team found that the policies and procedures for recruitment, selection and admission work effectively in practice. Information is available to students through a range of media including the College website, prospectus, open days, and advice and guidance sessions. This enables students to make informed choices. The website and Higher Education Prospectus provide clear information including standard and non-standard entry requirements, application details, and the support available.

2.9   As part of the selection process, the team heard that students are auditioned or interviewed, with the option to use online video links or a video-sharing website to aid accessibility where necessary. Students can also request additional support during interviews or auditions as set out in the Higher Education Admissions Policy. The team heard that staff are supported, through peer discussion and shared decisions, to ensure selection processes are fair and allow equal opportunity for students. For some programmes, students are included on audition panels. Students are positive about the selection methods used by the College and believe they help to ensure students are recruited onto the appropriate course.

2.10   All students are sent a welcome pack including relevant information regarding induction, enrolment, bursaries and accommodation. Students have various opportunities to identify a need for additional support including at application, interview or enrolment. All students undertake various induction activities, including an introduction to relevant staff and services. Students reported that they had sufficient information to aid their transition into higher education.

2.11   The evidence from documentation and meetings shows that the College has recruitment, selection and admission procedures which adhere to the principles of fair admission. The procedures are inclusive, transparent and successful in assisting prospective students to make informed decisions. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met both in design and operation 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

2.12   The College's approach to learning and teaching is set out in its draft Strategic Plan for 2014-2018 and Higher Education Development Plan for 2014-2016. Priorities established in these documents include enhancing the 'on-programme' higher education experience, providing work-based learning, and promoting equality and diversity. The Director of Higher Education, Marketing and Admissions has formal responsibility for strategy. The College has a number of policies to support and protect students including a Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations Policy, an Equality and Diversity Policy, a Tutorial and Enrichment Policy, a Visitors Policy and Safeguarding Policies.

2.13   The College has a Staff Development Policy which includes weekly timetabled slots for masterclasses by 'advanced practitioners' and other activities. The College's Teaching, Learning & Assessment Strategy provides for developmental observation and mentoring of new staff. Staff who teach in higher education are allocated a defined share of the staff development budget and programme leaders receive a remission in teaching hours. Teaching staff are encouraged to maintain industry links and/or enrol for higher degrees. Unqualified new staff are required to undertake formal teacher training at the College's expense. Staffing for higher education is established in the business cases for new programmes and reviewed in the annual planning cycle. The Corporation, which meets monthly in term-time, exercises detailed oversight of provision and outcomes. The College's processes allow it to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.14   The review team examined the effectiveness of teaching and learning procedures by reading relevant documentation including the policies and strategies mentioned in the previous two paragraphs. The team also met senior staff, teaching and support staff and students.

2.15   Overall, the review team found that the policies, strategies and procedures for teaching and learning work effectively in practice. Students whom the team met were aware of the differences between further and higher education levels and the team noted how these were usefully articulated in some programme handbooks. The team saw evidence of detailed assessment briefs, module plans and handbooks with clear assessment deadlines and timescales for the provision of feedback. Students are encouraged to reflect on their performance and, in some programmes, to develop a critical eye by informally evaluating each other's work. However, outside the classroom, students reported that they are not always sufficiently distinguished from further education students and the College could do more to create a higher education culture.

2.16   Students rate highly the quality of teaching. They regard teaching staff as being professional, organised, friendly, approachable and well qualified, and the feedback given to students is good, if not always prompt. Many teachers come from industry backgrounds and some continue to engage in professional practice. The team heard several examples of how staff use their industrial experience and contacts to inform teaching, and this is something to which students attach great value. This is supported by the use of guest tutors from industry. The team considers the use of staff experience and their professional networks to enrich the

student learning experience and promote employability to be **good practice** (see also Expectations B4 and B6).

2.17   Staff whom the team met acknowledged the support given to those teaching in higher education although they felt there should be greater remission of hours. Staff also have the opportunity to undertake training provided by the awarding bodies, and the team saw evidence of take-up of professional development opportunities at and beyond the College. Recently, the College has begun to promote the sharing of experience among staff and students. A dedicated staff intranet area has been set up to share good practice, while the team also heard of several examples of cross-programme initiatives in the creative arts in which staff share ideas and students gain work-realistic experience of collaboration with those with different skillsets. There are also plans to timetable a common teaching day for higher education programmes to facilitate interaction and staff development. The team **affirms** the initiatives to share pedagogy and scholarly activity (see also Enhancement).

2.18   Most teaching staff work in both further and higher education. There are a number of part-time staff and some professional practitioners act as guest tutors. The College acknowledges its past difficulties with higher education staffing. These include instances of poor-quality teaching, high staff turnover and inadequate numbers of staff, which have had a particular effect on Musical Theatre, Acting, Health and Social Care, and Animation and Visual Effects. While acknowledging that the College had acted to address these problems quickly and effectively, the review team were concerned that the College's senior leadership team tended to regard the staffing problems as 'one-offs' and needed to more fully acknowledge the reality of continuing risk in staffing small-scale niche provision. The team therefore **recommends** that, by January 2016, the College devise and implement procedures to mitigate the risk and impact of staff turnover.

2.19   While students are provided with a range of opportunities to provide feedback about the quality of teaching and learning, the opportunity to provide feedback through module/unit evaluations is inconsistent across the higher education provision, in particular for Pearson programmes (see also paragraph 2.36). The team therefore **recommends** that, by January 2016, the College extend the formal opportunities for all higher education students to provide feedback on modules/units (see also Expectation B5).

2.20   Although senior staff whom the team met gave assurances that teaching observation in higher education is distinct from that in further education, this did not seem to be clear to all staff, particularly as the process is uniform across the provision. Even though observers are trained in what to look for at different levels of study, the College might wish to consider further differentiating its performance management tools in further and higher education.

2.21   Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good at the College and students are effectively supported to enable them to achieve. However, the team also makes two recommendations regarding the extension of opportunities for all students to provide feedback on modules/units, and the requirement for effective procedures to mitigate the risk and impact of staff turnover. As a result, the review team concludes that, although the Expectation is met, the associated level of risk is moderate, primarily because of the past problems with staffing and the need to effectively safeguard against future difficulties in this area. This suggests current weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's governance structure, and insufficient emphasis given to assuring quality in its planning processes.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*

Findings

2.22   Most of the College's governance arrangements apply both to further and higher education. Senior managers and most teaching staff have responsibilities across the provision, with academic leadership being provided by the Director of Higher Education, Marketing and Admissions and Heads of Department. In addition, the College has recently created Programme Area Managers with responsibility for small teams of teaching staff. A coordinated approach to higher education provision is secured by the post of Director of Higher Education, Marketing and Admissions in the senior leadership team, cross-departmental collegial structures in the form of the Higher Education Board (senior managers and heads of department), HECQC (programme leaders), and a Higher Education Office with responsibilities for the admission and support of students. The administrative post of Higher Education Coordinator facilitates cooperation between academic and service departments as well as between the College and its awarding partners and is an easily identifiable point of contact for students.

2.23   The system for annual resource planning also applies across further and higher education provision. In addition to the Higher Education Development Plan, a Higher Education Resourcing Strategy was recently agreed with BNU. The Higher Education Development Plan and draft Strategic Plan also highlight the importance of transition, support and employability for students.

2.24   Higher education students have access to a dedicated area of the Learning Resource Centre, a separate study room, and to the College's Hub which houses a professionally-staffed support service encompassing welfare, disability, careers and study skills. Those on the foundation and bachelor degree programmes also have access to services at BNU. The College's virtual learning environment (VLE) has academic and support service sections, while the VLE of BNU is available to students studying for one of its awards. Specialist physical resources are located at Amersham except for the HNC/HND Sport which uses facilities at the Flackwell Heath campus. The processes the College has in place allow it to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.25   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's arrangements and resources by scrutinising relevant documents relating to the annual business planning process, minutes of meetings and committees, the Higher Education Development Plan, Strategic Plan, Higher Education Resourcing Strategy, and by looking at the use of the VLE. The team also held meetings with students, senior staff, and teaching and support staff.

2.26   The review team found that the procedures for implementing, monitoring and evaluating arrangements and resources work effectively in practice. Senior managers and heads of department attend the relevant committees and take an active interest in higher education. The team saw evidence of a strategic approach to resourcing higher education provision, although enhancement is largely dependent upon increased recruitment. Development Plans and a Curriculum Planning Document record progress against milestones and summarise resource requirements for 2015-2016 in terms of costing them and tracking their delivery. Requirements for human and physical resources in higher education are considered in the annual planning cycle and the team was given examples of additional investment in response to bids by teaching staff. Both staff and students felt that

support services are well managed and the role of the Higher Education Coordinator is particularly valued by students. The latest results from the National Student Survey record significant improvement for most indicators.

2.27   Overall, students are very aware of, and positive about, the support and resources they receive. These include pastoral, welfare, career and study skills services. The team heard from students that a delay could arise between diagnosis and provision of support for students with dyslexia but were assured by support staff that individual support on a drop-in basis is offered in such cases. The team heard many examples of support in transition from further to higher education at the College including access to, and help with, industry-standard software during the summer, and redesign of the further education curriculum in preparation for the introduction of a new HNC programme. Students on programmes which use specialist facilities are generally happy with them, particularly industry-standard software and high quality digital resources, although some concerns were expressed about the availability of technical support and about the maintenance and cleanliness of some of the facilities. Students had no difficulty in accessing the VLEs but reported that the College VLE was not very easy to use and both they and staff preferred to use email and sometimes social media for communication.

2.28   Students spoke enthusiastically about how the College develops their employability and transferable skills. These include work-realistic assignments and opportunities to visit and meet practitioners and to receive additional practical instruction. They receive support from teachers in developing their curricula vitae and, where appropriate, their own portfolios and websites. Business students explained how the professional development modules prepared them to move from the first year to the second year of their programmes. The review team considers the use of staff experience and their professional networks to enrich the student learning experience and promote employability to be good practice (see also Expectations B3 and B6).

2.29   The College has an integrated approach to ensuring that students have access to the support and resources they require to develop their potential. The review team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation and 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

2.30   The College's Learner Voice Strategy sets out its commitment to consulting all students on aspects of their educational experience by providing formal and informal mechanisms for collecting feedback at all levels of the organisation. The strategy states that the student voice is valued for its contribution to College leadership, for providing opportunities to improve quality, and for its ability to enhance the student experience. The mechanisms for engaging students and gathering their feedback include a range of student surveys, such as the College Induction Survey and On-Course Surveys, College-wide Stakeholder Meetings, and Group Review Visits which are conducted at least once a term by the Director of Higher Education, Marketing and Admissions.

2.31   The College also has a student representative system, which engages students in Course Committees and encourages them to contribute to discussions at an institutional level through invitation to the Higher Education Board and CQC. Higher education student engagement is not well defined to students and the opportunities available are based on consultation and involvement in issue resolution rather than on discussion as partners. Generic training is offered to student representatives across the College which discusses the general student representative role but is not specific to higher education students. BNU course representatives are offered training from the University. While there is clear evidence of student involvement, the team found that the mechanisms outlined do not allow the Expectation to be met in theory due to a lack of clear definition of, and preparation for, the student representative role, and lack of emphasis placed on engaging students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

2.32   The review team tested the effectiveness of the strategies and procedures in place to engage students by examining documentation, including the Learner Voice Strategy, information for students regarding engagement opportunities, Stakeholder Meetings, Group Review Visits, minutes and actions from Course Committee meetings, Higher Education Board, and CQC, and examples of training for student representatives. The team also held meetings with senior staff, teaching and support staff, and students.

2.33   The College uses surveys and Group Review Visits to gather feedback from higher education students and report on progress with actions. Students consider the Group Review Visits to be an effective way of doing this. The team saw evidence of student representatives attending Course Committee meetings where they are encouraged to provide feedback on issues relating to their course, for example with regard to obtaining relevant software. However, the team saw no examples to evidence student involvement as partners in quality assurance and enhancement activities beyond issue resolution. Student representatives are invited by e-mail to attend meetings of the Higher Education Board and CQC. However, attendance by student representatives is variable, with no named student member. Students whom the team met suggested that the College could do more to encourage engagement at these meetings.

2.34   Students are supplied with information regarding student engagement opportunities during induction and briefly in student handbooks. Although the Learner Voice Strategy states the College's commitment to student consultation, it does not clearly define and articulate the actual opportunities available. Discussion with students highlighted some confusion about where College-wide issues could be discussed and the range of available

opportunities for engagement beyond Course Committees. The College has outlined its opportunities for formal student engagement to aid enhancement, but this is not yet well-developed nor currently available to students. While the College monitors attendance at meetings involving student representatives, and gathers and reviews their feedback through surveys, the College does not routinely monitor and review the effectiveness of the opportunities made available to higher education students. The team therefore **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College formally define, articulate and monitor the effectiveness of the opportunities for higher education student engagement (see also Expectations C and Enhancement).

2.35   Student representatives are offered College-wide training, outlining the generic nature and necessary skills for the role. BNU student representatives are also invited to attend student representative training at the University as well as receiving a BNU student representative handbook. Some of the student representatives whom the team met had been offered training but could not attend, while others were unaware of the training opportunities available. None of the student representatives whom the team met had undertaken formal training for the role, although some did state they felt the informal information had been sufficient. The lack of clear definition of the role and tailored HE student representative training has resulted in confusion among some student representatives regarding where it is appropriate to discuss issues not relating to the course itself. The team therefore **recommends** that, by November 2015, the College provide tailored training for all higher education student representatives to equip them to fulfil their roles.

2.36   An important opportunity for students to provide feedback about their courses, alongside discussion at Course Committees, is through module evaluations. These opportunities are not consistent across the higher education provision. For the PGCE, it is a requirements of the University of Westminster to gather student feedback on each module which is then incorporated into module reports; for BNU programmes, Module Exception Reports are produced only where issues have been identified. Module evaluations are not routinely carried out for Pearson programmes. Due to the inconsistency in the approach to module evaluation, the team recommends that, by January 2016, the College extend the formal opportunities for all higher education students to provide feedback on modules/units (see also Expectation B3).

2.37   Although there are opportunities available for higher education student engagement and there is a clear College commitment to consulting students regarding their educational experience, the review team makes three recommendations concerning the need for opportunities for engagement to be clearly defined and articulated, training for higher education student representatives to be tailored, and formal opportunities to be made available for all students to provide feedback on modules/units. As a result, the review team concludes that the Expectation is not met in theory or in practice. The level of risk is moderate because of the need for the College to more actively engage students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. This suggests weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's governance structure, a lack of clarity about responsibilities, and insufficient emphasis given to assuring quality in its planning processes.

Expectation: Not 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

2.38   The College processes for assessment operate in accordance with the academic frameworks and regulations of the awarding bodies and organisation (see paragraphs 1.24 to 1.26). The College's own procedures for assessment and its approach to complying with its awarding bodies' and organisation's regulations allow it to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.39   The team examined the effectiveness of the approaches and procedures through scrutinising assessment documentation, partnership agreements, programme handbooks, minutes of Course Committee and HECQC meetings, programme specifications, annual monitoring reports, and external examiners' reports. The team also held meetings with students, teaching staff, and senior staff including representatives from the awarding bodies.

2.40   Overall, the evidence reviewed showed the procedures to be effective in practice. Feedback to students on their assessed work is predominantly timely and developmental. Students understand the grading criteria for assessments and see their assignments as having vocational relevance, for example, the industry standard live briefs given to them in Animation, Graphics, Theatre and Fine Art programmes. At Level 6, the Musical Theatre degree students are required to operate as a professional company which introduces a sense of realism into the assessment experience. The credibility and networks of teaching staff are valued highly by students (see also paragraphs 2.16 and 2.28). The team considers the use of staff experience and their professional networks to enrich the student learning experience and promote employability to be good practice (see also Expectations B3 and B4).

2.41   Examination and Assessment Boards are conducted by the awarding bodies at module, stage and award levels, and are attended by teaching staff. However, for Pearson provision, there is no formal Assessment Board. Instead, issues are discussed, and brief notes taken, at the end of the appropriate Higher Education Board meeting. The team saw no evidence regarding the discussion of levels of achievement nor of matters such as academic offences and extenuating circumstances. The team heard that summative assessment grades are agreed at programme level. Decisions relating to mitigating circumstances are taken at departmental level with no mechanism to triangulate practice across the College. Despite it being a requirement of the awarding organisation and an essential recommendation from an external examiner, the College has not taken action to implement a formal board despite an acknowledgement to the team that one is required. The team therefore **recommends** that, by June 2016, the College establish and conduct a formal Assessment Board for Pearson provision.

2.42   The most recent external examiners' reports for the HNDs in Acting and Music required some essential action to be taken by the College. The team learned that much of this had been attributable to one former member of staff and a brief period of staffing instability. Teaching and senior staff whom the team met confirmed that the internal verification issues had been addressed, the criteria for Merit and Distinction grades had been clarified, and an assessment schedule introduced. The minutes of relevant committees and meetings also show that the issues and their resolution have been effectively monitored.

2.43   As noted in paragraph 1.24, there is no specific higher education assessment policy. For the Pearson provision, the College relies on the generic BTEC Centre Guide for Assessment and Standards Verification but does not translate this into a reference point to assure the College's specific and consistent approaches to, and expectations of, assessment. Within Music and Performing Arts, the external examiner has noted the need to ensure equity across the three higher national programmes in that curriculum area. Given the previous staffing difficulties encountered in the Arts (see paragraph 2.18), the need to attract and retain specialist staff, minimise the impact of staff turnover, and promote the sharing of good practice generally, the team concluded that discussions about assessment design and practice take place informally within subject teams. However, this is not explicitly addressed through specific staff development activities, within the higher education committee structures, or in formally approved documentation. The team therefore **recommends** that, by January 2016, the College formalise and articulate the principles of assessment design to provide initial guidance and promote continuous improvement in assessment practice.

2.44   Overall, the College's processes provide students with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes for the award of credit or qualification. However, the team makes two recommendations regarding the articulation of assessment design principles and the establishment of a formal Assessment Board for Pearson provision. As a result, the review team concludes that, although the Expectation is met, the associated level of risk is moderate, primarily because of current weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's governance structure, and insufficient emphasis given to assuring quality in its planning processes.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.45　　External examiners are appointed by the College's awarding partners who also determine the format of their reports. They normally visit the College and meet students, and programme teams ensure they are provided with relevant materials. The role of the external examiner is explained to students in their programme handbooks and the reports are made available to them through the College's VLE. The awarding bodies are responsible for responding to the external examiners after consulting the programme team; for Pearson provision, programme leaders respond directly. Reports and responses are considered at programme committees and then at the HECQC, in Quality and Performance Review meetings, and at the Higher Education Board. The reports and responses inform annual monitoring and periodic review as well as the College's Higher Education Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan which are drawn up by the Director of Higher Education, Marketing and Admissions. BNU uses a traffic-light grading to determine what action should be taken and can require a Module Improvement Plan to be drawn up. The College has also begun to operate a 'notice to improve' system triggered by critical reports or other adverse indicators. The College's procedures, and its adherence to those of its awarding bodies and organisation, allow it to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.46　　The review team examined the effectiveness of these procedures in practice by examining a range of documentation including external examiners' reports and associated responses, minutes of relevant committees and meetings where reports are considered, action and improvement plans generated from reports, and annual monitoring and periodic review documents. The team also held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

2.47　　The evidence reviewed showed the procedures to be effective in practice. The College senior leadership team have a clear understanding of their responsibilities regarding the provision of evidence for external examiners, consideration of reports at institutional and programme level, responding to external examiners, publication of reports to students, and appropriate involvement of students in consideration of reports. Reports are considered at College level and the Director of Higher Education, Marketing and Admissions and the Assistant Principal Students and Quality exercise oversight on behalf of the College. The review team saw some evidence that reports had been considered by programme committees, which is regarded as standard practice, but were unable to verify this in all cases because, in 2013-2014, the College replaced conventional minutes with action sheets at the request of BNU. The team heard that the College is now in the process of reintroducing minutes to go alongside action sheets. This is particularly important given the essential actions highlighted in some external examiners' reports, and the significant problems highlighted in annual monitoring and periodic review reports in Musical Theatre, Animation, and Visual Effects.

2.48　　The team saw evidence that external examiners' reports inform the College's Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan, its Academic Partner Achievement Report Action Plan for BNU, and action plans relating to individual programmes. There are a small number of adverse reports but the team saw evidence that actions are highlighted and usually acted upon swiftly, although the serious issues raised in HNC Performing Arts in 2012-2013 were not fully resolved in 2013-2014.

2.49   The team saw evidence that the role of the external examiner is outlined in programme handbooks. Most students whom the team met were aware of this role, and some had met the external examiner or had participated in discussion of reports at College-level committees. Students understood that the reports should be available to them but had not been able to locate them in the College's VLE. It transpired during the review visit that the reports had been uploaded incorrectly as a result of an administrative error, which was immediately corrected.

2.50   Overall, the role of external examiners is embedded in the quality assurance systems and the College makes effective use of reports. As the issue relating to the HNC in Performing Arts appears to be an isolated incident, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and 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 College follows the awarding bodies' and organisation's processes for programme monitoring and review and has its own internal processes (see paragraphs 1.31 to 1.33). These processes allow the College to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.52   The team tested the effectiveness of the College's arrangements for programme monitoring and review by examining relevant documentation including PREs, SARs, QIPs, Academic Partner Achievement Report), annual reports, partnership agreements, reports from awarding partners, operations manuals and handbooks, and minutes of HECQC, Higher Education Board, and Course Committee meetings. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and support staff, and senior staff including representatives from the awarding bodies.

2.53   Overall, the team found that the processes for programme monitoring and review work reasonably well. The main bodies carrying out monitoring and review at an institutional level are the HECQC, Higher Education Board and the QPR. The team saw evidence of the College adhering to the annual monitoring cycles set out in the partnership agreements and ensuring the annual review of its Pearson provision.

2.54   However, the operation of the processes to ensure more effective oversight within the College need to be reviewed (see also paragraphs 1.36 to 1.38). The College has already recognised the need to review the role and purpose of institutional level committees to provide greater clarity and the elimination of duplication, for example, to merge the Higher Education Board and the QPR. The team heard that staff are generally unclear about the terms of reference and membership of the various committees. For example, the higher education SAR can be taken to either the QPR or the Higher Education Board; students are invited to attend meetings but are not named in the membership; and there was confusion among staff about who could attend HECQC.

2.55   The team also noted the emphasis placed on the reporting and monitoring of performance indicators including attendance, retention, achievement, completion, destination and progression data at these meetings but little evidence concerning the discussion of, and reflection on, the academic development of the higher education portfolio. Scrutiny of the minutes of the QPR panels, HECQC and Higher Education Board show brief discussions of relevant aspects of the provision but a lack of consistency and detail in the recording of actions, responsibilities and commentary on updates, the cross disciplinary sharing of good practice and development areas from the annual programme reporting cycle. The team confirmed the monitoring of the resulting improvement plans and the focus on resolving 'issues' in committee meeting minutes but found limited evidence of academic discussion to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities. The team therefore recommends that, by January 2016, the College review the committee structure to ensure more effective oversight of academic standards and quality, and a more reflective approach to the development of the higher education provision (see also Expectations A3.3 and Enhancement).

2.56   The team explored the effectiveness of course committees and found some inconsistencies across the provision. HECQC minutes show that some meetings had not

taken place. For the BNU programmes, the College had ceased to keep detailed minutes as the University required only action tracker sheets (see also paragraph 2.47). The team was informed that the College is planning to reintroduce formal minutes. There is a standard agenda for course committees and most evidence students in attendance. These meetings tend to be focused on 'issues' but do provide the opportunities for students to meet with staff. Analysis of the course committee minutes for Pearson programmes showed limited discussion of assessment experiences and the academic aspects of quality assurance. The team heard that annual reporting at programme level for the Pearson provision is achieved through a cumulative agenda of the course committees, with the third meeting of the year resulting in the summation of the process. The course reviews feed into the relevant departmental SAR and these inform the higher education SAR.

2.57   The College has increased the number of Pearson Higher National programmes since 2011 and plans to continue growth with this provision. There is currently no process for the periodic review of these programmes (see paragraph 1.36]. The team therefore recommends that, by June 2016, the College develop a periodic review process for the Pearson provision (see also Expectation A3.3).

2.58   Overall, the evidence from documentation and meetings show that the College is managing its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the programmes delivered on behalf of its awarding partners. The team has, however, made two recommendations which require the College to strengthen its own institutional oversight of programme monitoring and review, and to develop a periodic review process for its Pearson provision. The College does recognise the need to review its committee structure and to implement the periodic review process but, at the time of the review, had no firm plans to introduce these changes. Although the Expectation is met, the associated level of risk is moderate because there are some weaknesses in the operation of part of the provider's academic governance structure.

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

2.59   The College's Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions Policy outlines its commitment to listening and responding to stakeholders. The College's Academic Appeals Policy sets out its commitment to ensuring equitable solutions to problems of an academic nature. Both policies contain clear information about procedures, including expected time frames for resolution.

2.60   The College's responsibilities for handling complaints and appeals vary according to the awarding bodies or organisation involved. For BNU programmes, the College is responsible for dealing with all informal complaints. It also has responsibility for ensuring that students are aware of the complaints procedures and for directing them to BNU if formal procedures are required. BNU deals directly with academic appeals. These procedures are set out in the Collaborative Agreement between the College and BNU.

2.61   For University of Westminster and Pearson programmes, complaints and appeals are initially dealt with through the College's procedures. Students can then be directed to the awarding body if the outcome is considered unsatisfactory. Information about complaints and appeals is given to students at induction and the relevant policies and procedures are accessible on the College website and VLE. The College's policies and procedures and its adherence to those of its awarding bodies enable the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.62   The team tested the effectiveness of the policies and procedures by reviewing the policies and procedures mentioned above, the College website and VLE, reports and action plans regarding any appeals and complaints received, and information supplied to students. The team also held meetings with students, and teaching and support staff.

2.63   The team found that the policies and procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints work effectively in practice. While the College has received five formal complaints, appropriate action plans have been put in place and the use of the relevant procedures highlights their accessibility to students.

2.64   Students whom the team met knew about the differences between an appeal and a complaint, where to access the relevant policies and procedures, and the potential support available. They felt they could raise issues without fear of disadvantage. Wherever possible, the College attempts informal resolution. Students were able to give examples of both formal and informal issue resolution and they felt confident issues had been addressed appropriately. The College records and monitors formal and informal complaints and utilises these to ensure improvement. Support is available to students from both academic and support staff. Staff whom the team met were aware of the relevant procedures and how to direct and support students if required.

2.65   The review team found the appeals and complaints procedures to be clear and accessible. Informal opportunities are available to students that allow for early resolution and, if necessary, effective support is available. The 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

2.66   The College requires students on its CertEd/PGCE and HNC/HND Early Years programmes to complete substantial work placements. It also offers short work experience placements in its HNC/HND in Graphic Design, and asks the employers of part-time students to facilitate their professional practice projects where appropriate. These are the only responsibilities it delegates to other organisations.

2.67   The College currently manages these activities at programme level although it has recently appointed a Work Placements Coordinator due to its intention to extend the provision. Programme leaders are responsible for briefing and supporting students, for risk assessments using the College's Health and Safety and Safeguarding policies, and monitoring students on placement through visits and, in the case of the longer placements, assessments and reflective logs. On the Early Years programme, there is a Work Placement Tutor to whom much of this is delegated. EarlyYears and CertEd/PGCE students also have workplace mentors provided by the employer. Programme leaders are also responsible for briefing employers, who are asked to adopt the College's Equal Opportunities Policy if they do not have their own. Most students complete placements with their current employer, which are checked for suitability upon admission, but, if necessary, the College is able to assist with alternatives and provides some opportunities itself. The CertEd/PGCE provision is also subject to review by Ofsted and providers of CertEd/PGCE and Early Years placements are Ofsted-approved. The short placements offered to Graphic Design students are in a media agency with which the College has a longstanding link. The College's stated approach meets the Expectation in theory.

2.68   The review team tested the College's arrangements for implementing and managing work-based learning opportunities through the scrutiny of placement documentation including student handbooks. The team also held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, support staff, employers and students.

2.69   The team found that the processes for managing higher education provision with others work effectively. Students whom the team met reported that they had been briefed and well supported on placements. Scrutiny of handbooks for students on Early Years and CertEd/PGCE placements showed them to be detailed and informative. Employers whom the team met reported that they had been effectively briefed by the College and understood what was required of them. One had been offered training as a mentor. They confirmed that tutors visit the workplace and that students are adequately prepared and supported. Teaching staff involved with placements also demonstrate clear understanding of their responsibilities.

2.70   The team found that the College has effective procedures in place to manage the work-based learning provision in collaboration with employers. Students and employers commented positively on the support they receive from the College. 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 (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols.
This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

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

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.72   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. Nine of the 10 applicable Expectations are met. The risk to the quality of learning opportunities within six met Expectations is low, with the exception of Expectations B3, B6 and B8 where there are moderate risks. Expectation B5 is not met, and has a moderate level of risk. The moderate risks in Part B indicate some weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's governance structure, insufficient emphasis given to assuring quality in the College's planning processes, and shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which quality assurance procedures have been applied.

2.73   The review team makes seven new recommendations in quality of student learning opportunities which relate to the following: formally defining, articulating and monitoring the effectiveness of opportunities for student engagement (B5); providing tailored training for all higher education student representatives (B5); articulating a procedure for the internal approval of new programmes to strengthen consideration of the academic case (B1); devising and implementing procedures to mitigate the risk and impact of staff turnover (B3); extending the formal opportunities for all higher education students to provide feedback on modules/units (B3 and B5); formalising and articulating the principles of assessment design to provide initial guidance and promote continuous improvement in assessment practice (B6); and establishing and conducting a formal Assessment Board for Pearson provision (B6). The team repeats the recommendations from Part A about reviewing the committee structure (B8) and developing a periodic review process for Pearson provision (B8).

2.74   The review team makes one new affirmation in this section which concerns the initiatives to share pedagogy and scholarly activity (B3). There is one feature of good practice regarding the use of staff experience and their professional networks to enrich the student learning experience and promote employability (B3, B4 and B6).

2.75   Despite the recommendations and the moderate level of risk in four Expectations, the team is assured that the College is aware of the significance of most of these issues and intends to rectify them. The review team therefore concludes that, overall, 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 about its higher education provision is provided to the intended audiences primarily through the College website, Higher Education Prospectus, and College VLE and, for students on BNU programmes, the University's VLE. Information for the public and prospective students is available on the College website, at regular open days and advice and guidance sessions, and through the Higher Education Prospectus which includes details of available courses, the College environment, a variety of policies, and the support available. Additional information is available to current students through course handbooks and the College VLE which contains course handbooks, programme specifications (where available), assessment information and course materials. The responsibility for producing course handbooks vary by awarding partner, with the University of Westminster creating their handbooks, but those for Pearson and BNU programmes being produced by the course leaders.

3.2   The College recognises the need for a systematic and rigorous check of all information and has implemented a procedure to ensure its accuracy. Any marketing material is signed off through an approval form which is sent to relevant staff. College marketing materials relating to BNU programmes are shared with the University marketing department to ensure accuracy and currency of information provided. Course and website information is sourced from course staff, checked for accuracy and signed off by the Course Leader. These practices and procedures allow the College to meet the Expectation in theory.

3.3   The team tested the effectiveness of the practices and procedures by reviewing the website, VLE, handbooks, the Higher Education Prospectus, and course information supplied to students. The team also held meetings with students, senior staff, and teaching and support staff.

3.4   Overall, the team found the policies and procedures for checking and producing information about higher education provision to be effective in practice. Students whom the team met confirmed that they can easily access information and support during the admission process, and the information available to them prior to enrolment is sufficient to allow them to make an informed decision. They are made aware of expectations through the College Code of Conduct and BNU students also sign a Student Contract which contains a clear set of mutual expectations. The team also saw evidence that admissions staff undertake regular UCAS professional development advice and guidance training. Students feel that information is generally accessible, accurate and trustworthy.

3.5   The College does not produce programme specifications for the Pearson provision (see also paragraph 1.16). While information about the Pearson programmes is provided in course handbooks and on the College VLE, the College has not produced overall programme specifications for its higher national provision. This is a requirement of the awarding organisation and was highlighted by a Pearson external examiner. The team therefore recommends that, by September 2015, the College produce and publish programme specifications for the Pearson provision (see also Expectation A2.2).

3.6 Course tutors have control over the information on their VLE pages with basic minimum expectations featuring the inclusion of a course handbook with course content and assessment schedule. The team heard from support staff that Heads of Department have overview of these pages and, during teaching observations, the VLE will be accessed and sampled. Students were generally positive about the College VLE, suggesting course feedback had been used to improve content on some courses. Students, however, have highlighted inconsistencies in the use of the VLE by tutors.

3.7 Students whom the team met pointed out inconsistencies in some of the information available in handbooks and these were confirmed by the team when scrutinising them. Staff and students whom the team met stated that course handbooks are generally relevant and useful, but inconsistent, and teaching staff commented that, although there are minimum expected standards which are overseen by the Director of Higher Education, Marketing and Admissions, a template would be beneficial to ensure consistency and inclusion of all relevant information. The team therefore **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College improve the consistency of information for current students in course handbooks and on the VLE.

3.8 It was noted in paragraph 2.34 that the College does not clearly define and articulate the opportunities for higher education student engagement and this has led to some confusion about where College-wide issues could be discussed and the range of available opportunities for engagement beyond Course Committees. In addition, the College does not routinely monitor and review the effectiveness of the opportunities made available to higher education students. The team therefore recommends that, by September 2015, the College formally define, articulate and monitor the effectiveness of the opportunities for higher education student engagement (see also Expectations B5 and Enhancement).

3.9 Overall, the College's information about its higher education provision is clear and accessible and therefore the Expectation is met. However, there are some weaknesses in the information provided for current students. This led to the team making three recommendations concerning the need for opportunities for engagement being clearly defined and articulated, the publication of programme specifications for Pearson provision, and the need to improve consistency of information in course handbooks and on the VLE. The level of risk is moderate because of some weaknesses in the operation of the quality assurance processes and the rigour with which they are applied.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

3.10   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The Expectation is met with a moderate level of risk. The moderate risks in Part C indicate some weaknesses in the operation of the quality assurance processes and the rigour with which they are applied.

3.11   The review team makes one new recommendation in quality of information about learning opportunities which relates to the following: improving the consistency of information for current students in course handbooks and on the VLE. The review team repeats the recommendations from Parts A and B about producing and publishing programme specifications for the Pearson provision, and formally defining, articulating and monitoring the effectiveness of the opportunities for higher education student engagement.

3.12   Despite the recommendations and the moderate level of risk for this Expectation, the team concludes that, overall, 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   Following the management restructure in 2011, which introduced a Director role into senior management with oversight of higher education, the College states that further deliberate steps have been taken to support the strategic development of higher education. These include: the appointment of a cross-College Head of Quality; the introduction of a new higher education committee structure; the development of a higher education SAR and Development Plan; and the creation of a higher education office with dedicated administrative staff. The College has a document entitled 'quality enhancement and student engagement summary' and states that its impact is measurable through analysis of student feedback, quality of teaching and learning outcomes, and increased recruitment as evidenced in the enhancement impact logs. These initiatives were informed by the higher education provision infrastructure development plan 2013-15 which drew upon external reference points and higher education policy publications relevant to college-based higher education.

4.2   The College commits, through its strategic plan, to work closely with the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership to develop higher education to address identified skills gaps. The Higher Education Development Plan refers to such initiatives supporting the 'cross-cutting college themes of employability and enterprise'. In 2014, the BNU Collaborative Partnership Review enabled the College to focus on the future direction for its higher education provision. Several of the resulting recommendations invited the College to strengthen its strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities in a systematic and planned manner. An action plan was produced to progress the recommendations. These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

4.3   The team evaluated the effectiveness of these arrangements by examining the documentation referred to above. The team also held meetings with the interim Principal, senior staff, teaching and support staff, and students.

4.4   The team saw evidence that strategic oversight is maintained through the committee structure, namely the Higher Education Board and the HECQC. These arrangements have enabled the continued development of the higher education provision. However, as the team noted under Expectations B8 and A3.3, the introduction of the higher education QPR is contributing towards some duplication of terms of reference and remits. As a result, the team established that the focus is primarily on monitoring activities and improvement plans to address areas of concern with little evidence of reflection on academic standards and quality to inform the development of the higher education portfolio and the nurturing of an enhancement-led culture. Membership of the committees extends to either Course Leaders or Heads of Department but there are no opportunities for teaching staff to meet in an inter-disciplinary way to share and develop their practices, although the College did state that it is planning staff development opportunities through common timetabled slots.

4.5   The team also saw evidence that the focus of the higher education SAR is largely placed upon the monitoring of performance indicators and targets for attendance, retention and completion. While acknowledging the importance of these fundamental quality assurance procedures, the team found little evaluation of aspects such as the student experience, learning and teaching, or of the effectiveness of quality assurance processes

including course committees, annual reporting or student engagement to inform and encourage the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The team therefore recommends that, by January 2016, the College reviews the committee structure to ensure more effective oversight of academic standards and quality, and a more reflective approach to the development of the higher education provision (see also Expectations B8 and A3.3).

4.6   The team saw evidence of the College's strategic approach to resourcing the higher education provision. The departmental business planning templates operationalise and align with the College's strategic priorities. Most elements of the Higher Education Infrastructure plan 2013-15 have been implemented, particularly the creation of the dedicated learning resource centre and the Higher Education Information Office with admissions, academic administration and increased levels of student support staffing. Students whom the team met confirmed their satisfaction with these arrangements.

4.7   The team saw evidence that the College has taken some steps to recognise the staffing commitment required to support the higher education provision (see also paragraph 2.17). Following the IQER, the College implemented a remission of hours for course leaders and, following the BNU Collaborative Partnership Review, the College committed to a percentage share of the staff development budget supporting those staff working in higher education. The team also heard of plans to timetable common time to facilitate higher education staff engagement. The team affirms the initiatives to share pedagogy and scholarly activity (see also Expectation B3).

4.8   The Higher Education Development Plan has two principal objectives: to achieve growth; and to introduce initiatives, processes and activities which will achieve enhancement of the student experience and 'outstanding quality and value for money'. While the actions to implement the strategy have the potential to realise the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team noted that the actions and the measures of success lack focus on the specific activities required to achieve, review and evaluate progress towards the achievement of these objectives. The March 2015 update contains no further evaluative commentary. There was no connection between the action plan following the BNU Collaborative Review and the translation from the 2014 action plan into the ongoing Higher Education Development Plan through to 2016. Although elements of an appropriate strategic approach are in place, the College would benefit from articulating and translating them into a more explicit action plan which is effectively evaluated. The team therefore **recommends** that, by June 2016, the College make explicit and regularly evaluate enhancement-led actions within the Higher Education Development Plan.

4.9   While the College listens to the student voice and seeks to achieve involvement in many ways, the team concludes that student engagement is underdeveloped in terms of involvement in representational structures and quality assurance. It was noted in paragraphs 2.34 and 3.8 that the College does not clearly define and articulate the opportunities for higher education student engagement and this has led to some confusion about where College-wide issues could be discussed and the range of available opportunities for engagement beyond Course Committees. In addition, the College does not routinely monitor and review the effectiveness of the opportunities made available to higher education students. The team therefore recommends that, by September 2015, the College formally defines, articulates and monitors the effectiveness of the opportunities for higher education student engagement (see also Expectations B5 and C).

4.10   Overall, the team concludes that the College has appropriate structures and plans in place to meet the Expectation in theory and in operation. However, these structures and plans are in the early stages of development and therefore the team makes three recommendations concerning the opportunities for student engagement, reviewing the committee structure and encouragement to take a more reflective approach to the

development of the higher education provision, and make more explicit and regularly evaluate the enhancement-led actions in the development plan. Although the Expectation is met, the associated level of risk is moderate because of an insufficient emphasis given to enhancing quality in the College's planning processes. In addition, while quality assurance and enhancement procedures are broadly adequate, there are some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The Expectation is met with a moderate level of risk. The moderate risk indicates insufficient emphasis given to enhancing quality in the College's planning processes. In addition, while quality assurance and enhancement procedures are broadly adequate, there are some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied.

4.12   The review team makes one new recommendation in the enhancement of student learning opportunities which relates to making explicit and regularly evaluating enhancement-led actions within the higher education development plan. The team repeats the recommendations from Parts A, B and C about formally defining, articulating and monitoring the effectiveness of the opportunities for higher education student engagement, and reviewing the committee structure to ensure greater oversight of, and reflection on, higher education provision. The team also repeats the affirmation concerning the initiatives to share pedagogy and scholarly activity.

4.13   Despite the recommendations and the moderate level of risk for this Expectation, the team concludes that, overall, the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

# 5	Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1	In its draft Strategic Plan, Amersham and Wycombe College identifies itself as a local college providing vocational programmes which are skills-focused and employer relevant. Its Higher Education Development Plan articulates a commitment to providing 'work-realistic activities which support employability'. The College aims to link its provision to local economic needs, drawing on local market intelligence which it commissions as well as from its membership of the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership and contacts with local employers. The College is currently developing a new HNC/HND in Media Make-up in consultation with a number of employers who have indicated a need for staff with this expertise.

5.2	Much of the College's higher education provision is centred upon a particular niche in the creative and performing arts in which it has a strong record of student achievement. The College has strong links with local employers who provide realistic assignment briefs and guest tutors, take placement students and recruit from the College. These include employers such as Aston Martin, Wycombe Wanderers FC, Pinewood and Shepperton Studios and other media companies such as Boundless Productions, Centroid, Focusrite UK and BBC Red Bee. Many of the teaching staff come from a relevant industrial background and some continue to work in industry. The use the College makes of these connections is highly valued by students. The College invites guest speakers from industry and has an industry panel to support dance students.

5.3	The College offers foundation degrees which offer work-based learning in a 'realistic and authentic work environment' including 'work realistic assessment' as well as a Certificate and Postgraduate Certificate in Education which are necessarily work based. Its HNC/HND programmes are also designed to offer work-based learning. The College offers a relatively limited number of work placement opportunities but is seeking to expand its provision. Many of its students are already in employment or self-employed and this experience is drawn upon in teaching. Business students informed the review team of how much they learned from each others' experience. The College uses 'live' assessment briefs which require students to respond to real professional tasks, an example being fine art students who are commissioned to provide art for Stoke Mandeville Hospital. Students are also encouraged to enter competitions such as the Penguin Design Award. Each Musical Theatre cohort is set up as a company and works with professional musicians and technicians, culminating in a performance in a London theatre under an external director.

5.4	The College places great emphasis on developing transferable skills and uses personal development planning to this end. Career skills are also embedded in the curriculum. Students of Animation and Visual Effects are taught soft skills including how to pitch a concept and deliver a project. Students of fine art and photography are taught how to build a professional website, promote themselves and develop a freelance career. Students of sport are encouraged to acquire external coaching qualifications, while those studying performing arts are taught how to profile themselves and audition for parts.

5.5	Students are confident that their programmes are enhancing their employability. The College has not had its own student numbers for long and cannot draw much on Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education data but it commissions its own survey and monitors the results closely. The College has set itself the target of destination rates which are in the top quartile of comparable institutions.

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* (FHEQIS).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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