Higher Education Review of Southampton City College

February 2015

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Southampton City College. The review took place from 10 to 13 February 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mrs Colette Coleman
- Mr Eric MacIntyre
- Miss Kate Wicklow (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Southampton City College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of Middlesex University **meets** UK expectations.
- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of Pearson **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The extensive mapping of the Quality Code against the BTEC HN Art and Design which strengthens curriculum planning and programme development (Expectation B1).
- The personal development support on the BA (Hons) Person-Centred Counselling and Psychotherapy that exceeds the expectations set by the professional body (Expectation B4).
- The comprehensive information provided to students on the BA (Hons) Person-Centred Counselling and Psychotherapy in both the course handbook and on the virtual learning environment (Expectation C).
- The range and quality of information, tools and resources published on the Information Station which support students to achieve their personal, professional and academic potential (Expectation C).

Recommendations

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

By July 2015:

- implement formal assessment boards for Higher National programmes in accordance with Pearson regulations and ensure accurate recording of assessment (Expectations A3.2, B6).

By September 2015:

- ensure definitive course records are standardised, implemented and embedded for all Higher National programmes (Expectation A2.2)
- formalise the approval mechanisms for all programmes including approval of definitive course records (Expectations A3.1, B1)
- ensure all students have a consistent higher education-appropriate induction experience (Expectation B2)
- formalise and publish assessment schedules and feedback deadlines for Higher National programmes (Expectation B6)

- clearly articulate the policy and procedures for academic appeals on Higher National programmes and ensure they are accessible to students (Expectations B9, C)
- produce and implement a standard format and minimum content requirement for Higher National course handbooks (Expectation C).

By December 2015:

- articulate, implement and embed the deliberative structures' reporting processes in regard to standards (Expectation A2.1)
- ensure robust annual monitoring processes are implemented and embedded and there is central oversight and monitoring for Higher National programmes (Expectations A3.3, B8)
- formalise procedures for approving and modifying the design and delivery structures of Higher National programmes (Expectation B1)
- ensure all issues identified in external examiner reports are effectively actioned, implemented and monitored at College level (Expectation B7)
- further develop and embed appropriate monitoring and review processes at course level to effectively capture areas of strength and areas for development to improve the quality of the student experience across the provision (Expectations B8, Enhancement)
- formalise and implement minimum standards for course materials published on the virtual learning environment (Expectation C)
- at College level ensure quality assurance procedures are used more systematically to identify opportunities for enhancement and to measure their impact (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The College-level initiative and positive steps being taken to further develop student engagement (Expectation B5).

Theme: Student Employability

The College has a strong vocational focus and a wide range of employability initiatives. Personal development planning is included in programme delivery and tutorials. Students are able to undertake a variety of real-world experiences and develop their professional practice while studying at the College. Students feel prepared for work through module content, live briefs and talking to tutors with current industry experience and are actively encouraged to think about their future career choices. Progression routes for HN programmes are clearly stated within course handbooks and the College designs their programmes with progression routes in mind. Students on the BA (Hons) programme undertake a work placement, have external clinical supervisory sessions and develop a personal learning log throughout their studies.

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

About Southampton City College

Southampton City College (the College) is a medium-sized general further education college based on a single main campus in Southampton with a specialist marine technologies centre situated on the River Itchen a mile away at Woolston. The College provision reaches from entry-level skills to advanced-level courses with higher education provision linked to employment and professional development. In recent years the College has undertaken a major capital development programme, investing £48 million in its Estate.

The College's mission is to provide a high-quality source of education, training and promotion of learning and to enable individuals and business to thrive and succeed. The College's vision is to provide outstanding education and training that raises the aspirations of learners and enables them to achieve their goals.

Since the last review there have been changes to the senior management team and to staff responsibilities for higher education provision.

The College faces challenges caused by the economic downturn and significant reductions in funding streams for further education. The governing body and executive risk-manage all aspects of the provision to maintain good financial health and have systems in place to ensure the continuing quality and academic standards of all the provision. The College is committed to widening participation and at higher education level this is demonstrated through the support and encouragement given to level 3 students and those who progress via non-traditional routes, whether by progressing within the College or onto another higher education institution.

At the time of the review visit, approximately 200 students were enrolled on higher education programmes. The College has partnership agreements with one higher education institution, Middlesex University (the University), and with Pearson. The BA (Hons) Person-Centred Counselling and Psychotherapy programme is delivered by the College and validated by the University. The College delivers Higher National (HN) programmes validated by Pearson in Construction, Engineering, Art and Design, Photography, Dance and Hospitality. The College has a small number of directly HEFCE-funded students studying on part-time higher education programmes in Engineering and Construction.

Since the last review the College has made mixed progress with regard to the features of good practice and recommendations identified. The BA (Hons) programme continues to be managed effectively with areas of strength. The virtual learning environment (VLE) has not remained as a feature of good practice and there are new recommendations arising regarding the way in which it is used. The minutes from the Higher Education Board of Studies (HEBOS) do not indicate that student representatives actively participate as partners in the quality assurance of their learning experiences or that they have a more prominent role in quality assurance management or spreading of good practice. There continues to be concerns over staffing in Construction and Engineering. There continues to be an inconsistent approach taken to HN handbooks. The College has enhanced its relationships with employers.

Explanation of the findings about Southampton City College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

Explanation of the findings about Southampton City College

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and 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 BA (Hons) programme is informed by relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and _The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland_ (FHEQ) as well as guidelines provided by the relevant professional body, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. The Pearson HN programmes the College delivers are designed and approved by Pearson.

1.2   The University and Pearson take ultimate responsibility for ensuring the UK and European reference points for academic standards are used to secure threshold academic standards and the College takes shared responsibility to use these reference points to maintain threshold academic standards. Regular checks are made by both the University and Pearson**,** enabling this Expectation to be met in theory.

1.3   The review team met staff from across the College as well as the Quality Enhancement Manager (Partnerships and Quality Monitoring) from the University. The team reviewed evidence of the latest revalidation of the BA (Hons) programme which took place in 2014 and the programme specifications for both the University and Pearson programmes.

1.4   The course teams demonstrated a good understanding of the national benchmarks and how they inform curriculum development. The programme specifications across the provision show which Subject Benchmark Statement is being used to inform the delivery of

the programme. On one programme the course leader explicitly mapped the course against the Expectations of the Quality Code. At the time of the periodic review for the BA (Hons) programme, the College was asked to revisit the programme specification to include more specific references to Subject Benchmark Statements and the review team saw evidence that this had been undertaken.

1.5   The review team found evidence that relevant UK reference points are being used and understood by the College. Therefore, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.6 For the delivery of the BA (Hons) programme the College is required to adhere to the academic framework and regulations of Middlesex University. For Pearson HN programmes, the College is required to adhere to the Pearson frameworks and regulations. The College also produces its own quality manual for the management of their wider provision which includes annual monitoring processes that are applicable to the higher education programmes they offer. Regulations are available to staff and students through the VLE.

1.7 The College has a Higher Education Board of Study (HEBOS) which oversees the higher education programmes. The operational management of and decisions regarding higher education are discussed and agreed at senior management team (SMT) meetings. Management at programme level is undertaken at department-wide attendance, retention, achievement and quality (ARAQ) meetings as well as informal course team meetings. Staff and students on the BA (Hons) programme are invited to the programme committee held at the University.

1.8 Both the University and Pearson require the College to run assessment boards. The BA (Hons) programme meets the requirements of the University. New terms of reference for the HN programmes were drafted and awaiting approval at the next HEBOS These include both confirmation of students' grades and a review of the programme.

1.9 The combination of the HEBOS, SMT and ARAQ meetings, informal course team meetings and adherence to the University and Pearson regulations should allow the College to meet this Expectation in theory.

1.10 The review team reviewed a flowchart of new committee processes as well as new terms of reference and a new operation guide for HN assessment boards. The team also considered minutes of the BA (Hons) programme assessment boards as well as HN Engineering for 2014 and terms of reference and minutes from HEBOS. ARAQ minutes were also reviewed, as well as minutes from an SMT meeting and a selection of course-level meetings from one programme and external examiner reports. The review team met senior staff, teaching staff and students from the College and the Quality Enhancement Manager (Partnerships and Quality Monitoring) from the University.

1.11 The College is currently in the process of implementing and embedding a new committee structure to ensure the effective management of all higher education provision. At the time of the review, the new structure had not been fully implemented and therefore the team were unable to see how each of the stages works in practice. HEBOS has responsibility for overseeing the self-assessment review (SAR) process and the quality improvement plan (QIP) process which relate to higher education as well as the oversight of external examiner reports. However, evidence of HEBOS' role in determining new programmes and having strategic oversight of decisions relating to the management of standards was limited. For example, the HEBOS minutes relating to the 2014 external examiners' reports made no mention of the actions being taken after extensive issues were picked up by one external examiner.

1.12   The new terms of reference and the development of an operation guide for the new HN assessment boards were in progress at the time of the review. Before the introduction of these new committee structures and processes, there was mixed nomenclature and practice in the way departments maintained academic standards on HN programmes, in particular the way in which the College ran assessment boards. 2013-14 programme handbooks cited boards of study for HN students in Photography, Construction and Art and Design, all of which ran an assessment board in addition to reviewing the course. For HN Engineering, the department ran a separate annual course review meeting and board of study, but not an assessment board. The review team was not provided with evidence of the running of boards of study within each of the HN programmes and it was confirmed in meetings that not all HN programmes have run assessment boards, which is in direct violation of Pearson regulations.

1.13   The review team found it unclear how course teams make decisions about the management of the HN programmes. ARAQ minutes do not demonstrate how course teams identify issues and produce actions. An example was given of a paper to SMT which showed a summary of all of the comments, and an initial commentary on updates to appropriate actions from the course team. The external examiner for HN Construction noted little progress had been made on the previous year's report and identified that there was no evidence to demonstrate how the programme had been managed and monitored. Staff also confirmed that course-level decisions in relation to standards are not being fed into a higher committee such as HEBOS. This was primarily done through the SAR process, which the review team found does not explicitly address issues relating to higher education programmes.

1.14   At the time of the review, there was limited evidence to demonstrate the full operation and effectiveness of the new deliberative structures and quality assurance processes relating to the oversight and maintenance of standards. Therefore the review team **recommends** that the College articulate, implement and embed the deliberative structures' reporting processes with regard to standards.

1.15   Overall, the review team concludes that the College does not effectively adhere to the Pearson regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications, particularly in regards to assessment boards. Therefore, Expectation A2.1 is not met. As the College has shown failings of managing standards within one HN programme which was not significantly recognised in the evidence provided to the review team, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.16   For the BA (Hons) programme the definitive course documentation, including the programme specification, is produced following validation or review and is wholly fit for purpose. The documentation is clear and accessible to staff and students in both printed format and on the virtual learning environment (VLE). It provides an up-to-date, definitive record of the award.

1.17   For all HN programmes, the College has recently introduced a requirement to produce contextualised programme specifications, although some had previously been produced. These make reference to the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Programme specifications are not written in a common format and have not been through a formal approval process before production. A decision has not yet been taken on where they will be published and thus not all HN programme specifications have been included in student handbooks or published on the VLE.

1.18   By following the requirements of the University, Pearson and the College's own guidelines for producing HN contextualised programme specifications, the College could in theory meet this Expectation.

1.19   The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements and resources through an analysis of programme handbooks and programme specifications, a review of the College's VLE and discussions with senior staff, academic staff and students.

1.20   The review team found the definitive documentation produced for the BA (Hons) programme is comprehensive and is used effectively by validating partners and College staff and students. Changes to definitive documents are formally approved by the University and a form is completed and sent to the Link Tutor. Changes were made and approved at the recent review meeting, but do not go through HEBOS.

1.21   For Pearson programmes, the review team found lack of contextualisation and variation in the format and production of the definitive programme records. In meetings, staff acknowledged the need to standardise the format of HN programme specifications and of their importance as definitive course documents for both staff and students. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure definitive course records are standardised, implemented and embedded for all HN programmes.

1.22   While they lack standardisation and consistency, the College does maintain a definitive programme record for each programme and qualification. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A2.2 is met in both design and operation. However, due to the lack of contextualisation to date and the inconsistencies found in producing definitive programme records for HN programmes and the inconsistent use of HEBOS in changes to programme specifications, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

1.23   Course development, design and approval processes are aligned with and overseen by the University and Pearson. The BA (Hons) programme was developed by the College and validated by the University. This programme is subject to the University review processes and the programme was successfully revalidated following periodic review in 2014. The development of the programme has been informed through links with the British Association for Person-Centred Approach and Psychotherapy (BACP). The programme specification for the BA (Hons) programme clearly references the FHEQ and relevant reference points and is published to students in the programme handbook.

1.24   The College's curriculum planning process for 2015-16 outlines the approach for identifying and approving new programme proposals prior to development. The Curriculum Planning Nuts and Bolts document provides guidance on planning delivery. Managers undertake a curriculum planning exercise commencing in November with final sign-off in March. The process seeks to evaluate current provision in terms of success, recruitment and relevance to the College's strategic plan. Ideas for a new curriculum, including higher education provision, were discussed at the December 2014 curriculum planning meeting and presented to Academic Board. Following sign-off, the curriculum is confirmed and marketed. The guidance includes market analysis and removal of courses. The College's course approval process does not result in a definitive programme specification and delivery structure. Therefore, in design, this Expectation is not met.

1.25   The team reviewed the self-evaluation document and supporting evidence such as curriculum planning guidance, programme handbooks, QIPs, the course proposal for HNC Dance and minutes of curriculum planning meetings. The team reviewed the VLE in consideration of curriculum planning. The team also met members of course teams and senior staff to explore the operation of procedures, as well as questioning students on their experience.

1.26   The processes for proposing and approving new provision are effective in responding to demand and employer needs but do not result in a definitive course record or a formalised delivery structure. It is not evident how the College assures itself that the curriculum is planned and delivered in accordance with specifications. Furthermore, the formalisation of the delivery structure is inconsistently presented in programme information. In meetings with students it was clear that some students did not always understand the delivery structure of their programme and some are now required to catch up on units which had not been delivered.

1.27   In the meeting with managers it was confirmed that the HNC Performing Arts was approved using the 2014-15 curriculum planning process and the curriculum proposal demonstrates the College's approach to course planning pre-marketing. The HEBOS terms of reference includes consideration and recommendation of new programmes but the minutes provided did not demonstrate this, and it was confirmed that the HNC Performing Arts was not considered at HEBOS.

1.28   Changes to delivery structures of Pearson programmes do not go through a formal approval process but are determined by programme leaders and learning managers. The College provided an example of how it had made use of a Consortium higher apprenticeship framework for construction management which incorporates the HND Construction and Built Environment to determine which units it selected.

1.29   In light of the above, the review team **recommends** the College formalise the approval mechanisms for all programmes including approval of definitive course records.

1.30   The review team considers that the approval processes for Pearson HN programmes are insufficiently robust as the absence of an approval process, which results in a published definitive record for some of the HN programmes, represents a significant gap in the College's quality assurance mechanisms. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.1 is neither met in design nor in operation. The recommendation relates to shortcomings in the processes and in terms of the rigour with which the relevant quality assurance procedures are applied to HN programmes. The associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.31   For the BA (Hons) programme the College follows the academic frameworks and regulations of the University. Additional guidance is provided by University Link Tutors. The annual assessment and awards board takes place at the College and is chaired by the University Link Tutor, and minutes confirm standards and confirmation of results and achievement of awards. The external examiners for the BA (Hons) programme consider the standards of marking to be high and the procedures for assessment and examination clearly laid out.

1.32   For HN programmes the College is required to adhere to Pearson frameworks and regulations. In 2013-14 there was inconsistent practice in holding assessment boards. The College has produced a process for assessment boards for HN programmes for 2014-15 which will consider grading.

1.33   The team reviewed the self-evaluation document and scrutinised supporting evidence including minutes from boards of studies, summary reports provided to students, grade tracking sheets, external examiner reports and minutes which outline the College's approach to recording outcomes of assessment boards and reporting outcomes to the University and Pearson. The team also met members of course teams and senior staff to explore the operation of the procedures, as well as questioning students about their experience.

1.34   The team found inconsistent practice in assessment boards for HN programmes in 2013-14. For example. the assessment board for HN Photography was effectively managed but an assessment board was not held for HN Construction in accordance with Pearson's regulations. The external examiner report for Engineering includes an action to introduce a formal exam board. Draft terms of reference have been written for higher education assessment boards but the team was not provided with any evidence of these in practice. The lack of policy and inconsistent practice of holding assessment boards and recording outcomes for HNs in 2013-14 means that the College did not have sufficient oversight of the recording of achievement of credit and awards prior to publishing results. Therefore, the review team **recommends** the College implement formal assessment boards for HN programmes in accordance with Pearson regulations and ensure accurate recording of assessment.

1.35   The processes for the BA (Hons) programme are rigorous and effectively implemented. The review team found that the processes for operating HN assessment boards and recording outcomes for HN could not be fully evidenced and did not meet Pearson's assessment regulations. The team was provided with evidence of the action being taken to formalise processes for 2015. Therefore, overall the review team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is neither met in design nor operation. The College has not responded

effectively to some external examiner comments and the processes for HN assessment boards are insufficiently robust. Therefore, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: **Not met**
Level of risk: **Moderate**

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

1.36   The BA (Hons) programme is reviewed by the University according to its review procedures; the College produces a programme annual monitoring report which is submitted to the University and is in accordance with its guidelines but does not go through College meeting structures. The programme was successfully reviewed in 2013 as part of the University six-yearly review cycle and revalidated.

1.37   With regard to standards, Pearson takes primary responsibility for reviewing the programmes. All HN programmes have an external examiner who provides an annual report on standards and achievement of learning outcomes. A summary of external examiner reports is considered by the SMT and HEBOS. Students are asked to complete unit, project and end-of-year evaluations which are examined and used to inform changes to programme delivery that are within the responsibility of the College.

1.38   The College has systems for module review, annual self-assessment and action planning that are overseen by the management team. Each programme completes a course-level review which feeds into a department annual self-assessment report (SAR) that is informed by Ofsted's Common Inspection Framework criteria, resulting in a College-wide SAR. In response to actions emerging from the College SAR, each department establishes department-level QIPs. These are completed and monitored during Teaching Quality and Learning days and at recently introduced ARAQ meetings. In theory, these processes enable the College to meet the Expectation.

1.39   The review team considered the self-evaluation document, Quality Assurance and Improvement Manual, course reviews, SARs, quality improvement plans, external examiner reports, minutes of HEBOS and minutes of ARAQ meetings outlining the College's approach to monitoring and review of provision. The team also met members of course teams, senior staff and the University to explore the operation of the procedures, as well as questioning students on their experience.

1.40   The team found that monitoring and review processes made limited reference to HN programmes and there was no evidence of the course-level report feeding into the SAR for Engineering. The College was unable to provide a course-level report for Construction. The course-level reviews do not make any reference to external examiner reports but do capture student feedback. According to the self-evaluation, the College intends to establish a practice of completing annual monitoring reports for HN programmes in 2015 along similar lines to the annual monitoring report produced for the University. The team was not provided with evidence of this new process. The College acknowledged a need for clearer focus on higher education in their monitoring and review processes. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure robust annual monitoring processes are implemented and embedded and there is central oversight and monitoring for HN programmes.

1.41   The review team found the processes for monitoring the BA (Hons) programme are well established and rigorously implemented by staff within the College. The processes for monitoring and review of HN programmes are insufficiently developed. There is some

evidence of action being taken to address this, but the team was unable to see this in practice. Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.3 is neither met in design nor operation. There are monitoring and review processes in place but they are limited in their effectiveness to provide the College with a holistic view of the performance of higher education programmes. Therefore, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: **Not met**
Level of risk: **Moderate**

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

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

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

Findings

1.42   The College engages with external examiners, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), and employers to support the design and development of their curriculum offer and the maintenance of academic standards. External examiners are in place across all provision. The BA (Hons) programme uses the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy requirements to map against their programme. Where appropriate, professional bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Building and the Chartered Institute of Building Engineers are used to support the design and development of the College provision. The College runs a series of Employer Advisory Boards within relevant disciplines which helps them to develop their curriculum offer with employer and graduate needs in mind.

1.43   The processes and mechanisms the College has in place to engage with external experts enable this Expectation to be met in theory.

1.44   The review team met senior staff, academic staff and professional support staff and spoke to a number of local employers. The team also received minutes of the Marine Advisory Board, external examiners' reports and evidence relating to the development of links between the College and universities and professional bodies.

1.45   The review team found the College has an effective process for consulting with local employers on the educational needs of the local workforce. Through the Employer Advisory Boards and the Business Development Team/Apprentice Coordinators, links are being used to develop an educational offer which meets both the needs of students and the local region. In subject areas where there are no advisory boards, the College consults with local employers in the design and delivery of the course. Employers are also involved in providing feedback to the College about the curriculum content.

1.46   Professional bodies are also being used in curriculum planning. The BA (Hons) programme is mapped against the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy requirements and the College is working towards formal accreditation this year. Staff are aware of associated professional bodies within their fields and are actively engaged in understanding the academic expectations of their subject areas.

1.47   For the HN Construction programme, staff use the Leeds Consortium Higher Apprentice framework for construction management, even though the College itself is not a member of the Consortium. Within this programme the academic staff also make use of Southampton Solent University's laboratory facilities and staff expertise. The College is in the process of further developing its relationships with local universities to support the delivery of HN programmes, which offer students access to equipment and expertise the College would otherwise not be able to provide. The College has signposted students to relevant progression options after completion of their HN qualification, and courses are developed with student destinations in mind. The review team found that, generally, the

College makes satisfactory use of the external examining processes with regard to standards. However, the review team found that the College has not taken sufficient consideration of some issues identified by external examiners in HN Construction and HN Engineering (see section B7).

1.48   In summary, the College makes satisfactory use of relevant external experts at key stages of maintaining academic standards, although more effective use could be made of external examining processes on HN programmes. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.50   Of the seven Expectations in this area, three are met and four are not met. Five Expectations have a moderate associated level of risk. There are no features of good practice and no affirmations. There are five recommendations.

1.51   The College is limited in how it has oversight and monitors the maintenance of standards across the higher education provision. Thus, the review team recommends that the College articulate, implement and embed the deliberative structures' reporting processes in regard to standards (A2.1). This relates to both the University and Pearson provision.

1.52   For the BA (Hons) programme the College has clear definitive programme records. However, for HN programmes, the practice is varied and does not adhere to Pearson regulations. Therefore, the review team recommends that the College ensure definitive course records are standardised, implemented and embedded for all HN programmes (A2.2). Following on from this, the review team found that there is no formal approval process for definitive course records on any programmes and it is not a part of programme approval or review processes. The review team recommends that the College formalise the approval mechanisms for all programmes including approval of definitive course records (A3.1). Without action on these two recommendations, this could lead to serious problems over time with the maintenance of academic threshold standards.

1.53   The review team identified variable practice and a number of issues relating to HN programme assessment, in particular the lack of an effective and consistent approach to assessment boards across the HN provision. The College has not responded effectively to the issues identified by the external examiners or the requirement for the College to implement assessment boards for HN Construction and Engineering. The review team recommends the College implement formal assessment boards for HN programmes in accordance with Pearson regulations and ensure accurate recording of assessment (A3.2).

1.54   In regard to monitoring and review, the BA (Hons) programme is effective and meets the requirements of the University. While the monitoring and review processes are broadly adequate for HN programmes, there are inconsistencies in how they are applied. The College's limited response to the issues raised by external examiners on HN programmes suggests that the College may not be fully aware of the significance of certain issues. Therefore, the review team recommends that the College ensure robust annual monitoring processes are implemented and embedded and there is central oversight and monitoring for HN programmes (A3.3).

1.55   Recommendations in this area relate to quality assurance procedures, which while broadly adequate, have shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied. The problems are generally related to HN programmes.

1.56   The judgement for the maintenance of threshold academic standards is differentiated. The review team concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the University **meets** UK expectations. However, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of Pearson **requires improvement to meet** 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 and approval of programmes.

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

Findings

2.1   Higher education programmes offered by the College are designed and developed by either the University which approves programme delivery in its validation process or Pearson for which the College is an approved centre for delivery.

2.2   The College has a curriculum planning process which has focused on further education although evidence was provided that the 2015-16 process will include higher education. The College uses this process to identify new provision and the process for the design and approval of programmes is described in detail under section A3.1. The course approval process was used for approving HN Dance, although this was prior to requirement for HEBOS approval. In some cases employers' views are sought for curriculum design. These processes enable the College to meet this Expectation in theory.

2.3   The review team analysed the self-evaluation and student submission and reviewed a number of documents such as curriculum planning guidance, new course approval flow chart, minutes of HEBOS, the HNC Art and Design Quality Statement, the BA (Hons) programme review and compliance reports, the HNC Building Services Engineering course structure and the HNC Dance new course proposal and Delivery Rationale. In addition the team spoke to members of course teams and senior staff, students and employers regarding their experience of design and approval processes.

2.4   The processes for design and approval do not provide clear guidance in regard to the quality of learning opportunities and it is not evident how the College assures itself that the curriculum is delivered in accordance with specifications. Some students did not understand the delivery structure of their programme and some are now required to catch up on units which had not been delivered the previous academic year. Not all students felt fully briefed on changes to their course.

2.5   This supports the recommendation made in section A3.1 that the College formalise the approval mechanisms for all programmes including approval of definitive course records.

2.6   The review team found that the processes used to select and approve appropriate units for Pearson HN programmes and oversee delivery structure are conducted at a local level and the College did not provide evidence of oversight at College level. Proposed changes for HN programmes and the BA (Hons) programme are not approved by the College deliberative structures. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College formalise procedures for approving and modifying the design and delivery structures of HN programmes.

2.7   The HNC Art and Design course was mapped extensively against the Quality Code as part of curriculum planning. This has enabled the team to reflect on how learning opportunities can be enhanced. For example, following course team and student feedback, students were provided with longer drawing classes and one of the units being delivered was replaced during the first week of delivery with a lens-based recording unit which was more

beneficial to the students than studio photography. Therefore, the review team considers the extensive mapping of the Quality Code against the BTEC HN Art and Design, which strengthens curriculum planning and programme development, to be **good practice**.

2.8   The College works effectively with the University to design and approve the BA (Hons) programme, but the process for designing and approving HN programmes needs further development. Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B1 is met in both design and operation. However, due to the lack of formal mechanisms for approving and modifying the design and delivery structures and definitive course records on HN programmes, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.9   The College has delegated responsibilities for recruitment, selection and admission to its BA (Hons) programme and is responsible for recruitment, selection and admissions to its Pearson HN programmes. Recruitment procedures and entry criteria to the BA (Hons) programme are approved at validation. The College's admissions policy outlines its general admissions practices, College responsibilities and right of appeal. Students who choose to progress internally are provided with appropriate information from higher education staff. General information is provided by College careers advice staff. Local employers refer and sponsor students on higher education programmes in Engineering and Construction. All applicants, regardless of means of admission, are interviewed to ensure minimum criteria are met and to assess suitability for the programme. Applicants to arts programmes are expected to provide a portfolio of work or undertake an audition at interview. Induction programmes are designed and delivered at department level. The College undertakes an application and induction questionnaire.

2.10   The systems, policies and procedures in place should ensure fair recruitment, selection and admission.

2.11   The team reviewed various College documents relating to admissions such as the full and part-time prospectuses and the admissions policy. The review team also tested the College's approach to recruitment, selection and admissions through meeting with staff responsible for admissions, senior staff, academic staff and other professional support staff.

2.12   The review team found that students are satisfied with the recruitment and selection processes followed in admitting them to the College and noted they had been well advised. Central support staff involved in recruitment and admissions activities have undertaken Information, Advice and Guidance courses and the College has Matrix accreditation, a quality mark which indicates quality in this area.

2.13   The College does not currently have a consistent approach to induction. Course teams plan and run their own induction programmes in conjunction with staff from the Library Resource Centre, who offer sessions on such aspects as study skills and Harvard academic referencing skills. The students the review team met were happy with the course-level induction activities and the sessions from Library Resource Centre staff. However, the results of the Application and Induction Questionnaire in September 2014 identified that on some programmes not all students had received the course handbooks, some students had not been informed about how to access additional support and some students had not been informed about financial and other support available to them. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure all students have a consistent higher education-appropriate induction experience.

2.14   Overall, the College policies and processes for recruitment, selection and admission are appropriate and are implemented to ensure fair admissions. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B2 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.15   The College has a number of policies relating to the development of teaching and learning practice including a staff development policy, a higher education-specific peer review policy and a staff appraisal framework. The College is in the process of developing a new learning and teaching strategy. The College also operates an advanced teacher scheme which supports new teaching staff and provides pedagogic support to all staff teaching across the College. Outcomes from observations and appraisals are shared at the HE Practitioners group meeting and informally at Teaching Quality and Learning days and staff conferences. The College operates a VLE which houses teaching and learning resources such as course materials, assignment details, quizzes and embedded videos as well as links to further learning resources.

2.16   The policies, procedures and mechanisms in place provide a basis for effective learning and teaching, allowing the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.17   To test this Expectation, the review team met a range of students and staff across the College as well as a selection of local employers. Evidence provided covered strategy, staff development and performance, and College committees with responsibilities for teaching and learning.

2.18   At the time of the review, the new learning and teaching strategy was due to go to the SMT and the governing body for approval. However, teaching staff were unaware of the development of a new strategy and had not been consulted as part of the process.

2.19   The review team found that the staff are aware of their responsibilities as teachers of higher-level programmes, and some had engaged in the peer observation process, outcomes of which are shared through the HE Practitioner meetings and HEBOS. Overall, staff were positive about developing their professional practice, and felt supported by their colleagues, including the advanced teachers. One staff member had recently applied for the Higher Education Academy Fellowship programme with more staff being encouraged to do so. Staff engage in continuing professional development, either by undertaking further study or engaging in professional practice. Students who the review team met with were very complimentary about the quality of teaching received.

2.20   The review team found inconsistent practice by staff in the use of the VLE, though students commented positively on the content available to them. Training is available for staff and the College is starting to monitor how courses are using the different elements.

2.21   Overall, the College has a number of policies and procedures to ensure the effectiveness of teaching practitioners, and staff are able to actively engage in scholarly and professional practice. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B3 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.22   The College provides students with a variety of higher education-appropriate resources and services to support their learning including the library, the Learning Resources Centre, the Student Success Centre, e-books and the Information Station. Within the library, the College has developed a specific space for higher education students. The library team also arranges additional study workshops focused on improving academic literacy. The Student Success Centre provides tailored support for students including for those with declared additional learning needs. Students have access to specialist equipment either directly from the College or through relationships with local universities. Student services are annually reviewed using the College SAR and QIP processes.

2.23   Students are allocated a primary tutor who supports student academic development. Information is given to students about the role in their student handbooks which is varied across the subject disciplines. Students on the BA (Hons) programme attend tutorial sessions run by an external supervisor and a yearly Summer School.

2.24   Students on the BA (Hons) programme undertake a required placement to become certified. This placement does not form part of their formal learning experience within the College, but the College takes responsibility for ensuring the placement provider is appropriate. The College runs its own counselling service which also offers placements.

2.25   All HN courses at the College are vocational. Each course explicitly signposts students to opportunities for academic progression and courses are developed with student destinations in mind. The College is currently in the process of developing more formal progression links with a number of local universities.

2.26   For students on the HN Art and Design programmes, live briefs are used extensively. Briefs are commissioned through College engagements with local employers, as well as through employer-led initiatives. The College also commissions students to undertake work. For other HN courses, the curriculum is centred around 'real work' scenarios which enable students to apply their learning to their profession.

2.27   HN Construction students have the opportunity to use Southampton Solent University labs for their course, and a specific module is taught by Southampton Solent University staff. Field trips are organised jointly by the University and College and students also informally work with Southampton University students through an exchange programme.

2.28   The arrangements and resource in place enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The review processes allow the College to evaluate and improve what is made available to students. Therefore, the Expectation is met in theory.

2.29   To test this Expectation in operation, the review team met senior managers, academic staff, students and professional support staff from student services teams. The team reviewed the 2013-14 student services QIP and SAR as well as student handbooks, a statement on student services, the annual monitoring report and revalidation report for the BA (Hons) programme and copies of external examiners' reports. The review team also considered results from College surveys.

2.30   The review team found students are generally satisfied with both the academic and central support available to them and that they specifically value the support from their tutors who are industry specialists. Students spoke favourably of the specialist facilities available to them, including the lending of specialist equipment for both academic and personal use, and the encouragement of staff to develop their professional skills. The student services team was awarded Matrix accreditation in 2014 and all staff are able to access professional development. Students praised the support offered to disabled students and the College SAR for the student services department shows high attainment statistics for students whom the team have supported. However, College survey results show many students are not aware of the full range of support services available.

2.31   The review team found that students are able to receive a varied learning experience through placements, live briefs and the academic curriculum. Students understand what is expected of them on work placements, and although they mentioned some anxiety about having to secure a placement, once on placements they feel supported by both the College and the placement provider. Similarly, students were very enthusiastic about their experiences of live briefs and found them beneficial. Clients who commissioned the live briefs were satisfied with the students' work.

2.32   Students on the BA (Hons) programme spoke highly of the support offered to them through the external clinical supervisor and the summer schools, and stated that these helped them reflect on both their personal and professional practice while developing a supportive environment. The BA (Hons) programme support services received a commendable judgement from the University in the annual monitoring reports and the revalidation report. The review team considers the personal development support on the BA (Hons) that exceeds the expectations set by the professional body to make a particularly positive contribution to the students' learning experience and to be **good practice**.

2.33   The review team noted a number of issues that had arisen for the HN Construction students in regard to staffing, delivery schedules, assessment briefs and summative feedback. The College has responded to these issues by creating a staff board but no formal action plan has been drawn up to address the issues arising from a lack of staff support for students.

2.34   Overall, the College has in place, monitors and evaluates a wide range of support services and opportunities for students to develop their potential, and the College demonstrates sound management of the central support services. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B4 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.35 The College uses both formal and informal mechanisms to engage students in the quality assurance of their learning experience, but there is no formal College student engagement strategy or policy. The College has a student charter applicable to all students, regardless of level of study. Student engagement is encouraged at programme level through programme committees, group tutorials and end-of-module evaluations. Module evaluations are considered by programme teams and the Learning Manager for each department and feed into the QIP for each department. A student representative is invited to attend HEBOS. The College has recently implemented student voice meetings, some of which contain a higher education focus, and has introduced new higher education-specific questions to the Learner Voice survey.

2.36 While student participation in quality assurance opportunities is lower than the College would like, the College's formal and informal mechanisms and the strategies and actions currently being taken to improve student engagement mean that in theory this Expectation is met.

2.37 To test this Expectation the review team considered evidence such as the student charter, student survey results, Learner Voice meeting minutes, focus group materials, annual monitoring reports, SARs and QIPs. The team met the principal, senior staff, academic staff, professional support staff and students to discuss student engagement.

2.38 Students the team met confirmed that their involvement in deliberative structures is limited but that they felt consulted on relevant topics and could express views and receive feedback in regard to the quality assurance of their learning experience. The review team found that the students are also not fully engaged in the student representative system and this is an area the College is currently addressing. Staff confirmed the College is taking strategic action to improve the consistency of student engagement at the College. For example, there are a number of initiatives such as to have a dedicated higher education student member of the College Corporation, promote student attendance and engagement at HEBOS and have a dedicated higher education representative post on the Learner Voice Council and Student Cabinet. Students will also be represented at the HN assessment boards which are to be held in June 2015. The review team **affirms** the College-level initiative and positive steps being taken to further develop student engagement.

2.39 Overall, the College seeks to engage students in evaluating their learning experience, playing a role in quality assurance and becoming involved in deliberative structures and bodies. Although this is currently done in a largely informal manner, students are able to influence decisions regarding quality assurance. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B5 is met in both design and operation and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.40   The assessment requirements are outlined by the University and Pearson and supported by internal College policies and procedures for managing the assessment process as noted in section A3.2. Assessment follows University and Pearson regulations and guidelines which are available to staff and students. Information on assessment is contained in student handbooks and explained at the start of each module or unit. Students are provided with assignment briefs either on the VLE or in module guides. These are devised by the College to University and Pearson guidelines and identify the learning outcomes to be achieved through assessment and marking criteria. The College internal verification policies for both University and Pearson programmes require that assessed work is double-marked where appropriate and subject to a process of internal verification. The assessment process is overseen by learning managers. External examiner reports for programmes with the exception of Engineering and Construction confirmed that there was evidence of second marking or internal verification.

2.41   The College has clear procedures for consideration of certificated and non-certificated accreditation of prior learning approved by the University and Pearson, although the team did not see examples of these processes in use. Accreditations for Awarding Academic Credit Arrangements are in place to accept direct entrants to year 3 with identified qualifications and these were approved at validation.

2.42   The College has an approved Academic Malpractice Policy and follows the University and Pearson regulations. Students are informed about academic malpractice in handbooks and at induction. Students are informed about correct referencing and citing work. Suspected malpractice is investigated in line with University and Pearson procedures and appropriate penalties may be imposed. The College does not use plagiarism-detection software and relies on staff to screen assessments; as a result of formative assessment processes, students have opportunities to revise work if referencing needs to be improved.

2.43   In considering this Expectation, the team reviewed the self-evaluation and student submission and scrutinised documentation pertaining to this area including College procedures and guidelines, examples of assessment feedback, internal verification evidence, the VLE, external examiner reports and minutes of assessment boards. In addition, the team met students from across a range of programmes and study modes to explore their experience of assessment and met with managers and academic staff.

2.44   The review team found that the processes related to assessment are generally well documented and secure. External examiner reports for both the BA (Hons) programme and HND Photography are positive about assessment practice with examples of good practice provided. Students the team met were generally clear about assessment procedures and how they are graded with the exception of HN Construction students. Students on the BA (Hons) programme and HN Art and Design were very positive about the information given on grading which is available both on paper and digitally on CityBit. The students confirmed that feedback on marked work is timely and helpful with the exception of HN Construction students.

2.45   In operation, the review team also found inconsistencies in the use of assessment plans with excellent practice on the BA (Hons) programme and HN Art and Design and HN Photography but limited information provided to students on HN Construction and HN Engineering programmes. The review team found that some students on the HN Construction programme were not sure about how they were to be assessed or the timescales for this and were unaware of external assessment. These students are broadly dissatisfied with the academic requirements of their course; tutors had different ways of assessing their work and timescales for work to be returned after submission are substantially longer than they would expect. These students are currently continuing to wait for coursework to be returned from last year. The external examiner report for HN Construction raises significant concerns about assessment practice including timeliness and quality of feedback and states that no schedule of assessment or internal verification plan was made available. The external examiner for HN Engineering raises concerns about the publication of assessments on the VLE, timeliness of assessment decisions and quality of feedback. External examiner reports for HN Construction and HN Engineering required assessment briefs to be redrafted. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College formalise and publish assessment schedules and feedback deadlines for HN programmes.

2.46   As described in section A3.2 and outlined above, inconsistent practice of holding assessment boards and recording outcomes for HN programmes in 2013-14 and insufficient oversight of assessment and internal verification processes on Construction and Engineering mean that some students were not provided with timely assessment feedback and results. This impacted on some students' achievement of units through not receiving developmental feedback on additional work required of them and resulted in staff being required to reassess some units. Although the College could not provide minutes of the assessment board for Construction, the team was provided with evidence of how results were reported to students studying on this programme. This contributes to the recommendation in section A3.2 that the College implement formal assessment boards for HN programmes in accordance with Pearson regulations and ensure accurate recording of assessment.

2.47   Overall, the College operates fair, valid and reliable processes of assessment and recognition of prior learning that ensure students have appropriate opportunities to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. The review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B6, but due to inconsistent approaches to producing assessment schedules and feedback deadlines and recording and approving assessment results, which impacts on the quality of some students' learning, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.48   External examiners for HN programmes are appointed and trained by Pearson. For the BA (Hons) programme, the University approves, trains and employs external examiners. External examiner reports are sent to the College quality team for recording and consideration by the Performance and Quality Manager and the Teaching Standards and Innovation Manager. Reports are passed to programme teams who draft responses and actions and share outcomes. Responses to reports are a standard agenda item at HEBOS and feed into the SMT. External examiner reports inform course evaluations and annual monitoring reports. As per the Pearson regulations for HN programmes, the College does not need to formally respond to external examiner reports unless major issues have been identified. For the BA (Hons) programme, the College programme leader responds to the University Link Tutor. Students have access to external examiners' reports through sitting on the HEBOS committee and through the College VLE.

2.49   The responsibilities of the University and Pearson and the College's own mechanisms in place for managing external examiner processes allow this Expectation to be met in theory.

2.50   In reviewing this Expectation, the team considered various documents including the 2013-14 external examiner reports, minutes of the HEBOS committee and a paper that went to the College SMT. The team also reviewed SARs and QIPs, ARAQ minutes and a response to an external examiner. The team met senior staff, academic staff, a representative from the University and students.

2.51   The review team found that for the BA (Hons) programme, the College makes effective use of external examining processes. References to external examiners' reports are clear within the annual monitoring report and the SAR and central oversight of the process is maintained by the University.

2.52   For HN programmes, the review team found that although some of the issues raised by external examiners were implicit within the ARAQ and SAR processes, the full extent of the issues was not addressed and actions arising were limited. The QIPs also make limited reference to actions that address problems identified through external examiner reports and the College was not able to provide the review team with an action plan for the issues arising in HN Construction. However, any issues that caused courses to be blocked had been addressed. While external examiner reports are discussed at HEBOS, there is limited evidence that the College identifies or monitors actions to address problems arising. The review team identified repeat issues occurring over a number of years. Therefore, the review team **recommends** the College ensure all issues identified in external examiner reports are effectively actioned, implemented and monitored at College level.

2.53   Overall, through its quality assurance mechanisms and the ultimate responsibilities of the University and Pearson, the College satisfactorily engages with external examining processes. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B7 is met. However, evidence reviewed demonstrates a weakness in the way in which the College has addressed issues arising on HN programmes, which suggests the College is not fully aware of the significance of certain issues. Therefore, the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

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

2.54   The BA (Hons) programme is reviewed by the University according to its review procedures. The College produces an annual monitoring review following University regulations which is then submitted to the University. This incorporates outcomes from module review and feedback from external examiners. The programme was successfully reviewed and revalidated in 2013.

2.55   For HN programmes, students complete module, unit, project and end-of-year evaluations which feed into course-level reviews and inform changes that are the responsibility of the College. Course-level reports capture course data, assessment completion, learner voice and employer involvement..

2.56   Each department produces a SAR and QIP which feed into the College's annual SAR. Department SARs culminate in a QIP in which departments identify actions and timescales for completion which are reviewed at Attendance Retention Achievement and Quality meetings. QIPs are also reviewed and updated during Teaching, Quality and Learning days. There is an opportunity for higher education teams to be involved in this process, although the review criteria are not focused on higher education standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The quality assurance mechanisms and deliberative structures in place in theory enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.57   The review team considered documentation pertaining to the annual monitoring process including the Quality Assurance and Improvement Manual, course reviews, SARs, QIPs, external examiner reports, minutes of HEBOS and minutes of ARAQ meetings. The team met academic staff and senior managers to discuss the approach to monitoring and review and met with students and employers to establish how they contributed to review processes.

2.58   The review team found that the annual monitoring and periodic review process is well established for the BA (Hons) programme. External examiner reports are considered within the annual report and at module level students are required to complete module evaluation forms, which feed into the annual monitoring report.

2.59   The College acknowledges its self-assessment structure focuses on criteria which reflect the Common Inspection Framework from Ofsted and it has identified that a clearer focus on higher education is required from the academic year 2014-15. It is planning a new process for review and evaluation which reflects the requirements of the Quality Code. HN course reviews do not currently include external examiner comments and provide limited evaluation of issues arising on programmes. With the exception of the BA (Hons) programme, SARs and QIPs do not capture higher education issues and good practice. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College further develop and embed appropriate monitoring and review processes at course level to effectively capture areas of strength and areas for development to improve the quality of the student experience across the provision.

2.60   The review team found the monitoring and review processes for HN programmes are underdeveloped. In 2013-14 there was limited formal review of HN programmes through

quality assurance procedures and deliberative structures. This contributes to the recommendation in section A3.3 that the College ensure robust annual monitoring processes are implemented and embedded and there is central oversight and monitoring for HN programmes.

2.61   There are broadly adequate quality assurance mechanisms and deliberative structures in place that enable the College to monitor and review provision. However, for HN programmes, there are shortcomings in the ways in which these are operated. Overall, the review team considers the College to meet Expectation B9, but given the underdeveloped processes for HN programmes, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.62   The College adheres to the regulations of the University and Pearson in regard to academic appeals and student complaints. The appeals process is outlined in the Quality Assurance and Improvement Manual. All assessment and verification appeals follow the sequences assessor, internal verifier, Learning Manager, Director of Learning, Quality, Assistant Principal Curriculum, and awarding body. The College must respond to the appellant within two weeks to confirm the outcome of the appeal. All appeals must be sent to Quality for data logging regardless of where they are in the process. The HN Internal Verification Guide for staff also refers to an appeals process.

2.63   The College has its own Comments and Complaints scheme which is outlined in a leaflet and available from reception. The multi-stage process requires students' complaints to be acknowledged within three days and resolved within three working weeks. Where an issue cannot be resolved, it is escalated to the SMT and ultimately the Principal and Chief Executive. Both the appeals process and the Comments and Complaints scheme are outlined to varying degrees in student handbooks.

2.64   The mechanisms for appeals and complaints themselves and the ultimate responsibility held by the University and Pearson enable this Expectation to be met in theory.

2.65   The review team tested the College's approach to this Expectation by meeting senior staff, academic staff, professional support staff and students. The review team considered relevant documentation such as the Comments and Complaints scheme leaflet, the Quality and Improvement manual, complaints policy, student handbooks and minutes of relevant meetings.

2.66   In meetings students confirmed that they are fully aware of how to make complaints or appeals and that these are dealt with by staff in a timely and appropriate manner. Staff confirmed that there had been very few complaints or appeals lodged by students.

2.67   The review team found that handbooks are inconsistent in the way they include appeals and complaints information. For the BA (Hons) programme, both a Complaints and Academic Appeals process are included which follow the University's policies and procedures. In the course handbooks for HN programmes the complaints procedure is published in four of the six handbooks and academic appeals are only mentioned in two of the six handbooks. The Higher Education Application and Induction Questionnaire makes reference to complaints but not to academic appeals. Given the above findings, the review team **recommends** the College clearly articulate the policy and procedures for academic appeals on HN programmes and ensure they are accessible to students.

2.68   Overall, the College has effective mechanisms in place for both complaints and academic appeals. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation B9 is met in both design and operation. However, as there is inconsistency in the way in which information on complaints and academic appeals is provided to students on HN programmes, the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

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

2.69   The College offers work placements and live briefs and has an agreement with a local university to use laboratory facilities. Students on the BA (Hons) programme must undertake a placement to gain their professional registration. Students are responsible for finding their own placements and the College checks that the placement environment is suitable. Awarding body guidelines are followed and new providers undergo a formal approval process before the placement commences. The College also runs an external counselling service where students are able to undertake their work placements.

2.70   Students on HN Art and Design programmes have the opportunity to undertake live briefs. These are commissioned by employers in the local region and the experiences are used as part of student assessment. The College manages the relationship between the client and students, although on most occasions students will meet with the client to discuss their needs.

2.71   The College also has a formal agreement with Southampton Solent University to deliver a specific unit of the HN Construction programme. Teaching and assessment is delivered by University staff and assessment is internally verified by the College.

2.72   The College has processes and procedures in place to ensure that students undertaking learning in a setting other than the College are managed effectively. A list of current employers is kept by the BA (Hons) programme Learning Manager, while a customer relationship management system makes effective use of employer contacts College-wide. The College therefore meets the Expectation in theory.

2.73   The review team met staff and students from the College as well as employers and saw evidence of contracts and live briefs, as well as documentation relating to the BA (Hons) programme work placement.

2.74   The review team found that, overall, students are satisfied with their experiences of both placements and live briefs. Some students found obtaining a work placement in their first year difficult, but the College is able to provide a list of suitable employers for students to contact. The Learning Manager for the College is also the manager of the City Counselling Community Service and provides support to supervisors who have College students undertaking a work placement. Supervisors must complete a supervisor report, but do not contribute to assessment in any other way. These reports are seen by the teaching team and comments are reviewed as part of the annual monitoring process.

2.75   Intelligence gathered about employers through the Business Development team contributes to student learning opportunities such as the commissioning of live briefs. Clients who had provided live briefs were extremely satisfied with the quality of student work and found students to be knowledgeable and professional.

2.76   Overall, the College has robust systems in place to ensure effective work placements for students, sufficient contracts in place to secure learning opportunities and effective operation of live briefs. The College's customer relationship management system is

used effectively to identify opportunities for further engagements between employers, the College and students. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B10 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.77   The College does not offer research degrees.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.79   Of the 10 applicable Expectations in this area, all are met. Five Expectations have a low associated level of risk and five have a moderate level of associated risk. There are nine recommendations, one affirmation and two features of good practice in this area. The quality assurance and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities on the BA (Hons) programme are managed effectively. There is inconsistent practice in the management of HN programmes.

2.80   Two recommendations relate to formalising processes for programme design and approval (B1) and two recommendations relate to further developing processes for programme monitoring and review (B8). For all provision, oversight and monitoring needs to be strengthened and without action, this could lead to serious problems in the management and enhancement of this area.

2.81   Student inductions are currently designed and run at programme level and practice is variable. The review team recommends the College ensure all students have a consistent higher education-appropriate induction experience (B2).

2.82   Assessment practices are well run on the BA (Hons) programme. Two recommendations relate to assessment practices on HN programmes (B6). The recommendations relate to weakness in part of the operation. While procedures are broadly adequate, there are shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied. Insufficient emphasis and priority has been given to addressing assessment issues arising on HN Construction and HN Engineering. Without action, this could also lead to serious problems. The issues in assessment had been identified by the external examiners but not sufficiently addressed by the College, which has resulted in the team recommending the College ensure all issues identified in external examiner reports are effectively implemented and monitored at College level.

2.83   The affirmation recognises the College-level initiative and positive steps being taken to further develop student engagement (B5). The two features of good practice relate to the BA (Hons) programme and the way it effectively uses the Quality Code as an external reference point in its curriculum planning and programme development and the personal development support provided to students.

2.84   Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

3.1 The College website includes information that describes its mission, values and overall strategy. It also includes detailed information on the admissions and applications process. Information about higher education programmes and study is also provided through the Higher Education Prospectus which is produced for both full and part-time study modes.

3.2 The College does not currently have an information policy. A process is followed for the production and sign-off for published information whereby departments produce material for the prospectuses and website. The Marketing and Recruitment Manager has final approval over and signs off material for the prospectus and the website. Information on University awards and the use of the logo is provided in line with guidelines in the Memorandum of Agreement, with material submitted to the University for approval prior to publication. The College has produced guidelines on using Social Media in a Professional Context which are designed primarily for staff.

3.3 Course handbooks are produced for all programmes and issued to students either in a hard copy or published on the College's VLE, CityBit, or in some cases both. The review team found a number of inconsistencies in the course handbooks. There is lack of clarity on complaints and academic appeals for HN programmes (see section B9) and the team also found variability in the way in which assessment schedules and feedback deadlines are published in handbooks for HN programmes (see section B6). Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College produce and implement a standard format and minimum content requirement for HN course handbooks.

3.4 In theory, despite the lack of a formal policy, the College has sufficient mechanisms in place to ensure the appropriateness of the information it produces about learning opportunities.

3.5 To test this Expectation in practice, the review team followed trails through the College's public website and information produced about learning opportunities, and reviewed guidance to staff about the production of information. The team examined student handbooks, programme documentation including programme handbooks, programme specifications and materials relating to academic support services, and attended demonstrations of the VLE, customer relationship management database and apprenticeship tracking databases. The team also reviewed policy documents. The team met senior staff, academic staff, professional support staff and students.

3.6 Students who had accessed College information in the prospectus and on the website before applying to the College confirmed that it was fit for purpose and accurately reflected their learning experiences. Employers access course information through the prospectus or website and also confirmed to the review team that they value the visits by members of the College Apprenticeship team in terms of both potential courses for their employees and in providing information on their current progress while on College courses. The team attended a demonstration which confirmed the effectiveness of College

approaches to keeping employers updated and informed and of how such contacts are recorded.

3.7   The review team found there is inconsistency in the quality and quantity of materials housed on CityBit. Each programme area has a section on CityBit to which material can be uploaded. Information is input by programme leaders and monitored by learning managers. The accuracy, currency and appropriateness are monitored by the ICT Support Manager. Staff confirmed that minimum standards for course materials to be uploaded to CityBit are being developed with a view to enhancing student learning through the VLE. Students were generally satisfied with the additional teaching and learning resource materials which staff uploaded to their course pages. However, the review team found that while some courses had extensive materials, others were more limited in their approach and content. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College formalise and implement minimum standards for course materials published on the VLE.

3.8   The College VLE has an Information Station section which contains generic materials on study skills, academic learning and support for study. Students confirmed the value of this aspect of the VLE and the review team found the range and quality of information, tools and resources published on the Information Station, which supports students to achieve their personal, professional and academic potential, to be **good practice**.

3.9   The review team scrutinised the materials produced for the BA (Hons) programme. The information is continually reviewed by the University and College to ensure its currency and fitness for purpose. The same procedures are followed for producing and reviewing materials for the VLE. Students confirmed to reviewers the extensive nature of the materials provided and how highly they value them as additional tools and as a valuable resource repository for their studies. Therefore, the review team concluded that the information provided to students on the BA (Hons) in Person-Centred Counselling & Psychotherapy in both the course handbook and on the VLE is **good practice**.

3.10   Overall, both inward and external-facing information produced by the College about the course provision and to aid student learning is comprehensive, accurate and well received. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation C is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.12   The one applicable Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are two features of good practice and two recommendations in this area. This area also contributes to a recommendation found in section B9. There are no affirmations.

3.13   One feature of good practice relates to the information produced for the BA (Hons) programme. The second feature of good practice relates to a specific section on the VLE, the Information Station, which is available to all students.

3.14   The two recommendations relate to setting and monitoring minimum and consistent standards of information about learning opportunities for students. The first recommendation is in regards to student handbooks for HN students and the second is in regard to the VLE for all students. The third recommendation relates specifically to academic appeals and ensuring the process is accessible to students on HN programmes.

3.15   The recommendations require changes to procedures or documentation but do not require or will not result in major structural or operational change. The need for action has been acknowledged by the College during the review. There is evidence the College is fully aware of its responsibilities and previous responses to external review activities indicate the College will take appropriate action to address the recommendations.

3.16   Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

4   Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1   The College takes both formal and informal steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The College has developed mechanisms to improve student engagement and has implemented scheduled student voice weeks where meetings are held across provision, providing opportunities to capture student views and enhance learning opportunities. These meetings feed into ARAQ and SMT meetings. Regular communication between staff and students ensures that issues that enhance the student experience and quality of learning opportunities are discussed and changes made. The College uses a range of information during ARAQ meetings to provide effective oversight of student achievement, identify students at risk and ensure students have access to appropriate support. The College has established a Success Centre which provides students with targeted support to ensure they achieve their potential; for example, assignment writing and proofreading.

4.2   The College provides an extensive range of initiatives to improve employability outcomes for students and a range of enhancement initiatives to improve learning opportunities. The College also provides comprehensive advice to ensure a range of progression opportunities are in place. Good practice is identified and shared in a number of ways, including higher education peer observations, module evaluations, programme self-assessment reports, Teaching Quality and Learning days, Quality Exchange meetings, the teaching and learning carousel, Higher Education Practitioners Group and Higher Education Board of Study (HEBOS).

4.3   As outlined in sections A3.3 and B8, the annual review process does not currently result in effective evaluation at College level of changes arising from programme-level evaluation processes and these do not systematically feed into College-wide enhancement. Issues raised by external examiners for Construction and Engineering did not feed into department QIP actions, and minutes of HEBOS did not reflect the impact of these issues on student achievement. This contributes to the recommendation found in section B8 that the College further develop and embed appropriate monitoring and review processes at course level to effectively capture areas of strength and areas for development to improve the quality of the student experience across the provision.

4.4   The review team met senior managers who summarised the College's key priorities where they were driving changes to improve learning opportunities. These were identified as teaching, learning and assessment, learner voice, employability and access to information to support learning. The review team conducted a comprehensive review of a range of College-wide documents and were able to see evidence of each key priority for enhancement in practice through mechanisms such as course reviews, department SARs, QIPs and minutes of meetings where good practice is shared. The review team also heard from both academic staff and students of consistent improvements made to the learning experience through investment in resources and curriculum and assessment changes. The review team witnessed a clear ethos among all those met during the review visit which expects and encourages enhancement of student learning opportunities.

4.5   While the documentation reviewed and meetings attended provided many examples of enhancement activity on the ground, the College's reporting and monitoring cycle does

not ensure integration and evaluation of enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner at College level. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure the quality assurance procedures are used more systematically to identify opportunities for enhancement and to measure their impact.

4.6   Overall, given the clear ethos of an awareness of the importance of enhancement and the many examples of identification and dissemination of appropriate initiatives, the review team considers that the Expectation relating to enhancement is met in both design and operation. However, as both recommendations in this section relate to more effectively using both programme and College-level monitoring and review processes to identify and measure the impact of enhancement initiatives, there is a weakness in operation. Therefore the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.8   The one applicable Expectation in this area is met; however, the associated level of risk is moderate. There are no features of good practice or affirmations. There are two recommendations.

4.9   The first recommendation refers to the need to use quality assurance procedures more effectively to identify College-level opportunities for enhancement and to ensure systems are in place to monitor the effectiveness of the enhancement initiatives. Due to the current limited way in which the College monitors its enhancement initiatives, the associated level of risk is moderate.

4.10   The second recommendation relates to the College's need to further develop and embed appropriate monitoring and review processes at course level to enable identification of cross-provision areas for development and good practice that can be disseminated more effectively. This recommendation relates to all programmes.

4.11   The recommendations do not require or will not result in major structural or operational change. There is evidence the College is aware of its responsibilities and previous responses to external review activities indicate the College will take appropriate action to address the recommendations.

4.12   Overall, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The College has a strong vocational focus and a wide range of employability initiatives. Personal development planning is included in programme delivery and tutorials. Students feel prepared for work through module content, live briefs and talking to tutors with current industry experience.

Innovations in promoting the employability of students
5.2   Students are actively encouraged to think about their future career choices and staff are able to offer support and guidance. Progression routes for HN courses are clearly stated within course handbooks and the College designs its programmes with progression routes in mind. The College is currently developing formal progression routes for students through its connections with local universities.

5.3   The College is also developing ways to receive more data about graduate destinations. For example, there is an agreement between the College and Southampton Solent University to share Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) data where a student has come from the College.

5.4   Students are able to undertake a variety of real-world experiences and develop their professional practice while studying at the College. Students on the BA (Hons) programme undertake a work placement, have external clinical supervisory sessions and develop a personal learning log throughout their studies. Students are also able to undertake a work placement at the College's own counselling service.

5.5   HN students within the Art and Design department undertake a practice-based module and live briefs. Students within Construction and Engineering are also able to use their knowledge in their own workplace as the course progresses.

How employers are involved in the delivery and development of the curriculum
5.6   The College engages employers in a variety of ways, including through the Local Enterprise Partnership. A number of disciplines have advisory boards that bring together employers and practitioners. The College is currently developing a new programme based on feedback from an employer advisory board.

5.7   The Apprentice Coordinators and Business Development Teams support the College to enable central oversight of employers in the local area. The College's own customer relationship management system helps the College to prepare market trend analysis for new courses and supports new partnerships.

5.8   Overall, employers see their relationship with the College as partners and are able to take the opportunity to influence module choices and course development.

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 **framework for higher education qualifications**.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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