

Higher Education Review of Birkenhead Sixth Form College

May 2014

Contents

About this review	1
Key findings.....	2
QAA's judgements about Birkenhead Sixth Form College.....	2
Good practice	2
Recommendations	2
Affirmation of action being taken	2
Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement	3
About Birkenhead Sixth Form College.....	3
Explanation of the findings about Birkenhead Sixth Form College.....	5
1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards.....	6
2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities.....	13
3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision.....	26
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities	29
5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.....	33
Glossary.....	34

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Birkenhead Sixth Form College. The review took place from 20 to 21 May 2014 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Glenn Barr
- Craig Best (student reviewer)
- Maxina Butler-Holmes
- Matthew Kitching (student reviewer)

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Birkenhead Sixth Form 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 threshold 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 7.

In reviewing Birkenhead Sixth Form 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 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement, and Student Employability,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.

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 Birkenhead Sixth Form College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Birkenhead Sixth Form College.

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **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 Birkenhead Sixth Form College:

- the wide-ranging arrangements which support the transition and preparation of students for progression to level 4 (Expectation B3)
- the comprehensive range of information provided to students in collaboration with the degree-awarding body which makes a significant impact on the quality of the students' learning experience (Expectations C and B3).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Birkenhead Sixth Form College.

By October 2015:

- liaise with the degree-awarding body to facilitate student participation in programme management meetings (Expectations B5 and Enhancement)
- formally articulate student engagement arrangements within the College to ensure the active participation of students in the enhancement of the programme (Expectation B5)
- liaise with the degree-awarding body to make the external moderator's reports available to students (Expectation B7).

By January 2016:

- consolidate the various improvement activities to provide a more systematic, explicit and planned approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to improve the quality of assessment feedback to students (Expectation B6).

- The introduction of an external examiner from the degree-awarding body to achieve greater externality on the programme (Expectation B7).

Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The number of higher education students is relatively small and there are limited opportunities for formal engagement in quality assurance and enhancement processes. Students complete module evaluations and attend liaison meetings where modules are reviewed and can also participate in focus groups. However, no students had attended the programme management meetings held at the College's degree-awarding body. Nevertheless, students feel that they are sufficiently involved and that the College is responsive to their feedback. Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement is therefore adequate, but further opportunities could be made available.

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

About Birkenhead Sixth Form College

Birkenhead Sixth Form College (the College) is located on the Wirral and serves a mixed community comprising both affluent areas and those with high levels of deprivation and unemployment.

The College offers a wide range of mainly A Level provision to approximately 1,200 full-time and 480 part-time students. There is one higher education programme, Foundation to Health and Veterinary Studies. This is a Year 0 programme which offers direct progression onto degrees in Allied Health Professions and Nursing at the University of Liverpool (the University). The route leading to Veterinary Science is taught at a neighbouring college, alongside a route into Medicine and Dentistry.

The programme was originally developed as part of collaborative provision under the Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network and forms part of the University's commitment to widening participation. It is validated by the University, with which the College has a formal partnership agreement, and academic and quality assurance oversight is provided by the School of Health Sciences within the Faculty of Medicine at the University.

The programme has been running since 2006 and enrolled 13 students in 2013-14. The programme is regarded as stable, having experienced only three changes of personnel during this period.

The College's mission is to be an outstanding sixth form college providing high quality education for all. The mission is underpinned by a set of core values.

- Having the highest standards and expectations in everything we do.
- Delivering high quality teaching and learning.
- Enabling all learners and staff to achieve their full potential.
- Creating a challenging and supportive educational experience.
- Fostering confidence, independence, personal growth and aspirations.
- Promoting equality of opportunity and respect in a safe learning environment.

Subsequent to QAA's Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2009, the College produced an action plan with actions monitored over the following year.

There were three advisable and two desirable recommendations. The College has made good progress in developing its peer observation process and in providing information about alternative progression routes. There is clear reference in the Programme Handbook to support for students with disabilities. Although satisfactory progress has been made in providing staff development opportunities, there is scope for further improvement.

Explanation of the findings about Birkenhead Sixth Form College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

Expectation (A1): Each qualification (including those awarded through arrangements with other delivery organisations or support providers) is allocated to the appropriate level in The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ).

Quality Code, Chapter A1: The National Level

Findings

1.1 The College delivers the Year 0 Foundation to Health and Veterinary Studies programme which is a pre-degree course validated by the University of Liverpool (the degree-awarding body). The programme is not allocated to a level of the FHEQ but it sits at the level commonly understood to be Year 0. Upon completion, students are able to enter a degree in the Allied Health programmes area at level 4. The College's degree-awarding body is responsible for the setting of academic standards and for ensuring that programme content and delivery are in line with the validated outcomes.

1.2 It is the responsibility of the degree-awarding body to ensure that the volume of study is sufficient to demonstrate that the learning outcomes are achievable. The College Lead was part of the original development team and remains the primary conduit between the two institutions in the assurance of academic standards. The programme specification, responsibility for which resides with the degree-awarding body, shows clearly articulated aims and intended learning outcomes. These arrangements, reflected in the partnership agreement, enable Expectation A1 to be met in theory.

1.3 The review team reviewed the evidence presented including the partnership agreement and the programme specification, and scrutinised Programme Handbooks. Meetings with staff provided evidence that they have a sound understanding of the level of the qualification and how it aligns with the sequel level 4 of the bachelor's programme.

1.4 The overall responsibility for ensuring Expectation A1 is met lies with the degree-awarding body. The team concludes that the College is fulfilling its delegated responsibilities in this process and that Expectation A1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2): All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

Quality Code, Chapter A2: The Subject and Qualification Level

Findings

1.5 The design of the programme was led by the degree-awarding body. Given that the award is designated at Year 0, Subject Benchmark Statements do not directly apply.

1.6 Developed as part of the degree-awarding body's widening participation commitments, the programme was specifically designed in partnership with the College to prepare students for entry to associated bachelor programmes. The curricula and learning outcomes are designed as prerequisites for entry to a degree with an exit point at level 6 of the FHEQ. The programme specification states that there are no professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements as the programme does not carry formal accreditation. This design process enables Expectation A2 to be met in theory.

1.7 The review team read the programme specification that shows the cross-matching of key skills to individual modules and the 2011 re-approval of delivery report. Following this, meetings were held with staff which confirmed that the programme's rationale is to provide a seamless transition into undergraduate study, culminating in a level 6 qualification which is informed by the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRB requirements.

1.8 The review team therefore concludes that the College's responsibility for Expectation A2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3): Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study.

Quality Code, Chapter A3: The Programme Level

Findings

1.9 The degree-awarding body has responsibility for the design of the programme and for ensuring that it is delivered effectively by the College. The College has limited responsibility for maintaining definitive information.

1.10 Information on programme aims, intended learning outcomes and expected levels of achievement are clearly articulated in the programme specification and Programme Handbook, which provide a definitive source of reference. The self-evaluation document states that the Programme Handbook, although produced by the degree-awarding body, is developed and reviewed in partnership with the College as required under the partnership agreement. The handbook contains information on both the degree-awarding body and the two colleges involved in the delivery of the programme. There are sections covering learning, teaching and assessment policies; academic regulations; and the role of the various liaison committees. The responsibility for ensuring the effectiveness of this process is held by the degree-awarding body Programme Director who liaises with the College Lead, with reporting to the programme management team. These arrangements enable Expectation A3 to be met within the spirit of partnership.

1.11 The review team read the documentation provided to test the ways in which the College and degree-awarding body make the relevant information available. Individual module handbooks, produced in partnership, reinforce the learning outcomes and provide further information for students about marking and grading criteria and assessment processes. The programme specification, Programme Handbook and module handbooks are provided at induction and are accessible on the degree-awarding body's virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.12 The team read the student submission and met students who confirmed that they find these documents useful and have a clear understanding of what they need to do to achieve. The availability of information was made apparent through a demonstration of the VLE by the lead student representative.

1.13 The review team explored the extent to which College staff are actively involved in the review of modules. There is evidence of staff participation in programme management meetings and of direct action taken in response to student feedback and to a recommendation in the 2011 programme re-approval. The review of the structure of the mathematics module and the introduction of changes to the professional studies module demonstrate the ongoing review and updating of programme information and students confirmed the positive impact these changes have made.

1.14 On the basis of the documentation provided and through meetings with staff and students, the review team are able to conclude that the College effectively disseminates, monitors and reviews definitive information, in partnership with its degree-awarding body, which meets Expectation A3 and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A4): Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter A4: Approval and Review

Findings

1.15 The overall responsibility for programme approval and periodic review resides with the degree-awarding body. There has been no requirement to consider new course approvals since the programme was approved in 2006. There is no formal College policy for academic approval or periodic review as the degree-awarding body's procedures are closely followed.

1.16 The continuing relevance and validity of the Year 0 programme is ensured by the degree-awarding body's periodic review process which takes place on a quinquennial basis; the most recent re-approval of the provision was confirmed in 2011. The requirement for the College to observe the degree-awarding body's annual monitoring cycle is identified in the partnership agreement which requires the College to submit an annual report to the Programme Management Committee. There is, however, a devolved responsibility to operate a Staff-Student Liaison Committee.

1.17 The programme is monitored as part of the degree-awarding body's annual review of collaborative provision with the Programme Management Group receiving the College's annual report (further detailed under Expectation B8). The College's own quality assurance procedure ensures that a programme level self-assessment report feeds into the overall College self-assessment report which is monitored at both departmental and senior management levels. These processes enable Expectation A4 to be met in theory.

1.18 The review team tested the effectiveness of these processes by reading the periodic review minutes and in meetings with senior and academic staff. The College participates in the review process through the production of reports to inform the periodic review and there was evidence of an open and constructive dialogue taking place during re-approval to maintain the validity and relevance of the programme and to ensure that any recommendations were addressed. The College Lead was a member of the original programme design team and the strength of the partnership continues to enable the reciprocation of views. This is particularly evident in the ongoing review of the mathematics and professional studies modules.

1.19 During meetings with staff the team was informed that any expansion of subjects at Year 0 would be led by the degree-awarding body, but that the business case for approval would be led by the Deputy Principal through the senior management structure. The ongoing review of relevance and efficiency takes place through the College performance management cycle which is led by the Deputy Principal meeting the relevant Head of Department on a six-weekly basis.

1.20 The team noted that the minutes of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee, although informal, provide a clear record of discussions, including the ongoing review of modules. These are forwarded to the programme management meetings held at the degree-awarding body. Unfortunately, student attendance at these meetings is very rare (see paragraph 2.28). The College Lead does, however, feed back verbally to students.

1.21 The College works in an effective partnership with the degree-awarding body to approve and review its provision and the review team concludes that Expectation A4 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A5): Higher education providers ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards.

Quality Code, Chapter A5: Externality

Findings

1.22 The degree-awarding body's approvals process does not require external representation at Year 0 level. The College has not made use of external expertise in the design and review of the programme as the process is led by the degree-awarding body. The programme was developed with the degree-awarding body acting as external examiner, but as a result of ongoing review, it is planned to introduce an external examiner from another subject department within the degree-awarding body for 2014-15.

1.23 The review team explored the College's approach to externality by scrutinising documentary evidence and in meetings with staff and students.

1.24 The College endeavours to draw upon external expertise in relation to the programme in a number of ways. A degree-awarding body representative from the host faculty sits on the College Board of Governors. The College has encouraged staff to engage with external practitioners for professional updating or for them to attend as guest speakers. Students and staff clearly benefit from taster days held at the degree-awarding body, which have proved useful in enabling staff to develop a deeper understanding of their specialist areas through engagement with the external academic community. Students are also able to engage with their peers at the other partner college during the taster days.

1.25 The Year 0 self-assessment report is sent to the degree-awarding body for comment and is on the cycle for external validation procedures. The link tutor moderation reports also provide an element of externality in the assurance of academic standards and are used to inform practice.

1.26 The review team concludes that the College, in the current context of delivering one programme, meets Expectation A5 and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A6): Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Quality Code, Chapter A6: Assessment of Achievement of Learning Outcomes

Findings

1.27 The degree-awarding body's academic and regulatory framework guides the design, approval and monitoring of assessment strategies. There is a degree-awarding body Code of Practice on Assessment and the host academic school produces an Assessment Handbook. The self-evaluation document noted that formal assessments are set by the degree-awarding body in consultation with the College-based team. The assessment strategy is designed to mirror the range of assessments students will meet when they progress to level 4 study. The College ensures compliance with the degree-awarding body's processes, and this enables Expectation A6 to be met in theory.

1.28 The review team explored the effectiveness of processes and procedures for the assessment of students through reading key documents provided and by conducting meetings with staff and students to confirm the College's stated responsibilities.

1.29 The programme specification sets out the learning, teaching and assessment strategies to enable students to achieve and demonstrate the intended learning outcomes. The academic regulations, and information and guidance covering extensions, plagiarism and aspects of academic integrity are all contained within the Programme Handbook and module handbooks. The team confirmed in discussion with College staff and the degree-awarding body's Programme Director that staff and students are introduced to the degree-awarding body's Code of Practice on Assessment during the induction day led by the degree-awarding body, and all module handbooks contain a live link to the Code of Practice on the degree-awarding body's VLE. Students who met the review team confirmed that they understood the requirements of assessment, how their work would be assessed and who to refer to for assistance.

1.30 Within the partnership, teaching staff work collaboratively to determine the assessment strategy. The team identified several examples where revisions were made to ensure that assessment is fit for purpose. Changes have been agreed to improve the assessment of learning outcomes with mathematics. Diagnostic testing takes place through the Advanced Academic Writing Programme to improve levels of attainment in biology, psychology and mathematics. Interim formative assessment has also been introduced to support the Professional Studies module. Students confirmed the validity of assessment and can increasingly see the relevance of reflection in preparation for their sequel studies. Paired marking relationships assure academic standards internally which are then endorsed by degree-awarding body module leaders and ultimately by the Programme Director, who produces the moderation reports for the programme management team.

1.31 The College sustains a close relationship between its programme team and the degree-awarding body in respect of assessment of achievement of learning outcomes and the review team concludes that Expectation A6 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.32 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. All Expectations for the maintenance of threshold academic standards are met with the associated level of risk low in all instances.

1.33 There were no affirmations, features of good practice or recommendations. The team noted that there is a well established partnership between the College and the degree-awarding body which is solely focused on one Year 0 programme. The degree-awarding body's policies and procedures lead all aspects relating to the maintenance of academic standards and the College ensures that relevant staff engage effectively with these processes.

1.34 The team concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.

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

Findings

2.1 Responsibility for the design and approval of programmes rests with the degree-awarding body. The degree-awarding body's Programme Director is responsible for the course within the degree-awarding body and also acts as the key point of liaison for collaborative partners. Within the College, the College Lead has responsibility for the delivery of the programme. The management of the programmes is primarily conducted at programme level through the Year 0 team meeting and oversight is provided by the College's senior management team. These arrangements are sufficient to enable Expectation B1 to be met in theory.

2.2 The review team tested these arrangements by meeting staff and students, and viewing documentation relating to programme approval and the minutes of several College meetings which relate to the management of learning opportunities.

2.3 The programme has multiple pathways with a number of these being delivered at the second partner college. The College is therefore part of wider Programme Management Group meetings, which take place at the degree-awarding body and consider all aspects of the programme across the various delivery locations.

2.4 The review team found that the arrangements for the design and approval of programmes are being carried out effectively, as the College has articulated. While the degree-awarding body maintains responsibility for the design and approval of the programme, the close working relationship has enabled College staff to play an active role in programme development. The College Lead was part of the initial programme design team and College staff members also liaise regularly with module leaders at the degree-awarding body with regard to content and design. The programme was revalidated most recently in 2010-11.

2.5 The degree-awarding body is ultimately responsible for programme design and approval and the College maintains a close working relationship with the degree-awarding body in fulfilling its responsibilities, therefore the review team concludes that Expectation B1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

Quality Code, Chapter B2: Admissions

Findings

2.6 Arrangements for the admission of students to the programme are clearly articulated in programme approval documentation. The degree-awarding body maintains overall responsibility for admissions to the Year 0 Programme. However, the College is involved in the process through its participation in the interview process. Applications for the 2014-15 cohort will be conducted via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) in response to the recent decline in student numbers on the programme. These arrangements enable Expectation B2 to be met in theory.

2.7 The review team examined these arrangements by meeting students and staff. The team also considered the degree-awarding body's Access Agreement, information and guidance provided to prospective students, and staff training materials related to admissions.

2.8 Entry requirements are clearly detailed in programme approval documentation and are also readily available to prospective students on the degree-awarding body's website. The team was informed that because students do not tend to search the College website for such programmes, all the relevant admissions information is housed on the degree-awarding body website. Students informed the team that they had been provided with all the information and support they needed during the admissions process and deemed it to be clear and transparent.

2.9 All interviews are conducted jointly by staff from the College and the degree-awarding body against agreed criteria. No formal training is in place for College staff involved in the admissions process but the Programme Director will discuss arrangements in advance. The College Lead will normally be the staff member involved in the process. However, the team heard that another staff member had recently conducted interviews.

2.10 Owing to the clear degree-awarding body policies on admissions, tightly controlled website and positive experience of students, the review team concludes that Expectation B2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.11 In line with the integrated approach to the management of its higher education provision the College has no explicit teaching and learning strategy for higher education. Instead the programme specification, created by the degree-awarding body, details for students the approach to teaching, learning and assessment on the course. This information is also made available on the degree-awarding body's VLE and is referenced in the Programme Handbook. In addition each module has its own handbook providing students with an extra layer of information. Staff development arrangements are the responsibility of the Assistant Principal and a formal process of peer observation is also in place. Altogether, these arrangements enable Expectation B3 to be met in theory.

2.12 These arrangements were tested by meeting staff and students, viewing the programme specification, programme and module handbooks. The team also considered the Staff Development Policy, examined staff development opportunities and analysed the outcomes of peer observation.

2.13 Students confirmed that the programme specification and module handbooks provide clear information on the teaching methods employed during their studies. These methods are varied and include small group discussions, the creation of reflective journals, individual exercises and lectures. The module handbooks themselves supplement the Programme Handbook and are very detailed. Students find this helpful in ensuring they always have access to the required information. This is further bolstered by the information contained on both the degree-awarding body and College VLEs which students considered to be well structured. The comprehensive range of information provided to students in collaboration with the degree-awarding body is good practice identified under Expectation C, paragraph 3.8.

2.14 A system of peer observation is in place and this is reviewed by the degree-awarding body as part of its annual monitoring arrangements. The 2009 IQER included a recommendation to develop the peer observation process in relation to the College's higher education provision and the College has progressed this work. Staff provided the team with several examples of improvements which have been brought about as a result of peer observations, including additional support for students in relation to referencing and ethics.

2.15 Students feel highly supported and well prepared to follow progression routes. Taster days are pivotal to this and students value highly the use of degree-awarding body staff and current undergraduate students in communicating their understanding and experience of the university learning environment. The IQER report also recommended that the College provide information about flexible learning progression routes. While the College and the degree-awarding body are clear that the standard progression route is onto a university, students are provided with support, advice and a transcript should they decide to follow an alternative route. An academic writing programme has also been implemented, which has its own annual self-assessment, and is providing effective support in developing the writing skills of students on the programme, some of whom have been out of education for a sustained period. The role of the Academic Adviser, as outlined in paragraph 2.23, also

contributes to the students' preparedness for progression. The team therefore considers the wide-ranging arrangements which support the transition and preparation of students for progression to level 4 to be **good practice**.

2.16 The College has a clear Staff Development Policy and it was evident to the review team that staff members feel supported in their roles. The centrally organised Staff Development Weeks provide a useful opportunity for staff to share good practice and discuss common challenges. The team considered the use of external academics in delivering keynote sessions to be beneficial in relation to the development of higher education provision within the College. Staff development sessions have also been conducted on the Academic Adviser Scheme and use of the degree-awarding body's VLE. The 2009 IQER report also recommended that the College enhance the staff development opportunities available to staff and while some progress has been made in this regard, scope still exists for the College to increase the breadth of this programme.

2.17 The College makes informed use of the outcomes of peer observations to improve teaching and learning and provides transparent information to students. The review team concludes that Expectation B3 is met 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

2.18 The College has an approach to the allocation of resources which is not documented but is an accepted convention understood by staff. Resources are considered during the programme approval process and by the senior management and programme teams on an ongoing basis. Students are also provided with the opportunity to submit feedback on the quality of resources, which is considered by the programme team and relevant departments. Given the size of the provision, this arrangement enables Expectation B4 to be met in theory.

2.19 In testing this arrangement the review team examined module feedback and the learning resources annual self-assessment and questionnaire, as well as the minutes of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee. The team also met the Principal, staff and students and saw a demonstration of the VLE.

2.20 Considering the size of higher education provision at the College, a broad range of resources are available and students are generally very happy with their sufficiency and accessibility. Students have access to both the degree-awarding body and College VLEs, which offer general information pertaining to the programme and well structured learning materials. Wikis are also used to support student learning and in particular act as an aid to induction, something students spoke highly of. The team found that in response to the 2009 IQER recommendation, explicit information was provided to students with disabilities about the support available.

2.21 Students can also access resources at the University of Liverpool's library and consider materials at the College library to be of a good standard. The well appointed and dedicated higher education base room, which was identified as good practice in the 2009 IQER, remains a strength of the programme and is also valued by students.

2.22 Resources are allocated via a central planning round with needs identified through the annual self-assessment process, peer observation and student feedback. This is collected through both module evaluations (which rate resources highly), and through a centrally administered survey on learning resources. Oversight of this is subsequently maintained through the dedicated learning resources annual self-assessment document.

2.23 The degree-awarding body has worked with the College to adapt its Academic Adviser Scheme and implement it within the College. College staff have received training on the scheme, which is designed to provide advice on degree-awarding body processes, underpin induction, and identify any additional support needs, acting as a point of referral where necessary. The scheme is documented in a handbook for the advisers.

2.24 The College has a clear process for the allocation of resources, a proactive approach to generating feedback, ready access to academic support and well structured online information. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B4 is met 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

2.25 The College has a range of mechanisms in place for gathering student feedback including module evaluations and the Staff-Student Liaison Committee. Outcomes from these processes are then considered by the programme team and action is taken in response to the issues raised. This approach enables Expectation B5 to be met in theory.

2.26 The effectiveness of the College's approach was tested by meeting with staff and students. The review team also viewed the minutes of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings and the degree-awarding body's Course Representative Handbook.

2.27 The team found that student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement at the College was not very developed. A student representative is in place for the programme and the team was provided with documentary evidence of training and support available from the degree-awarding body, although students were not familiar with this when questioned by the team. Students are also represented on the governing body, although there are no higher education representatives and there is no significant student involvement in validation and revalidation activity, for instance, as panel members. Students are not given access to annual monitoring reports, however, they have been given a verbal overview of the outcomes from module feedback.

2.28 All students are able to take part in the Staff-Student Liaison Committee, however, they do not consistently attend the programme management meetings which are held at the degree-awarding body. The team questioned the scheduling of this meeting and were informed that it was the only time that enabled staff to come together and discuss the programme. The team came to the view, however, that this was limiting the ability for students to be active partners in quality assurance and enhancement, and therefore **recommends** that by October 2015 the College liaise with the degree-awarding body to facilitate student participation in programme management meetings.

2.29 Student engagement is not defined within the context of the College and the review team found that while students were content with the scale of their involvement and felt the College was very responsive to any concerns they may have, the opportunity exists to increase student involvement in this area, especially with regard to enhancement. The team therefore **recommends** that by October 2015 the College formally articulate student engagement arrangements within the College in order to ensure the active participation of students in the enhancement of the programme.

2.30 Students were positive about the extent to which they feel listened to and, while the team have identified areas it believes the College can strengthen, the small scale of the provision means that the limited mechanisms in place are performing adequately for the purposes of quality assurance. Despite the recommendation, the team concludes that Expectation B5 is met and the associated level of risk attached is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.

Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and Accreditation of Prior Learning

Findings

2.31 The degree-awarding body retains responsibility for assessment, including its format and this is governed by the School Assessment Handbook and Code of Practice on Assessment. The College is closely involved, however, in developing assessment titles. The significant involvement of the degree-awarding body enables Expectation B6 to be met in theory.

2.32 The assessment process was tested by viewing programme specifications, meeting staff and students and examining module evaluations. The review team also considered moderator reports and the minutes of team meetings.

2.33 Assessment arrangements, including the dates for exams, are communicated to students during their first induction day. Students consider the variety of assessment methods employed to be of benefit to their learning and are clear about what is required. No formal policy exists on draft submissions; students are able to submit drafts for consideration and receive reports from software programmes which identify plagiarism prior to final submission. Feedback is provided in a variety of formats and, although some formative feedback is detailed, students informed the team that the quality of feedback, especially written feedback, is variable. Feedback has been identified as an issue by the College, which confirmed that it was taking steps to improve the quality of assessment feedback across the institution. Consequently, it has been a topic for discussion at staff development events and within team meetings. The team therefore **affirms** the steps being taken to improve the quality of assessment feedback to students.

2.34 The team found that clear guidance is provided to staff involved in the marking of assignments. While the degree-awarding body is responsible for formal moderation, College staff undertake informal moderation to support their marking practice.

2.35 Owing to the high involvement of the degree-awarding body, robust guidance for staff and clear information to students, the team concludes that Expectation B6 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.36 Degree-awarding body regulations do not require an external examiner to be in place for the Year 0 programme. This is clearly articulated in the Code of Practice on Assessment Appendix H: External Examiner System. Instead, the degree-awarding body's Programme Director completes an annual monitoring report and this is considered by the programme team at the College. These arrangements enable Expectation B7 to be met in theory.

2.37 The review team reviewed these arrangements by reading moderator reports, discussing them with staff and students and examining the degree-awarding body's Code of Practice on Assessment.

2.38 Annual monitoring reports are not currently shared with students. The team came to the conclusion that doing so may enable students to play a more active role in the enhancement of provision. The team therefore **recommends** that by October 2015 the College liaise with the degree-awarding body to make external moderator's reports available to students.

2.39 The degree-awarding body and the College are currently in dialogue over plans to appoint an external examiner. This will be a degree-awarding body member of staff drawn from a department who does not have responsibility for the management and oversight of the programme. The team **affirms** the introduction of an external examiner from the degree-awarding body to achieve greater externality on the programme.

2.40 The team concludes that the College fulfils its limited responsibility for external examining and that Expectation B7 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.41 The degree-awarding body retains responsibility for the monitoring and review of the programme as detailed in the partnership agreement. This is undertaken through regular programme management meetings which are led by degree-awarding body staff and involve collaborative partners. The degree-awarding body's moderator also supports monitoring through the production of an annual report (see paragraph 2.36). The College plays a part in the monitoring process by compiling an annual evaluation of the course in the form of a self-assessment report, arrangements for which are documented in the College's Quality Assurance Policy. These processes enable Expectation B8 to be met in theory.

2.42 The review team explored the operation of these processes by reviewing the partnership agreement, moderator reports and completed self-assessment reports. The team also met degree-awarding body and College staff, and students. In addition, the team viewed the minutes of partnership management and team meetings.

2.43 The processes for reviewing the currency, quality and validity of programmes on an ongoing basis are detailed and effective. Programme management meetings involve staff members from the second college partner which is also delivering a pathway of the programme and this provides a forum for staff to discuss common issues with the degree-awarding body and to take action.

2.44 Student involvement in monitoring and review is limited. Students are provided with an overview of module feedback, however, they do not see the self-assessment report. Students informed the team that they found it difficult to attend programme management meetings, as discussed in paragraph 2.28, as the meetings are scheduled on a day when they are not in College.

2.45 The moderator report is compiled in two stages with an overview report consisting of issues ranging from whether policies are in place to the identification of good practice. This is supplemented by module reports which focus on teaching and assessment. These are primarily used by the programme team to develop provision and the College informed the team that issues would be directed to senior managers where it was deemed necessary.

2.46 The annual self-assessment process is clearly understood by staff and consistently applied. However, actions appear to be mainly related to student recruitment and the quality of learning opportunities.

2.47 The College collates and monitors actions on a central software programme which enables it to maintain effective oversight of progress. Regular monitoring meetings are scheduled between the College Lead and senior staff at the College. This acts as a further opportunity for the institution to review the work of the programme team and monitor the health of the course.

2.48 Owing to the broad range of monitoring systems which are clearly understood by staff and the high level of involvement from the degree-awarding body, the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B8 and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals.

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Complaints and Appeals

Findings

2.49 Clearly defined processes exist for any student wishing to raise a complaint. Academic complaints and appeals are processed in accordance with degree-awarding body policies, whereas complaints relating to more general aspects of the student experience are the responsibility of the College. The Student Handbook makes explicit reference to the permissible grounds for an assessment appeal. This handbook also outlines the complaints process for students. These processes allow for Expectation B9 to be met in theory.

2.50 These complaints and appeals processes were tested by meeting with students and staff, viewing the College Complaints Policy and examining web pages and handbooks.

2.51 The College Complaints Policy is detailed and coherent, as is the information relating to the degree-awarding body's complaints procedure and assessment appeals, which can be found in the degree-awarding body's Handbook for Undergraduate Students. There is no explicit reference to complaints in either the programme or module handbooks, something which the team agreed would be beneficial for students as it would make information even more accessible.

2.52 No complaints or appeals have been filed since the programme's inception; however, students informed the team that they would seek advice initially from the College Lead. This corresponds with the expectation that the College attempts to resolve any issues informally with students in the first instance.

2.53 Owing to the presence of accurate and readily available guidance and the existence of clear processes on complaints and appeals, the review team concludes that Expectation B9 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.54 Expectation B10 does not apply as the College does not have any placements or formal relationships with employers.

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.55 Expectation B11 does not apply as the College does not deliver any research degrees.

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.56 In reaching its judgement about this area the review team matched its findings against the criteria in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the Expectations applicable to the College are met and the associated level of risk in each case is low.

2.57 There is one feature of good practice relating to the support for students' transition to level 4 study. Another feature of good practice, located under Expectation C and regarding the provision of information about the programme, is also relevant here. There are three recommendations. Two require the College to liaise with the degree-awarding body, firstly to facilitate student participation in programme management meetings, and secondly to make the external moderator's reports available to students. The third encourages the formal articulation of student engagement arrangements within the College to ensure the active participation of students in the enhancement of the programme. The review team also affirmed the steps being taken to improve the quality of assessment feedback to students, and the introduction of an external examiner from the degree-awarding body to achieve greater externality on the programme.

2.58 The team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 Information about the programme is available from the College but the degree-awarding body's website is the primary source of information for potential applicants. The College provides a direct link to the programme page from its own website. Any publicity materials produced independently by the College using the degree-awarding body's branding have to be approved under the terms of the partnership agreement. The annual programme monitoring report for collaborative provision requires the College to confirm that any relevant new publicity materials have received degree-awarding body approval.

3.2 Responsibility for the marketing of the provision is shared and there is a joint responsibility for assuring the accuracy of information provided to stakeholders about the higher education programme. In reality, the degree-awarding body undertakes the production of all information relating to the Year 0 programme. The College has a public information approvals process which sees the College Lead liaising with either the College senior management team or with the degree-awarding body Programme Director. This process operates relatively informally but enables Expectation C to be met in theory.

3.3 The review team tested the processes for ensuring that information is fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible by speaking to students and staff, and through the scrutiny of key documents.

3.4 The strong partnership with the degree-awarding body continues to be evident in relation to producing information about learning opportunities. College staff are actively involved in contributing to the annual review of documents, particularly the Programme Handbook and module handbooks. The College Lead forwards the College-specific information booklet and details of the College-based induction process for inclusion in the degree-awarding body's welcome pack. The pack is posted from the degree-awarding body to all new students. The review team confirmed with students that this approach is valued in affirming their identity as students of both institutions from the outset.

3.5 The student information booklet is updated annually by the College, following the approvals process. The Programme Handbook, although produced and revised annually by the degree-awarding body's academic staff, is shared prior to publication. Module handbooks are shared with College staff for contributory comments at the end of the academic year. Students are provided with a generic degree-awarding body handbook which provides an insight into the campus and its facilities.

3.6 Students whom the review team met confirmed that they found the range of information helpful and from the outset felt a close affinity with both institutions. Furthermore, the information provided at taster days throughout the year and information on progression provided when the Programme Director visits the College, reinforce the stages of the student journey through Year 0. Students enthusiastically confirmed the central role of the Programme Handbook as a constant reference point.

3.7 The Programme Handbook has a strong emphasis on the university context, academic structures and physical resources; students, however, find this useful as they spend a reasonable amount of time on campus. The student submission suggests that shorter versions of module handbooks would be welcomed and the review team ascertained that students sometimes feel that information is duplicated.

3.8 Students are provided with a range of information which effectively supports the student journey from pre-entry at the College through transition and ultimately onwards into the degree-awarding body, or other institutions as appropriate. This information, combined with the facilitating role played by College staff, is integral in the development of student confidence and preparedness for the next steps into higher education. The team found that the comprehensive range of information provided to students in collaboration with the degree-awarding body which makes a significant impact on the quality of the students' learning experience is **good practice**.

3.9 The review team concludes that Expectation C is met. The level of risk is low as the majority of information about the higher education provision is produced by the degree-awarding body.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Quality of the information produced about its provision: Summary of findings

3.10 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk was low.

3.11 There was one feature of good practice in this area regarding the comprehensive range of information provided to students in collaboration with the degree-awarding body, and there were no recommendations or affirmations.

3.12 The team concludes that the quality of information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College's awarding body maintains responsibility for the monitoring and review of the programme. The College employs a range of mechanisms which capture and address issues and areas for improvement. Regular Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings feed into Programme Management Team meetings providing opportunities to identify, implement and monitor enhancement initiatives.

4.2 The recently developed Higher Education Strategy establishes a framework for the programme within the College's existing Ofsted focused processes. Mechanisms for identifying enhancement opportunities include regular self-assessment and review meetings between the Assistant Principal and Programme Manager. Programme level self-assessment reports consider feedback from module evaluations, Programme Management Team meetings and data sets. Programme self-assessment feeds into the College SAR which informs the College's overarching Development Plan. This plan is considered and ratified by governors. The interconnected quality assurance procedures of the College and awarding body, and the processes for sharing good practice, allow for the identification of areas for enhancement. These arrangements allow the College to meet the Enhancement Expectation in theory.

4.3 The review team examined documentary evidence provided prior to the review, including minutes of staff-student meetings, programme management meetings, documentation related to the self-assessment process and student engagement. It considered the Higher Education Strategy, information on the 2014-15 theme of Independence and Resilience, and the Student Representation and Participants in Enhancement of the Programme document. The team met senior staff and a representative of the awarding body, teaching staff and students.

4.4 The College generates useful information to inform its enhancement activities through the self-assessment processes. At present information generated is limited, but becoming more extensive. External practitioners provide valuable support for learning and teaching, but there has been no systematic process to use their expertise in programme review and enhancement. The recent appointment of an external examiner, and processes to improve student engagement, are providing increased opportunities to inform and develop enhancement initiatives. This matter is addressed in Expectation B7, where the team affirms the introduction of an external examiner appointed by the degree-awarding body to achieve greater externality for the programme.

4.5 The College's recently introduced Higher Education Strategy, although linked to College and programme area performance indicators, does not clearly articulate objectives and outcomes. The strategy does not refer explicitly to engagement with the Quality Code or how to embed the Expectations in practice. The strategy provides limited evaluation of College approaches, and no mention is made of how good practice is identified and disseminated. Staff lack awareness of the use or significance of the strategy and the College confirmed there has been no student input into its recent development. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact the strategy might have in establishing a foundation for the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

4.6 Senior staff recognise the responsibilities of the College in applying the Quality Code. However, teaching staff at a meeting with the review team demonstrated little understanding of the Expectations of the Code or of their responsibilities relative to the awarding body. The College recognises this, and the self-assessment action plan confirms the need for staff development, currently proposed for the end of the 2015 academic year. The team recommends that, by January 2016, the College ensure that the Quality Code is fully embedded, understood by staff and informs strategic developments.

4.7 The quality assurance processes of the College and its awarding body are interconnected. These operate effectively and provide oversight of the single programme delivered. Programme team meetings respond to identified issues and operational matters. Staff-Student Liaison Committee and Programme Management Team meetings review module and programme content, delivery and assessment, taking account of student feedback. The Programme Management Team also considers recruitment, publicity and staff development needs. Regular monitoring by the programme leader, awarding body link tutor/academic advisor and the Assistant Principal (Quality and Standards) allows for the review of progress against the action plan and key performance indicators. The Deputy Principal identifies cross-College enhancement themes from the self-assessment process, and these are used to develop College-wide initiatives. The 2014-15 theme of Independence and Resilience has focused on encouraging students' independent learning and confidence building. The teaching team has applied and implemented features of this theme in their teaching and support for Year 0 students.

4.8 Formal opportunities to ensure the identification and dissemination of good practice are limited. The College uses the teaching and peer observation process as the primary means of identifying good practice, and examples of this have been used in enhancing provision. This matter is also addressed under Expectation B3. The College quality unit organises Staff Development Weeks, which provide a useful opportunity to share good practice and discuss common challenges. Staff have been invited to attend the awarding body's teaching and learning conference as part of staff development, and some are booked to attend.

4.9 The College considers student participation in quality assurance and enhancement is effective. However, it acknowledges that there is a need for further development in line with Expectation B5 of the Quality Code. The recently introduced Student Representation and Participants in Enhancement of the Programme document sets out a limited range of opportunities for students' active participation. There is a range of useful mechanisms in place for gathering student feedback, including module evaluations and Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings. Students are invited to attend cross-College student meetings and awarding body Programme Management meetings. The review team also met students who consider that they have opportunities to express issues, raise good practice and potential actions, and propose solutions. This matter is also addressed in in Expectation B5, where the team recommends that the College formally articulate student engagement arrangements, in order to ensure their active participation in the enhancement of the programme.

4.10 Although quality assurance processes operate effectively there is limited evidence of systematic consideration of good practice, enhancement activities, or of the Expectations of the Quality Code. The College has yet to engage students fully as partners. Although external experts and practitioners are involved in the teaching of the programme there is no systematic process to use their expertise in programme review and enhancement.

4.11 Enhancement is implicit in many of the College's aims, priorities and practices, with some examples of enhancement taking place. A number of enhancement activities have recently been introduced. However, the Higher Education Strategy does not refer explicitly to

how enhancement is deliberately addressed or embedded, or how various improvement activities are coherently drawn together. The mechanisms in place for compliance and quality assurance provide the foundations for a more strategic approach. Further work needs to be undertaken systematically to identify and disseminate good practice. The team considers that there are emerging processes in place to develop and enrich the students' experience, but more needs to be done to fully engage students as partners. There is insufficient emphasis on use of the Quality Code in managing higher education, to underpin processes of enhancement. The review team **recommends** that, by January 2016, the College consolidates the various improvement activities to provide a more systematic, explicit and planned approach to enhancement.

4.12 Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation about Enhancement is met. The associated level of risk is moderate as, although procedures for implementing and reviewing enhancement activities are broadly adequate, they are not fully developed or explicit. There is insufficient emphasis on use of the Quality Code in managing higher education at the College to underpin processes of enhancement.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.13 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. The team considers the Expectation is met, based on the extent to which the College has recently introduced and integrated a set of initiatives to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.14 However, the College's approach to the monitoring and review of enhancement activity is at an emerging stage. Enhancement is driven informally, rather than systematically consolidated within the higher education structures. Procedures for implementing enhancement are not fully developed or explicit which has led to a recommendation in this area. There are limited opportunities for students' formal engagement in quality assurance and enhancement processes and this is addressed both in a recommendation under Part B and in this section where it is recommended that, by January 2016, the College consolidate the various improvement activities to provide a more systematic, explicit and planned approach to enhancement. There are no features of good practice or affirmations.

4.15 The team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

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

Findings

5.1 The College selected the theme of student involvement in quality assurance for the review team to explore.

5.2 The self-evaluation states that the College's desire is to be responsive to the students and also notes that, given the small number of students, there are many informal opportunities to realise student involvement. More formal opportunities are provided by the Staff-Student Liaison Committee, which the College is required to conduct under the terms of the partnership agreement and student representatives are invited to attend the Programme Management Committee which is held at the degree-awarding body.

5.3 The review team conducted meetings with both staff and students and read the minutes of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee and Programme Management Committee meetings to gather evidence in relation to the theme.

5.4 In meetings, students comment that they are generally content with their level of involvement in College processes, are happy with the programme and feel well supported. Students complete module evaluations and attend the liaison meetings where modules are reviewed. An additional student focus group was held earlier in the current academic year following the expression of some dissatisfaction with the professional studies module. It was evident, however, that no students who met the team had attended the programme management meetings held at the degree-awarding body, and this is addressed by a recommendation under Expectation B5.

5.5 In summary, the review team concludes that student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement tends to operate reactively. This approach ensures that issues are resolved as they arise, but the College is encouraged to consider appropriate ways in which to facilitate the engagement of students as proactive participants in their learning experience.

Glossary

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

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

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

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* (FQHEIS).

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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