

# Higher Education Review of Peter Symonds College

June 2015

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## About this review

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

- Ms Tessa Counsell
- Mr Colin Stanfield
- Dr James Freeman (student reviewer)

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of 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 Peter Symonds 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,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code)

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106)

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

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review)

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Peter Symonds College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations for provision validated by awarding bodies.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations for Higher National provision.
- 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 Peter Symonds College.

- The effective contribution made by the Holistic and the Peer Observation of Teaching schemes to the enhancement of student learning opportunities (Expectations B3 and Enhancement).
- The effective and sustained responsiveness to feedback to improve students' learning opportunities (Expectation B5).
- The wide ranging and fit for purpose information available to students and staff through the virtual learning environment, which is underpinned by staff development (Expectation C).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendation** to Peter Symonds College.

By October 2015:

- work with the awarding organisation to ensure that the design of programme delivery patterns is aligned with the requirements of the programme specifications statement on guided learning hours, to make a clear distinction between part-time and full-time study (Expectation B1).

### Affirmation of action being taken

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

- the steps being taken to implement the research and scholarship protocol and staff development plan (Expectation B3)
- the work underway to evaluate the quality and timeliness of assessment feedback, which will inform a training programme for improvement before the start of the 2015-16 academic year (Expectation B6)

- the action being taken to ensure that the academic regulations on assessment include specific reference to Higher National provision (Expectation B6)
- the steps being taken to ensure the quality and accuracy of management data to maintain strategic oversight of student achievement, in order to strengthen programme monitoring and enhancement (Expectation B8).

## **Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

The College encourages and rewards student participation in quality assurance and enhancement, as noted in its Student Charter. Staff are supported through their continuing professional development and the use of detailed handbooks in order to gather, analyse and respond to a wide range of student feedback. Student representatives are involved effectively in quality assurance systems at programme and College levels, including membership of committees and course boards.

Student representation is introduced through College and programme inductions, with ongoing support for representatives through the use of training and information, as well as invitations to participate in quality assurance opportunities provided by awarding bodies. The College's Student Engagement Impact Analysis, an effective tool for evaluating and disseminating changes made as a result of student feedback, is considered by the Student Representative Committee and leads to programme specific alterations where appropriate.

The College responds quickly and thoroughly to comments and suggestions from students, with examples including changes to learning strategies and resources based on systematic student engagement in the review of programmes and materials. Plans for the future include the establishment of a staff-student journal, and the extension of the College's current bursary scheme for the reward of student representatives to the wider involvement of student groups in enhancement projects.

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

## **About Peter Symonds College**

Peter Symonds College (the College) was founded as a boys' grammar school for Winchester in 1897, with its current status as a sixth-form college being confirmed in 1974. The College has Ofsted outstanding provider status and offers vocational courses at Levels 2 and 3, with the majority of its provision involving Advanced Level AS/A2 courses for students aged 16 to 18. The College uses the motto of 'Counting in Ones', wherein each student is considered to be an exception with the aim of realising aspirations through providing support that helps to meet each person's needs.

The College commenced the delivery of higher education programmes at foundation degree level in 2008, moving to validated provision in partnership with Middlesex University in 2009-10, together with education and teaching programmes in conjunction with the University of Greenwich. Subsequent developments led to further foundation degrees, together with BA honours level top-up programmes, a Pearson Higher National Diploma (HND) in Business, Liberal Arts diplomas of higher education and, most recently, a master's degree in Psychotherapy/Transactional Analysis. In 2014-15 the College enrolled a total of 200 higher education students.

While higher education provision remains a small part of the College's education portfolio, it has expanded, and reflects underlying widening participation objectives for attracting those

learners who otherwise may not have access to learning opportunities. This provision has emerged from adult education and access to higher education programmes involving older age groups, with the entire portfolio being coordinated by the College's Adult and Higher Education Division. All higher education is based in the Stoney Lane campus, with access to College-wide services and facilities on the sixth-form site.

Higher education provision is managed by curriculum heads and programme leaders who have responsibility for higher education teaching staff and personal tutors. Further support is provided through the College's Head of Adult Study Support who oversees a team of higher education academic support tutors. There are dedicated posts for assisting with higher education administration and quality, in addition to two managers for operations and student support. All of these individuals report to the Director of Adult and Higher Education, who reports directly to the Principal. The senior managers are members of Academic Board, as are the higher education programme leaders and the Assistant Principal for Quality. The Academic Board oversees the Boards of Study, which involve appropriate teaching and support staff, external examiners, and link tutors from the awarding body. Regular higher education team leader and programme meetings involve more detailed planning and monitoring at operational levels.

The College's Higher Education Strategy and Needs Analysis 2014-20 recognises the objectives and priorities of the Solent and Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnerships. Improved progression rates for Level 3 learners, and generally improved attainment rates for Level 4 and above, are declared priorities for the region. The projected growth in retail and wholesale employment, as well as management and professional occupations, has informed curriculum planning in order to support applications to higher skilled occupations.

The overall aim for the College is to expand the higher education cohort to 500 students by 2020 through further developing the higher education infrastructure. This includes the provision of effective staffing for supporting higher education provision, reviewing accommodation plans, extending the involvement of higher education students in wider college life, and managing partnerships for the development and delivery of higher education.

The 2013 QAA Initial Review for the College made 13 recommendations, all of which have been addressed through subsequent actions. They include more detailed support for staff engaging in higher education delivery, and the introduction of revised assessment procedures for communicating deadlines and providing feedback. The College has agreed a student charter, and strengthened systems and procedures for student representative training and guidance. A new Complaints and Appeals Procedure has been developed, and the remit of the Academic Board has been extended to include support staff. The College has introduced an information protocol and revised the virtual learning environment (VLE) as used by staff and students.

## Explanation of the findings about Peter Symonds 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/or 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's higher education provision is delivered under its agreements with its awarding bodies and organisation. A Higher National programme is offered through the College's agreement with the awarding organisation using the programme specification aligned to the Qualifications and Curriculum Framework (QCF) which maps to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). For its Higher National provision the College states that it has the responsibility for the delivery of programmes at the correct level, and for the design of assessments that measure the achievement of learning outcomes. The design of these arrangements allows Expectation A.1 to be met in principle.

1.2 The team reviewed relevant College and University documentation, including quality assurance and curriculum approval documents, external examiner reports, programme specifications, assignment documentation and staff development documentation. The review team also met senior and teaching staff, including a representative from one of the awarding bodies, to explore how the College maintains the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and organisation.

1.3 The review team recognised that the validation of programmes with awarding bodies involves appropriate applications of the FHEQ, and of subject and qualification benchmark statements. With reference to relevant PSRB regulations, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy accredits the College's Foundation Degree in Counselling and Humanistic Transactional Analysis. Programme specifications detail the level of the qualification and the related Subject Benchmark Statement.

1.4 The team concludes that the College, in partnership with its awarding bodies and organisation, meets the Expectation for the use of national qualification frameworks and benchmark statements. 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**

1.5 The College operates within the frameworks and in accordance with the governance arrangements set by the awarding bodies. Higher National programmes are offered through the College's agreement with the awarding organisation, based on the Pearson specification for Higher National provision.

1.6 The awarding bodies are responsible for establishing some of the procedures that embed the Quality Code and other external points of reference in validated provision. The College is responsible for subsequent implementation. The design of these procedures and arrangement allows Expectation A2.1 to be met in principle.

1.7 The review team considered relevant documentation, including quality assurance and curriculum approval documents, awarding body and organisation information, external examiner reports, programme specifications, assignment details, and evidence of staff development. The team also met senior and teaching staff, including a representative from one of the awarding bodies, to explore how the College secures academic standards through the use of transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations that govern the awarding of academic credit.

1.8 The team noted the College's recognition of its responsibility for maintaining the standards of its awarding bodies and organisation and does so on the basis of its academic regulations. As discussed in Expectation B6, the College has taken recent action to ensure that the regulations encapsulate the requirements of Higher National provision.

1.9 Shared methods for structuring courses and modules based on academic credit are articulated clearly, as are details for assessment and progression based on the definition of levels which align with the FHEQ. These regulations also outline rules regarding academic misconduct, referrals, deferrals, credit transfer and compensation. Changes to the College's academic regulations must be approved by the College Academic Board and are agreed with the respective awarding body.

1.10 The team concludes that overall, the College, in partnership with its awarding bodies and organisation, has established transparent and comprehensive academic governance arrangements and frameworks. In so doing, the College meets the Expectation 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**

1.11 The College's academic regulations state that each programme will have a definitive document, comprising a programme specification and module descriptors. The College's awarding bodies and organisation produce and validate programme specifications. When seeking approval for a new programme from awarding bodies, definitive documentation is devised by College teams, with the support of awarding body partners. Memoranda of agreements with its awarding bodies and their quality handbooks stipulate that programme specifications be made available to students and outline processes for updating documentation when significant changes are made. For its Higher National provision, the College translates the awarding organisation's overarching national specification into a programme-specific specification.

1.12 The design of procedures for producing and maintaining programme specifications ensures that the expectation is met in principle.

1.13 To test the effectiveness of these procedures, the team examined programme specifications, validation documents and handbooks. In addition, the team held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

1.14 Programme specifications follow partners' templates and contain references to the FHEQ, programme structure, intended learning outcomes, and assessment methods. With the exception of issues surrounding guided learning hours, discussed under Expectation B1, the Higher National programme specification effectively contextualises the national specifications as per the awarding organisation's requirements. Programme teams and senior staff regard validated programme handbooks as the definitive form of information. Handbooks include programme and module specifications, although their exact content and authorship depends upon the awarding body and programme. Students are aware of programme specifications and access these via handbooks or the VLE. For some programmes, specifications are also available via the College's website.

1.15 Through its Boards of Study, the College works with its awarding bodies to alter specifications and documentation, and link tutors work with programme leaders to ensure handbooks and the VLE are updated. With the exception of a Higher National issue discussed under Expectation B1, programme specifications and handbooks are otherwise used effectively in programme approval. Annual monitoring reports (AMRs) consider the above definitive documentation and recommend changes where appropriate. On the basis of this evidence the team concludes that the College's effective use of programme specifications ensures that the Expectation is met with a low level of associated risk.

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

**Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK 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**

1.16 The College has partnership agreements with two awarding bodies, and is a Pearson-approved centre for its Higher National qualification delivery. The awarding bodies and organisation are responsible for the design and approval of the higher education programmes and for ensuring that the College adheres to their academic frameworks to secure threshold academic standards.

1.17 The planning process for new programmes commences with the completion of a University Proposal Form and the Academic Planning Programme Group Form, which request a rationale for the proposed programme, programme structure, arrangements for placements and target numbers.

1.18 The approval process is managed by the awarding bodies and organisation, involving the College's Academic Planning Programme Group and, where appropriate, external examiner feedback on proposals. The design of these planning and approval arrangements between the awarding bodies, the awarding organisation and the College allow the Expectation A3.1 to be met in principle.

1.19 The review team scrutinised the evidence provided by the College, including the partnership agreements with the two awarding bodies, a responsibilities checklist, the University Quality Assurance Handbooks, minutes of validation meetings, external examiner reports, and Academic Planning Programme Group Forms. Aspects of programme planning and approval were also discussed with senior and academic staff and a representative from one of the awarding bodies.

1.20 The team noted that the majority of current students are enrolled on the five Middlesex University approved foundation degrees, together with four BA programmes. Small numbers are enrolled on the Master's Degree in Psychotherapy. Programmes that have not recruited students in 2014-15 include two University of Greenwich programmes, two Middlesex University foundation degrees and one Higher National Diploma. Three diplomas in higher education, validated by Middlesex University as part of the College's framework degrees, have not recruited first year students but retain small numbers of year 2 students.

1.21 Discussions with senior staff confirmed the process for the internal approval of programmes and the support and development of staff teams to enable them to work effectively with the awarding bodies during the process of development and validation. Delivery staff confirmed the processes involved for the design of new programmes and modules, using student feedback and their experience from working externally to the College. They commented on the support provided by senior staff, and those at the respective awarding body, throughout the design and approval process.

1.22 The review team found that the processes laid down by the awarding bodies and organisation for the setting of standards for the higher education programmes are adhered to

by the College and confirmed by external examiner reports. Therefore, the team confirms that the College meets the Expectation 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**

1.23 The partnership agreements and responsibilities checklists define processes to be followed regarding the outcomes-based approach to the higher education programmes at the College, including the use of Progression and Finalist Assessment Boards. Detailed programme specifications, approved at the time of validation for awarding body programmes and College-devised for those approved by the awarding organisation, are in place for all higher education programmes. These specifications indicate learning outcomes at programme and unit/module level that are mapped to assessment briefs, with internal moderation and verification procedures alongside the external examiner system ensuring that they are fully covered in assessment. The frameworks in place at the College, in partnership with the awarding bodies and organisation, enable Expectation A3.2 to be met in principle.

1.24 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising the evidence provided by the College, including minutes of the Progression and Finalist Assessment Boards, the academic regulations of the College and its awarding bodies, external examiner reports and the report of the PSRBs for the counselling programmes. The team also discussed outcomes and assessment with senior and academic staff, a representative from one of the awarding the bodies, and students.

1.25 Through the evidence provided, and from the meetings at the visit, the review team found that in practice an outcomes-based approach is in place at the College. Students are clear about processes for assessing their learning outcomes, and staff made reference to the assistance given to them for assessment design, marking and moderation through work with peers and the awarding bodies, together with documentation in handbooks and on the College VLE.

1.26 The team considered the College's Assessment Procedure for Higher Education Programmes to be detailed, including the requirements for the mapping of learning outcomes to assessment for all programmes and assignment briefing sheets. External examiner and PSRB reports demonstrate that an outcomes-based approach is in place at the College. Support for teaching staff regarding assessment is made available in staff handbooks for each programme and on the College VLE. Student programme handbooks contain details of all programme learning outcomes mapped to the modules.

1.27 The review team found evidence that credit is only awarded where learning outcomes have been met. College staff understand their responsibilities in relation to assessment design, marking and moderation, and there is staff development and support throughout the assessment process. The review team concludes that the College complies with the requirements of its awarding partners in relation to standards for the design and

approval of assessment and as such meets the Expectation 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**

1.28 The College adheres to the monitoring and review requirements of its awarding bodies, and has developed its own internal processes based on annual and programme monitoring reports that feed into respective awarding body quality assurance systems. The College processes are based on the HE Programme Monitoring Cycle and the recently developed Internal Programme Review Process. They detail what is required of the programme leaders' AMRs and the membership of the October Programme Monitoring Academic Board meetings to which they are presented.

1.29 The Board is chaired by the Principal and includes a governor of the College and student and external representation. By means of a summary of external examiner reports, any common themes are identified and shared. A subsequent meeting of the Academic Board in the spring term encompasses a mid-year review, where programme leaders demonstrate progress actions in their AMR development plans. The review team found that the design of these detailed processes at the College and with its awarding partners enable Expectation A3.3 to be met in principle.

1.30 The review team scrutinised the evidence provided by the College, including AMRs, summaries of external examiners' reports, and minutes of meetings from Academic Board, mid-year reviews, and Boards of Study. The team also discussed the monitoring and review of programmes with students, senior and academic staff, an awarding body representative, and students.

1.31 During discussions with staff and students there was confirmation of processes involved in the monitoring and review of programmes and the involvement of students in annual monitoring. Teaching staff gave examples of actions that had arisen as a result of the annual monitoring process, and the resulting improvements to process. Two examples involved changes to the delivery mode of the active learning module as a result of student feedback, and changes to assessment deadlines to reduce assignment bunching.

1.32 The review team found that AMRs are detailed, and provide a constructive and well considered overview of the programmes. They draw on a range of information, including external examiner reports and responses made, minutes of assessment boards, commentary on resources for the programme, student feedback and programme data. The HE Programme Monitoring Cycle is well understood by managers and staff and allows issues to be addressed and good practice disseminated. The Board of Study meetings consider, among other things, all issues pertaining to monitoring and review, and, through the presence of the awarding body link tutor, ensure that reports feed into the appropriate University quality process. Therefore, the College's awarding bodies maintain responsibility for the periodic review and revalidation of programmes, and the review team found that the College participates appropriately in these arrangements.

1.33 The team recognises that the Internal Review Process is new and has only had one iteration through reviewing the programmes in counselling, but is similarly detailed and also reports to the Academic Board. Furthermore, it is clearly differentiated from the annual

monitoring process, and is designed to give the College an overview of the quality and standards of its higher education programmes prior to the Middlesex University periodic review due to take place in 2017.

1.34 In summary, the review team found that the College meets the Expectation thereby enabling alignment with UK threshold academic standards and those of the awarding bodies and organisation. The associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

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

**Findings**

1.35 The College states that programme validation processes involve independent expertise, including the maintenance of academic standards through the use of external reviewers for internal reviews, as well as external examining for the sampling of student work and assessment feedback. Through using these systems and procedures, the College meets Expectation A3.4 in principle.

1.36 The team reviewed relevant College, awarding body and organisation documentation, including quality assurance and curriculum approval documents, external examiner reports, programme specifications, assignment documentation and staff development documentation. The team also met senior staff and teaching staff, including an awarding body representative, and employers to explore the how the College uses external and independent expertise at key stages of maintaining academic standards.

1.37 Discussions with senior staff confirmed that as part of the awarding body requirements of the programme approval process, external academic and sector advisers are used on validation panels. Evidence confirmed that while the awarding bodies and organisation are responsible for the appointment and training of external examiners and Standards Verifiers, the College succeeds in providing its external examiner community with a comprehensive range of College and course-specific information to enable them to carry out their role effectively.

1.38 External examiner and Standards Verifier reports are made available to students through the College VLE, and used to inform the College AMRs and programme monitoring reports. An overview of these reports and subsequent action plan is compiled by the Director of Adult and Higher Education in order to identify common themes for discussion at the College's Annual Quality Review of the Academic Board.

1.39 The College is in the process of rolling out an internal review process in which expertise from related employment and skills sectors is used to inform the review, although as this is a recent development, as noted under Expectation A3.3, it has so far only involved the counselling programmes. The team noted the supportive comments from external counselling professionals who valued their input to the process of internal review. Additionally, many tutors for higher education programmes are current practitioners in their professions and are members of professional bodies. The team recognises that this brings valuable external expertise for informing course design, delivery and review.

On the basis of this evidence the team concludes that the College, in partnership with its awarding bodies, meets the Expectation 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/or other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.40 The College's responsibilities relating to the UK expectations about academic standards as detailed in Chapters A1 to A3 of the Quality Code have all been met. There are no recommendations or affirmations, and all of the Expectations are judged as low risk.

1.41 The review team confirmed that the College, in partnership with its awarding bodies and organisation, establishes transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications. Definitive records of each approved programme and qualification are maintained and used as reference points for delivery and assessment. The team noted that consistent processes have been established and used for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes, in accordance with appropriate academic frameworks and regulations. The team also noted that the College secures external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards.

1.42 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards at the College on behalf of its awarding bodies and organisation **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 partnership agreements with the two awarding bodies and their respective quality handbooks set out the framework within which the College works to develop higher education programmes. Regarding the Higher National Diploma, the responsibilities checklist states that the responsibility for production of definitive programme information (such as programme specifications) is shared between Pearson and the College.

2.2 The Academic Planning Programme Group (APPG) forms, completed by the College, demonstrate the rationale for new programme proposals, together with detail, among other things, on external reference points. The College is developing the use of student feedback in the process of course design, development and approval, for example in the design of BA progression programmes. The design of the College's procedures, and awarding body and organisation frameworks and processes, lead to Expectation B1 being met in principle.

2.3 The review team scrutinised evidence provided by the College, including examples of APPG forms, validation reports and handbooks. Aspects of programme design and approval were also discussed with a range of College staff, an awarding body representative, and students.

2.4 The team recognised that the majority of the College's higher education provision is validated by Middlesex University, with the awarding body providing support for the College in compiling programme documentation for approval. Reports of validation meetings demonstrate that the process fully considers academic standards and student learning opportunities, including the use of both an independent Chair and academic externality. Programme specifications provided examples of definitive documentation made available to staff and students at the College in their respective handbooks and on the College VLE.

2.5 Meetings with senior and teaching staff confirmed that the College strategy for the development of higher education programmes is clear and understood, as stated in the College's Higher Education Strategy and Needs Analysis 2014-2020. The team was given examples of employer involvement in curriculum design, and student feedback informing development. The review team found that the process for the design and validation of the foundation, bachelor, and master's degrees at the College, in partnership with the awarding organisation, is effective in practice. However, regarding the off-the-shelf Pearson HND in Business, shortcomings in design were noted.

2.6 The Pearson BTEC Levels 4 and 5 Higher Nationals in Business (QCF) Specification - Issue 8 - February 2015 states that it is expected that the guided learning hours (GLH) for an HND are approximately 960, with each 15-credit unit approximating to a learning time of 150 hours. GLH are defined as the time when a tutor, trainer or facilitator is present to give specific guidance, including in lectures, tutorials and supervised study. Pearson's programme specification states that 'Centres delivering these qualifications are

required to use their professional expertise in their design and delivery within the overall guided learning hours for the qualification'.

2.7 The College's contextualised programme specification for the Higher National in Business states that it is a full-time HND incorporating weekly six-hour teaching slots over 33 to 34 weeks for two academic years, giving a total of 396 hours. The specification also states that students will be expected to undertake a minimum of 100 hours of work experience over the course of the programme. The team found that even if the work experience of 100 hours is added to the actual GLH, the shortfall in guided learning is such that it is not possible for the additional time to be made up with tutorial time. In meetings with teaching staff and students, tutorial time was described as one formally scheduled session per term, with an open-door policy and availability of staff at the start and conclusion of the teaching session each week. Moreover, staff handbooks state that the personal tutorial allocation is two hours per student. The review team also found no evidence that the supervised study component of the GLH requirement was an aspect of the six hours per week delivery time at the College, which comprises teaching delivery for two modules at a time, for three hours each.

2.8 The programme handbook for the HND Business, the College prospectus, the College's offer letters to successful applicants, and the self-evaluation document also state the programme is classified as full-time. The programme handbook states that the normal GLH per module is three hours per week, and two modules are delivered per term, giving a total of six hours per week. These arrangements were confirmed at the visit in meetings with staff and students. In addition the Standards Verifier's report states that 'as they (the students) are part-time there is no formal personal tutorial; however, they all expressed the individual support they get from their tutors. All the students are in full-time work and find time management an issue, especially with the timing of deadlines'. Similarly, students reported to the November 2014 Board of Study meeting that they found 'time management was an issue for some and finding time for research could be demanding with full-time working'. The team further recognised that although the student submission noted that those HND Business students surveyed agreed that workload and timetabling were appropriate 'as long as you planned ahead', they also suggested 'more interactive classes' with 'time for discussion'.

2.9 The minutes of the Business and Liberal Arts Board of Study meeting held on 27 February 2014 noted that as part of the recent Students Perspective on Course (SPOC) feedback carried out as an internal quality assurance survey, students stated that some sessions were rushed. The programme leader 'explained that there was a lot of teaching to fit into one day and an element of home research and preparation was necessary by students to accommodate this'. The 2013/14 Business HND SPOC stated that while some students valued the ability to balance study and work, others felt 'sometimes lessons feel rushed'. The programme leader responded: 'Unfortunately this is the downside of keeping attendance to one day; there is a lot to pack in'. Additionally, the SPOC highlighted that students felt there was 'a lot to take in over the course of 6 hours, I have difficulty digesting the last subjects covered. Also most of the level 4 and 5 learning is on the same day'. Staff responded: 'We do appreciate it is intensive but it is the trade off with keeping the commitment to attend to only one day a week. Apart from Active Learning year 1 is all level 4, in year 2 we cover level 5 but keep to the same day so it is not confusing for employers'. Furthermore, under 'changes that could be made' students requested 'more class time' and 'less concentrated bursts'. Staff replied that 'this would either result in shorter breaks or a longer day which would have implications for those in employment' and that 'we do appreciate it is a long day but it is a difficult balancing act to cover all the material in the time'.

2.10 The team cross-referred to the College website section on adult and higher education, which confirms the study time as six hours per week and also states 'part time

study afternoon and evening a week (classified as full time for student loan purposes)'. The team found that the College's full-time definition for the Higher National in Business is not shared by the Standards Verifier who described the programme as part-time in nature.

2.11 The team discussed the apparent disparity between the stated nature of the programme and actual guided learning time with senior staff. The College stated that the definition of full-time study is based on the credit achieved, rather than hours of scheduled time at the College, and that Pearson accepted the College's HND proposal with ample materials on the VLE for independent learning. The College also provided a written statement stating, among other things 'Students are meeting the 150 learning time hours per unit as they are learning through their research and through their employment (the majority of our assessments allow students to focus on their own organisation) and as per page 23 learning time is time taken by learners at the level of the unit on average to complete the learning outcomes of the unit to the standard determined by the assessment criteria. It should address all learning...regardless of where, when or how the learning has taken place.' The team noted that this statement refers to learning hours generally, but does not meet the Pearson definition of GLH from the national specification.

2.12 Following the visit, the review team received evidence from the College in the form of a letter from the awarding organisation, repeating the wording regarding GLH from the national specification, but with the additional wording, 'If the students are adults in employment then this could be a key factor as some students may complement their classroom learning through application of their learning in the workplace, or there may be recognition of their prior learning and experience, and delivery hours may be lowered in this context'. While the team is aware that the students on this programme are generally employed, and may therefore make use of their workplace to support their learning, there was no evidence that all students had been involved with the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process. The team noted that the reduction of hours affected the whole programme, rather than being confined to students who had undergone the RPL process. The letter states further 'Contact time may be virtual through email or virtual learning environments (VLEs). It can be with a lecturer when giving one to one assessment feedback, specialist support staff, or their peers during group work'. This statement does not negate the stated requirement that providers 'use their professional expertise in their design and delivery within the overall 960 guided learning hours for the qualification'.

2.13 During the visit, the team was informed that the College would be replacing its HND provision with University-validated programmes. During the period of review, an internal course approval application was made dated 19 April 2015, and Academic Board minutes from 27 April 2015 noted a decision was pending from the University of Chichester on 7 May 2015.

2.14 The team concludes that at present there is insufficient provision of lectures, tutorials, virtual contact time, and supervised study within the full-time Higher National Business programme to align fully with the awarding organisation's programme specification. The team therefore **recommends** that by October 2015 the College works with the awarding organisation to ensure that the design of programme delivery patterns is aligned with the requirements of the programme specification statement on guided learning hours, to make a clear distinction between part-time and full-time study.

2.15 The team further noted that the foundation degrees, except those in counselling, have the same delivery pattern and hours as the Higher National programme, and are validated as full-time provision. However, as the awarding bodies apply total learning hour requirements to these programmes as opposed to GLH, there is more flexibility permitted when delivery patterns are designed and validated.

2.16 In summary, the review team found that the College does not meet the Expectation for operating effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes, due to the failure to adhere to the requirements of the awarding organisation relating to guided learning hours on the HND Business, both in the contextualised programme specification and in practice. While acknowledging that the particular programme is being phased out, the associated level of risk is considered moderate due to the fact that quality assurance procedures are broadly adequate, but have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied. In addition, the problems identified are confined to a small part of the provision.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.17 A higher education admissions protocol defines the College's procedures for admissions and commits it to a fair, transparent, consistent and timely application process. As well as clearly outlining the principles and processes of recruitment and selection, the protocol contains terms and conditions around alterations to programmes. The higher education admissions team will immediately contact applicants if a programme is withdrawn and discuss alternative options. The protocol also defines applicants' responsibilities and signposts them to the complaints procedure. Appeals can be made in writing to the Director of Adult and Higher Education, with the option to escalate these to the Principal. Applicants not offered a place can receive further advice and support.

2.18 The Student Support Manager is the first point of contact for queries regarding admissions, although a wide range of information is made available via the prospectus and website. Much of this information is subject to the Management of Public Information Protocol as discussed under the Expectation for Part C. Prospective students receive a copy of the HE Admissions Protocol, and the HE Admission, Application Induction Process document maps the stages of enrolment in practical terms.

2.19 Heads of curriculum are responsible for recruitment, drawing upon operations managers for support. Entry and selection criteria derived from the programme specification are published online, in the HE Prospectus, and in programme publicity materials. The College operates a general admissions criterion for its framework degree programmes, but prospective students over 21 years of age who do not meet this requirement can use the Higher Education Accreditation/Recognition of Prior Learning procedure. Applicants whose first language is not English must reach a 'satisfactory' standard in an appropriate test. The College uses a standard template and guidance note to ensure a consistent interview process and documentation across its provision, with the exception of Counselling programmes where students must complete advance screening assignments and present responses to three questions at interview. All successful applicants receive an induction, which includes visits by key members of staff to discuss opportunities for resources and further support.

2.20 The design of these clearly defined and transparent admissions, interview, and enrolment procedures enables the expectation to be met in principle.

2.21 The team met programme teams, senior staff, an awarding body representative, students, and alumni to test the effectiveness of these procedures in practice. The team also scrutinised sample documentation from the enrolment and registration processes as well as the various sources of information available to prospective students.

2.22 The team recognised that the College's admissions and enrolment procedures operate in a fair and effective manner. While the admissions protocol states that 'entry criteria may be varied at the discretion of the HE Programme Manager particularly where experience may be deemed to stand in place of certification', the team heard that this does not happen outside of the APL/RPL procedures. Programme leaders conduct interviews and complete interview records after taking copies of certificates and completing enrolment

forms. Candidates then complete tasks that assess literacy and numeracy and are issued with a confirmation of attendance letter, a course outline, interview feedback and student finance advice. Applicants also complete an Academic Study Skills Self-Assessment, with the agreement of an Individual Support Plan for those declaring disability. Rejection letters and interviews are used to suggest alternatives for candidates not offered a place. The Exams Officer registers Higher National students with their awarding organisation within the prescribed timeframes.

2.23 Throughout the process, the team noted that applicants receive clear information and advice through letters, phone calls, or at an open event. Prospective students also receive information packs, a Higher Education Course Guide, the university prospectus where relevant, and a list of study skill workshops. As discussed under Expectation A2.2, programme specifications and the HE Prospectus can be accessed online and in print, along with other publicity materials. Where applicable, Key Information Set (KIS) data is also available online, and College representatives attend a number of open events each year. Interviewers give applicants information about the recognition of prior learning, and the HE Application Pack contains information about the admissions cycle outlining key dates and deadlines, application forms, and student finance information. Offer letters clearly state the awarding organisation or body and detail fees, contacts, conditions and next steps. For framework degrees, an active learning module acts as a compulsory introduction to academic skills, which, in hindsight, students found useful.

2.24 The team noted that the College has reviewed its procedures in order to promote higher retention rates, with the recruitment profile for programmes being considered at Academic Board. Applicants are surveyed regarding their experience of the interview and admissions process, and a Student Representative Questionnaire also covers induction arrangements. As a result of feedback, programme handbooks were distributed at induction, with the team recognising that a series of changes to study support prior to entry are being planned. Moreover, following feedback, the format of induction has been changed so that a programme's cohort can meet separately in break-out groups. This responsiveness to student feedback is discussed further under Expectation B5.

2.25 Combined with the plentiful information available to prospective students, the team concludes that the College's fair operation and effective review of application and enrolment procedures meets the Expectation 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**

2.26 The College has developed a Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. Staff are supported in their professional development by the College Staff Development Plan and a Scholarly Activity and Research Protocol outlining scholarship and research which supports higher education provision. The recently introduced HE Staff Handbook seeks to act as a key point of reference for staff and a new VLE section provides a portal to the College's higher education documentation.

2.27 The College states that evaluation of the impact of learning opportunities takes place at tutor, module, team and management level culminating in annual monitoring and reporting to the Principal's Review Panel and Academic Board. The College also monitors the extent to which learning opportunities are inclusive through an equal opportunities monitoring group to which the Director of Adult and Higher Education reports. The design of these policies and procedures allows Expectation B3 to be met in principle.

2.28 The team reviewed quality assurance and curriculum approval documentation, external examiner reports, monitoring and review evidence from the awarding bodies and organisation, programme specifications, assignment information, and staff development plans. Evidence was also gathered through discussions with senior and teaching staff, an awarding body representative, employers, students, and professional support staff.

2.29 The team noted that a wide range of additional policies, procedures and documentation specific to higher education programmes have been developed to promote a higher education identity and culture as the College develops its higher education provision in line with its strategic plan. The team also recognised the value that students place on the quality of the personal tutoring system involving formal and informal one-to-one meetings for the provision of general support as well as progress reviews. This is reinforced by effective use of the VLE to feed back to students on their overall achievement and appropriate action planning.

2.30 The transition of students to higher education study is driven by a planned induction process and is supported by useful documentation such as the generic student handbook and the programme handbooks. Students are able to disclose a need for additional learning support at application and interview, and may do so at any subsequent time during their period of study with the College. Additionally, early formative assessments provide a useful diagnostic for any learning support needs. Discussions with staff and students confirmed the responsiveness of the College to student feedback on induction leading to a revised programme for the 2015-16 intake. Further responsiveness, also discussed in Expectation B5, is apparent within the College's actions on comments from students about the ease of navigation and consistency of layout of material on the VLE.

2.31 The College has recently introduced a range of higher education specific recruitment and induction materials, with staff interviews exploring the extent of a tutor's scholarship and subject engagement, in addition to the submission of CVs to the relevant awarding body. Many tutors are employed by the College on a part-time basis and remain

actively engaged in their professions and professional bodies and this experience allows them to bring valuable currency to their teaching. The review team noted that for the planning and provision of staff development the College places an emphasis on pedagogy rather than subject-specific scholarly activity per se. A number of examples were evident, including enrolment on postgraduate qualifications and carrying out research activity or writing articles. The team found that the College is, as a condition of validation for the master's degree in Psychotherapy, supporting the staff development of relevant tutors including engagement in doctorate programmes and the need to make further explicit use of the UK Professional Standards Framework for enhancing staff development. On the basis of this evidence the review team **affirms** the steps being taken to implement the research and scholarship protocol and staff development plan.

2.32 The team recognised that the Higher Education Lesson Observation Policy involving peer review has evolved since the QAA Initial Review in 2013 and is now supplemented by the College's new Holistic Observation of Teaching and Learning (HOT) scheme for the active promotion of reflection on practice. Staff development needs are identified in annual staff appraisals and informed by the outcomes from lesson observation and HOT. Staff then access and engage with development activities facilitated by their awarding bodies. The team views the effective contribution made by the Holistic and the Peer Observation of Teaching schemes to the enhancement of student learning opportunities as **good practice**.

2.33 The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation through enabling every student to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking. The associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.34 Higher education resources are based in the Stoney Lane campus, with student access to the College-wide facilities at the Owen's Road site. The College's Strategic and Operational Plans and the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Strategy contextualise systems and procedures for providing student support. Policies and strategies identify key roles for subject, personal and academic support tutors and the student support manager. The College states that the Higher Education Away Days, Higher Education Team Leaders' meetings, Boards of Studies, Academic Board, completion of AMRs, and the Higher Education Programme Monitoring Process provide formal evaluation of these roles. On the basis of the design of planning and monitoring of student support, the College in principle meets Expectation B4.

2.35 The review team considered relevant documentation, including operational plans, validation and review reports, annual monitoring and periodic reviews, external examiner and student survey feedback, programme specifications and handbooks, and staff CVs. The team also discussed aspects of student support with senior, teaching and professional support staff, an awarding body representative, employers, and students.

2.36 The team noted that transition of students to higher education study is driven by a planned induction process and is supported by useful documentation such as the generic student handbook and the programme handbooks. Students are able to disclose a need for additional learning support at application and interview stages and may do so at any subsequent time during their period of study within the College. Additionally, early formative assessments provide a useful diagnostic for any learning support needs. Discussions with staff and students confirmed the responsiveness of the College to student feedback on induction leading to a revised programme for the 2015-16 intake.

2.37 The current Learning Resource Centre (LRC) is located within the main College site and provides a limited stock of reading material at the Stoney Lane campus, accompanied by use of the VLE with LRC and careers guidance specialists advising and helping students where appropriate. The College recognises that its National Student Survey (NSS) results in respect of resources reflected the need to enhance student access to the book and journal resources and is taking positive steps to address this issue. The review team recognises that the College has undertaken development of accommodation and teaching facilities and is in the process of investigating opportunities for further upgrading or change of accommodation for its higher education provision.

2.38 Despite the NSS feedback on books and journals, the team noted that students praise their learning environment and recognise the high level of support that they get as a consequence of the relatively small class sizes and the ready access to a range of teaching and support staff. Academic support tutors work with students on a one-to-one basis, reinforced by workshops and skills sessions for specific additional help with, for example, literacy, numeracy and referencing. Student handbooks also provide comprehensive information about academic support and how to improve assessment and grades. The systematic use of progress reviews provide students with opportunities to consider employability and career development and this is supplemented with the Student Progression Guide, which aims to support students in decisions relating to further study.

2.39 The team recognised the College's responsiveness to the evolving needs of students, and has, for example, changed its approach to the provision of personal tutors for the Early Years, Teaching and Learning; Business; and Liberal Arts programmes, such that subject tutors no longer act as personal tutors. The College will monitor the impact of this development. Further responsiveness, also highlighted in Expectation B5, is apparent within the College's actions on comments from students about the ease of navigation and consistency of layout of material on the VLE.

2.40 On the basis of this wide-ranging evidence, the team concludes that the College meets the Expectation for providing, monitoring and evaluating arrangements and resources, which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. 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**

2.41 The Higher Education Student Charter and the Strategic Plan outline the College's vision for student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement. The College defines the latter as the 'deliberate attempt to involve and empower students in the process of shaping their learning experience'. This approach is made operational at a number of levels, including formative communication through classroom feedback to tutors, a representative system, feedback surveys, and student involvement in internal review processes and decision-making committees. With the majority being mature students who have other responsibilities, the College recognises that its learners are potentially inaccessible. Therefore, in addition to shaping the formal channels of representation to overcome these barriers, the College encourages tutor/student openness and makes relevant resources, information, and training available online.

2.42 The design of the College's strategic approach to student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement allows the Expectation to be met in principle.

2.43 The review team tested the effectiveness of the above strategy and associated systems and initiatives by scrutinising committee minutes, training materials, and quality assurance process documentation, as well as discussing details with a range of students and staff.

2.44 The team confirmed that student engagement in quality assurance has been strengthened since the creation of formal representation structures, despite the potentially hard to reach nature of its student population. All students are able to engage with relevant quality assurance documentation including programme level pages on the VLE feature module feedback, action plans, external examiner reports and responses from programme teams. In addition, the College shares AMRs, and minutes from Boards of Study and Academic Board through its VLE.

2.45 Students elect representatives, who attend Boards of Study and Student Council, where they give extensive feedback and input into planning discussions. They also have representation on internal reviews and panels that validate AMRs, and are members of Higher Education Academic Board. Representatives can communicate with their peers via notice boards, discussions before or after lectures, and hand-outs or emails. Student Council membership consists of one representative from each of the year groups, the Director of Adult and Higher Education, the HE Administration Assistant, the Student Support Manager, and the Head of Study Support. A Student Representative Committee meets five times per year and reports to Academic Board on the student experience, using module feedback, NSS data, anonymised complaints and appeals, and other information sources. The College states that it hopes the Student Representative Committee will be involved in reviews of the Charter and College-wide handbooks.

2.46 Student representatives are offered training and those unable to attend are sent a training pack or can access materials via the VLE. Boards of Study are organised on teaching days to facilitate a good turnout from student representatives, and representative training takes place on a weekend. Induction is used to raise awareness of student engagement and guides to being a representative are included in student handbooks and distributed in a poster format to promote engagement. A student representative leaflet also

outlines the key skills required for the role. Student representative meeting dates are posted on the VLE, along with minutes, leaflets, training materials and terms of reference. The College rewards its representatives' commitment via a gift at graduation and a £200 bursary to reward regular attendance.

2.47 The team noted that the College has made significant efforts to enhance its provision using student feedback. Module and end-of-year surveys are used on all programmes with the Registry scanning and returning data to programme leaders, who incorporate the results into AMRs and discussion at team planning meetings. Module surveys allow results to be broken down by a number of metrics, with key findings posted on the VLE. In addition, the SPOC form allows a high level of qualitative feedback during the spring term from those studying framework degrees. Results are fed back to students via the VLE. While students in their final year of study complete the NSS, other years complete the College's own survey, which mimics the questions in the NSS. The data from either is used in AMRs and will become a standard agenda item at Student Representative Committee meetings. Feedback is shared with staff via email, committee meetings, and planning days and discussed with students at Boards of Study. This use of feedback stretches beyond academic staff, with professional support staff making changes in response to module and NSS surveys, AMRs and SPOC data.

2.48 The Student Engagement Impact Analysis assessment tracks the initiatives taken across different programmes as a result of student feedback. For example, following discussion with representatives, the higher education common room forum has been created to enhance the social side to studying at the College. Feedback has also resulted in the introduction of an Academic Support Tutor, the reorganisation of the VLE study section, increased visits from LRC staff, improvements to the allocation of student login details, revisions to the questions asked at programme reviews to better detect resourcing weaknesses, enhanced assignment uploading and electronic marking, and revised interview guidance. Many of these changes form part of an action plan drawn up in response to specific lower than expected NSS results, with actions tracked through committee discussions and AMRs.

2.49 In general, students feel that the College has an ethos of constant improvement and listens to them so as to enhance its provision. On the basis of all this extensive evidence the team considers the effective and sustained responsiveness to feedback to improve students' learning opportunities as **good practice**.

2.50 The team concludes that the College provides effective responses to student feedback and develops initiatives to engage students in the enhancement of programmes. The College meets the Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

**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**

2.51 The College adheres to the requirements of its awarding bodies for the assessment of its higher education programmes, in order to demonstrate student achievement of learning outcomes set at the time of programme validation. While ensuring adherence to partner institutions' memoranda of agreement and academic regulations, the College has also designed detailed internal processes and guidance in order to fulfil its responsibilities as a provider. Module evaluations reflect on assessment practice and AMRs and external examiner reports further monitor assessment practice. The design of these arrangements allow Expectation B6 to be met in principle.

2.52 The review team tested the expectation by scrutinising documentation provided by the College. This included awarding institutions' academic regulations and quality handbooks, the College's academic regulations, the HE Assessment Procedure and Assessment and Marking Flow Chart, the Recognition of Prior Learning Policy, the Guide to Good Practice in Marking and Feedback, the Submission of Draft Assessments policy, staff handbooks, module handbooks, the Moderation Process, and Finalist and Progression Board minutes. The team also considered the student submission and external examiner reports and met students and senior and academic staff as well as representatives from the awarding bodies.

2.53 The review team found that the documentation, in the form of detailed assessment policies and guidance, was fundamental in providing an effective framework for the setting, marking and moderation of assessment on the higher education programmes at the College. The team considered key documentation available to students and staff via programme-specific and generic handbooks and on the VLE to be detailed and comprehensive.

2.54 The team noted the College's recognition of its responsibility for maintaining the standards of its awarding bodies and organisation and does so on the basis of its Academic Regulations. They are a useful addition to those of the awarding bodies and provide clear underpinning information for students on relevant programmes, although at the time of the review visit the regulations as presented did not fully encapsulate the requirements of Higher National programmes, leaving the potential for incorrect guidance to staff and students. One higher education team leaders meeting, for example, shows discrepancy on guidance in relation to word count on assessment. The team noted that inclusion of specific Higher National information is a requirement of the Pearson Centre Guide to Assessment levels 4-7. It was, however, noted that revisions to the regulations to include reference to HNC/D programmes were in the process of being finalised at the time of the visit. Therefore, the team **affirms** the action the College is taking to ensure that the academic regulations on assessment include specific reference to Higher National provision.

2.55 In meetings with professional support staff and students, the team found that College procedures and guidance were easily accessible, understood and adhered to in order to inform a shared understanding of assessment, marking and moderation processes. Assessment design, also detailed in Expectation A3.1, is discussed at the point of validation and the process is defined in the College Assessment Procedure for Higher Education



Programmes. External examiners are complimentary regarding the range of assessments used across the programmes and, in general, the processes for marking and moderation. Where shortcomings are noted in reports, for instance regarding access to academic journals in the Sport report for 2014, an action is noted in both the programme AMR action plan and the overview of external examiner reports for the year, with clear timescales for improvement. The action plan is then reported to the subsequent Principal's HE Programme Monitoring Academic Board Meeting. Discussions with professional support staff generated examples of how the LRC have liaised with awarding bodies regarding journal selection, with a separate budget for higher education learning resources being used effectively and use of individual resources monitored regularly by LRC staff.

2.56 Students surveyed for the student submission generally reported that they have information regarding assessment criteria, policy and practice and receive useful and timely feedback, although there was reference to an issue with coinciding hand-in dates and a request for the review of the timing of submissions. In discussions with students, the team recognised a clear understanding of all aspects of assessment, with comments confirming the receipt of regular and supportive advice from all tutors, face-to-face and electronically. Students are aware of the use of diagnostic assessment to identify individual needs, and are permitted to submit draft work for additional guidance. They are fully aware of how to reference their sources and how to avoid plagiarism. There was strong agreement regarding the value of self and peer assessment, the linkage of theory and practice, and the range of formative and summative assessment.

2.57 Students are given clear information about the expected turnaround period for return of marked work, with the team noting comments about occasional slippage with deadlines and variability in the quality of feedback given. Students stated that they had provided appropriate feedback to the College in end of module evaluations, and the team was reassured through discussions with staff during the visit that they are aware of the issues. The Higher Education Quality Assistant has the task of overseeing the effectiveness of the assessment process and this work is planned to be completed by the start of the next academic year. The team therefore **affirms** the work underway to evaluate the quality and timeliness of assessment feedback, which will inform a training programme for improvement before the start of the 2015-16 academic year.

2.58 The process for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning is defined in the University of Greenwich process documentation, and in Middlesex University's Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook and the College's Recognition of Prior Learning guidelines. Detailed definitions and processes to be followed in making a claim are outlined, together with staff roles and responsibilities. Information is available to students and applicants on the VLE and the College website. The team observed clarity among staff about RPL procedures, with all students undergoing an interview including selection tasks. All prior certificated learning is discussed with awarding bodies and assessed using authenticated documentation mapped to programme and unit/module learning outcomes.

2.59 In summary, the review team confirms that the College meets the Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

**Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

**Findings**

2.60 The Academic Regulations for the College align with those of its awarding bodies, who have responsibilities for the appointment and training of external examiners. The College Academic Board oversees nominations by the College to the awarding bodies, with the awarding organisation having direct responsibility for the appointment of external verifiers. The College has a formally defined system for the consideration of external examiner feedback, leading to action plans. The design of these arrangements and procedures meets, in principle, Expectation B7.

2.61 The review team referred to annual monitoring and periodic review documentation, external examiner and Standards Verifier reports, minutes from assessment and progression meetings, and programme handbooks. The team also discussed external examiner procedures and systems with senior and teaching staff, students, and an awarding body representative.

2.62 The team noted that the College provides external examiners and Standards Verifiers with College and course specific material to enable them to undertake their role effectively. Programme leaders receive external examiner reports, and feed responses into the College annual monitoring process with an overview compiled by the Director of Adult and Higher Education. This evaluative summary seeks to identify common themes arising from external examiner feedback and is presented at the Annual Quality Review of the Academic Board. Formal College responses to each external examiner report are then sent to the awarding bodies, and reports are shared with students through publication on the VLE.

2.63 The team confirms that robust and consistent procedures are in place for gathering and analysing external examiner feedback and concludes that the College meets the Expectation. 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**

2.64 The College adheres to the requirements for monitoring and review set out by the awarding bodies and organisation, in order to ensure that the academic standards and student learning opportunities set at the time of validation are maintained. These requirements are based on annual programme monitoring, with periodic review by Middlesex University taking place every six years. The College Higher Education Programme Monitoring Cycle sets out the annual process and the College has developed its own programme of internal review. The design of systems and procedures, in conjunction with those of the awarding bodies and organisation, for annual programme monitoring and periodic review lead to Expectation B8 being met in principle.

2.65 The team scrutinised relevant documentation provided by the College, including AMRs and minutes of Academic Board meetings at which the reports are discussed. During the visit the team discussed monitoring and review procedures and policies with senior, teaching and professional support staff, students, employers and an awarding body representative.

2.66 The review team found that the annual monitoring process is robust and effective, with strategic oversight being maintained through the Principal's HE Programme Monitoring Academic Board meeting. Overarching themes from annual monitoring are fed into the College's Operational Plan, which is agreed by the College Board. External examiner comments are fully incorporated into the AMRs, which also include detail on student profiles, data on enrolment and achievement, issues, strengths and any good practice for dissemination.

2.67 In meetings with senior and teaching staff and students, the review team found that the processes for monitoring and review of the higher education at the College are fully understood. Programme leaders confirmed that they compile a draft of the annual monitoring report for their programme in conjunction with the programme team, and discuss the draft with the Director of Adult and Higher Education prior to submission of the final version. This two-stage process enables the Director for Adult and Higher Education to provide support where required. Students contribute to the process by means of course and module evaluations, the NSS, student representatives, and by their presence on Academic Board.

2.68 The recent internal review of Counselling was the first iteration of a new process, due to be rolled out across all areas prior to the Middlesex University full programme review in May 2017. Counselling was selected as it was the first programme area to be validated by the awarding body for delivery at the College. The review included a student representative, and the team noted that other students were aware and supportive of the process. In meetings with employers the review team heard that there had been some employer involvement through discussing strengths of the counselling programmes and areas for improvement from professional practitioner perspectives.

2.69 In assessing the overarching monitoring and review of the higher education at the College as a whole, the review team found that the Adult and Higher Education Division (AHED) Outcomes analysis (2014) 2 and the data reported to the senior management team and Board in October 2014 do not align, with apparent disparities in the reporting of the

number of students enrolled, numbers retained over the whole programme and final success rates. This contrasts with the statement in the minutes of the January 2015 Academic Board, that 'Data information was circulated to Board showing higher education students by age bands and average ages on different programmes, as well as data on continuation of students staying on courses and progressing'. For example, the number of higher education enrolments in the academic year 2013-14 are stated as 152 in the Population and performance analysis document and Governors' snapshot May 2015, 156 in the AHED Outcomes Analysis for HE (2014) 2 and 174 in the July 2014 AHED Governors presentation.

2.70 The team recognised that the management of data had been noted in the QAA 2013 Initial Review report, with the recommendation that, by the start of the academic year 2014-15 'the College should develop management information systems that make better use of comprehensive higher education management information including benchmark data'. In section 2.1 of the College's self-evaluation, the response to that recommendation states, among other things, that 'the Assistant Principal (Quality) is scheduled to present an analysis of three years data at the Academic Board meeting in April 2015'. The team received further information during the visit regarding the presentation of higher education data, including the May 2015 Governors' snapshot data, which includes three years' enrolment figures for higher education and 2013-14 outcome data by year of study. This methodology omits overall data and benchmarking on numbers of students enrolled and then continuing study to complete the whole programme.

2.71 The team discussed the issue with senior staff in the final meeting, having considered relevant evidence after requests during the visit. The College explained the process for the production and reporting of higher education student data, but the team could not resolve the precise reasons for the anomalies noted. However, the team notes the recent evidence provided by the College, in the unconfirmed minutes of the April 2015 Academic Board meeting and the performance indicator clarification. The team therefore **affirms** the steps the College is taking to ensure the quality and accuracy of management data to maintain strategic oversight of student achievement, in order to strengthen programme monitoring and enhancement.

2.72 In summary, the review team found that, in general, the College meets the Expectation for the operation of effective, regular and systematic processes for the monitoring and review of programmes. Despite some shortcomings regarding quality assurance procedures relating to the reporting of overarching higher education data, the associated level of risk is low.

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

**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**

2.73 A Higher Education Student Complaints and Grievance Procedures document outlines key principles underpinning complaints, contacts, stages of complaints, and timelines, with a College commitment to resolving complaints informally wherever possible. Along with programme teams and personal tutors, students can discuss concerns with the Director of Adult Education. This procedure provides for informal stages of resolution, which involves module leaders or personal tutors and aims to resolve complaints within 10 days. A second informal stage raises issues with programme leaders or service managers, who investigate and report within a further 10 days. Thereafter, a formal stage involves the Director of Adult Education, with provision for appeal to the Principal, who may convene a complaints panel involving a member of the Governors and the Vice-Principal. Where applicable, students can go to the awarding body after exhausting the College's procedures.

2.74 Formal complaints are logged and held centrally by the Student Support Manager, records of which are used in AMRs and reported to the senior management team and governing body. Anonymised higher education complaints will be reviewed at the Student Representation Committee and the complaints procedure itself reviewed annually.

2.75 Students must follow the College's internal appeals procedures before escalating their case to an awarding body or organisation. The procedures clearly state deadlines for making an appeal, the permissible grounds for appeal against an Assessment Board decision, and the possible resulting actions. The policy encourages students to first consult with tutors or administrative staff before completing an appeals form. The Student Support Manager uses the completed form, supporting evidence, and programme staff testimony to build a case file that is passed to the Director of Adult and Higher Education, who, in consultation with the Principal, decides whether to dismiss the appeal, reach an informal settlement (whereby the Chair of Assessment Board asks members to review the decision), or convene an Appeal Panel consisting of three senior staff from different areas of the College and one higher education student. Students appealing are entitled to see all the evidence presented and may bring a companion and question witnesses at the panel.

2.76 The design of these clearly defined and fair complaints and appeals procedures allow Expectation B9 to be met in principle.

2.77 The review team tested the above procedures' effectiveness through meetings with programme teams, support staff, students and alumni. In addition, the team scrutinised the complaints log and information about complaints and appeals available in programme handbooks, on the VLE and online.

2.78 The team confirms that staff and students are aware of complaints and appeals procedure. Useful information regarding complaints and appeals is available on the College's VLE and website, and programme handbooks outline both sets of procedures. The College has resolved and logged the very few complaints it has received in a timely and effective manner, with no recent complaints from higher education students reaching a formal stage. The College has not received any academic appeals.

2.79 The team concludes that the College meets the Expectation for the effective operation of complaints and appeals procedures, which is well understood by staff and students. 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**

2.80 The College works with other organisations, principally employers and their representative bodies, to enhance learning opportunities for its students. The College states that work-based learning is a feature of a number of programmes and that it is proactive in its work with employers to secure the academic standards and to provide valuable learning opportunities. Procedures are defined for managing learning opportunities in other organisations, with the identification of respective responsibilities. This design allows the College to meet Expectation B10 in principle.

2.81 The team reviewed relevant documentation, including quality assurance and curriculum approval documents, programme specifications, assessment briefs, and work-based learning agreements. Aspects of working with others were also discussed with senior and teaching staff, students, professional support staff and employers.

2.82 The team focused on the Foundation Degree in Humanistic Counselling, which is accredited by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and as such has a formal requirement for work-based learning. Students and employers confirmed that placements and activities with clients are well supported by College tutors and employers. Employers speak highly of their engagement with the College and also comment positively on the information and guidance that they get from the College to allow them to undertake their role effectively.

2.83 The team noted that for early years and teaching and learning programmes, students are required to undertake work placements which align with the requirements of specific modules on these courses. The team also recognised the College's awareness of the need to further develop arrangements for mentoring in the workplace, with the College piloting the use of information packs for work-based mentors of students on the early years and teaching and learning programmes, based on feedback from student who have previously undertaken work-based learning. The curriculum heads for these programmes plan to review subsequent impact with the College using these outcomes to extend work-based learning to future business programmes.

2.84 The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation for ensuring that arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with other organisations are implemented securely and managed effectively. 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**

2.85 The College does not deliver research degrees, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

## The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.86 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.87 Nine of the 10 Expectations for the quality of student learning opportunities have been met, with low levels of associated risk. The team noted that recruitment, selection, and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. The College enables the development of independent learners through well received learning and teaching strategies alongside resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The College takes deliberate steps to involve students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The team confirms that the College, in partnership with its awarding bodies and organisation, makes scrupulous use of external examiners, while operating equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment. Procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints are viewed as fair, accessible and timely, thereby enabling enhancement. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with other organisations are implemented securely and managed effectively.

2.88 The team recognised two features of good practice based on sustained, strategic and cross-programme developments. With reference to Expectation B3, the team noted the effective contribution made by the Holistic and Peer Observation of Teaching schemes to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. With reference to Expectation B5, the College's effective and sustained responsiveness to student feedback is identified.

2.89 The team affirmed four actions currently being undertaken by the College, based on the recognition of a need to improve procedures and practices. These refer to Expectation B3 regarding the implementation of research and scholarship within staff development plans, Expectation B6 for evaluating the quality and timeliness of assessment feedback and the incorporation of Higher National assessment within the academic regulations, and Expectation B8 for ensuring the quality and accuracy of management data.

2.90 The team also made one recommendation with action to be completed by October 2015. The recommendation referred to Expectation B1, again involving the Higher National programme in Business. The team noted the need for the College to ensure that the design of programme delivery patterns is aligned with the awarding organisation's requirement for guided learning hours, making a clear distinction between part and full-time study. While the team recognised the successful operation of systems and procedures for the design and approval of all other programmes, the current shortfall in guided learning hours experienced by the full-time Higher National students resulted in a 'requires improvement' judgement for Expectation B1. This is accompanied by moderate risk due to the fact that quality assurance procedures are broadly adequate, but have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied. In addition, the problems identified are confined to a small part of the provision.

2.91 The team balances the moderate risk and not met judgement outcome for Expectation B1 with the positive outcomes for all of the other Expectations regarding the College's provision of learning opportunities. The team therefore concludes a split judgement for Part B of the Quality Code, where the quality of learning opportunities **meets** UK Expectations for provision validated by awarding bodies, but **requires improvement** to meet UK expectations for Higher National provision in respect of programme design.



### **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 The College produces a wide range of information for staff, students and other stakeholders, including that available via its website, programme handbooks and VLE. The Director of Adult and Higher Education is ultimately responsible for the management of public information in the Adult and Higher Education Division Protocol that defines key responsibilities and procedures capable of ensuring this information is fit for purpose and trustworthy. The Director has authority to vary processes in order to meet deadlines, with a three stage procedure being used for checking information within the higher education prospectus. Firstly, programme leaders compile information with help from registry and the Operations Manager. Secondly, the Operations Manager and Assistant Bursar and Student Support Manager (or two other members of the division) check the overall quality of the publication. Thirdly, the Director of Adult and Higher Education signs off the content.

3.2 The same procedures apply broadly to online information, although particular responsibilities are devolved, with programme leaders maintaining information about staff and programmes, the Operations Manager updating information regarding fees and news stories, and the Student Support Manager renewing webpages on external funding and support services. The Director will sign off other promotional materials produced by the Operations Manager, and staff members have a duty to report changes that could affect these materials. Detailed guidance on representing awarding bodies is also available, with a system of locally arranged inspections monitoring the effectiveness of the above protocol. With reference to information for current students, programme staff are responsible for updating handbooks and the VLE, and working with awarding body staff where appropriate.

3.3 The design of clearly defined roles and procedures for managing a range of information about learning opportunities allow Expectation C to be met in principle.

3.4 To test the effectiveness of procedures for producing trustworthy information, the team met staff, students, alumni and employers. Furthermore, the team reviewed information available to the public via the College's website and prospectus, as well as the handbooks and VLE used by staff and students.

3.5 College staff make effective use of awarding bodies' quality handbooks and internal programme materials. As discussed under Expectation A2.1, a clear set of internal academic regulations provide a useful reference point for staff and students, supported by an effective higher education staff handbook. When inaccuracies or inconsistencies have been noted at Boards of Study, actions are followed up at subsequent meetings.

3.6 Overall, the team confirmed that staff are aware of the protocols governing the production and monitoring of information. The Director of Adult and Higher Education has delegated authority for signing off KIS submissions, although the team noted that the initial submission had not been signed off by the Principal as required by national regulations.

3.7 The College's website publishes key documents, such as the Student Charter, Mission and Higher Education Statements, governance documents and terms of reference,

the Annual Report, and the Higher Education Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy. Clear statements about the College's relationship with its awarding bodies, its internal review processes, and approach to employability combine with policies on complaints, appeals, admissions, RPL, and support. They all make a public information set that aligns well with the wider information set requirements. Programme webpages offering basic information on costs and indicative content link to fuller course outlines, which provide extensive programme information, including KIS data, entry requirements, and links to full specifications for some programmes. Therefore, although the website is currently being redesigned, it provides an effective range of trustworthy information for stakeholders.

3.8 At induction, students receive a College-wide student handbook containing generic information about the College, its higher education provision, and its policies and procedures. The higher education Student Charter supports the information in the handbooks and sets out the College's expectations of its students and what they can expect. Programme handbooks provide students with a wide array of fit for purpose information about their programme, supported by clear assignment briefs and information delivered via programme teams and personal tutors. As discussed under Expectation A2.2, programme specifications are available to students and staff via handbooks. Although students have suggested improvements to the induction arrangements, most feel that communications with the College are effective.

3.9 Both staff and students value a comprehensive VLE that makes much of this information available online and hosts presentation slides and notes so that students can catch up on missed lectures. With the exception of Counselling, programmes follow a common format for units on the VLE that ensures students receive resources linked to each seminar. The VLE also includes detailed cross-College information on procedures, regulations and handbooks, as well as study and careers support. The VLE facilitates deeper student engagement with quality assurance by making surveys, external examiner and Standards Verifiers reports, representative meeting agendas, minutes and training materials easily available. Students are also supported via the VLE by Progress Review Wikis with a wide range of quality assurance documentation also available for staff. To strengthen use of the VLE, the College has used external advisers and developed a dedicated staff continuing professional development programme. The HOT Scheme review system discussed under Expectation B3 checks the quality of VLE materials and can trigger staff development where gaps or good practice are identified. On the basis of this extensive evidence the team considers the wide-ranging and fit-for-purpose information available to students and staff through the VLE, which is underpinned by staff development, to be **good practice**.

3.10 The team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

3.11 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.12 The team noted that the College produces and publishes accessible and trustworthy information for their intended audiences, with one inconsistency being noted for the delegated responsibility for the initial KIS submission sign-off.

3.13 Processes for application and admission by new students are explained clearly and comprehensively, alongside expectations and programme information for current students. On completion of their studies, students receive appropriate documentation for achievement in their academic programme, with the College describing the data and information used to support the implementation of academic standards and quality assurance.

3.14 There are no recommendations or affirmations, with one feature of good practice being noted for the College's continual refinement and development of the wide-ranging and fit-for-purpose information made available to students and staff through the VLE.

3.15 On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff and students, the review team made the judgement that the quality of the information about higher education provision at the College **meets** UK expectations, with a low level of associated risk.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College has high expectations at the heart of its 'Counting in Ones' vision, seeking to develop the aspiration and achievement of each student through the continual enhancement of its provision. This approach is set out in the Inspiring Excellence and Achievement Higher Education, Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy with an annual monitoring process, incorporating student feedback and externality, resulting in the identification of actions for the subsequent academic year. External examiner reports are used for the identification of good practice, with key aspects compiled in an annual overview for the Academic Board in order to identify common themes across programmes. Specific responsibilities for enhancement are included within the recently created post of Higher Education Quality Assistant. The design of the procedures and strategies for the College's stated approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities indicates that the Expectation is met in principle.

4.2 The review team explored evidence for the taking of deliberate steps to enhance students' learning opportunities through scrutiny of documentation, including the Student Engagement Impact Analysis and the recently developed Holistic Observation of Teaching policy. The team also met students, senior and teaching staff, and professional support staff, including the Higher Education Quality Assistant, in order to explore cross-College understanding of enhancement and to obtain examples of the College's strategic approach.

4.3 The review team agreed that the College's strategic aim for enhancing learning and raising achievement is reflected within its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy through making explicit links to annual monitoring and the production of quality improvement plans. Senior staff gave examples of processes designed to ensure the identification, support and dissemination of good practice with formal annual monitoring reporting biannually to the Principal's Academic Board meetings and annually to the Board of Governors. Examples include responsiveness to student feedback regarding student access to resources as well as changes to induction and module delivery. Other illustrations were noted for the Student Engagement Impact Analysis, student progress review wikis, and the work of Higher Education Quality Assistant.

4.4 The annual monitoring presentation at the October meeting of the Academic Board is designed to include information on whether each course enhances student learning opportunities. The minutes seen by the team lack detail on this aspect, although teaching staff shared institutional definitions of enhancement. Clear examples of enhancement as cross-College activity were noted, including the improvements to the College VLE coordinated by the Director of Adult and Higher Education, and reflection on teaching practice through the Peer Observation Scheme and Holistic Observation of Teaching process. Students were also able to give clear examples of enhancement as a result of their feedback through end-of-module evaluation and the Student Perception of Course processes, for example improvements to the timing of taught sessions and the use of the VLE to provide assessment grades and weighted marks.

4.5 In summary, the review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

## The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.6 The review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook and confirmed that the Expectation for this judgement area is met, with low risk. There are no recommendations or affirmations, with a link being made to Expectation B3 for the identification of good practice in the strategic use of peer and Holistic Observation of Teaching.

4.7 The team concludes that the College takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities, and that the enhancement of student learning opportunities therefore **meets** UK expectations.

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

### **Findings**

5.1 In addition to the innovations outlined under Expectation B5, such as the wide availability of quality assurance documentation, training materials, and timing of meetings to maximise representatives' attendance, the College has plans to further develop its culture of encouraging and rewarding student participation in quality assurance and enhancement. For example, staff are experimenting with electronic feedback stickers and the Student Representative Committee will be formally involved in reviewing the Student Charter and handbooks. Some steps have already been taken in this direction, including suggested changes from student representatives to the College's mentor handbook based on the close involvement in the detailed review of programmes and materials through Boards of Study meetings. It is planned that this spirit of partnership will be furthered via a staff-student journal and student involvement in away days. The College is also planning to extend its bursary system to facilitate student enhancement projects: in future, individual students (or small groups) will receive small bursaries in exchange for suggesting improvements and monitoring their solutions effectiveness .

5.2 Staff handbooks outline the processes for student involvement in quality assurance and provide key references to feedback forms, NSS-style surveys, student representative leaflets, and the Student Charter. This information provides the basis from which College staff with a range of roles and responsibilities articulate a strong commitment to using student feedback to improve their provision. For example, those involved in the provision of learning resources use feedback to alter subscriptions to journals and improve the support offered to students wishing to use them.

5.3 As discussed in greater depth under expectation B5, feedback is actively used by the College to enhance its provision. For example, both students and staff recognise the improvements made to induction and the delivery of the Active Learning module following student feedback. Student representatives have developed a template for feeding back to their peers in a consistent manner. Beyond representatives consistently reporting back in person, a number of mechanisms are used to 'close the feedback loop' with one illustration involving a student representative section on the VLE hosting the minutes of meetings, survey results and action plans.

5.4 The review team recognises that student representatives regularly note the changes that have been made and the following up of suggestions from Boards of Study discussions. In its Student Engagement Impact Analysis, the College has developed a very effective tool for evaluating and disseminating changes made as a result of student feedback. The report, considered by the Student Representative Committee, collates changes made across the provision and highlights programme specific alterations and the student views which prompted change. One example involves students on sport courses who requested that more books be available on site; the impact analysis records that a mini-library was then created for core textbooks.

## 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](http://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](http://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.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000  
Email: [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

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