Higher Education Review of Bournville College

February 2015

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Bournville College. The review took place from 3 to 5 February 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

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

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

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

The themes for the academic year 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Bournville College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The timely and constructive assessment feedback to students (Expectation B6).

Recommendations

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

By September 2015:

- ensure that all programme handbooks contain consistent programme information, and refer students to information about the complaints and appeals procedures of the awarding bodies (Expectations A2.2, B9 and C).
- articulate the internal programme approval process and formalise the involvement of external expertise (Expectations A3.1, A3.4 and B1)

By June 2016:

- systematically monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Higher Education Enhancement Policy (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The actions being taken to work with its awarding body to provide College-specific information in external examiners' reports (Expectations A3.4 and B7).
- The steps being taken to monitor scholarly activity (Expectation B3).

Theme: Student Employability

The College has a strong focus on student employability and this is reflected in the vocational nature of its higher education programmes and the link between work-related and academic learning. Close attention is paid at the programme design stage to the needs of employers' and students' opportunities on completion. The College's business planning cycle

includes specific reference to Local Enterprise Partnership priorities. Students welcome the chance to practice their academic learning in the workplace and they spoke enthusiastically about the opportunities available to them including workplace visits, volunteering, a guest speaker programme and live briefs to work on.

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

About Bournville College

Bournville College (the College) was established in south-west Birmingham by George Cadbury in 1913. It is a medium-sized general further education college with a mission 'to be the education and training provider of first choice'. In 2011, the College relocated to a new purpose-built campus in Longbridge.

The College made a strategic decision in 2011 to increase its higher education provision. At the time of its Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) by QAA in 2010, the College had 134 part-time higher education students. The College now has 266 students on higher education programmes, 225 of whom are full-time. This represents an increase of 51 per cent compared with the previous academic year. Nearly one half of its higher education students progress internally from level 3 courses.

The College offers a range of foundation degrees, Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), a Higher National Certificate (HNC) and a Diploma in Education and Training. Programmes are offered across the following curriculum areas: Sciences; Business, Leisure and Public Services; Hair, Beauty and Culinary Arts; Creative Industries; and Health Studies, Social Care and Early Years. Programmes are validated by the University of Worcester, Staffordshire University, University College Birmingham and Pearson. The College has also developed a new partnership with Newman University to offer courses from September 2015.

The College has identified a number of key challenges facing its higher education provision, including: promoting and maintaining a higher education ethos within a further education college; ensuring effective support for Pearson programmes; continuing to grow in the face of increasing competition for higher education students; understanding the needs of higher education students; managing the greater expectations among students; and meeting the needs of staff who teach across further and higher education programmes.

The College has made good progress with the recommendations made in the IQER. The College has made improvements in how students are represented and involved in quality assurance. In addition, the College has developed a dedicated higher education department to meet the increasing demands of higher education provision within the College, and to provide better links between teaching and support areas.

Explanation of the findings about Bournville College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1   The College is responsible for delivering the programmes offered through its partnerships with Staffordshire University, University of Worcester, University College Birmingham and Pearson. Design, development and approval are carried out by the awarding bodies and the College contributes fully to the validation processes, including during periodic reviews. The awarding bodies and awarding organisation, through their approval and review procedures, are responsible for ensuring that key reference points are adhered to. The awarding bodies supply the College with comprehensive information about reference points, which is made available to staff through handbooks, the virtual learning environment (VLE) and in other relevant documentation. The *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) level, Subject Benchmark Statements and, where applicable, professional body statements of each programme are stated on programme specifications. These are checked during the programme approval process by the relevant awarding body or awarding organisation and then confirmed at an approval event, which formally approves the College to deliver the programme. Standards are confirmed annually by external examiners and, periodically, through the Periodic Subject Review process, which involves external assessors.
The College's processes meet the Expectation in *Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards*.

1.2   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining programme specifications, programme approval documentation, partnership and license agreements, periodic review documentation, and external examiners' reports, and by holding meetings with staff and awarding body representatives.

1.3   The evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective in practice. External examiners' reports show that the College appropriately acknowledges relevant reference points in its teaching, learning and assessment practices at both module and programme level. The College monitors standards through mark verification and module evaluations which feed into annual evaluation reports (AERs) at programme level and for higher education across the College. Staff are involved in externally organised programme approval events and those whom the team met confirmed their awareness of external reference points. Students whom the team met confirmed their awareness of the existence of programme specifications in handbooks and on the VLE.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.5   The regulatory frameworks of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation determine academic standards and award of credit for each programme. The College works within the academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation as outlined in the partnership agreements. The College demonstrates its awareness of, and engagement with, these frameworks and regulations through a variety of mechanisms including validation and revalidation processes, programme monitoring and review, and external examiners' reports and responses. Internally, the College has generic and higher education-specific quality cycles comprising key documents, policies and committees responsible for securing academic standards and quality. The College's processes meet Expectation A2.1: of the Quality Code.

1.6   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining academic frameworks and regulations, partnership agreements, validation and revalidation reports, programme monitoring and review documentation, external examiners' reports and responses, terms of reference of higher education-specific committees, and the College's Quality and Enhancement Policies. The team also met senior staff, teaching staff and representatives of its awarding body and awarding organisation.

1.7   The evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective in practice. Active participation at validation events and evidence from annual monitoring and external examiners' reports demonstrate the College's awareness of, and adherence to, the frameworks and regulations of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The College's strong links with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation help to ensure that there are coherent quality assurance procedures in place. Staff whom the team met were clear about the respective responsibilities between the College and the Universities.

1.8   The College's committee structure and their reporting lines are clear and effective in ensuring oversight of higher education provision and in ensuring adherence to the regulatory frameworks of its awarding bodies. The Higher Education Programme Committee (HEPC) is the primary College committee and this feeds into the recently formed Academic Board, and subsequently the Quality Improvement Board. The meetings of the HEPC are supplemented by course team meetings with any major matters being taken forward to the next HEPC or its subgroups. Staff whom the team met understood the committee structure and how the design and delivery of teaching impacts on the maintenance and enhancement of academic standards. Regulatory information is clearly set out in staff and student handbooks. Student handbooks include information about how assessment, marking and credit arrangements work. The College's Higher Education Staff Handbook includes a wide range of relevant information, for example on assessment, and this complements its Assessment for Learning Policy.

1.9   The awarding bodies have responsibility for academic frameworks and regulations. AERs and external examiners' reports clearly indicate that the College operates effectively to uphold the frameworks and regulations. The College's committee structure and internal quality assurance processes operate effectively in this respect. Additionally, there are well-defined lines of responsibility between the College and its awarding bodies and

awarding organisation. Therefore, within the context of the partnership agreements with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met both in theory and in practice, and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

Findings

1.10   Responsibility for maintaining the definitive record of each approved programme and qualification, in the form of programme specifications, lies with the awarding bodies. Responsibility for Pearson programmes is shared between the College and the awarding organisation. Programme specifications contain information about learning aims and outcomes, assessment strategies and external verification and are made available through the College's VLE and in some programme handbooks. Module specifications are provided in module and programme handbooks, and on the VLE. The role of programme specifications is identified in the College's internal quality assurance procedures, including its annual evaluation of its higher education provision. For the HND provision, Pearson produces basic programme specifications which can be developed by College Curriculum Managers with oversight by the HEPC. Programme specifications are benchmarked against external reference points, including the Quality Code, the FHEQ, and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. The College makes this information available to staff through its Higher Education Community Site. These approaches allow the College to meet Expectation A2.2 in theory.

1.11   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining programme specifications and their role in internal quality assurance procedures, programme and module handbooks, AERs and the VLE. The team also met students, teaching staff and support staff.

1.12   The evidence reviewed shows the practices and procedures to be effective in practice. The team saw evidence that programme specifications are used as part of the process for programme approval with awarding bodies. Evidence from the College's self-evaluation processes, reviews by awarding bodies, and external examiners' reports show that the information contained in programme specifications is used as a reference point for the delivery and assessment of programmes. The team found that module specifications written by the College for a forthcoming programme validated by Newman University contained suitable information relating to learning outcomes and Subject Benchmark Statements. The team heard from support staff that the availability of programme specifications on the College VLE enables them to support students within their programme areas.

1.13   While students whom the team met were aware of programme specifications, and most had referred to them, access to them is inconsistent. Links to programme specifications are provided in some programme handbooks but this is not consistent due to the College's reliance on handbook templates provided by the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Some students had accessed the programme specifications via their handbooks while others had been given them by their tutors. The team therefore **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College ensures that all programme handbooks contain consistent programme information, and refer students to information about the complaints and appeals procedures of the awarding bodies (see also Expectations B9 and C).

1.14   Within its partnership agreements, the College fulfils its responsibilities for maintaining definitive records. The team saw significant evidence of how the College does this, most notably through its use of programme specifications in quality assurance processes, and in making information available on the website and in handbooks. The team made a recommendation about consistency of information in programme handbooks. Despite the recommendation, the review team concludes that, in the context of the agreements with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation, the College meets Expectation A2.2 both in theory and in practice, and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.15   The awarding bodies and awarding organisation have ultimate responsibility for programme design and approval, and for ensuring that qualifications are set at the correct level and are in accordance with appropriate academic frameworks and regulations. These processes are clearly set out in the formal agreements between the awarding bodies and the College. Pearson has academic regulations and an official arrangement with the College for the programmes it awards. The awarding bodies assess the College's ability to deliver at the correct academic standard at formal validation events or, in the case of Pearson awards, a vocational centre recognition process and qualification approval. The College's internal approval process applies to awards offered on behalf of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The process starts with proposals for new programmes being initiated at subgroups of the HEPC. The next stage involves discussion at the HEPC, including the business planning process using an internal application for qualification approval form. Finally, the approval documents are agreed by the Higher Education Standards Manager and the Assistant Principal for Higher Education before the programme can progress to full formal approval with the relevant awarding body or awarding organisation. These processes enable the College, in theory, to meet Expectation A3.1.

1.16   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation relating to programme approval, re-approval and validation events, partnership agreements, and programme specifications. The review team also held discussions with awarding body and organisation representatives, teaching staff and senior staff.

1.17   The team found that, overall, the processes for programme approval work effectively. The College clearly understands its delegated responsibilities and operates appropriate procedures to comply with academic regulations. The College has successfully completed formal validation procedures set down by the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The positive working relationships between the College staff and the awarding bodies and awarding organisation ensure that academic standards are subsequently maintained by the College. The College discusses programme approval and the maintenance of academic standards within appropriate groups and committees, and during periodic reviews with its awarding bodies. The College communicates with Pearson primarily through the Regional Quality Manager and external examiners for each programme. Reports produced by the University Link Tutor and Programme Adviser demonstrate satisfaction with the College's procedures.

1.18   The team did, however, find evidence to suggest that the minutes of HEPC meetings do not reflect in-depth discussions at this point concerning the evidence for the need for curriculum content and design. While the pro forma used by the College for all course proposals includes detailed information about issues such as assessment processes and staffing, details of employer involvement in determining the demand for the programme and in curriculum design are not included. The College does not hold its own formal internal validation events. Instead, its own internal approval process culminates with a formal approval event with the relevant awarding body. At this point the external and curriculum

specialists are invited to attend and comment on the proposal for a new programme. The internal approval procedure is not clearly defined in documentation to indicate the points at which input from stakeholders is sought and used. Therefore, the team **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College articulates the internal programme approval process and formalises the involvement of external expertise (see also Expectations A3.4 and B1).

1.19   Within the context of the partnership agreements with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation, the evidence from documentation and meetings clearly shows that the College is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities for programme approval to ensure that each of its qualifications is allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. To do this, the College works closely with its validating partners and contributes effectively to the approval process. While the College has an internal approval process, it is not clearly documented and does not specify the formal requirement for external input into the College's own design and approval process. Despite this recommendation, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met both in design and operation, and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.20   The College has an Assessment for Learning Policy which states the College's commitment to comply with the requirement for accurate assessment as detailed by awarding and regulatory bodies. The Policy also states the College's commitment to open access and fair assessment within its Equal Opportunities framework. The College's processes are intended to ensure compliance with assessment frameworks and regulations of its awarding bodies and the awarding organisation's quality and assessment guides and manuals. Information concerning assessment and regulations is made available to students in programme specifications. The awarding bodies are responsible for the operation of examination boards and the College attends these events. The College has set up its own examination boards for Pearson programmes.

1.21   The College uses assessments which have been approved by its awarding bodies and adheres to the appropriate marking policy. For these programmes, staff teaching the module are responsible for first marking with moderation being carried out by staff from a partner institution. Pearson provides a bank of authorised assignment briefs but academic staff have the option to adapt these or write their own 'bespoke' ones to better meet the needs of students. The majority of assignment briefs for the Pearson programmes are written by College staff. The College has an Internal Verification Handbook and procedures to check assignment briefs, standardise assessments and ensure that learning outcomes are met. These procedures allow the College to meet Expectation A3.2 in theory.

1.22   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these policies and procedures by examining documentation including the Assessment for Learning Policy, four Handbook and records, programme AERs, external examiners' reports, and reports of partner organisations. The team also met senior and academic staff, and students.

1.23   The evidence reviewed showed the policies and procedures to be effective in practice. The academic staff at the College use the four process and work closely with link tutors from the Universities to ensure that assessments are set at the correct standard and that marking and grades are standardised and confirmed. For Pearson programmes, the team saw evidence that the College uses the awarding organisation's assignment checking service to ensure that all briefs appropriately cover the learning outcomes and meet the national standards. Relevant College staff attend their programme examination board with the external examiner. External examiners' reports are positive and confirm the successful achievement of learning outcomes and academic standards in students' work. Awarding bodies' reports also demonstrate satisfaction with the standards and organisation of examination boards.

1.24   The evidence from documentation and meetings clearly shows that the College is effectively managing its responsibilities for the award of credit and qualifications.

The assessment methods and assignments provide appropriate opportunities for students to achieve the learning outcomes. This is confirmed by evidence from reports produced by external examiners and awarding bodies. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met both in design and operation, and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.25   The College follows the awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's processes for programme monitoring and review and also has its own comprehensive internal processes. For its internal processes, the College uses management data and feedback from students, external examiners and partner universities to inform programme AERs. The programmes AERs feed into an overall higher education AER. The AERs are subsequently discussed and validated at a range of internal and external events, including Course Management Committees, Partnership Advisory Group meetings, quality visits from awarding body representatives, standardisation events, examination boards and periodic review. For its Pearson programmes, the College makes use of similar procedures, notably AERs and reporting through committees, to ensure they comply with the guidelines in the BTEC Quality Handbook. For these awards, the College has also put in place formal examination boards which mirror the processes of the awarding bodies' procedures. Ultimately, the College's Quality Improvement Board reviews the information before oversight by the Executive Leadership Team and Corporation. There are regular meetings at which quality improvement plans, arising from the AERs, are monitored. The College reviews its monitoring and review procedures every year to ensure they remain fit for purpose. The College's own processes and its adherence to those of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation enable it to meet Expectation A3.3.

1.26   The effectiveness of the College's practices was tested by examining relevant documentation including quality assurance policies, minutes of committee meetings, programme AERs, the higher education AER, external examiners' reports, and reports from partner organisations. The team also held discussions with support staff, academic staff, senior staff, awarding body and organisation representatives, and students.

1.27   The evidence reviewed showed the procedures to be effective in practice. The College staff maintain good working relationships and clear lines of communication with the University link tutors and Pearson contact. The team saw evidence that College staff regularly attend relevant meetings, committees and examination boards, and are diligent in meeting their requirements for programme monitoring and review. The team also saw evidence that the College had successfully undergone its sole Periodic Review and Revalidation with the University of Worcester in 2010. Currently the College does not carry out periodic review for Pearson programmes but there are plans to undertake this within the next two years. The College's own internal processes for programme monitoring and review work effectively. The procedures and the currency of the programmes are confirmed in positive reports from external examiners and awarding bodies. Action plans arising from these reports are monitored throughout the year at course team meetings.

1.28   The evidence from documentation and meetings clearly shows that the College has effective systems in place for programme monitoring and review and is operating in accordance with the requirements of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The College also takes appropriate account of reports from external examiners and the awarding bodies. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.3 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.29   The awarding bodies and awarding organisation design the programmes delivered by the College and therefore have ultimate responsibility for making use of external and independent expertise to set and maintain academic standards. External examiners' reports comment on whether academic standards have successfully been achieved and maintained by the College. External examiners are appointed and trained by the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The College has a strategy for engagement with local employers and employer-related organisations. Externality is enhanced by the experience of academic staff, many of whom have current or recent experience in the sectors in which they teach. These approaches allow the College's processes to meet Expectation A3.4 in theory.

1.30   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining relevant strategies, details of staff development and external examiners' reports, and through meetings with students, the Principal, an employer organisation, senior staff, support staff and academic staff.

1.31   Overall, the review team found these processes to work effectively in practice. External examiners' reports suggest satisfaction with the maintenance of academic standards, although there were some reports that did not specifically refer to the College by name but instead described findings at a number of local providers. The College identified this as a weakness and, following discussions with the University of Worcester, the external examiners' report template has been amended so that providers will be separately identified in future reports. The team therefore **affirms** the action being taken by the College to work with its awarding body to provide College-specific information in external examiners' reports (see also Expectation B7).

1.32   The College maintains good links with local employers and employer-related agencies. The College has considered the requirements of employers in the design of some of its programmes, while local employers and employer-related agencies provide input into the delivery of programmes. Students whom the team met confirmed that they value engagement with industry and with teaching staff who have current industry expertise. Despite these links and the engagement with local industry, the College does not currently adopt a formal internal approval stage that explicitly requires external input. Rather, externality is assured when programme development reaches the stage of an approval event with an awarding body, or based on the pre-approved units for the awarding organisation. Therefore, the team **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College should articulate the internal programme approval process and formalise the involvement of external expertise (see also Expectations A3.1 and B1).

1.33   The evidence from documentation and meetings shows that, overall, the College is effectively managing its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards and making use of external expertise. This is confirmed by external examiners' reports and the team saw

evidence of productive relationships with local employers and related agencies. However, the team recommends that the College formalise its use of external expertise in a more clearly articulated internal programme approval stage. The review team also affirms the actions being taken to improve College-specific information in external examiners' reports for programmes delivered in a consortium. Despite these issues, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met both in design and operation, and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.34   In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated levels of risk are low. In all sections under academic standards, the College is also required to adhere to the procedures of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The review team makes two recommendations and one affirmation in this section. The recommendations relate to the following: articulating the internal programme approval process and formalising the involvement of external expertise, and ensuring that all programme handbooks contain consistent programme information and refer students to information about the complaints and appeals procedures of its awarding bodies. The affirmation concerns the actions being taken to work with its awarding body to provide College-specific information in external examiners' reports. There are no features of good practice in this section. The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisations at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The responsibility for the design, development and approval of programmes rests with the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The College's internal approval process applies to the awards offered on behalf of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation, and is set out in paragraph 1.15. The College's Higher Education Strategy 2013-2016 states its intention to further develop and expand its provision to meet the needs and aspirations of learners and employers. To do this, the College intends to enhance the good working relationships its has with its present university partners and to develop new links with appropriate awarding bodies, for example Newman University. The adherence of the College to the awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's formal procedures for programme design, development and approval, and its own internal processes, allows the College to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.2 The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation relating to programme design and approval, re-approval and validation events, partnership agreements, programme specifications, and the Higher Education Strategy. The review team also held discussions with awarding body and organisation representatives, teaching staff, support staff and senior staff.

2.3 Overall, the College's processes for programme design, development and approval work effectively (see paragraphs 1.17 and 1.18). The College clearly understands its delegated responsibilities and operates appropriate procedures to comply with academic regulations set out by its awarding bodies and awarding organisation, and has successfully completed formal validation procedures. Reports produced by the University Link Tutor and Programme Adviser demonstrate satisfaction with the College's procedures. However, the College's internal approval procedure is not clearly defined in documentation to indicate the points at which input from stakeholders is sought and used. The team therefore again recommends that, by September 2015, the College articulates the internal programme approval process and formalises the involvement of external expertise (see also Expectations A3.1 and A3.4).

2.4 The internal processes for developing ideas for higher education programmes through to approval are sufficiently appropriate to enable the College to successfully gain validation and accreditation. Despite the need for greater clarity in documenting the procedure and formally involving external expertise, the team concludes that the College is effective at discharging its responsibilities for the design, development and approval of its higher education programmes. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met both in design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission*

Findings

2.5   The College takes responsibility for the recruitment and admission of students. The College has a Higher Education Admissions Policy which sets out the expectation that applicants will meet the academic requirements of the awarding body. The College hosts open days, and uses printed materials and the website to recruit new students. Entry requirements, module options and modes of study are clearly articulated on the College website and in programme specifications. Applications are made through UCAS but are then processed within the College by the Higher Education Admissions Team Leader who forwards the application to the relevant programme area. Applicants may be invited for interview. A decision on that applicant is then returned to the Admissions Team Leader and uploaded to the UCAS website. Applicants are notified of the decision via UCAS and also in a letter from the College. Successful applicants receive a welcome letter encouraging them to contact the College to discuss any additional support they think they might need to complete their studies. The College has well-established and clearly articulated policies and procedures for applications and enrolment and this allows it to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.6   The review team examined the effectiveness of the recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures by analysing documentation including the Admissions Policy, programme specifications, the welcome letter and guidance to Admissions staff. The team also held meetings with students, teaching staff and support staff.

2.7   The team found that the policies and procedures for recruitment, selection and admission work effectively in practice. Findings from the post-enrolment survey indicate that students have a largely positive experience with regard to the information and opportunities initially offered by the College. Students whom the team met reported positive experiences of application, interview and enrolment, regardless of whether they were external applicants or had progressed internally. They also stated that the supportive atmosphere provided by the College was integral to their decision to progress onto a higher education course at the College.

2.8   Staff who interview students are required to be experienced higher education tutors. They use checklists to aid this process and ensure consistency. The team heard that staff are required to be fully conversant with the Admissions Policy and the requirements of the courses, and to have had significant experience in admissions decision-making. Information about how to seek additional support, including prior to admission, is available through the College website. The College prompts students to declare learning needs upon application, but if the student is found to have additional needs after the course has commenced, they are referred to the Additional Learning and Support Coordinator. Students whom the team met confirmed that they had been given the opportunity to disclose any additional learning needs at the application stage.

2.9   The review team saw evidence that recruitment and UCAS practices are discussed at higher education committees, and that diversity and widening participation measures, and also student progression, are monitored as part of the higher education AER. The post-enrolment surveys also occur at course level and result in action plans which are

completed by course teams and approved by the Assistant Principal. These action plans provide an effective mechanism for ensuring that the student voice is monitored and acted upon with regard to the student experience of admissions.

2.10   The evidence from documentation and meetings shows that the College has recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures which adhere to the principles of fair admission. The College supports students by offering a good experience at initial application and admissions stages and by offering appropriate support to those who need it. Information for prospective students is clear, accurate and widely available. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met both in design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.11   The College sets out clear aims to inform learning and teaching in its Higher Education Strategic Plan. The strategy is underpinned by curriculum design and teaching initiatives to develop students' capacities to be engaged and to learn, as well as a commitment to staff development and the observation of teaching to maintain and improve practice. The strategy for teaching and learning for each course is set out in the programme specification and reinforced in handbooks. The management and delivery of staff development to support learning and teaching involves a combination of College, University partner and staff-directed activities. Staff development outcomes are generally reported in AERs. Staff development needs are identified through observation of teaching, annual staff appraisal and student feedback. Peer reviews, 'walk-throughs' and graded observations underpin the College's quality assurance checks on the quality of teaching, and these are backed up by collecting students' views. The College has mechanisms that report on the quality of teaching and learning through the annual monitoring process. The College's processes allow it to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.12   The review team examined the effectiveness of teaching and learning procedures by reading relevant documentation including the Higher Education Strategic Plan and other strategic documents, programme reviews, programme specifications, course handbooks, AERs, and minutes of meetings where learning opportunities and teaching practices were discussed. The team also held meetings with students, the Principal, senior staff, teachers and support staff.

2.13   The review team found that the strategies and procedures for teaching and learning work effectively in practice. Evidence from student surveys and meetings with students suggest a high degree of satisfaction and student engagement with the learning and teaching environment. Students whom the team met did report a few areas for improvement such as the different teaching styles of tutors and insufficient current industry reports. The team found that information about teaching and learning is clearly set out in course and module handbooks. Tutors consistently place learning materials on the College VLE for students to access, and students make good use of, and value, this resource. Students are supported in their learning through the College's specialist Higher Education Learning Advisers who are available in the Study Hub.

2.14   The College has a well-developed system of regular teaching observation. The findings of graded observations are moderated by a panel, which found that all higher education observations were graded as good or better. The Quality Team oversee teaching observations, and there is a policy to react to any inadequate findings relating to teaching quality. The College has mechanisms that report on the quality of teaching and learning through the annual monitoring process, using progression and achievement data, information arising from the observation of teaching and student feedback.

2.15   Teaching staff whom the team met provided examples where they have undertaken development activities which have had a direct impact on their teaching. These include studying for higher degrees, and engaging in events organised by the awarding bodies and

the College. Staff have an additional requirement to undertake scholarly activities and are supported to do so. Examples include pedagogy research and conference attendance. Staff are expected to evaluate and assess their development activities, and discuss their impact on teaching practice within the Performance Review and Development Scheme. The outcome of such activities is noted in the AER for the curriculum area. Reviewers noted variation in practice in these, where some listed activities and others provided a more evaluative account. Despite the progress made, the College acknowledges that mixed practice remains in respect of scholarly activity, with some curriculum teams focusing more heavily on the College's continual professional development programme as they felt that this required improvement. The team therefore **affirms** the steps being taken to monitor scholarly activities.

2.16   The College has a comprehensive approach to learning and teaching that focuses on inclusivity, student engagement and continuous improvement. The College has acknowledged inconsistencies in the uptake of scholarly activity and the team has affirmed the steps being taken to monitor those activities. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.17   The College's senior management team (SMT) is responsible for the strategic allocation of resources to enable higher education students to develop their potential. Resources for higher education programmes are reviewed and determined through the annual business planning process. The allocation and monitoring of resources are also considered at higher education meetings and committees, and at programme validation and revalidation events. The College has a resource centre providing books and periodicals as well as online journals and electronic versions of books. Students also have library lending rights with the libraries of some of the partner universities. Programmes are structured to support and engage students and arrangements are in place to facilitate work-related learning. All students have access to dedicated Higher Education Learning Advisers and the range of support services provided to all students at the College. The College hosts a VLE which provides a range of materials to support students' learning. The quality of resources is monitored and evaluated through annual evaluations drawing on feedback from staff, students and external examiners. Through membership of the HEPC, students are able to engage in dialogue with staff regarding the development of resources. The processes the College has in place allow it to meet the Expectation in theory.

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

2.19   The review team found that the procedures for implementing, monitoring and evaluating arrangements and resources work effectively in practice. Students whom the team met confirmed that guidance arrangements, including pre-entry guidance, induction, counselling and careers, are effective. All students are interviewed and receive an induction to their programme. Support for students while studying addresses a range of needs. Students praised the accessibility and willingness of teaching staff and Learning Advisers to answer questions and provide support. Effective liaison also takes place between teaching teams and the support staff to select and maintain resources.

2.20   Students benefit from a variety of specialist facilities which are required by the vocational nature of the higher education programmes. They are able to put forward their opinions on resources through a number of channels including representation at meetings and committees, and feedback to staff through module evaluations and surveys. Some students are required to have suitable concurrent work experience, which is made clear at initial application. For these programmes, appropriate checks are undertaken and students have a workplace mentor to guide their study.

2.21   The College makes use of a VLE to support teaching and learning. There is a strategic commitment to using the VLE to support students and the College audits materials deposited on the VLE to guide staff and promote consistency and improvements across the provision. Students whom the team met confirmed that they make use of, and value, the VLE.

2.22   The College has a systematic and comprehensive approach to ensuring that students have access to the support and resources they require to develop their potential. Students have many opportunities to provide feedback about the support and resources and, overall, they are very satisfied with the provision made available by the College. The review team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.23   The College does not have a specific student engagement strategy for higher education but it does have a Learner Involvement Policy and Strategy to cover all levels of provision offered at the College. This was considered by the team to be fit for purpose for higher education students. The Corporate Executive Director, Quality oversees and manages the strategy with operational responsibilities being devolved to relevant members of staff and working groups. Student feedback is considered as part of the College's quality assurance processes and feeds into self-assessment reports, the higher education and programme AERs, and the Quality Improvement Plan. Student representatives attend course team meetings and the HEPC where they provide feedback about the student experience. The College undertakes an annual review of the learner voice and this is presented to the Quality Improvement Board, with actions subsequently being monitored by the Quality Improvement Board. These policies, strategies and procedures enable the College to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.24   The review team tested the effectiveness of the procedures in place to engage students by examining documentation, including an evaluation of the implementation of the Learner Involvement Policy and Strategy, minutes of relevant meetings and committees, and course feedback documents. The team also held meetings with students, teaching staff and senior staff.

2.25   The review team found the processes for engaging students to work effectively in practice. Students reported a positive working relationship with staff at the College. There are several mechanisms available for students to provide feedback and to participate as partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. These mechanisms are also robust enough to distinguish the issues relevant to higher education students. The College gathers students' views through surveys at both College and course level which are used to inform its quality assurance and enhancement processes. Subsequent action plans have clear lines of responsibility and completion dates. Students also have the option of feeding back their opinions to the College online through the Learner Voice webpage. Feedback given to the College through this route is centrally monitored by the Student Services team. Students also have the opportunity to meet link tutors from awarding bodies.

2.26   The College has developed an effective student representative system in which students are elected to be representatives by their peers at course level. Student representatives are issued with a handbook which gives clear advice and guidance to them about their responsibilities and what to expect at meetings. Student representatives whom the team met confirmed that they regularly attend course team meetings, the HEPC, the Learner Voice Conference and the HE Student Forum, and they feel that their input is valued, discussed at senior level and acted upon. This was confirmed in meetings with teaching staff. Both staff and students whom the team met gave examples of how the College had responded to requests by students and their representatives, particularly with regards to increasing and diversifying course resources. The College has several mechanisms in place to 'close the feedback loop', including making information about 'you said, we did' available in the College magazine, the use of plasma screens around the College, and through student representatives, the student council and the Board of Governors.

2.27   The College makes robust efforts to gather student views, to act on them and to 'close the feedback loop'. The student representative system works well and students regularly attend higher education meetings and committees where their voice is heard and responded to. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (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

2.28   The College has an Assessment for Learning Policy which states the College's commitment to comply with the requirement for accurate assessment as detailed by awarding and regulatory bodies. The standards of awards are set by the awarding bodies and awarding organisation and the delegated responsibilities for assessment are set out in partnership agreements and approval processes. The processes for assessment are set out in paragraphs 1.20 and 1.21. The College's own policies and procedures for assessment and its approach to complying with its awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's regulations allow it to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.29   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these policies and procedures by examining documentation including the Assessment for Learning Policy, four Handbook and completed four records, programme AERs, course handbooks, external examiners' reports, and reports of partner organisations. The team also met senior and academic staff and students.

2.30   The evidence reviewed showed the policies and procedures to be effective in practice. Students feel that assessments are appropriate and become more challenging as they progress through academic levels, feedback on assessed work is timely and constructive, grading criteria are clear, support is available and adjustments made when necessary, and they are fully aware of the implications of plagiarism and detection software when submitting their work. Students are particularly appreciative of the timely and constructive feedback they receive on their assessed work. These views are supported by internal survey scores of 90 per cent compared with a National Student Survey (NSS) score of 72 per cent for assessment and feedback. Staff provide feedback to students verbally, in written form, and on the VLE. The feedback is given within two weeks and sometimes sooner. The College's four process tracks the dates when work is returned and enables identification of instances where it may have been delayed. Feedback is clearly linked to learning outcomes and helps students to improve their work. External examiners for University and Pearson awards have also commented on the timeliness of feedback and the constructive advice given to students on how to improve and develop their work. The team considers the timely and constructive assessment feedback to students to be **good practice**.

2.31   The College adheres to the appeals and mitigating circumstances policies of its awarding bodies. For awards offered on behalf of its awarding organisation, the College operates its own Appeal Against Assessment Policy and a procedure for dealing with academic misconduct.

2.32   The College makes effective use of the assessments designed and approved by its awarding bodies. It also conscientiously uses the Pearson assignment checking service to ensure any adapted assessments are set at the appropriate level, fit for purpose and cover the specified learning outcomes. Reports from external examiners and awarding bodies confirm that the College carries out marking, moderation and four satisfactorily and in line with relevant regulations.

2.33   College academic staff actively participate in partnership meetings with other colleges and its awarding bodies to update assessments and implement amendments made in response to feedback from students and external examiners. In the case of the Foundation Degree Early Years, validated by the University of Worcester, College staff have recently been involved in writing new assessments with the other partner colleges. The team also saw evidence that the College responds effectively to feedback from external examiners for Pearson programmes. Action plans are formulated which are monitored throughout the year at course team meetings. Assessment processes are evaluated at course team meetings and through annual monitoring. Any proposed changes to assessments are agreed with University and College partners and via the Pearson assignment checking service to ensure that learning outcomes continue to be assessed appropriately and at the correct level.

2.34   During validation procedures, the competence of staff to assess at the level required is checked through the awarding bodies' processes. For awards offered on behalf of its awarding organisation, the College completes the Pearson approval pro forma including details about staff qualifications. Subsequently, staff attend training and standardisation events or partner meetings to ensure their understanding of assessment regulations remains current. Staff new to higher education assessment attend Pearson briefings and are supported and mentored by senior members of staff.

2.35   The College's processes provide students with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes for the award of credit or qualification. The College works closely with its awarding bodies and organisation and complies with their regulatory frameworks including the moderation, standardisation and four of marking. It operates its own robust systems and supports students well, particularly with high-quality and timely feedback. The review team therefore considers the Expectation to be met and the associated level of risk to be 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

2.36   The awarding bodies and awarding organisation determine the external examining arrangements for their programmes, including the appointment, training, support and reporting requirements of examiners. As well as the awarding bodies and awarding organisation, the College also receives external examiners' reports and consideration is given to the reports at both programme and senior levels. Comments from the reports also feed into the AERs at programme and higher education levels. The College's procedures, and its adherence to those of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation, allow it to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.37   The review team examined the effectiveness of these procedures in practice by examining a range of documentation including external examiners' reports and associated responses, minutes of relevant meetings where reports are considered, and AERs. The team also held meetings with students, teaching staff and senior staff

2.38   The evidence reviewed showed the procedures to be effective in practice. The team saw evidence that the findings from external examiners' reports are considered by programme teams. Through their AERs, programme teams comment on actions taken as a result of these reports. The efficacy of programme AERs is confirmed by the Higher Education Programme Committee and Academic Board and these feed into the annual evaluation of higher education. External examiners' reports are available to students on the VLE, and students reported a reasonable awareness of their existence.

2.39   While the College makes appropriate use of input from external examiners, the reports themselves vary according to the format and amount of detailed comment required by each awarding body. As outlined in paragraph 1.31, there had been some reports for one programme that described findings across a number of providers, rather than providing feedback specific to individual colleges within that consortium. The College has recognised this as an issue and, following discussions with the relevant awarding body, the report template has been amended so that, in future, each provider will be clearly identified in the reports. Therefore, the team again **affirms** the actions being taken by the College to work with its awarding body to provide College-specific information in external examiners' reports (see also Expectation A3.4).

2.40   The role of external examiners is well embedded in the quality assurance systems and the College makes effective use of reports. The team again affirms the actions being taken to ensure College-specific information is made available in reports. Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.41   The College follows the awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's processes for programme monitoring and review and also has its own effective internal processes (see paragraph 1.25). These processes allow the College to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.42   The effectiveness of the College's practices was tested by examining relevant documentation including quality assurance policies, minutes of committee meetings, AERs, external examiners' reports, and reports from partner organisations. The team also held discussions with support staff, academic staff, senior staff, awarding body and organisation representatives, and students.

2.43   The evidence reviewed showed the policies and procedures to be effective in practice (see also paragraph 1.27). The College's internal processes for programme monitoring and review include the extensive use of data from support areas, external examiners, partner universities and students in producing programme AERs. AERs are also sent to partner universities and the College requires programme teams to meet twice each term and, among other things, update the ensuing action plans. The quality improvement plans for each programme are then incorporated within the detailed higher education AER. The College might wish to consider improving the evaluation of programmes further by including formal employer feedback and ensuring greater critical analysis in the programme AERs and the higher education AER action plan.

2.44   Validation of the AERs is undertaken at the HEPC and the new Academic Board. This is a thorough process and provides opportunities to improve the quality and accuracy of the reports. At the mid-year review each February, this process of self-assessment is revisited to inform the business planning cycle. The team saw evidence that the Quality Improvement Board is effective in monitoring action plans throughout the year. Members of the higher education SMT hold termly review meetings to monitor targets for key performance indicators and identify programmes or areas of underperformance. Where programmes are discontinued, the College works with the relevant awarding body to ensure that affected students are able to complete their programmes and are not disadvantaged.

2.45   The comprehensive self-assessment processes and oversight through the deliberative structures are clearly understood by all staff and work effectively in practice. They ensure that the College is maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities for students on its own behalf and in accordance with the requirements of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and 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

2.46   The College's approach with higher education students is that they first follow their awarding bodies' procedure for academic complaints. However, for Pearson programmes, the College takes responsibility for complaints and uses its internal procedures based on the Complaints Policy and Procedure. This complaint may be referred to Pearson if the student feels that the College has failed to follow its own procedures or if the complaints procedure has been exhausted. The College's Complaints Policy and Procedure clearly articulates the difference between a non-academic complaint, an academic complaint and an appeal against an assessment decision. For the latter, the College also has a separate Appeal Against Assessment Decision Policy for students on Pearson programmes. All other students follow the relevant awarding body's appeals procedure. Information for staff about the College's approach to appeals against assessment decisions is detailed in its Assessment for Learning Policy. The College seeks to resolve complaints at an informal level first. If this fails, students are directed to the relevant awarding body's complaints or appeals policy or, for Pearson programmes, the student may raise the appeal with the Academic Board. These processes enable the College to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.47   The effectiveness of the College's policies and procedures was tested by examining documentation including the Complaints Policy and Procedure, the Appeal Against Assessment Decision Policy, the Assessment for Learning Policy, Academic Misconduct Policy, and course handbooks. The team also met students and teaching and support staff.

2.48   Overall, the team found that the processes for academic appeals and student complaints work effectively in practice. Students whom the team met were aware of the difference between a complaint and appeal, and were aware of the mechanisms in place if they wished to raise an issue. During the last academic year, there were no formal complaints made by higher education students as any issues were resolved informally. Senior staff whom the team met reported that complaints resolved at an informal level would be discussed at course team meetings. Staff also pointed to the opportunities available for students to raise issues through the VLE, a mechanism that is monitored centrally by the Student Services team. The SMT communicates information about complaints and appeals to the awarding bodies.

2.49   While students understand complaints and appeals and information is available on the VLE, information about the awarding bodies' complaints and appeals procedures is not consistently available in programme handbooks. The College acknowledged this inconsistency and pointed out that the discrepancies had arisen because of the different formats used by its awarding bodies. Therefore, the team again **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College ensures that all programme handbooks contain consistent programme information, and refer students to information about the complaints and appeals procedures of its awarding bodies (see also Expectations A2.2 and C).

2.50   Despite the recommendation regarding the consistency of information in handbooks, students showed good awareness of the complaints and appeals procedures and the information is available elsewhere. Therefore, the review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*

Findings

2.51   The College has a range of responsibilities for the provision of learning opportunities delegated by its awarding bodies. This includes the provision of work-based learning opportunities on two foundation degrees (Health and Social Care, and Early Years) and teacher training qualifications. Students on these courses are required to identify a work-based mentor. The College's Higher Education Strategic Plan and Mission for Employer Engagement outlines its association with employers and this is delivered through the provision of information to employers and work-based mentors, including a Work-Based Mentor Handbook, and through ongoing contact by staff with the organisations providing settings for student learning. The College's stated approach meets the Expectation in theory.

2.52   The review team tested the College's arrangements for implementing and managing work-based learning opportunities through the scrutiny of programme information and guidance to workplace mentors, the Higher Education Strategic Plan and Mission for Employer Engagement, the Work-Based Mentor Handbook, and through meetings with College staff, students and an employer organisation.

2.53   The team found that the processes for managing higher education provision with others work effectively. Students whom the team met reported a high degree of satisfaction with processes associated with work-based learning and confirmed that an appropriate setting was approved at the interview stage. The College's procedures to investigate and judge the risks of each arrangement are robust, and appropriate due diligence procedures are in place. Scrutiny of the Work-Based Mentor Handbook showed it to be thorough and informative. Work-based mentors are provided with information relating to their role and are invited to training activities at the College.

2.54   Overall, the team found that the College has effective procedures in place to manage the work-based learning provision in collaboration with employers. Students commented positively on the support they receive from the College. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

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

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.56   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. All of the Expectations relating to the College's quality of student learning opportunities are met with low risk. The review team makes one new affirmation in this section which concerns the steps being taken to monitor scholarly activity. The team repeats two recommendations and one affirmation. There is one feature of good practice regarding the timely and constructive assessment feedback to students. The review team concludes that, overall, the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3   Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

3.1   The College has a Marketing Policy, reviewed biannually by the SMT. The College produces information about its higher education provision through the marketing team. The marketing team, admissions staff and curriculum teams liaise closely annually to ensure the accuracy of programme information. This includes printed materials and information available on the website. The Higher Education Quality Team checks accuracy and signs off documents and the awarding bodies carries out a final check of information before it is published on the website. The Executive Director, Marketing and Student Services reports to the SMT on strategic issues. The College also has an Information Services Department which provides and analyses management information to ensure the accuracy of information for use in internal processes. The College also has an information dashboard system to monitor data in 'real time'. The College uses the data to inform the quality improvement plans and these are overseen at termly course team meetings. Information regarding student retention and attainment is discussed at programme level during annual evaluation processes.

3.2   Information is made available to students through the website, VLE and in student and programme handbooks. The College communicates information to staff about its quality assurance policies and processes through the Higher Education Staff Handbook and via the VLE. The College has a procedure for writing, authorising and publishing policies to ensure that documentation conforms to a standardised format and mandates that policies are made available through the VLE. It also articulates lines of authority regarding which senior member of staff has responsibility for approving procedures. The Corporate Executive Director, Quality is responsible for updating and revising policies every one, two or three years. These practices and procedures allow the College to meet the Expectation in theory.

3.3   The team tested the effectiveness of the practices and procedures by reviewing the website, VLE, handbooks, student surveys and documentation referred to in the previous paragraph. The team also met students, teaching staff and support staff

3.4   The team found the policies and procedures for checking and producing information about higher education provision to be effective in practice. The College makes good use of the website to communicate information to prospective and current students about courses, student support, the awarding bodies, and its mission statement and value framework. This information is continually monitored throughout the year and, along with the marketing strategy and campaigns, informs the business planning cycle. The team also saw evidence that marketing and management data are used for strategic planning, for example at the HEPC and Quality Improvement Board and in the production of AERs.

3.5   The team saw evidence and heard from students that, overall, the information provided in programme handbooks is clear, reliable and useful. The marketing team liaises closely with curriculum teams and admissions staff to check the accuracy of information. Students whom the team met were confident that they understood the assessment aims and procedures and learning outcomes of their course. However, the extent and consistency of

information in programme handbooks does vary. For example, some handbooks outline programme aims, learning outcomes and modes of assessment, but others lack this information. While the team acknowledges that key information is available in other places such as the VLE and, in this case, in programme specifications, it again **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College ensures that all programme handbooks contain consistent programme information, and refer students to information about the complaints and appeals procedures of its awarding bodies (see also Expectations A2.2 and B9).

3.6   The evidence from documentation and meetings clearly shows that, overall, the College is effectively managing its responsibilities for providing information about its higher education provision that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Students are positive about the information provided by the College and know where to find what they want. Despite the recommendation about ensuring consistency of information in programme handbooks, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met both in design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.7   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. The team makes no new recommendations or affirmations in this section, but repeats one recommendation regarding consistency of information in programme handbooks. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College's approach to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities is that of continuous quality improvement. The comprehensive College Quality Policy emphasises the strategic priority to continually improve quality and raise success rates. The Academic Quality and Enhancement in Learning and Teaching Policy states the overall aim of the College to enhance the quality of the student experience through its policies, procedures and identification of opportunities to pursue areas for development. A new separate Higher Education Enhancement Policy links the intention to improve quality to the College's mission and core values and to the Quality Policy. The stated intention is the continuous improvement of the learning experience using data and evidence such as retention and achievement, teaching observations and feedback from students. The Learner Involvement Policy and Strategy states the College's vision to improve learners' experience by taking account of learner views through a systematic process of student involvement. The policy lists the range of planned ways that student feedback is sought. The College's Quality Improvement Board and Quality Improvement Team are central to the operation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, and to proactively developing planned and systematic identification of areas for improvement. Each curriculum area produces an AER which feeds into a higher education AER. Along with service area reports, the higher education AER contributes to the College-wide self-assessment report. At each level, quality improvement plans are formulated. Although the Higher Education Strategy 2013-2016 does not have a specific focus or strategic objective for enhancement, the HEPC has a remit to 'enhance the learning experience for students'. The College's policies and procedures allow this Expectation to be met in theory.

4.2 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the policies and procedures by examining minutes of meetings, use of feedback from students and external examiners, the policies and strategies mentioned above, and AERs. Also, the team met senior staff, teaching and support staff and students to explore the deliberate steps being taken by the College to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.3 The team found that the College's policies and procedures for enhancement work effectively. Besides information derived from external examiners, link tutors, retention and achievement data and continuous professional development (CPD) undertaken, the College also proactively uses student opinion to inform strategic improvements in the quality of learning opportunities. Staff whom the team met constantly reiterated the College's recognition of the importance of students' views to improve the quality of learning opportunities. For example, a strategic decision was taken to increase the remit of the Study Hub to have dedicated time slots and drop-in sessions and a specialist Higher Education Adviser available to support the development of academic skills. Students whom the team met were very appreciative of the additional support available to students with additional needs, for example the range of support for those with dyslexia and dyscalculia. Students were also complimentary about the staff who work at the College, citing several examples of how committed tutors are to enhancing their learning opportunities. These examples included opportunities to hear external lecturers, take part in presentations to outside organisations, and develop skills through participating in teambuilding events. The College recognises the challenges of creating a higher education ethos in a college environment and has taken steps to address it by providing a range of specific facilities for higher education

students including a theory teaching area, designated rooms and areas, and a study area in the Learning Zone.

4.4 The feedback from the various sources mentioned in paragraph 4.3 is also used to inform programme and higher education AERs. Quality improvement plans arising from AERs are monitored at course team meetings and an annual review day in February. The new Academic Board, which has only met once, has a remit to monitor and review programme AERs and validate the higher education AER. The Student Services Steering Group has higher education enhancement as a standing agenda item and minutes of meetings demonstrate its positive responsiveness to student requests. Other formal meetings do not have a discrete enhancement item but do address quality improvement successfully by monitoring action plans.

4.5 The effective teaching and peer observation schemes enhance teaching and learning (see also paragraph 2.15). Teaching observation grades are reported in the higher education AER and discussed with tutors at annual appraisal. The College uses Advanced Practitioners to promote an ethos of high-quality teaching and learning. They are part of the College's approach to driving up standards in teaching and learning. A higher education Advanced Practitioner supports staff whose performance falls below minimum levels and promotes the development of teaching techniques for all higher education tutors, for example how to stretch and challenge students further. In addition, the College has recently introduced a practice of 'walk through' observations for higher education programmes which provide developmental feedback. Staff whom the team met find this process supportive and useful. Good practice is identified and shared at College CPD and conference days and through the HEPC and its subgroup meetings.

4.6 The recent development of a dedicated higher education team, and Higher Education Strategy, policies and committee structure, most notably a Higher Education Academic Board, demonstrates the College's commitment to the development of its provision and enables more effective oversight of the quality of higher education programmes and the student experience. Additionally, the new Higher Education Enhancement Policy has a stronger focus on enhancement. Staff at the College had been consulted on the development of the policy but some did not demonstrate a full understanding of its significance. The policy was published in December 2014 and is still evolving. Following feedback from staff, it will be discussed at a future HEPC meeting. There is a degree of overlap in the increasing number of policies relating to quality assurance and enhancement, potentially leading to confusion. The new Higher Education Enhancement Policy can potentially provide a more focused and coherent approach to planning and reviewing enhancement but it is too early to assess its impact or effectiveness. The team therefore **recommends** that, by June 2016, the College systematically monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the Policy.

4.7 The evidence from documentation and meetings demonstrates that the College is taking deliberate steps to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities. The College's quality assurance processes are central to the promotion of high-quality, continuously improving higher education provision. The strategic approach of continuous quality improvement is well embedded across academic and support areas through the clear committee structures, reporting processes and monitored action plans. The data and evidence base used in reports provide qualitative and quantitative information from which key performance targets for improvement are formulated. Good practice in teaching, learning and supporting students is identified and shared at group meetings of staff and training days. Although the ethos of enhancement has been developed through a process of adding on supplementary policies, the team has confidence that the new Higher Education Enhancement Policy will provide a greater focus for a more systematic operation of enhancement. Despite the recommendation to systematically monitor and evaluate the

effectiveness of the new Policy, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.8   In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The Expectation in this area is met and the level of risk is low. The College has systems to disseminate good practice and make use of its review mechanisms to identify opportunities for improvement. The College recognises the need to focus more on enhancement of higher education and has thus introduced a new Higher Education Enhancement Policy to complement its existing policies and strategies. It is too early to assess the impact or effectiveness of the new Policy and therefore the team makes one new recommendation in this section, which is to systematically monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Policy. There are no repeated recommendations or affirmations, and no features of good practice. The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The College is aware of its role and historic location within the local community, its contribution to economic prosperity, and the benefits that higher education can bring to individuals. The strong focus on student employability manifests itself at the programme design stage, where attention is paid to employer need and students' opportunities on programme completion. The College's Higher Education Strategy has an explicit focus on employability and professionalism. Within the College's business planning cycle, all Assistant Principals are asked to focus on Local Enterprise Partnership priorities, which are linked to employment opportunities and the needs of employers.

5.2 All of the College's higher education programmes are vocational. The range of foundation degrees reflect the relevant Qualification Benchmark with regard to the integration of work-related and academic learning, and the development of vocational skills. Programmes require students to engage with work-related activities in a variety of different ways and aspects of employability are embedded in curriculum design and assessment, including skills development modules. Examples across different programmes include workplace visits, volunteering, a guest speaker programme and live briefs. Foundation degree courses in Early Years and Health and Social Care use workplace mentors to develop the link between theory and practice, thus enabling the employer to engage with the process. These students are engaged with employers throughout their course as practice forms an integral part of their studies.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 29-32 of the Higher Education Review handbook.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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