Higher Education Review of South and City College Birmingham

January 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 South and City College Birmingham. The review took place from 19 January to 22 January 2015 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Helen Corkill
- Mrs Amanda Greason
- Professor Ann Holmes
- Miss Sarah Ingram (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by South and City College Birmingham 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 3. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

In reviewing South and City College Birmingham 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.

As part of the Higher Education Review, the team also investigated a Concern that was submitted to the QAA Concerns Scheme by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) shortly before the start of the review visit. This concerned the rapid development of the HNC Business Distance Learning programme which has a rolling monthly recruitment cycle in association with Acquire Learning, a commercial, for-profit organisation. Statistics up to December 2014 show there are 302 active distance learning students out of 615 active first-year higher education students at the College. When including the statistics and prediction for January 2015, this rises to 402 out of 715 and therefore, at the time of the review visit, 56 per cent of the first-year higher education

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk//the-quality-code.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.

students were on the distance learning programme. Reference is made to the Concern at appropriate points in the report, particularly in Expectations B2 and B10. Further information relating to the outcomes associated with the Concern can be found in the summary section of the quality of student learning opportunities on pages 45 and 46.

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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[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 South and City College Birmingham

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at South and City College Birmingham.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities for on-campus provision **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities for distance learning provision **requires improvement to meet** 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 South and City College Birmingham.

- The extensive support and opportunities for staff to develop as higher education practitioners (Expectation B3).
- The effective support for students in the transition from lower levels to higher education (Expectation B4).
- The clear focus on student employability and the established links with employers (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to South and City College Birmingham.

By June 2015:

- clarify the admissions interview policy and communicate it clearly to staff and prospective students (Expectation B2)
- ensure that all prospective and current students are kept fully informed about their admission and enrolment with the College and their registration status with the awarding body or organisation (Expectations B2, B10 and C)
- introduce and embed mechanisms to gather and respond to feedback from distance learning students in the enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5)
- ensure that all higher education students are able to access external examiner reports (Expectation B7)
- ensure effective and formal oversight and management of the learning opportunities delivered by others in line with its own policies and procedures (Expectations B2, B10 and C).

By July 2015:

- revise the procedure for programme approval to ensure that all modes of study are subject to the approval process (Expectations A3.1 and B1)
- establish formal written agreements with the employers who provide student placements (Expectation B10).

By September 2015:

- strengthen and clarify the arrangements for governance and determining risk to ensure there is a clearly articulated and systematic approach before entering into the delivery of learning opportunities with others (Expectation B10).

Theme: Student Employability

The College is committed to encouraging students to progress from lower levels of education into higher education and ultimately into employment. It has an Employability Strategy and aims to ensure that employability is embedded in the curriculum so that students become confident and employable.

The College has well established links with local employers and students benefit from guest speakers. Some students have work placement opportunities as part of their programme and these provide valuable opportunities to link theory and practice. However, while the links with employers are well established, they could be more formalised in terms of written agreements.

The College continues to develop its focus on employability. Programmes include the addition of live briefs where possible and students are encouraged to work on skills that will enhance their employment prospects.

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

About South and City College Birmingham

South and City College Birmingham is a large, diverse, general further education college with 11 campus sites across Birmingham. The higher education centre is based at the Digbeth Campus, although there is some provision, including Construction, on other sites such as the Bordesley Green Campus.

The College's mission is 'to provide outstanding education and training which is primarily vocational, in response to the needs of learners and employers'.

The origins of the College date back to 1875 when it was formed as Handsworth Technical School. In 1963 Hall Green Technical College was formed and then became independent as South Birmingham College in 1993 following the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*. South Birmingham College and City College Birmingham merged in August 2012 and this has resulted in the current institution, South and City College Birmingham.

The majority of provision at the College is at academic levels 1 and 2, reflecting the need the College fulfils within the Birmingham area. The College also offers level 3 provision which enables students to progress to higher education. In addition, the College has offered higher education courses for over 20 years, all of which were franchised from a local university partner until 2012. The College has now developed directly funded higher education provision.

At the time of the last review all higher education provision at the College was franchised. An agreement with the University of Wolverhampton ended at the end of the 2012 academic year and so the College had one main university partner, Birmingham City University. Following the merger, two further partnerships were formed, one with the University of Birmingham which is due to finish at the end of the current academic year, and a new partnership that had been developed with Newman University Birmingham. Both of these

partnerships are for validation of courses and not franchised provision. Therefore, since the last review in 2012, the most significant changes for the College have been the merger and the growth of higher education provision. There has been very rapid recent growth of a HNC Business (Distance Learning) programme since September 2014.

Some of the key challenges faced by the College have included managing the merger of two organisations and dealing with a reduction in funding. The College operates in a competitive market but is committed to maintaining its focus on 'student centred learning'. The College faces competition from local higher education institutions who may offer qualifications that students regard as more desirable, such as full honours degree programmes.

The College currently offers programmes with Birmingham City University, Newman University Birmingham and the University of Birmingham. The College also delivers Pearson programmes.

As the College now consists of two merged organisations, there were two previous QAA review reports with recommendations to consider. In the self-evaluation document the College has confirmed that it has addressed all the recommendations in its remit. There is now a higher education development plan and better public-facing information including a separate area of the website for higher education provision. Study skills training is provided for all students and the virtual learning environment (VLE) is used to provide course information. Peer observation has not been extended as all College teaching observations have been reviewed. Higher education programmes are now considered in the Quality Curriculum Review Panel (QCRP) meetings and summary information is reported to the Senior Management Team (SMT) and to the College Corporation.

Explanation of the findings about South and City College Birmingham

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

Explanation of the findings about South and City College Birmingham

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 awarding bodies retain ultimate responsibility for setting standards as informed by the FHEQ, qualification characteristics, credit frameworks and subject benchmarks. The specific responsibilities delegated to the College by its three university awarding bodies are set out in the partnership agreements. For the provision franchised from Birmingham City University, these responsibilities are further explained in the University's Collaborative Handbook. The College is required to make reference to the University's award descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements in the programme approval process. For the provision validated by Newman University the College is required to ensure that its proposal meets relevant aspects of the Quality Code.

1.2   For the Pearson provision, programmes are developed by Pearson and the College is approved as a delivery centre. Reference to relevant frameworks and benchmarks is therefore undertaken by this awarding organisation.

1.3   None of the College's programmes have been informed by professional and statutory body (PSRB) reference points although its Foundation Degree in Early Years is sector-endorsed and provides progression to Early Years Teacher Status. Where relevant, Pearson negotiates exemptions from some professional bodies for its Higher National

Awards. Adhering to the requirements of its university awarding bodies and Pearson enables the College to discharge its responsibilities and meet Expectation A1 in design.

1.4   The review team tested the College's approach to the implementation of its responsibilities under its agreements with the universities and with Pearson through the examination of documentation which sets out the College's programme development, approval and review processes. The team also examined reports of approval events and programme specifications and met with staff, students and employers.

1.5   College staff are clearly aware of their responsibilities to ensure that programmes meet the FHEQ and other relevant reference points. For the franchised provision with Birmingham City University and validated provision with Newman University and the University of Birmingham, the College makes links to external reference points in its programme validation documentation. The College's foundation degree programmes have clearly been informed by the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*. Validation panels have confirmed that programmes meet the relevant requirements.

1.6   For each programme, students are provided with a detailed and comprehensive programme specification. These specifications clearly outline the learning outcomes of the programme and associated modules. These conform to the FHEQ, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and in the case of foundation degrees, the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*.

1.7   The College has its own programme development process. This is intended to be used for Higher National programmes although it is yet to be fully implemented. It includes a planning approval process through which proposals for new programmes should be formally made, using a standard template, to the College's Quality Curriculum Review Panel (QCRP). The presentation to the QCRP part of the process has already been implemented and the referral of one proposal so far is testament to the robustness of this.

1.8   In summary, the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that awards reflect the FHEQ, qualification descriptors, credit frameworks and subject benchmarks resides with the relevant awarding bodies and organisation. The College effectively fulfils its responsibilities in the process. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A1 is met and that the risk in this area 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

1.9   Academic governance for the university-franchised and validated programmes is discharged by the respective university and these programmes operate under the associated academic regulations. Pearson has its own academic regulations to which the College conforms. However, for Pearson programmes the College has also developed a set of academic regulations and an assessment framework which reflect the Pearson requirements. Examination boards take place in line with university requirements and for Pearson awards. The processes in place enable the College to meet Expectation A2.1 in design.

1.10   The review team tested the College's implementation of its responsibilities for the adherence to the universities' academic regulations and those of Pearson through scrutiny of a range of documentation. This included minutes of examination boards, external examiner reports and annual monitoring reports. The team also met with College staff, Birmingham City University representatives and students.

1.11   The regulations of the universities are clearly indicated in programme handbooks and in the programme specifications and are available to staff and students on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE). Examination boards are professionally constituted and are effective in determining individual student progression and achievement. Examination boards for university programmes are attended by the relevant external examiners who confirm that standards have been met. It is not standard practice for the Pearson external examiner to attend the examination boards for its programmes and confirmation that standards have been met are provided on separate visits to the College. The use of the College-devised academic regulations ensures integrity in the award of credit and qualifications. External examiner reports confirm that students are meeting the required standards and a detailed overview report is produced by the College to enable the identification of good practice and the monitoring of required actions. In addition, reporting of academic standards is made to the College's Corporation.

1.12   In summary, the College works within the academic regulations of its awarding bodies and organisation. It has developed its own regulations which augment those of Pearson. The College has developed a comprehensive assessment framework to help staff and students in the assessment procedures. It therefore effectively discharges its responsibilities in the award of academic credit and qualifications on behalf of the universities and Pearson. The review team concludes that Expectation A2.1 is therefore met and that the risk in this area is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.13   Although it is the responsibility of the awarding body or organisation to maintain the definitive record of each programme, the College is aware of its responsibilities to students and alumni. The College uses the definitive record provided by the awarding body or organisation to deliver the programme.

1.14   The College uses the programme specifications which are made available on its own website and the VLE. The programme specifications are supported by information in the programme handbook, the module handbook and in the assessment schedules. This enables staff, students, alumni and the public to access a record of the programmes and qualifications available. The processes in place enable Expectation A2.2 to be met in design.

1.15   In testing this Expectation, the team considered the documentation provided by the College including programme specifications, student handbooks and assessment descriptors. The team was provided with demonstrations of the VLE which confirmed the information available to students. The team also met staff and students.

1.16   Changes to university-approved programmes are made through the universities' minor modification processes. These require approval from student representatives at the College and external examiners and the process is the responsibility of the university. Pearson is responsible for changes to its programmes and the College is notified of these through the Pearson website. Programme review for Pearson programmes takes place every four years and is scheduled for July 2015.

1.17   Students are aware of the awarding body or organisation that awards their qualification, how they are assessed and the criteria they are assessed against. This information is given to students by tutors and in the programme specifications and course handbooks that they are provided with.

1.18   The process in place enables the College to maintain the records of the programmes that they deliver and share this information with students and alumni. There are suitable processes for minor modification, reviews and changes of awards according to the requirements of the awarding body or organisation.

1.19   The ultimate responsibility lies with the awarding bodies or awarding organisation for maintaining the definitive record of a programme. However, the College also adheres to its own processes for this maintenance and these align with the requirements of the awarding bodies or awarding organisation. Information regarding the programme is shared with students and alumni. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A2.2 is met and the 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

1.20   The awarding bodies and awarding organisation retain validation responsibility for ensuring compliance with the FHEQ level descriptors, as well as relevant subject and qualification benchmarks. The awarding bodies and awarding organisation identify module content, associated learning outcomes and assessment strategies for the programmes delivered on their behalf by the College. Birmingham City University and Newman University, Birmingham carry out a six-yearly cycle of periodic review of programmes. The agreement with the University of Birmingham to deliver the Foundation Degree in Islamic Studies was valid for a period of four years. Pearson centre approval for Higher National programmes is reviewed every four years, and every five years for programme approval. The processes for setting standards enable Expectation A3.1 to be met in design.

1.21   The review team tested the College's approach by examining documents setting out the programme approval processes and by reviewing programme specifications, programme approval reports and minor modifications forms. The team also held discussions with senior management, university partner representatives, curriculum managers, teaching and support staff, and students.

1.22   The College complies with the programme approval policies and procedures of its awarding bodies, as set out in the institutional agreements, and with Pearson. The College also has a developing internal approvals process for higher education programmes which takes account of the Quality Code. The Higher Education Approval Process document and the allied Application for Higher Education Programme Approval for Partner Organisations was developed in 2014. This provides the mechanism for the College senior managers to consider a proposed new programme of study, including the rationale, potential student numbers, start date, staffing and learning resources and contact hours. In addition, the approval process permits consideration of student views, employer skill needs and student progression opportunities. New programme developments are considered further at the Quality and Curriculum Development Strategic Group.

1.23   The College's new internal programme approval process is designed to ensure that all new provision meets the College's strategic aims as well as student and employer needs. This process mirrors that of Birmingham City University but has not yet been used for a full cycle. While the process does consider new programmes, it does not consider fully all modes of delivery.

1.24   The College did not use fully its own processes to consider the introduction of the new Pearson-awarded HNC Business programme delivered by distance learning. While an HNC Business was already approved by Pearson to be delivered as a campus-based HNC, the College did not recognise the need to consider fully the implications of distance learning as a distinct delivery mode . The scope of this internal programme approval process therefore needs to be extended to include all changes to modes of delivery and this is linked to the recommendation under Expectation B1, paragraph 2.6.

1.25   The awarding bodies retain responsibility for the approval of new programmes and the revalidation of existing ones. They retain responsibility for ensuring academic standards are implemented through external examining, annual monitoring and partnership meetings. A link tutor is appointed to liaise with and support College delivery teams. The university partners provide a wide range of regulatory and academic policies and guidance documents, in addition to partnership contact, to ensure programme teams are fully compliant with university academic standards and procedures.

1.26   Birmingham City University works very closely with College programme teams in the approval of new programmes, as well as in revalidation and periodic review. The popular music team worked together with University quality and academic counterparts to develop and approve the new BA (Hons) Popular Music (Top-up) degree. The Early Years qualification was revalidated in May 2014, with programme teams from Birmingham City University and the College working together with employers to achieve an updated programme .

1.27   The College delivers some Higher National programmes approved through its university partner under license from Pearson and others undertaken directly with Pearson. Pearson retains responsibility for the validation of Higher National programmes run directly with the College. The College applies to Pearson for approval to deliver a higher national programme, and once approval has been given the external examiner report acts as an annual Pearson approval mechanism for the continuing delivery of the Higher National programme in the next academic year. External examiner reports show that the College effectively implements Pearson quality assurance policies and procedures, and assessment/internal verification regulations.

1.28   Overall, the processes for the approval of new programmes, as required by the awarding bodies and organisation, are in place ensuring that programmes align with the FHEQ, *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* and Subject Benchmark Statements. These processes are well understood by staff, although the internal College processes need to be revised to include fully all modes of study.

1.29   The review team considers the processes the College follows on behalf of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation and its own approach to the course approval process to be generally reliable and fit for purpose. Expectation A3.1 is therefore met and the level of risk in this area 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

1.30   The academic and regulatory frameworks which govern the award of higher education qualifications delivered by the College are those of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation.

1.31   The awarding bodies and awarding organisation confirm module learning outcomes and associated assessment strategies during approval, ensuring that these are aligned with the Quality Code and any relevant professional benchmarking. The College is informed of regulatory and assessment requirements from Birmingham City University through its Operations Manual for Collaborative Programmes Based in the UK and the Quality Handbook and Newman University's Academic Regulations. The College's quality assurance frameworks support the implementation of these .

1.32   The requirements for Pearson are standardised for all providers and published on the Pearson website. The College is responsible for writing and internally verifying assessment briefs for the higher national programmes it delivers directly on behalf of Pearson. The College has also developed its own procedures for the internal verification of Pearson awards.

1.33   Assessment is scrutinised by external examiners. For programmes offered in partnership with the awarding bodies, academic credit is awarded by the examination board of the partner university. The Higher National provision uses a system of internal verifiers and external examiners and the College has developed its own assessment regulations to inform the delivery of these awards. Pearson distance learning provision is served by a separate set of College regulations. Achievement of these Pearson qualifications is considered at assessment boards and reported to the awarding organisation.

1.34   Adherence to the frameworks for the award of academic credit following assessment enables the College to fulfil its responsibilities towards its awarding bodies and awarding organisation and meet Expectation A3.2 in design.

1.35   The review team tested the College's approach to securing the award of credit and qualification by reviewing the requirements of the awarding bodies, programme specifications, programme handbooks and assignment briefs. The team also considered documentation relating to internal verification, moderation processes, external examiner reports and assessment boards. The team held discussions with senior managers, curriculum managers, teaching staff, representatives from Birmingham City University and students.

1.36   Programme outcomes are validated through the prescribed processes of the awarding bodies and the awarding organisation. These are set out for each programme in a

programme specification. Modules are approved by the awarding bodies or selected from a prescribed list offered by the awarding organisation. Assessment of modules is undertaken against validated learning outcomes, which ensures that threshold standards are met. College staff undertake initial marking and double marking as required, and internal verification and/or moderation according to the awarding body or awarding organisation's academic regulations. The College has effective procedures in place to ensure that it complies with awarding body and awarding organisation requirements, as set out in programme and module specifications and assessment guidance documentation.

1.37   The College does not have a separate higher education assessment policy but has developed its own Assessment Framework and Assessment Regulations which cover the processes required for Higher National students. The Assessment Framework is also a useful document for approaching assessment in general. The College has developed a range of associated policies and procedures, including the Internal Verification Policy, Teaching and Learning Strategy, Peer Observation Scheme and the Higher Education Strategy.

1.38   Assessment activities are clearly set out in module handbooks, assignment briefs or on the VLE. These provide students with module content, learning outcomes, assessment schedules, assessment activity and a scheme of work for module delivery.

1.39   Teaching staff understand their responsibilities for the assessment of the programmes they deliver. They are conversant with academic levels as set out in the FHEQ. Each programme uses a range of assessment activities, many of which are designed to enhance students' employability skills. Only the FdA Early Years and HND Health and Social Care programmes have integrated assessed placement or work-based learning. However, other programmes make good use of assessed live projects. Examples include an annual entrepreneurship project run in conjunction with the Prince's Trust for business students, and live project work connected with the HS2 development for HNC Construction.

1.40   External examiners have oversight of assessment moderation processes. They confirm the appropriateness of assessment in enabling students to achieve the intended learning outcomes and they approve assessment results. Programme teams make effective use of external examiner reports which they receive and which are also received centrally. Programme teams respond to the reports through the annual monitoring process and construct action plans. The College operates a rigorous system for monitoring external examiner reports. All external examiner reports are scrutinised by the Higher Education Manager who draws together themes into an annual summary report. External examiner reports are considered by various committees, including the Quality and Curriculum Review Panels. They are a standing agenda item for all Board of Studies meetings.

1.41   Programme teams attend progression and awards boards at Birmingham City University where the award of academic credit and qualifications are approved. As a Pearson-approved centre, the College appoints an internal verifier for each programme. An external examiner appointed by Pearson visits the College annually to sample work and to meet staff and students. They may attend Higher National assessment boards run by the College. The external examiner reports for the HND Games programme request formal records for meetings between the assessors and the College management staff and for assessment boards. The external examiner also requests a copy of formal records for the programme assessment boards. Where they are held and minuted, the awards boards are conducted thoroughly and minuted in detail, and the College has subsequently held and minuted assessment boards for the HND Games programme.

1.42   The review team considered that the College engages systematically with the procedures of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation for the award of credit and final

qualification. External examiners confirm that assessment activity permits students to achieve the module learning outcomes. The processes to ensure compliance with academic frameworks and regulations are clearly understood by relevant staff and are used effectively. Overall the review team therefore concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met and that the risk in this area 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

1.43   The College adheres to the policies and procedures of its awarding bodies for monitoring and reviewing the programmes it delivers on their behalf. It follows the published regulations for higher national programmes developed, validated and revalidated by Pearson, which are published on the Pearson website. In addition, the College has developed its own procedures and assessment regulations for Pearson programmes, including for distance learning. Pearson external examiner reports also function as an annual re-approval mechanism for programme delivery in the following academic year.

1.44   All programmes at the College complete an annual monitoring report. This includes analysis and commentary on external examiners' reports and student achievement. The requirements for the awarding bodies are set out in the institutional agreements and in the Operations Manual for Collaborative Programmes Based in the UK for Birmingham City University. Birmingham City University and Newman University programmes are reviewed within six years through a critical appraisal and review.

1.45   As a Pearson-approved centre, the College follows the procedures and quality assurance processes required. Adherence to the frameworks for annual monitoring and periodic review of programmes enables the College to fulfil its responsibilities in securing Expectation A3.3 in design.

1.46   The review team tested the College's approach by scrutinising programme monitoring and review documents, alongside the College's strategic and divisional improvement plans. The review team also had discussions with senior managers from the College and Birmingham City University, curriculum managers, teaching staff and students to clarify processes of annual monitoring and review.

1.47   The College has effective internal annual monitoring procedures for its higher education provision. These help to ensure alignment with UK threshold academic standards. As part of the College's ongoing and continuous improvement procedures, standards are reported to the appropriate Pro Vice-Chancellors at the partner universities and reporting committees at the College. Standards are monitored at the College through Quality and Curriculum Review Panels and the Corporation. The Corporation receives regular reports on higher education. The HNC Business (Distance Learning) programme is overseen separately by the HNC Business (Distance Learning) Steering Group.

1.48   The College engages effectively with its various policies and procedures for monitoring and review. All annual monitoring reports are used for evaluation at module and programme level and take account of comments from external examiners, student achievement and student and staff feedback. For Birmingham City University programmes, a Programme Annual Review is completed which evaluates achievement and operational matters at the programme level. For the Foundation Degree in Islamic Studies with the University of Birmingham, an Annual Programme Review is completed. Link tutors engage with College staff in this annual process. Actions are drawn from the evaluation and contribute to the enhancement of the programme. The College has developed a

comprehensive annual monitoring template for directly funded higher education provision and a detailed action plan is produced by each programme team as part of this process.

1.49   The College has a continuous process of monitoring which informs the annual monitoring process. Programmes are monitored every six weeks, including scrutiny of recruitment and module reviews. Annual monitoring reports are written by all tutors working together and are escalated through the divisional to the College-level deliberative committees. They are a standing agenda item at Boards of Study. Annual monitoring reports are presented at Boards of Study for review and approval by student representatives and made available to students on the VLE.

1.50   Annual monitoring reports are sent to university partners and become integrated into the universities' annual monitoring systems. Programme staff attend their respective annual monitoring day at Birmingham City University and consider this a helpful exercise. Birmingham City University provides feedback on programme annual monitoring to the College.

1.51   The review team concludes that the College makes effective use of annual monitoring and review processes to ensure that the higher education programmes delivered meet UK threshold academic standards and awarding body and awarding organisation academic regulations. The College has effective annual internal monitoring and review procedures in place to monitor programme management, quality assurance and delivery. The template developed for monitoring directly funded Pearson programmes allows for detailed consideration of achievement data, and student and staff feedback.

1.52   Programme teams engage effectively in thorough annual monitoring and review processes. This ensures that responsibilities placed on the College are discharged appropriately. The review team concludes that Expectation A3.3 is met and that the risk in this area 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

1.53   The procedures of the awarding bodies require the use of external and independent expertise in the design, development and approval of programmes. In addition, the College has developed its own programme approval process which has yet to be fully implemented.

1.54   External examiners are used to confirm that the required standards have been set and maintained. External benchmarks inform undergraduate programmes, as does the input of employers in the design and review of provision. Adherence to the universities' requirements and the implementation of its own arrangements enables the College to meet Expectation A3.4 in design.

1.55   The review team tested the College's approach to gathering and responding to external input in programme development and review through scrutiny of a range of documentation. The team analysed the agreements with the universities, the College's own programme development process, approval panel reports, annual monitoring reports, the College's employment strategy and external examiner reports. The review team also met College staff, students, Birmingham City University staff, and employers.

1.56   The College is clearly aware of the benefits of seeking and responding to external feedback in the development and review of its programmes. While its newly developed programme approval process includes a requirement for external academics and other appropriate parties to sit on approval panels, it does not explicitly require programme teams to seek external academic advice during the development process.

1.57   The College has developed effective relationships with employers and values their feedback in the revalidation of its programmes, particularly in areas where there are occupational standards to consider. An example of this was in the revalidation of the Foundation Degree in Early Years which benefited particularly from the involvement of employers in the review stage. Employers were able to provide critical advice regarding the timing of the work placement and the need for additional attention to be paid within the curriculum to the issues of safeguarding.

1.58   External examiners are appointed by the universities and Pearson respectively and their reports confirm that students meet the appropriate learning outcomes. The College effectively engages with the requirements of the universities in seeking and responding to independent external academic advice in the development of its programmes, and it also involves employers in the development and review of its programmes. The review team concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met and the risk in this area 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

1.59   In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no features of good practice or affirmations in this area. There is a cross reference from information in A3.1 to the recommendation in B1 regarding programme design and approval in the quality of student learning opportunities.

1.60   The College uses the processes of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation to ensure that academic standards are maintained. The College makes effective use of external expertise and has developed its own internal process for programme approval. This process is not yet fully implemented but there is a system for programme proposals to be submitted for consideration within the College before progressing to the procedures associated with the awarding bodies. However, the review team noted that the College did not plan to use this process for approving different modes of study and this links to the recommendation under Expectation B1. The College also has its own processes for programme monitoring in addition to those of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation.

1.61   The College has met all seven Expectations in this area and the associated level of risk is low. Therefore, the review team concludes that the College's maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College regards higher education as a key priority area and ensures that its higher education portfolio aligns with its strategic objectives, as articulated through the Strategic Plan and Higher Education Strategy. In September 2014 the College introduced a new internal programme approvals process. This is designed to test viability, possibilities for internal progression, demand from local and regional employers, the business case and the current market. New awards are designed and developed in consultation with staff teams, employers, students and local universities. Following internal programme approval, the College adheres to the programme approval processes of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation.

2.2 The College's awarding bodies and awarding organisation retain responsibility for the development and approval of the courses delivered by the College on their behalf. The Birmingham City University's Standard Undergraduate Assessment Regulations and Operations Manual for Collaborative Programmes Based in the UK provides clear guidelines to prospective partners of the required approval processes. The Higher National programmes delivered by the College are either developed with the awarding body, under license from Pearson, or are standard awarding organisation programmes. The College has not developed any centre-devised modules. The College is able to access the academic regulations published on Pearson's website for their awarding organisation provision. The processes for programme design and approval enable Expectation B1 to be met in design.

2.3 In testing this Expectation, the team reviewed documentation relating to College internal processes, including the new internal approval procedures. It also considered documentation on programme development and approval from the awarding bodies and the awarding organisation. The review team also discussed programme design, development and approval with senior and curriculum managers, teaching staff, awarding body representatives, local employers and students.

2.4 For directly funded Pearson programmes, academic governance resides with the College, subject to Pearson's quality assurance procedures. The College has developed a new process for internal programme approval for this provision, which is being rolled out during the 2014-15 academic year. This process mirrors that of Birmingham City University. The approval process sits alongside the College's own academic regulations and assessment framework for awarding organisation provision.

2.5 To develop new Higher National programmes with Pearson, the College applies for programme approval status from the awarding organisation. When making this decision, the College selects modules from a standard range of options to add to a specified core. The College considers the employability needs of students and the vocational demands of local employers. Progression opportunities are also considered and discussed with local awarding bodies. The new internal College procedure for approval or re-approval will be

implemented fully during the 2014-15 academic year to support this process and align with the Quality Code. The procedure was used effectively to consider, and reject, a proposal for partnership from an alternative provider. The action dates from 2014 but the documentation does not require or record the date of the application.

2.6   The College did not have its new internal approval procedure fully in place when the HNC Business (Distance Learning) programme was introduced very quickly. There was no formal approval event held for this programme, which had students enrolled in less than two months after an internal outline agreement. A limited risk assessment was undertaken, but the record of this is not dated. While the College already runs a classroom-based version of the HNC programme, it has little recent experience of running higher education programmes by distance learning. The pedagogy and specific staffing and support requirements of large cohorts studying in a different mode of study were not subject to a formal programme approval process. The College did not formally notify the awarding organisation of the intended mode of delivery for the HNC (Distance Learning) programme. The College is currently approved by Pearson to run a classroom-based version of this programme. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College revises the procedure for programme approval to ensure that all modes of study are subject to the approval process.

2.7   The College plays an active role in the design and development of the programmes it offers with Birmingham City University. The Early Years team works very closely with local employers, who provide advice and guidance on professional standards and updating. They also worked together on the revalidation of the Foundation Degree Early Years. The design, development and writing of the new BA Popular Music top-up programme involved close collaboration between staff from the College and Birmingham City University.

2.8   The review team notes that the College's internal approval processes for directly funded Higher National provision are developing, but they have not yet been applied through a full cycle to ensure the thorough scrutiny of all new programmes and all modes of study. However, the College works very effectively with its awarding bodies in the design, development and approval of programmes. College staff participate actively in this process and the College values the contribution of students and employers. The College adheres to the requirements of Pearson when selecting their provision. The review team therefore concludes that the College's approach to the design and development of programmes, together with its developing approval processes, ensure that Expectation B1 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.9   The Admissions Policy and Code of Practice sets out the aims and objectives of admission to the College including information regarding equal opportunities. The admissions process is centralised for the majority of higher education programmes. Students make applications to the College largely through UCAS during the academic year or as direct entrants later in the year. Students can also apply directly to the College for part-time programmes.

2.10   Recruitment for programmes validated by the universities is undertaken by the university which also assesses the applications. The College admissions team consider the applications relating to programmes validated by Pearson and then liaise with the relevant curriculum team regarding the academic requirements. The website information, Admissions Policy and Code of Practice, Higher Education Induction Survey and College Complaints Policy enable the College to meet Expectation B2 in design.

2.11   In testing this Expectation, the review team considered the information provided by the College and met staff from the College and Birmingham City University, students and held a teleconference with the awarding organisation that validates the College's programmes. The team also spoke to students on the telephone and met representatives from Acquire Learning, the third party organisation which recruits and offers careers advice to the HNC in Business (Distance Learning) programme. The team confirmed with students and staff their experience of the application, enrolment and induction process. The team also considered whether the Admissions Policy and Code of Practice were adhered to, how students were recruited and whether admissions information was appropriate.

2.12   There is a clear admissions process which staff are aware of and College structures to ensure a transparent and fair recruitment process for on-campus programmes. Training for staff and support guidelines specific to higher education recruitment are provided to ensure staff are aware of the requirements.

2.13   Prospective students are informed about the College's programmes from the College Higher Education Guide, the College website and open days. International prospective students may be referred to the College by a small number of agents. Once referred by the agent, the application is considered by the international team in the College to ensure adherence to the academic and English language requirements before being considered by the curriculum team. Prospective students who meet these requirements are interviewed via the internet for identification purposes and to ensure they meet the visa requirements.

2.14   The College has an agreement with Acquire Learning to recruit for the HNC in Business (Distance Learning) programme. This organisation uses targeted telephone marketing to advertise the programme to prospective students. Acquire Learning uses a script agreed with the College in their conversation with prospective students. The rollout pack provided by Acquire Learning confirms that if prospective students wish to enrol on the programme after receiving information via the telephone, they are sent an email with a link

to the enrolment form, terms and conditions and the programme information on the College website.

2.15   The design of the admissions process for the HNC in Business (Distance Learning) is different to the other programmes. Acquire Learning has responsibility for the recruitment process for this programme. Standard applicants, that is prospective students with a level 3 qualification and English and Maths at GCSE, are offered a place by Acquire Learning subject to the approval of the College. Non-standard applicants are referred directly to the College and submit a 100-word statement, a CV and evidence of any qualifications. The College Higher Education Manager makes admission decisions regarding the standard and non-standard applications for the Distance Learning programme within 24 hours, as required by Acquire Learning's contract. Using this method of application, the College has declined some prospective students who have been referred by Acquire Learning, for example those who only have a level 2 qualification, and in this instance the College has suggested alternative programmes. The College did not provide information to the team regarding any monitoring procedures that were in place to ensure that prospective students for the HNC in Business (Distance Learning) were making an informed decision about enrolling on the programme. Other admissions processes require students to access the College website or the UCAS website. The College should consider the processes for recruitment, selection and admission to the distance learning programme to ensure effective oversight and management of the learning opportunities delivered by others, as set out in the recommendation linked to Expectation B10, paragraph 2.91.

2.16   All non-distance learning students that met the team confirmed they had been interviewed by the College prior to receiving an offer and the Admissions Policy confirms that all applicants are entitled to an interview and will be notified of the outcome within 10 working days. However, the self-evaluation document as well as academic and senior staff in the College confirmed that no students were interviewed other than Popular Music Practice students who were auditioned. Staff confirmed that students were able to attend an information meeting, prior to a decision being made regarding an application. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College clarify the admissions interview policy and communicate it clearly to staff and prospective students.

2.17   Prospective students are able to access the College Complaints Policy via the website and by request to the College. Feedback regarding admissions is gathered through the Higher Education Induction Survey. The Annual Monitoring Review and Higher Education Report provides regular analysis on admissions information which is reported to the Corporation.

2.18   The College website includes information about the awarding body or organisation that validates each programme. Students who study on campus are registered with the awarding body or organisation once they have enrolled with the College. Students on the HNC in Business (Distance Learning) programme are registered with Pearson on day 22 of enrolment according to the College Enrolment Flow Chart.

2.19   A new cohort of HNC in Business (Distance Learning) students begins with the College every month. In December 2014, Pearson informed the College that it would be unable to continue to register distance learning students with it until it had reviewed the College, due to the number of registrations. However, students began the programme in January 2015 in the belief that their programme was validated by Pearson and at the time of the review visit had not been informed that the College could not register any further distance learning students with Pearson until checks had been carried out. At the time of the review visit, students were still being recruited for the February enrolment of this programme and no information was provided regarding the pending registration status of students on this programme. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College ensures that all

prospective and current students are kept fully informed about their admission and enrolment with the College and registration status with the awarding body or organisation.

2.20   As a result of the recruitment techniques agreed to by the College and the lack of evidence of statistically based monitoring procedures, it appears that the College is unable to assure itself that students make informed decisions, as required by the College's Admissions Policy and Code of Practice.

2.21   Induction materials are provided for all students once they begin their programme. Students are assisted in their transition to higher education and the College provides a range of support for them to access through specific services and timetabled sessions.

2.22   The underlying policies enable this Expectation to be met, but in practice, the processes in place for the recruitment and admission of the HNC in Business (Distance Learning) do not ensure transparency and reliability. The College has not evidenced sufficient oversight of the activities undertaken by Acquire Learning and they have not been transparent with students or prospective students regarding the current registration status with the awarding organisation. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B2 is not met and the risk in this area is moderate because of problems confined to the distance learning provision, and insufficient emphasis or priority given to assuring standards or quality in the College's planning processes.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.23   The College has a Teaching and Learning Strategy which covers both further and higher education and has been informed by best practice from both sectors. It has been developed to suit the College's student market which includes those with non-traditional educational backgrounds and those with lower qualifications. It contains 11 main objectives, some of which emphasise the role of developing students as independent learners and encourages progression to employment. It particularly seeks to support the transition of learners from lower levels into higher education. The strategy also concentrates on employment skills in line with the College's employability focus and live employment-related projects are a feature of assessment in some of the more vocational courses such as Construction.

2.24   Personal development planning is an integral element of higher education courses at the College. A number of assignments are specifically set in employment situations. A number of related policies link to the Teaching and Learning Strategy and include observation of teaching, staff and development and e-learning. The Teaching and Learning Strategy and related policies enable the College to meet Expectation B3 in design.

2.25   The review team tested the College's approach to learning and teaching through an examination of the Teaching and Learning Strategy and a range of associated documentation including that related to teaching observation, staff development and e-learning as well as staff curricula vitae. The team explored the College's VLE facility and also met staff and students. The team held telephone discussions with students on the distance learning course.

2.26   The College's comprehensive Teaching and Learning Strategy enables learning and teaching to be reviewed and enhanced. The observation process requires teaching staff to be observed at least once per year. This observation process has a supportive and developmental function, is well embedded and is designed to reflect the UK Professional Standards Framework. It uses the expertise of learning coaches who are experienced staff drawn from the College's Quality Division and who support staff in the process. There is a range of comprehensive and helpful documentation to inform and support the process which includes a handbook with a section on reflection and the development of an individualised learning plan through the College's performance management portal. The outcomes of teaching observation appropriately inform the identification of staff development and continuing professional development needs with a focus on the enhancement of learning and teaching opportunities for students.

2.27   The College takes a strategic approach to staff development and continuing professional development. The College's Staff Development Plan and Training Plan demonstrate its commitment to and effective support of professional staff development and scholarly activity. One objective is to develop the skills of learners and staff in improving teaching, learning and assessment. Four staff members have achieved fellowship status with the Higher Education Academy and play a critical role in disseminating good practice through their own project work and in the delivery of fellowship awareness training in

association with Birmingham City University. Staff have been able to take advantage of College support to gain higher academic qualifications, and attend industrial updating events and conferences. New staff members undergo induction and are allocated a mentor to support them in developing their learning and teaching practices. The review team regards the extensive support and opportunities for staff to develop as higher education practitioners as **good practice**.

2.28   Resources effectively support higher education student learning. These include a higher education centre which provides higher education students with their own dedicated learning area. Virtual learning resources are well established in the College and there are comprehensive policies to support student access and use. All courses have a dedicated page on the VLE and this system also provides student access to a range of online resources. Minimum requirements have been established for uploading information at module/unit level and this is supplemented by a range of software and hardware including augmented reality and the provision of mini tablet devices. Students benefit from specialist facilities for practical subjects including music courses which can make use of an auditorium for performances.

2.29   The distance learning course was established initially using Pearson's online portal. This has been withdrawn and so the College is migrating to a new commercial portal on which it will be able to customise materials. Distance learning students can, in addition, access supplementary materials available on the College's VLE facility which is also available to on-campus students.

2.30   The College has agreed a staff to student ratio for its distance learning provision of 1:100. While staff and students voiced no concerns over this level at the time of the review visit and distance learning students informed the review team that they feel well supported, the College will wish to keep the staffing level under review to ensure that as student numbers grow, there is capacity on the part of the distance learning tutors to support the distance learning students effectively.

2.31   The College's strategic approach to learning and teaching and staff development, and the effective implementation of its policies and practice in these areas, enable it to review and enhance the quality of learning and teaching for its higher education students. Its approach to staff development is particularly effective in providing staff with opportunities to develop and enhance their higher education teaching skills. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B3 is met and the risk in this area 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

2.32   The College's strategic plans demonstrate its commitment to the development of higher education. The College aims to support student development, achievement and progression into further study or employment. It commits to providing 'excellent and efficient accommodation and learning resources for learners that facilitate achievement'. The detailed and explicit Teaching and Learning Strategy, Estates Policy and IT Strategic Plan mentioned earlier under Expectation B3 support this specific College key aim.

2.33   The College particularly seeks to support students from non-traditional backgrounds and those who progress from lower-level courses within the College. It seeks to enable students to develop their professional potential through the implementation of its Employment Strategy. The arrangements to support students in developing their potential enable the College to meet Expectation B4 in design.

2.34   In testing this Expectation, the review team examined relevant documentation such as the IT Strategic Plan and the Teaching and Learning Strategy. The team also met a range of staff members and students and held telephone discussions with those on the distance learning programme.

2.35   The College provides excellent support to enable students who are not familiar with higher education and those who are progressing from lower-level courses to progress and succeed. Particular emphasis is given to the provision of study skills with timetabled sessions or online support in all programmes including topics such as presentation skills, academic writing and referencing protocols. The VLE contains a specific study skills section aimed at higher education students. The College provides a range of comprehensive materials which effectively support student progression and achievement. These include detailed student and programme handbooks and programme specifications which are available on the College's VLE facility. Student progression is closely monitored during their course and through the formally constituted examination boards.

2.36   There is an effective approach to induction during which students are made aware of progression opportunities. Some programmes include a requirement at induction for the completion of an essay with formative feedback. This acts as an effective bridge for students new to higher education and enables staff to assess any additional learning support requirements. Induction is provided for second-year returning students as well as new students and study skills are also embedded in second-year modules.

2.37   A Peer Mentoring project completed by one of the College's Higher Education Academy Fellows is seeking to further support students and as a result revisions have been made to some programmes. For example, the placement element in the FD Early Years programme has been delayed until students have settled in further to the course and the inclusion of safeguarding has been included in the curriculum. The review team considers the effective support for students in the transition from lower levels to higher education as **good practice**.

2.38   Students benefit from effective academic and pastoral support provided through a personal tutor system, dedicated academic staff and a range of professional services provided by the College's Student Services department. All students have a personal tutor

who is drawn from the academic staff teaching on their course. These tutors provide academic advice but also act as a signpost to refer students to other services where required. Students informed the review team that academic staff are extremely approachable and an open-door policy operates whereby they can meet their tutors face-to-face or communicate via email. Student Services provides a wide range of support including career management and counselling services. A support plan is drawn up to ensure that appropriate assistance and resources are provided for students with identified additional needs.

2.39   Students studying on the College's distance-learning course access study skills support online and also through regular contact with their academic tutors. Access to other College services is available to them and they can also be referred by their tutor. Careers support is provided externally under the agreement with Acquire Learning.

2.40   Student progression and achievement is closely monitored. Individual students' progression is regularly monitored and discussed within course teams. The approach to assessment practice is robust and includes sound internal verification and moderation practices and formally constituted examination boards for its on-campus programmes.

2.41   Annual monitoring requires the detailed analysis of student performance and achievement at course level and enables the identification of courses which have high levels of success and those that warrant concerns. Through this process the College has noted low continuation rates on some programmes and has taken action to address this which has resulted in some improvement. However, one course has been discontinued and the College intends to review other low-performing courses with the option to discontinue at the end of the 2014-15 academic year. Conversely, achievement rates on some courses are high, including the Foundation Degree in Early Years and the Higher National Diploma in Fashion. External examiners consistently confirm that students are meeting the required standards.

2.42   Students are effectively supported to enable them to progress into employment at the end of their courses. The personal development element of the College's courses enables students to consider their future career options. The Careers Service provides advice and support to students regarding post-course employment as well as for those wishing to secure part-time employment during their courses. Advice is also provided on interview techniques and CV writing. The College has developed strong connections with employers. The College's 'In Business' initiative brings together students and employers from a range of sectors for work placements, internships and live projects. The review team regards the clear focus on student employability and the established links with employers as **good practice**.

2.43   In summary, the College effectively supports students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. It is particularly effective in supporting students in the transition into higher education. Students are complimentary about the academic and pastoral support provided by the College and the range of documentation available to them. Close monitoring of student progression and achievement enables the College to identify where actions are required at both student and course level. Advice and guidance for employment and the use of employers is particularly effective in preparing students for employment at the end of their course. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B4 is met and the risk in this area 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

2.44   The College appoints two student governors, including one higher education student who is currently the Students' Union President. The student governors represent the student body, contribute to setting the strategic direction and ensure accountability. The Students' Union officers include a higher education representative who engages with all students regularly. The President of the Students' Union sits on the Equality and Diversity Committee and the Student Services Committee and is able to communicate with all College students via the VLE.

2.45   The mechanisms that the College has in place enable students to engage individually through representation and collectively in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The College processes therefore enable Expectation B5 to be met in design.

2.46   In testing this Expectation, the team considered the information provided by the College and the Students' Union. The team met students, academic staff and professional staff to confirm that the written information was an accurate reflection of the student experience. The team also held telephone discussions with distance learning students.

2.47   The College runs a number of surveys to assess the student experience, including the Higher Education Induction Survey, Programme Surveys and the National Student Survey. In most handbooks the core information is the same and students are provided with details about the role of the external examiner, boards of studies and module evaluation questionnaires. For BA (Hons) Business and Marketing the quality assurance process is covered in induction. Students are requested to complete module evaluation questionnaires following each module, although the completion rate is variable. The College reports on the outcomes of the surveys that take place and analyses data within the annual monitoring report to ensure actions are recorded. The students commented on the positive ethos of the College and the close relationship they have with tutors which enables them to raise concerns and suggest improvements.

2.48   All programmes, with the exception of the HNC in Business (Distance Learning), have student representation which feeds into Boards of Studies. At the twice-yearly Boards of Studies student representatives discuss and agree the annual monitoring reports and external examiner reports. Training for the student representative role is provided by the College; however, most students the team met were unaware of this training and the existence of the Student Representative Handbook.

2.49   The HNC in Business (Distance Learning) programme began in October 2014. Students are given the opportunity to complete module questionnaires to give feedback regarding their learning experience. However, there is no current mechanism to enable students to engage collectively as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. While the intention to review the boards of study structure to accommodate distance learning students and the methodology for this has been noted in the latest higher education development plan, this is in a very early stage of development. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College introduce and embed mechanisms to gather and respond to feedback from distance learning students in the enhancement of their educational experience.

2.50   The College is continuing to develop the opportunities to engage with students in the quality assurance of their higher education experience. It has included a requirement to have student representation as part of the new programme approval process and is implementing a virtual democracy system which enables students to raise and debate ideas across disciplines.

2.51   Boards of Studies are a formal mechanism for students to provide feedback and discuss issues on their programme such as the quality of teaching, assessments, learning resources and facilities. The higher education learning space was developed as a result of direct feedback from students. The Boards of Studies have a standard agenda and the minutes are shared with students on the VLE.

2.52   In summary, although less developed in the distance learning programme, overall the College takes deliberate steps to engage students in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience using a variety of mechanisms. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B5 is met and the risk in this area 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

2.53   The College follows the assessment regulations, policies and procedures of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. In addition, it has developed an assessment framework to ensure a consistent approach to directly funded Pearson programmes across the College. The College is responsible for double marking, where appropriate, and for the operation of internal verification and moderation processes .

2.54   The College has developed a policy for Recognising Prior Learning and Achievement which covers both further and higher education programmes. The College's adherence to the assessment regulations and procedures of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation helps to ensure that assessment meets threshold academic standards. This permits students to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes of modules through a range of practical and academic assessment tasks. Students are supported in their assessment preparation by detailed assignment briefs and supplementary materials held on the VLE. The processes of assessment available enable the College to meet Expectation B6 in design.

2.55   The review team tested the College's approach to assessment by reviewing assessment-related policies, procedures and regulations. The team reviewed assessment documentation, including assignment briefs, support materials on the VLE and evidence of internal verification processes. The team also looked at the application of the College's policy on Recognising Prior Learning and Achievement and discussed assessment activity with teaching and support staff, students and employers.

2.56   The College has effective assessment procedures in place for the differing demands of its higher education provision. The College provides resources and environments to support practical activities. Hard copy and electronic learning resources are complemented by a developing use of new technologies. Students studying on any of the collaborative programmes have easy access to resources at Birmingham City University . Students studying the Foundation Degree in Islamic Studies have reference-only access to the special collection in the University of Birmingham library. Students also have access to the library facilities at Aston University and the Birmingham Public Library Service. External examiner reports confirm that both academic and practical assessment activities enable students to achieve module learning outcomes and that assessment evidence is graded appropriately. The College conforms with the assessment regulations of its awarding bodies and organisation. Students are made aware of the assessment requirements and academic regulations of their programme through programme handbooks and web links to information supplied by the awarding bodies and the awarding organisation.

2.57   The College follows the guidelines for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The College has developed a policy on RPL, but this is generic to both further and higher education and therefore the policy does not align explicitly with Chapter B6 of the Quality Code . The assessment of prior learning for admissions purposes is used extensively within the new HNC Business (Distance Learning) programme. Non-standard applicants are assessed by means of submission of a

CV and a 100-word supporting statement. The College has developed a generic assessment framework which complements the specific regulations of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. This has been aligned with Chapter B6 of the Quality Code. It provides useful guidance for staff on the principles of assessment and explains the standard processes and procedures for creating, grading and moderating assessments. The College is responsible for all initial assessment, including second marking. It has developed and implemented robust internal verification processes to support Pearson awards, including the development of a detailed internal verification policy. It was noted that, due to the early stage in the development of the distance learning programme, the external examiner has yet to confirm the effectiveness of internal verification for this programme. Some staff, including those teaching on the FdA Early Years, take part in moderation activities through the awarding body.

2.58   Birmingham City University provides clear guidelines on the timing and management of progression and awards boards, and there are regular meetings between the University and the College to discuss programme management and student progress. The University of Birmingham holds regular Boards of Examiners, but these are not necessarily attended by College staff. Directly funded Higher National programmes hold minuted internal assessment boards to confirm student achievement and on-course progression. The College does not have documented terms of reference for its directly funded Higher National assessment boards, but their operation is covered in the College's Assessment Framework.

2.59   Two programmes, the FdA Early Years and HNC Health and Social Care, include credit-bearing workplace learning activity. However, the College does not have a placement policy for its higher education programmes and does not use learning agreements to define or negotiate the learning to be drawn from a placement or work-based learning activity. Employers are not involved in summative assessment but may contribute to formative assessment .

2.60   The review team concludes that the College's approach to assessment and the arrangements for ensuring that students have appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the achievement of both academic and practical learning outcomes meet Expectation B6, and that the risk in this area is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.61   External examiners for programmes delivered on behalf of the three universities are appointed in line with the academic regulations of each respective university. The College is able to source and propose external examiners but the universities retain sole responsibility for their appointment. Pearson appoints the external examiners for its programmes in line with its own requirements.

2.62   The College has developed its own reporting procedures for external examiners to inform practice with regard to external examining arrangements on Pearson courses. University external examiners visit the College to meet staff and students, to carry out moderation duties and to attend formal examination boards. Pearson external examiners do not always attend examination boards but visit the College on separate occasions when they meet staff and students. They provide written annual reports which are considered by the College with action taken on matters arising. The College's approach to the management of its external examiners enables Expectation B7 to be met in design.

2.63   The review team tested the College's approach to this Expectation by considering a range of documentation including external examiners' reports and the College's overview report on these, along with annual monitoring reports. The team also met staff and students.

2.64   Programme handbooks contain detailed information for students on the role of the external examiner. The review team found, however, that while the College is aware of the need for students to meet external examiners, not all students the team met were aware of this requirement.

2.65   The College has comprehensive reporting procedures for external examiners for its Pearson provision and robust arrangements for considering and responding to all external examiner reports. These are shared with staff who, for university programmes, are required to draft responses which are then formally communicated to the examiners by the respective university. For Pearson programmes, responses are made directly by the College. The College's annual monitoring process requires reflection on the external examiner reports and the identification of any actions arising from these. The annual monitoring reports are considered at the relevant Board of Studies where student representatives are present. While some external examiner reports are available on the College's VLE facility, students whom the team met were unaware of the ways in which they could access the reports. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College ensures that all higher education students are able to access external examiner reports. A comprehensive overview report which encapsulates the main issues and concerns and good practice arising from the external examiner reports is compiled and actions arising are monitored by the Higher Education Manager. External examiner reports confirm that standards are being maintained on the College's courses.

2.66   In summary, responsibilities for the appointment of external examiners reside with the respective universities and Pearson. The College has robust arrangements to deal with external examiner reports and actively monitors actions arising from them. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B7 is met and the risk in this area 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

2.67   Annual programme monitoring takes place through Boards of Study, Quality and Curriculum Review Panels and the Quality and Curriculum Strategic Group. Action planning for continuous improvement is an integral part of the process.

2.68   All courses are monitored and reviewed annually. Programme Annual Reviews are completed every year for all awarding body programmes. Reports are fed into the awarding bodies' monitoring and review systems, with College staff playing an active role in monitoring meetings at Birmingham City University. An annual monitoring report is completed by programme teams for all directly funded Pearson programmes. All annual monitoring reports are used to inform divisional and College self-evaluation. The College monitors the effectiveness of its mechanisms for the oversight of higher education and this enables Expectation B8 to be met in design.

2.69   The review team tested the robustness and effectiveness of the College's continuous cycle of monitoring, review and action planning by looking at annual monitoring reports, programme annual reviews, minutes from Boards of Study and Quality and Curriculum Review Panels and the Summary of External Examiners' Reports 2014. Additional evidence viewed by the review team included external examiner reports, student feedback and module evaluations. The team discussed programme monitoring and review with senior and curriculum managers, teaching and support staff, representatives from Birmingham City University, students and employers.

2.70   The College has developed a thorough system of annual programme monitoring and review which is aligned to the requirements of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. All programmes are monitored and reviewed annually with programme teams holding the responsibility for completing annual monitoring reports. The College has developed a standard template for directly funded Pearson programmes, which allows for detailed recording and reflection on achievement and success data, and student and staff feedback. A detailed programme annual review is completed for each awarding body programme. At Birmingham City University these are presented to the university at a subject-based annual monitoring day.

2.71   Annual monitoring reports summarise and reflect on quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of sources such as examination or assessment board minutes, external examiners' reports, student views from Boards of Studies, module questionnaires and the National Students' Survey. The annual monitoring report requires the setting of an action plan. This is monitored throughout the year as part of the College's cycle of continuous improvement and considered at Quality and Curriculum Review Panel meetings.

2.72   Annual monitoring reports are reviewed strategically in Quality and Curriculum Review Panels, which inform higher education development needs and enhancement. Annual monitoring reports are also presented at Boards of Studies for discussion and approval by student representatives and reports are also made available to all students on the College VLE. Programmes that are awarded by Birmingham City University are also reported to the appropriate faculty annual monitoring scrutiny meetings at the University.

2.73   The College has developed robust processes for reviewing its provision and partnerships. Programmes are monitored throughout the year at programme team meetings. The College periodically reviews programmes and the awarding bodies and organisations themselves through the Quality and Curriculum Review Panel Meetings and through senior management team meetings. This activity is linked to the College's self-assessment reporting procedures. Where significant concern arises, programmes may be closed or placed in special measures, sanctioned by the Corporation.

2.74   The review team concludes that the College has effective procedures in place for the monitoring and review of its higher education provision. These include the involvement of students in the discussion and sign-off of annual monitoring reports at Boards of Study meetings. The procedures implemented by the College for its continuous cycle of programme review draw on a comprehensive range of data and evidence and allow for timely action planning. In conclusion, the team considers that Expectation B8 is met, and the risk in this area 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

2.75   The College's complaints procedure is used by all students with a complaint regarding the College in the first instance. The College also has the Errors in Conduct of Assessment or Exam Board procedure which is used by students on Pearson-validated programmes. Information regarding the appeals and complaint procedures is communicated to students in the handbook, on the College's VLE and during induction.

2.76   Appeals for franchised programmes are the responsibility of the awarding bodies. If an appeal or complaint is lodged with the College, it shares it with the partner and the Higher Education Manager will then investigate and feed back to the University. Appeals for directly funded programmes are addressed using the College's Academic Appeals Procedure. The appeals are submitted to the Higher Education Manager to investigate and respond to students, before the review stage with the Assistant Principal for Higher Education who will convene an appeals panel.

2.77   The College's procedures offer an opportunity for students and prospective students to raise grievances and for them to be considered and appropriately resolved. The College publicises the procedures in a number of different ways to ensure that students and prospective students are aware of them. These procedures enable Expectation B9 to be met in design.

2.78   In testing this Expectation, the review team considered the information provided by the College and the Students' Union. The team also met students, academic staff and professional staff to confirm an accurate reflection of the student experience.

2.79   The College's Complaints Procedure states that the Customer Liaison Officer will acknowledge a complaint within three working days. The Head of Division (who is responsible for dealing with the complaint) will respond in 10 working days. Complaints are analysed on a College basis and reported to the College Quality Curriculum Review Panel. Ultimate responsibility for the complaints procedure is with the access to further education team. There is analysis of student complaints, but this is not higher education specific, due to the small number of higher education students that complain (approximately two per year); instead students often raise issues informally prior to the formal procedure being activated.

2.80   Due to the small numbers of students using the formal procedures it is challenging for the College to make changes as a result of the formal procedures and instead it uses informal feedback to enact changes. Students are satisfied with the complaints and appeals processes available and will usually approach staff on an informal basis with an initial query rather than raising it through the formal channels. The 2013-14 Higher Education Induction Survey indicated that only 66 per cent and 65 per cent of students on Business ICT and Care courses are aware of the complaints procedure, but this was much higher on other courses. There has only been one academic appeal in the 2013-14 academic year. Students can be supported in the appeals process by Student Services who will also act in an advocacy role at the student's request.

2.81   The College has procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement. The review team concludes that Expectation B9 is therefore met and the level of risk in this area 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

2.82   The College works with a number of other organisations to whom it delegates some responsibility for the provision of some learning opportunities. The College's programmes in health and care which are delivered on campus include an integral work placement requirement to enable students to meet the professional practice requirements of the particular courses. The College produces a range of documentation to support staff and employers in the organisation and management of placement arrangements.

2.83   The distance-learning programme is delivered in partnership with a private organisation, Acquire Learning, that also provides recruitment, admissions and career advice and guidance . Acquire Learning has entered into a separate agreement with a third party to provide a learning management system. This system provides the distance learning students with access to learning materials, study skills, a discussion board and assessments.

2.84   While the College produces documentation to support work placements, there is a lack of formal agreements with placement providers. There are weaknesses in the procedures available for the development, approval and management of higher education with others. Therefore, the arrangements the College has for the approval and management of the provision with others do not enable Expectation B10 to be met in design.

2.85   The review team tested the College's approach to the management of its responsibilities for the quality of learning opportunities where other organisations are involved through the scrutiny of a range of documentation. The team examined partnership agreements for the distance learning provision, placement support documentation, minutes of meetings, briefing papers and tutor pro formas. It also met staff from the College, representatives from Acquire Learning, on-campus students, academic managers , teaching staff and professional services and support staff. The team undertook telephone conference calls with distance learning students and a representative from Pearson.

2.86   While the College does not have a written placement policy, the review team found that there are generally sound arrangements in place for securing and monitoring placements. The College has a large number of employers who provide placements and produces a range of useful documentation to support staff and employers in the organisation and management of these placements. Students are responsible for securing their own placement but support is also available from a placement officer who works in each curriculum area. The FdA Early Years work-based learning paperwork focuses on recording and auditing placement hours. There is a thorough Work-Based Placement Guide for the HNC Health and Social Care programme and comprehensive mentor guides for the HND Advanced Practice Working with Children and Families, Foundation Degree Early Years and for the HND in Health and Social Care.

2.87   Work placement mentors are appointed in each placement setting to support and guide the students but responsibility for all academic matters is retained by the College. There is a range of comprehensive documentation which includes a mentor briefing pack to ensure that mentors are aware of their responsibilities. Although there is documentation to support placements, the College does not use formal written agreements with placement

providers or work-based learning employers who are delivering learning opportunities on their behalf. While there is useful information exchange at the mentor level, the College does not make systematic use of formal written agreements with the management of all organisations providing placement learning opportunities. In addition, tri-partite learning agreements are not used throughout all programmes. The review team found that while the College has close working relationships with its placement providers, it does not formalise these. The team therefore **recommends** that the College establish formal written agreements with the employers who provide student placements.

2.88   The College recently entered into a partnership with Acquire Learning to deliver an HNC in Business by distance learning. The materials for the programme were originally made available to the students under licence from Pearson HN eLearning and Pearson entered into an agreement with Acquire Learning to this effect. The College provides the assessment briefs for the programme and academic tutors to support the students through the learning process. Supplementary materials and resources continue to be provided by the College on its own VLE. Following the withdrawal from eLearning by Pearson, Acquire Learning has entered into an agreement with a third party for use of its learning management system and access to the materials for the HNC in Business. Students on the HNC Business (Distance Learning) will not be able to access Pearson materials on the portal after July 2015.

2.89   The College considered a number of options for developing distance learning programmes. It maintains that while it did not undertake due diligence of the prospective partner, it did complete a thorough risk assessment and concluded that the risk was low. The documentation seen by the review team showed that the proposal was discussed by senior managers with updates for the senior management team and the Corporation. However a full, detailed risk assessment of the proposed provision, proportionate to the scale and potential rapid growth that illustrated how the decision for determining that this partnership was low risk, was not provided or made available to the review team. The partnership arrangement involves support activities in terms of recruitment, careers and job seeking but also covers the provision of the platform and new VLE, provided by a different external organisation, which is fundamental for the programme. The review team **recommends** that the College strengthen and clarify the arrangements for governance and determining risk to ensure there is a clearly articulated and systematic approach before entering into the delivery of learning opportunities with others.

2.90   The College has only recently developed its own programme approval procedure and therefore as the HNC by distance learning pre-dates this, it did not go through this approval process. However, the team was also told during the review visit that this internal programme approval process would not have been used for the distance learning programme as the College believes that, as a Pearson-approved centre delivering this programme on-campus, it does not need to validate a different mode of delivery. The review team was informed that the development of the distance learning provision had taken place quickly following an approach by Acquire Learning and was being piloted. The first cohort of students was enrolled in October 2014 and there has been a cohort enrolled each month since then, with two cohorts enrolled in December 2014. The short timescale between agreeing the project and students being enrolled has allowed limited time for planning and some aspects of the development have yet to be put in place. These include arrangements for student representation and gathering feedback from students in line with the College's arrangements for its on-campus students.

2.91   The College signed the agreement with Acquire Learning after the distance learning programme had commenced . Under the agreement Acquire Learning undertakes the recruitment and initial selection of the students with final acceptance and approval being

carried out by the College. Acquire Learning also provides careers support through its Rising Stars programme.

2.92   The College has in place a process for the annual monitoring of its programmes. As the HNC in Business by distance learning only commenced in October 2014, it has yet to go through the annual monitoring process. This process includes the evaluation of modules by students. Information is included in the distance learning student handbook which confirms that students will be asked to complete modules evaluations and, twice a year, to contribute to the boards of study process. No module evaluations have been completed as yet and the students who spoke with the review team were not aware of the module evaluation process. There is a distance learning steering group at the College and a course team. However, the review team noted from the minutes of these meetings and meetings with College staff that there did not appear to be systematic monitoring and review of the learning opportunities delivered by Acquire Learning. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College ensure effective and formal oversight and management of the learning opportunities delivered by others in line with its own policies and procedures.

2.93   The course tutors contact the distance learning students weekly by email or telephone and monitor student engagement. A process checklist is provided for tutors, records are maintained and individual student reports created by tutors. Distance learning students can access a range of central services including study skills and IT and learning needs support. Students who spoke with the review team were very satisfied with the level of support provided by College staff to date. However, the College has not informed students starting the course in January 2015 that Pearson has suspended its registration process for this programme. This issue is linked to the need to ensure that current and prospective students are kept informed of their registration status as outlined in the recommendation in Expectation B2, paragraph 2.19.

2.94   In summary, the College's arrangements for the delivery of learning opportunities with other organisations are only partially satisfactory. The organisation of work placements is generally sound but there is a need to ensure that agreements are established with work placement providers. Arrangements for the distance learning provision are not satisfactory and it is recommended that the College addresses concerns about governance, and the management of risk associated with this form of delivery with others. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B10 is not met and the risk in this area is moderate because of weakness in the operation of part of the College's governance structure as it relates to quality assurance.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.95   The College does not deliver research degrees.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.96   In reaching its judgements about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Eight out of the 10 applicable Expectations in this area are met with low risk and two are not met with a moderate risk. The team has identified three features of good practice and eight recommendations. There are no affirmations identified.

2.97   The review team identified good practice in the areas of learning and teaching and enabling student development and achievement. The College is committed to supporting its students in their progress into higher education and employment. It provides effective support for students in the transition from lower levels to higher education and has a clear focus on employability, supported by established links with employers. Staff teaching on higher education programmes are also given extensive support and opportunities to develop as practitioners.

2.98   In addition to recognising the good practice at the College, the review team did, however, identify a number of recommendations in the quality of student learning opportunities and two Expectations are not met. The review team concludes that the College does not meet Expectation B2 associated with recruitment and admissions and that this poses a moderate risk. There was a different understanding shown by staff and students in relation to the interview process for on-campus students. Therefore, the team recommends that the College clarifies its admissions interview policy and communicates this clearly to staff and prospective students. The team also recommends that all prospective and current students are kept fully informed about their admission and enrolment with the College and their registration status with the awarding body or organisation. This recommendation reflects the situation where students recently enrolling at the College on the HNC Business (Distance Learning) programme have not been informed of the current awarding organisation registration suspension. This recommendation also relates to Expectation C in terms of the provision of information that is trustworthy. Overall, Expectation B2 is not met and poses a moderate risk because of problems confined to the distance learning provision and insufficient emphasis or priority given to assuring standards or quality in the College's planning processes.

2.99   The review team concludes that the College does not meet Expectation B10 relating to managing higher education provision with others and that this also poses a moderate risk. In relation to the on-campus provision, the College does have a range of documentation to support students in placements and the team recommends that the College establish formal written agreements with the employers who provide student placements. The team also recommends that the College strengthen and clarify the arrangements for governance and determining risk to ensure there is a clearly articulated and systematic approach before entering into the delivery of learning opportunities with others. When entering into agreements, the College should ensure effective oversight and management of the learning opportunities delivered by others in line with its own policies and procedures. The recommendations relating to risk assessment and oversight of learning opportunities delivered by others are strongly linked to the recently developed distance learning provision. The issue of oversight is also linked to Expectation C in terms of the College ensuring that information given on its behalf is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. In addition, it relates to the need for robust monitoring mechanisms that enable any incorrect or potentially misleading information to be identified and amended. Overall, Expectation B10 is not met and poses a moderate risk because of weakness in the operation of part of the College's governance structure as it relates to quality assurance.

2.100   The review team recommends that the College revise the procedure for programme approval to ensure that all modes of study are subject to the approval process. This recommendation is related to the recently developed distance learning programme which did not go through the College internal approval process. While the process is newly developed, the College did not consider that the distance-learning programme needed to follow an internal approval process despite the lack of current experience of developing and delivering distance learning programmes and the differences compared to the on-campus course, such as the mode of delivery and staff to student ratio of 1:100.

2.101   The rapid introduction of the distance-learning programme has meant that some arrangements are still being discussed. For example, there are no clearly developed mechanisms for the representation of distance learning students to ensure that their collective voice is heard. The review team therefore recommends that the College should introduce and embed mechanisms to gather and respond to feedback from distance learning students in the enhancement of their educational experience.

2.102   In relation to all of its provision, the College should also ensure that all higher education students are able to access external examiner reports. There was evidence of some external examiner reports on the VLE, but a lack of student awareness relating to these.

2.103   In determining the judgement for the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team identified that most of the recommendations requiring action related to the recently introduced distance learning provision. This programme has been introduced very rapidly and current and predicted student recruitment is high in proportion to the overall higher education provision at the College. The rapid introduction, rolling monthly recruitment of students and the 1:100 staff to student ratio has been associated with the Concern submitted to the QAA Concerns Scheme. The recommendations relating to the Concern are primarily linked with the two Expectations in this area that are not met and pose a moderate risk. However, there are also links to Expectation C in that recently recruited students to the distance-learning programme are not being informed of a registration suspension with the awarding organisation and, at the time of the review visit, the programme was still being advertised and recruitment continuing. Therefore, the review team concludes that the discrepancy it identified between the quality of student learning opportunities available to on-campus and distance-learning students meant that, in line with paragraph 16 of the published handbook, it was appropriate to differentiate the judgement between these two categories. The quality of student learning opportunities for on-campus provision **meets** UK expectations. The quality of student learning opportunities for distance-learning provision **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations as there are some moderate risks which, without action, could lead to serious problems over time with the management of this area.

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 Website information is gathered from the College's information system which is updated by the curriculum teams. The College marketing team ensures the information is fit for purpose and that it aligns with the College's strategies and the requirements of the awarding bodies or organisation. The College produces a strategic plan which is published on the website and is supplemented by the Higher Education Strategy which sets out higher education priorities and an associated marketing plan.

3.2 The minimum information requirements for the VLE require the programme specification, academic regulations and appeals forms to be available. The College provides every student with a handbook that includes comprehensive information about student life and the College. The College processes and production of information enable the Expectation in Chapter C to be met in design.

3.3 In testing this Expectation, the review team considered information including the College website and associated organisations. The team also met students, academic staff and professional staff and had telephone discussions with students on the distance learning programme.

3.4 The College website includes a higher education section with published information for prospective students including programme details, the application process, fee and scholarship information, nearby accommodation and programme specifications. The College has a number of mechanisms to engage with employers, including 'InBusiness', a business network drawn from industry and community mentors designed to share ideas and help businesses expand. However, there is little information aimed specifically at employers on the College website.

3.5 The College website pages include programme specifications and entry requirements for each higher education programme. The information about the provider is included as the University for awarding body-validated programmes, but this is replaced with the College in the Pearson-validated programmes; this could be misleading for students, but is rectified in the programme specifications. The College uses the QAA review graphic on the website with the appropriate wording.

3.6 Prospective students are informed about the College's programmes through the College Higher Education Guide, the College website, social media and open days, as well as through Acquire Learning for the HNC in Business (Distance Learning) programme. This organisation uses targeted telephone marketing to advertise the programme to prospective students.

3.7 Acquire Learning's website for the HNC in Business (Distance Learning) programme has a number of inaccuracies including the College's name, the length of the programme and the precise course title, and this is replicated in their telephone script. The College should therefore ensure there is effective oversight where it has delegated its

responsibilities to an alternative organisation and this links to the recommendation in Expectation B10, paragraph 2.91.

3.8   There is a minimum information requirement relating to the VLE for all programmes. Course handbooks include detailed information on programmes, assessment, student support, academic regulations and study skills. Student support is available on the VLE and the students are satisfied that the level of information available on the website and on the VLE is good.

3.9   Programme teams issue transcripts 48 hours after an exam board. University awarding bodies issue certificates and Pearson provides certificates to the College which it then issues to students.

3.10   Information regarding quality assurance is kept on the VLE for staff to access at any time to enable up-to-date analysis and reflection. Staff can also access further information via the management information portal including student survey information and retention statistics.

3.11   The marketing team and curriculum teams ensure that prospective and current students are provided with up-to-date and suitable material. The processes that are in place work well and there are plans to enhance the current provision in the next few months. Where programmes do not adhere to the standard College processes, for example the HNC in Business (Distance Learning), the provision of website information is not as consistent and there is little evidence of the College's oversight and monitoring processes. The need for increased oversight is acknowledged in the recommendation outlined in Expectation B10, paragraph 2.91.

3.12   In December 2014 Pearson informed the College that they would no longer register distance-learning students until checks had been carried out. Students began the programme in January 2015 in the belief that their programme was validated by Pearson and at the time of the review visit had not been informed that the College could not register any further distance-learning students with Pearson until checks had been carried out. At the time of the review visit students were still being recruited for the February 2015 enrolment and no information was being provided regarding the pending registration status for students on this programme. This links to the recommendation concerning the need to keep students informed of their registration status as outlined in Expectation B2, paragraph 2.19.

3.13   The information about learning opportunities includes some inaccuracies and the College needs to ensure that the available information is accurate regarding the current status of the HNC Business (Distance Learning) programme. Overall, however, the information provided is largely fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation C is met and that the level of risk in this area is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.14   In reaching its judgement relating to the quality of information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no features of good practice or affirmations identified in this area but there are links with two recommendations that are present in the quality of learning opportunities section.

3.15   The College has a clear process for producing and monitoring information about learning opportunities. Students are satisfied with the information they have received from the pre-course stage onwards. However, the review team did identify some inaccuracies in the distance learning information and this supports the differentiated judgement in the quality of student learning opportunities. It therefore also supports the recommendations in B2 for students to be kept fully informed of their registration status and in B10 for the effective oversight of learning opportunities delivered by others.

3.16   The review team concluded that despite some inaccuracies, overall the College produces information that is largely fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Therefore, 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 student learning opportunities is articulated through its Strategic Plan 2014-16 and Higher Education Strategy. The College's strategic objectives and core values include drivers for enhancement. The College Corporation, together with the Senior Management Team, holds strategic responsibility for the enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

4.2 The Corporation and Senior Management Team retain close oversight of the College's higher education provision. There are senior and middle management personnel with designated responsibility for aspects of higher education. The Deputy Principal is the strategic lead for higher education. The approach to enhancement enables this Expectation to be met in design.

4.3 The review team tested the College's strategic and operational approach to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities through a review of the management structure, reading minutes of senior management meetings and the student submission and looking at students' engagement in quality assurance. To understand the College's strategic and operational approach to enhancement, the team also had discussions with the Principal, senior managers, curriculum managers, teaching and support staff, students and employers.

4.4 The College has a defined management structure for higher education quality assurance contained within the overall College management structure. The College's internal higher education quality assurance procedures are supported by an effective range of committees which permit a two-way flow of information between senior managers, assistant directors and teaching staff. There is a regular cycle of Boards of Study meetings which focus on programme-level management, quality assurance and delivery. Students are engaged actively through the Boards of Study and there is a higher education student governor.

4.5 Enhancement is driven by the Corporation and Senior Management Team and articulated through the College Strategic Plan and Higher Education Strategy. Enhancement decisions are informed by student and staff feedback. In direct response to feedback from students, in 2013 the College took the strategic decision to create a dedicated higher education centre on the Digbeth campus. There has been a phased move to consolidate most of the higher and professional education provision within the centre. The final programmes to be moved in 2015 will be those in construction. The move has given higher education students a more mature and quieter environment in which to work, with more tailored study and social learning spaces. Students and staff were consulted on the design and décor of the centre and students welcome the new working environment.

4.6 One of the College's strategic aims is to be responsive to the education and training needs of local communities. The College recruits a number of students from areas of high deprivation. As one measure to enhance learning opportunities, the College has introduced a scheme through which higher education students, on successful completion of their first term, can be provided with a mini tablet computer. This enhances their learning opportunities, including supporting digital literacy and opportunities for the use of mobile learning technologies. Approximately 175 higher education students benefited from this scheme in 2013-14.

4.7   Employability is a key strategic enhancement area for the College. The College has developed a wide range of formal and informal links with employers. It organises a wide variety of extra- and co-curricular business and employability events, for the benefit of all students. Through College industry weeks, students are provided with opportunities such as work shadowing and business creation games. The College has developed a strategic partnership with the InBusiness network which now works with higher education programmes at the College. A joint mentoring programme is being designed to match volunteer mentors with students to support studies and to provide opportunities for work experiences and help with employability skills or career goals, work shadowing, coaching and placements. This also provides a regular programme of talks given by famous or inspirational speakers.

4.8   The strategic focus on employability is seen within individual programmes. The FdA Early Years and HNC/D Health and Social Care programmes work especially closely with employers, and have embedded placement or work-based learning opportunities within the programmes. HND Creative Media - Computer Games Design is enhanced by the College hosting large-scale events like gameathons, which are supported by large multinational companies .

4.9   Music students do not have placements embedded in their courses, but they have a wide range of co-curricular opportunities, including paid work experiences in music performance, production and crewing. The external examiner for HND Popular Music Practice 2013-14 reported that 'The major strength of the course is that it so clearly prepares students for work in the industry, both as songwriters and/or performers and on the business side'. Good use is made of city centre music venues and companies, including workshops and events with large multinational companies. The Digbeth campus houses an auditorium which hosts commercial events. Students are employed to work at these functions and also have the opportunity of working with media students and gaining access to industry-standard equipment and products. This has enabled some of the music students to gain commercial work. The variety and frequency of work opportunities are much valued by music students.

4.10   The College has a clear strategy to enhance students' learning opportunities through developing its Higher Education Staff Training and Development Plan. Through a structured process of appraisal, staff are encouraged to develop as higher education practitioners. Staff are actively involved in professional updating and scholarly activity. Many are undertaking higher degrees, including examples at doctorate level. This has led to research activity informing developments in teaching and learning at the College. The College has implemented continuing professional development for higher education staff, linked to the UK Professional Standards Framework for Higher Education. There is encouragement for staff to gain fellowship or associateship of the Higher Education Academy and the first application for Senior Fellowship is being prepared. This has impacted on peers by promoting continuing professional development in higher education teaching and by introducing a placement peer mentoring research project into the College.

4.11   The College's e-Learning Strategy drives enhancement in teaching and learning. It focuses on technology making things easy for people to learn and includes a strategic drive to link home and College study capabilities. The College provides students with appropriate software for personal study use, access to a virtual desktop, and the ability to print from home and collect at College.

4.12   The review team concludes that the College's strategies for enhancing students' learning opportunities have resulted in a wide range of enhancement measures. The Corporation and senior management team explicitly acknowledge particular areas required to enhance the experience of higher education students. Student and staff views are considered and acted upon, informing some strategic decisions. Overall, the review team

concludes that the College takes deliberate steps to enhance the quality of the students' learning opportunities and therefore the Expectation is met and the risk in this area is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.13   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this area.

4.14   The College is committed to enhancing learning opportunities and has a strategic approach supported by the management structure. Staff members share good practice and there are innovative initiatives across a range of programmes to enable students to develop, particularly employability-related skills. Quality assurance systems are used to identify, address and monitor improvements.

4.15   The review team 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 takes a strategic approach to employability in terms of its external relationships with employers and employer groups, through its Employability Strategy and through the provision of support and guidance to students.

5.2   The College's comprehensive Employability Strategy emanates from its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and aims to ensure that employability is embedded in the curriculum so that students are developed to become confident and employable. It also aims to ensure students are able to become effective citizens, employees and entrepreneurs. Thus employability skills are a feature of all programmes. Live projects are a feature of some courses including organising and managing external events on the Fashion and Music courses and on Construction courses where students have been set assessments within the Birmingham New Street redevelopment project. The Small Business Enterprise module benefits from cooperation with the Prince's Trust which is involved in the design of the module assessment and provides feedback on the associated student presentations.

5.3   The College's Careers Service provides effective support and guidance on employment opportunities to students. This includes assistance with securing part-time employment and work placements during the course of their studies and advice on post-programme opportunities at the end of their course. In entering into an agreement with Acquire Learning for the delivery of the HNC Business (Distance Learning), the commercial provider provides careers and employability support. On enrolment students are provided with a Career Champion who maintains contact with the student to develop a CV and identify career progression. On completion of unit 4, the student is allocated a career hunter who will identify potential career opportunities and signpost prospective jobs.

5.4   The College ensures that employability is a feature of its courses through the involvement of employers at the design and review stages. Employers' views are canvassed with regard to the currency of the programme and the relevancy of modules and subjects. Health and Social Care and Early Years courses have minimum requirements for professional practice and work placements and the College works closely with employers who provide the placements. A comprehensive range of documentation underpins the placement process .

5.5   The College has developed effective strategic partnerships with a range of employment organisations. One is the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) which aims to re-establish Birmingham as the major driver of the economy outside of London. The College is also part of a Further Education Chamber Consortium which discusses policy with regard to employability and makes proposals to the GBSLEP. The most recent development concerns the implementation of a Level 4 apprenticeship in the construction sector. The College's partnership with the InBusiness network, which works with further and higher education programmes at the College, is currently developing a mentoring programme designed to match volunteer mentors with students to add value and provide opportunities for work experience . As mentioned above, the College also works closely with the Prince's Trust.

5.6   In summary, the College has a well-established and effective approach to the development of employability skills among its students through employer involvement in the curriculum, the provision of work placements and initiatives with employer organisations.

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 to 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 F**ramework 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 S**ubject 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.