



Higher Education Review of Barnfield College

October 2015

Contents

About this review	1
Key findings.....	2
QAA's judgements about Barnfield College.....	2
Good practice	2
Recommendations	2
Affirmation of action being taken	3
Theme: Student Employability.....	3
About Barnfield College	4
Explanation of the findings about Barnfield College	6
1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations	7
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities	23
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities	44
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities.....	47
5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability	50
Glossary.....	52

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Barnfield College. The review took place from 19 to 22 October 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Simon Jones
- Mrs Patricia Millner
- Miss Nicole Natur (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

In reviewing Barnfield 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 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,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/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code.

² Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.

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 Barnfield College

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

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

Good practice

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

- The engagement of students in internal and external interdisciplinary learning opportunities (Expectation B3).
- The engagement of the Health and Safety Manager in due diligence reviews of placement providers (Expectation B10).

Recommendations

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

By May 2016:

- ensure that higher education staff are familiar with the external reference points for academic standards (Expectation A2.1)
- formalise systems for maintaining academic records (Expectation A2.2)
- implement a rigorous ongoing process for senior management oversight of academic standards (Expectations A3.3 and A1)
- formalise internal procedures for the development and approval of higher education programmes (Expectation B1)
- systematically implement the Higher Education Admissions Policy, including appropriate training of staff involved in admissions (Expectation B2)
- implement a rigorous ongoing process for senior management oversight of learning and teaching practices (Expectation B3)
- formalise systems to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources that enable higher education students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4)
- implement a coherent procedure for the production and evaluation of annual course reports (Expectation B8)
- ensure that complaints and appeals are systematically recorded, analysed and discussed, and that appropriate action is taken (Expectation B9)
- provide clear information to prospective students on awarding bodies, how the recruitment, selection and admissions process will be conducted, and ensure that entry requirements are transparent (Expectations C and B2)
- develop and articulate a robust strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken by the College to engage with employers in the design and development of higher education programmes (Expectation B1).
- The actions being taken to increase students' involvement in College committees (Expectation B5).

Theme: Student Employability

Barnfield College is committed to providing students with individual guidance, access to employers, careers information and work experience, and promoting the development and use of transferable and career management skills to achieve rewarding and sustainable employment. The College's purpose and ambition is to equip students with the skills for successful, sustained careers, using a curriculum that reflects and informs industry practice. The College's Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment, and Student Enhancement Strategies place professional practice and industry awareness at the centre of its approach to teaching.

The College acknowledges that students have not always benefited from 'planned' or 'readily identified' strategies to promote employability. Students identified through informal discussions that they would like to have formal exposure to developing both their employability and entrepreneurial skills. According to the College, since the last QAA visit, the collection of destination data for higher education students has been weak. Teaching staff in individual curriculum areas are able to provide anecdotal evidence, but there has been no systematic collection and analysis of the journey that individual students take upon completion of their studies. Employers reported that currently no one is requested to deliver guest lectures or other employability-related events, though they would be open to such initiatives in future.

The College aims to implement a Student Employability Strategy in the coming academic year, though no evidence was offered in the College submission. In meetings there was little to demonstrate a systematic, integrated or comprehensive approach to employability within the curriculum or through extracurricular enhancement during the review visit.

The review team heard from teaching staff that employability skills were discretely considered in the second year, and students confirmed that tutors teach workplace etiquette, behaviour and skills. Students report that discrete skills, including teamwork, problem solving and interaction with one another offers insight into employability skills and awareness of personal capability. Students also report that their courses prepare them for placements and stimulate ambition for further study or career direction. Link Tutors identify that many students are already employed or on a placement, and they support individuals' pastoral needs particularly, also monitoring the attendance of work experience students.

The review team heard from support staff that although there was previously a Careers Adviser, no one is currently in post, and it is unlikely that a dedicated Higher Education Officer will be appointed in the near future. The review team explored elements of the College's Employability Policy with teaching staff, but struggled to establish a strong awareness of the policy and how it is integrated into the teaching curriculum effectively to promote transferable skills or realise graduate attributes, nor were these terms confidently used. Consequently, the review team found that the College was unable to demonstrate a

systematic, integrated or comprehensive approach to employability, and therefore this requires improvement.

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

About Barnfield College

Barnfield College (the College), located on two sites in Luton, has approximately 2,100 full-time students, of which approximately 1,500 are between 16 and 18 years old. Luton is in the top 20 per cent nationally of most deprived local authorities. Ninety per cent of students live within a three-mile radius of the College. Around 60 per cent of students at the College are from ethnic minority groups.

The College provides most sector subject areas, ranging from pre-entry to higher education programmes validated through the University of Bedfordshire and Pearson. The College has a large adult and employer training budget of £5.4 million and works with a range of different employers. College enrolment has declined due to recent poor local reputation and poor quality of provision.

The College mission aims to realise the entrepreneurial, skills and educational needs of the community and employers through inclusive, outstanding, innovative programmes of study. The primary aims of the Higher Education Strategy, aligned to the College's mission, are to offer applicants flexibility in the level and mode of study, raise and widen participation in higher education in Luton and the wider Bedfordshire area, represent value for money, and prepare students for careers in an identified vocational area mapped to relevant labour market intelligence.

The College provides higher education awards on behalf of the University of Bedfordshire and Pearson. Higher education provision at the College had shrunk both in terms of the number of programmes on offer and the number of full-time equivalents in the years preceding the last QAA review. In 2011-12, the College took the decision to grow its provision. The key aims of expansion were to offer progression opportunities in College higher education or full-time 16-18 year old students, and attract adult returners to undertake higher education study in order to progress their careers.

Since the last visit undertaken by QAA to conduct an Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in May 2011, the College experienced a decline in the quality of further education provision as a result of poor and changing leadership, and a lack of performance management. Previously having a local, regional and national reputation for high quality, innovation and responding to the needs of students, businesses and the local community, the College subsequently set up a multi-academy trust to work with a number of local schools. The decline in outcomes for students, quality of teaching and learning, and poor progression of students, together with constant change, culminated in an Ofsted inspection report of November 2014 where the College received an inadequate rating with no recorded strengths. Following the Ofsted report, the College appointed a new Chair, new Board and new Principal, and broke away from the multi-academy trust; the College is also pursuing a new direction, focused on meeting the needs of local students, business and the community, with a new strategic plan and management processes to achieve new key performance measures.

Key challenges for the College are to attain its new strategic plan and thus recapture its previous high reputation. The 2011 IQER report contained the advisable recommendation to establish more formal student participation at course level, to allow the expression of the student voice and to facilitate the sharing of information such as external examiner reports

with student representatives. The College notes that the Higher Education Student Engagement Policy outlines commitments the College will make to enhancing student representation from 2015-16 onwards, and more clearly defines the role of the student representatives in terms of their responsibilities for representing their cohort. Likewise, the College notes that student representatives have played a role in strategic development of the provision, but this presently occurs on a needs-led basis. These statements suggest that this advisable recommendation has not been addressed since the last QAA review.

The IQER report also recommended that it would be desirable to extend the specific overview of the College's higher education provision to foster a more collective and strategic approach to the review and enhancement of standards and the quality of learning opportunities, and to continue to develop the use of interactive facilities within the virtual learning environment (VLE). The College cites an Ofsted report as evidence addressing this desirable recommendation, which is a report that is not directly related to higher education provision and the Quality Code. The self-evaluation document which the College submitted for the current review also notes the College's developing of a Teaching and Learning Policy; Student Engagement Policy; Learner Enhancement Policy; and Pearson Assessment Policy. These statements suggest that this desirable recommendation has not been adequately addressed since the last QAA review.

Explanation of the findings about Barnfield College

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

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

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

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

positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College works with two higher education partners (the University of Bedfordshire and Pearson) on a number of Professional Graduate Certificates in Education, a foundation degree, and Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Diplomas (HNDs).

1.2 Awarding partners are responsible for setting the standards for the College's programmes through their own academic frameworks and regulations. The College identifies the University of Bedfordshire as ensuring provisions to meet *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and all programmes currently offered as being approved for partnership delivery, with the academic level checked through the University's Programme Design and Approval Process. The College identifies that Pearson courses are delivered at level 4 and 5 only. The College's programme specifications establish the coverage of core units, the aims and programme outcomes, unit specifications, and meeting FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements as appropriate.

1.3 The College contributes to the University's franchise arrangements through academic validation and review processes, by attending development meetings, and attending validation and review events.

1.4 College staff are able to contribute to course materials, subject to the University academic approval process set out in its Quality Regulations. The College notes that it has contributed only to minor modification activity to date, and has received positive verbal feedback from University committees for programme design and development, particularly in regard to the FdA Child and Family Studies programme.

1.5 The College identifies that the foundation degrees have been written noting the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark (2010)*, and that all share key features such as vocational referencing, are designed with sector/employer input, and contain aspects of work-based learning and/or professional development as key features. Teacher training qualifications are written with reference to professional standards and guidance on qualifications. The arrangements above would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.6 The review team tested this Expectation through scrutiny of documentation supplied to inform the approval and review of programmes from awarding partners, and external examiner reports, and through discussions with College and University staff.

1.7 External examiner reports reflect that academic standards are being met at appropriate levels and that learning outcomes are also being met, while raising minor issues about consistencies in marking and moderation. The College produces annual monitoring and enhancement plans for higher education programmes that address the maintenance of academic standards.

1.8 The College has appointed a new Senior Management Team for higher education programmes, and has recently implemented a new committee structure and reporting mechanism that offers the potential for clear oversight for the maintenance of academic standards. These arrangements include weekly higher education meetings with the newly appointed Head of Quality, supplementing regular informal meetings with Link Tutors and University/Pearson colleagues.

1.9 There is evidence that approaches to higher education standards are not clearly understood and expressed within higher education programmes, and confident understanding of higher education standards and its independent operation are not yet established. The College was unable to articulate the establishing of higher education key performance indicators beyond an analysis of the previous year's data. The review team heard that higher education students' metrics were not analysed independently of the College population. The review team learned that the College has newly introduced its own Examination Board, bringing courses together to share and encourage good practice. Plans for expansion of higher education provision, particularly in HNC/D provision, where responsibility for securing academic standards is invested in the College, were also identified.

1.10 The review team concludes that the College has a well-established contact with Link Tutors from its awarding body, but has less confidence in the action planning arising from external examiner reports and other reporting mechanisms generated by the Annual Monitoring and Review to address the student experience, for example, measured by retention, progression and attainment. The review team is concerned about the security and robustness of the new structures; the appreciation of higher education academic standards setting and benchmarking; and their operation, which is as yet untested. Consequently, the review team **recommends** that the College implement a rigorous ongoing process for senior management oversight of academic standards.

1.11 Given the immaturity of the current operation of the College's academic governance, and the rigour with which it is currently applied, the review team found that, while quality assurance procedures are broadly adequate, the College's policies and processes ensure standards are being met

1.12 Despite the immaturity of the current operation of the College's academic governance, and the rigour with which it is currently applied, the review team found that the College's quality assurance procedures are broadly adequate, and that policies and processes ensure that standards are being met. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.13 The College states that awarding body and awarding organisation regulations govern awarding of academic credit and qualifications for the higher education programmes that the College offers.

1.14 All higher education programmes are also governed by the College Higher Education Core Documents, which include the Higher Education Strategy, Higher Education Assessment Strategy, and the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Strategy. These are monitored by the College Higher Education Quality Group and subject to specific guidance set out in the College and University of Bedfordshire documentation that details policy and regulation for all provision.

1.15 The College identifies the University of Bedfordshire as responsible for academic approval, review and withdrawal arrangement. Programme monitoring and management that is led by the faculty is subject to University policy and process detailed within collaborative guidance, including regulations for programme operation, assessment regulations and examination regulations. The University appoints a Link Tutor to act as the main point of contact, and invites College staff to attend University partner forums and programme committees to monitor the programme.

1.16 Programme specifications are approved through validation and review processes set out by the University of Bedfordshire for franchised provision.

1.17 The College identifies Pearson provision as operated within the quality assurance requirements outlined in the Pearson Quality Assurance Handbook. The College has developed a set of policy documents and guidance for the delivery of HNCs, covering assessment, learning and teaching, admissions, and Assessment Boards. All guidance is available in the College Higher Education Core Documents.

1.18 The College states that Higher Education Strategy documentation is maintained and reviewed annually by the College Higher Education Quality Group. The arrangements above would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.19 The review team tested the Expectation through scrutiny of documentation supplied to inform the assurance of academic standards from the awarding body and organisation, and the College, external examiner reports, and discussions with College and University staff and students.

1.20 The College recently established a new academic committee and reporting structure for higher education provision with the appointment of a new Quality Manager to oversee these operations. Supporting this post are Higher Education Subject Leads among senior staff. All higher education-related staff attend weekly meetings to address the delivery of provision. The College restructure of its governance approach will provide opportunities through weekly meetings and explicit annual monitoring and reporting, and a revised continuing professional development approach for teaching staff. These strategies have the potential to support higher education teaching and learning, and postgraduate teaching

qualifications, and an opportunity to focus more effectively on higher education cohorts' student experience. The higher education-specific approach will enable teaching staff, support staff and industry/employers' views to support academic standards and benefit the student experience.

1.21 External examiner reports support the upholding of standards and the process of academic quality review and Examination Boards. External examiners attend the College and meet teaching staff and students during the academic year. External examiner reports are available on the College VLE. Students report that they are aware of the assessment marking regime operated in the College, and the moderation and confirmation of marks operated by the awarding body and organisation.

1.22 Both staff and students identified what was necessary within assessments to attain appropriate levels, and how the process works in liaison between the College and awarding body and organisation. The continual informal contact from the awarding body through the Link Tutor mechanism was shown to be an effective support. There was less evidence that higher education academic frameworks are fully understood. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure that higher education staff are familiar with the external reference points for academic standards.

1.23 The review team concludes that the College, with its relationships and well established links with awarding body and organisation partners, follows the standards set and operates an external examiner practice that demonstrates appropriate governance and transparency. Higher education staff are clear about awarding partners' expectations, but they do not demonstrate how standards and regulations are established and achieved. Consequently, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: 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

1.24 The College does not have degree awarding powers. Degrees are delivered as franchised programmes through the University of Bedfordshire and Pearson. Academic standards of all franchised programmes are subject to academic governance arrangements set out by the University of Bedfordshire and Pearson. The College has its own policies in place, regardless of the awarding body or organisation, that govern the programmes in the College Higher Education Core Documents (Higher Education Strategy, Higher Education Publishing, Higher Education Assessment Strategy, and Higher Education Teaching and Learning Strategy; alongside the Higher Education Submission Policy, the Higher Education Academic Misconduct Policy, Higher Education Assessment Board guidance and Accreditation of Prior and/or Experiential Learning (APEL) Policy.

1.25 All staff are required to comply with guidance set out in the Higher Education Core Documents. The College appoints a College Link Tutor to liaise with the University of Bedfordshire and Pearson, who attends University partner forums and programme committees. These provisions would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.26 The review team tested the College's arrangements for maintaining a definitive record of the programmes delivered on behalf of its awarding body and organisation by looking at the College course information form detailing course specification and learning outcomes for both its University of Bedfordshire provision and Pearson provision. The review team also spoke to senior staff and Link Tutors for degrees awarded by the University of Bedfordshire.

1.27 The awarding body Link Tutors engage in consistent communication with the College to ensure academic standards are maintained. Learning outcomes are consistently detailed in course handbooks for students. Although the College has its own policies that govern the programmes in the College Higher Education Core Documents, including the Higher Education Strategy, the review team found that no members of staff were able to describe how the College applied these policies. The review team noted a lack of clarity about who was responsible within the College for each aspect of ensuring that specifications remain up-to-date and are maintained. The review team notes that the College's formal arrangements for maintaining the reference point for delivery and assessment of programmes through its governance and committee structure have not been fully implemented. The review team **recommends** that the College formalise systems for maintaining academic records.

1.28 Overall, the review team found that the close and well maintained links between the College and the awarding body and organisation demonstrate that it is able to maintain the reference point for delivery and assessment of programmes, their monitoring and review, and for provision of records of study to students and alumni. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. The risk in this area is moderate as the College is generally able to maintain reference points for academic standards but formal systems have not yet been fully implemented.

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

1.29 As an institution without degree awarding powers, the College offers Level 6 qualifications such as HNCs, HNDs and foundation degrees, developed and approved by the University of Bedfordshire and Pearson. The programmes currently offered as part of a franchise arrangement with the University are also delivered by other partner colleges. Modifications to programmes are the responsibility of the University and Pearson. The responsibility for ensuring that academic standards are set at a level that meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification, in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations, lies with the University and Pearson.

1.30 For Pearson programmes, the College complies with Pearson's quality and standards requirements, and has developed appropriate policies and procedures, including those for assessment and verification, Assessment Boards, submission of assessed work and academic malpractice. The College operates within the framework of the University of Bedfordshire and follows the University's regulations for validation procedures of foundation degrees. The College processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.31 To review the effectiveness of these practices and procedures, the review team analysed the College's self-evaluation document and associated supporting evidence. The team also met awarding body representatives; senior, academic and support staff; and Subject Area Leads for Higher Education.

1.32 The evidence reviewed shows that the College operates effectively within the context of its awarding body and awarding organisation. Programmes are approved and the academic level checked through the University's Programme Design and Approval Process. The College contributes to academic validation by attending development meetings and events to demonstrate capacity to deliver the provision at the appropriate levels and confirm partnership arrangements. The College further supports validation by producing documents as needed: mostly those outlining physical and staffing resources. College staff attend validation events. The College has successfully gained approval from the University of Bedfordshire for its foundation degrees, Certificate in Education, and Professional Graduate Certificate in Education. For Pearson programmes, the College has some degree of autonomy because it can choose option units, write its own assignment and design its own quality assurance processes to align with Pearson guidelines. The College approval process applies to both Pearson and University programme proposals. Staff are able to put forward proposals for new programmes using a standard pro forma. The College's Head of Higher Education oversees and quality assures the process of programme design, development and approval. The Senior Leadership Team makes the final decision about whether the development will proceed.

1.33 Course information forms for University programmes and programme specifications for Pearson programmes are used to determine the levels of learning outcomes and assessment processes to ensure that students are able to achieve them. College staff work closely with the University Link Tutors and other College partners on assessment and moderation matters to assure academic standards through cross-marking events following

approval. The College has developed its own policies for Pearson programmes, including an Assessment and Verification Policy in line with guidance provided. External examiners reports have identified no issues for concern about the academic standards of students' work.

1.34 The review team considers that the College's higher education provision is developed and approved in accordance with the academic frameworks of the University of Bedfordshire and Pearson. The awarding partners ensure that the procedures followed by the College align with their guidelines and regulations. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (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

1.35 The University of Bedfordshire and Pearson are responsible for ensuring that assessment meets the UK threshold standard and their own academic standards. The College complies with the assessment processes and regulations of its awarding body and organisation. Assessments for University of Bedfordshire awards are developed and internally verified by the University to ensure that they enable learning outcomes in all modules to be achieved and the programme learning outcomes to be attained. The University's Quality Handbook and associated documentation enable the oversight of all assessment processes that the College follows. College teams deliver and mark the assessments. Staff double-mark assessments, which may also be moderated by other Colleges in the University's franchise partnerships. The process is managed by the University. Examination Boards ratify marks. The programme team designs the Pearson assessments, and a qualified member of the teaching team verifies assignment briefs. Assessments are marked by the tutor and moderated by an appropriately experienced member of staff. The external examiner appointed by Pearson reviews the briefs and agrees assessment decisions at the College Assessment Boards. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.36 To test the effectiveness of the processes, the review team considered the College's self-evaluation document and associated documentary evidence, including the College's Assessment and Verification Policy, external examiner reports, and programme specifications. The team also met senior staff, teaching staff and representatives from the University of Bedfordshire.

1.37 The evidence show that policies and practices are effective in practice. The review team heard evidence that College staff engage with University academic regulations for assessment. They have formed positive relationships with University link staff and contribute to moderation events with the other partner Colleges in the franchise. College staff are also involved in sharing suggestions for revising learning outcomes, assessment briefs and moderation practices. For example, the partnership has agreed that assessed work should be sampled rather than all pieces of work being double-marked. For Pearson programmes, staff write assignment briefs to cover the unit learning outcomes and ensure that pass criteria can be met. Staff follow the College Assessment and Verification Policy for checking assignment briefs, verifying the standards and accuracy of assessment marking and correct use of the grading criteria.

1.38 The external examiner appointed by the University samples all franchise provision from its partner Colleges, including Barnfield College, and produces a report for the whole provision across the franchise. Examination Boards are managed by the University of Bedfordshire. The College sends representatives to take part in the Boards. Pearson appoints external examiners for the higher education programmes at Barnfield. The College has its own Higher Education Assessment Board guidance, operated for HNC and HND

programmes. It was developed according to Pearson guidelines on examination processes. External examiners confirm that the award standards are being maintained and are comparable with those of similar programmes of other providers. The external examiner for Pearson business programmes commented on the 'rigorous quality assurance process in place in terms of the internal verification of the assignment briefs and assessment decisions'.

1.39 The review team found that the College is effectively managing its responsibilities for assessment, and award of credit and qualifications, in accordance with its awarding body and awarding organisation. It has suitable processes in place for accurate and consistent assessment that ensure appropriate opportunities to enable students to achieve the learning outcomes. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.40 The College states that it adheres to the requirements of the University of Bedfordshire for monitoring and review of its foundation degrees. Each programme completes an Annual Monitoring and Review report, unit enhancement plan and course enhancement plan. The College forwards reports to the University UK Partnerships Committee. The College works closely with University Link Tutors and other college franchise partners to address external examiner comments in order to maintain academic standards.

1.41 The College has its own annual programme review process for Pearson programmes. Previously, this process was based on an Ofsted framework. From 2015-16 the College will introduce a new, separate higher education self-evaluation document for all higher education programmes (University of Bedfordshire and Pearson), which will be mapped to QAA identified themes. Previously, HNC and HND programmes produced unit and course reports and enhancement plans that covered retention and achievement data, student feedback, external examiner comments, employer engagement and staff continuing professional development activities. The course journal is a summary of good practice and indicates items for dissemination. The reports and journals are working documents, which are monitored on a regular basis by weekly team meetings and reviews during November and February in the College quality cycle. These arrangements would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

1.42 The review team considered the College's self-evaluation document and associated supporting evidence, including annual monitoring reports, course reports and enhancement plans, course journals and external examiner reports. The review team met senior staff, teaching staff, support services staff, and University Link Tutors to assess the effectiveness of policies and practices for monitoring and reviewing programmes to address academic standards.

1.43 The University is satisfied that the College operates acceptably within its policies. Annual programme reports are produced and subsequently monitored satisfactorily. The College's self-evaluation document focuses on proposals for future Annual Monitoring and Review, with little information about the cyclical quality processes for current and past practices. Although staff were able to articulate a course report and enhancement process within a quality cycle for Pearson programmes, the College provided no detail or documentary evidence about the previous processes for annual reporting and subsequent monitoring of Pearson programmes, or about the way reports are fed through the College's deliberative and strategic committees. The review team **recommends** that the College implements a rigorous ongoing process for senior management oversight of academic standards.

1.44 While the review team found that the College follows the Annual Monitoring and Review procedures of its awarding body and organisation, operation of the College's quality cycle and reporting processes for course reviews needs to be strengthened to ensure senior management oversight of higher education academic standards. The review team concludes

that Expectation A3.3 is met and the associated level of risk is moderate, because of weaknesses in the College's academic governance structure.

Expectation: 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

1.45 The College states that it is responsible for maintaining academic standards on its programmes in accordance with the standards set by its awarding body and organisation.

1.46 The University and Pearson have clear procedures for monitoring academic provision, assessment of learning outcomes and alignment to UK academic standards.

1.47 University programmes complete annual programme monitoring and evaluation exercises for each individual programme that detail how assessment is delivered according to the University's assessment regulations. Assessments are set, and briefs are internally verified by the University team. College teaching teams deliver and mark the assessment. Work is then submitted for moderation, which is managed by the University.

1.48 The programme team writes the Pearson provision assessments, and a qualified member of the teaching team internally verifies the briefs. The College places reliance primarily on external examiners and standards verifiers appointed by the awarding organisation for Pearson programmes. Once verified, briefs are distributed to students. Assessments are marked by the responsible tutor and moderated by the appointed moderator. The external examiner reviews assessment decisions and briefs. Decisions made at the Assessment Board are then claimed through Pearson. Assessment rules are detailed in documentation for teaching teams and student handbooks.

1.49 External examiners are appointed by the University and Pearson according to their policies and procedures. All franchise provision for University programmes is sampled by one external examiner and a report produced for the provision. Pearson appoints external examiners for HNC/D provision. The College External Examiner Policy guides staff in this process.

1.50 Course teams discuss external examiner reports that identify areas of good practice and require further development, respond to feedback from the process of externality, and use this to enhance course provision and improve professional practice.

1.51 Assessment decisions are officially ratified by Examination Boards.

1.52 In the 2015-16 academic year, the College intends to introduce its own higher education self-evaluation document for University and Pearson provision. The purpose of introducing this process will be to map self-evaluation activity to QAA identified themes. The arrangements above would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.53 The review team tested this Expectation through scrutiny of documentation supplied to inform the assurance of academic standards from the awarding body, organisation and College, external examiner reports, and discussions with College and University staff and students.

1.54 External examiners and standards verifiers are appointed by the University and Pearson in accordance with their guidelines. External examiner reports confirm the alignment with academic standards and the assessment of learning outcomes. External examiner responses and reports are discussed with Link Tutors. The Quality Manager will collate action points and report to future higher education quality committees.

1.55 The review team established that the College follows the academic governance arrangements, monitoring and action planning set out by its awarding partners.

1.56 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.57 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.58 All seven of the Expectations for this judgement area are met, and the associated level of risk is low for three Expectations and moderate for four Expectations. The moderate risk in Expectation A1 centres around the security and robustness of new academic structures, and the staff's appreciation of higher education academic standards setting, benchmarking and their operation, which are untested. The moderate risk in Expectation A2.1 centres around the College's higher education staff's inability to demonstrate how the College's academic partners' standards and regulations are established and achieved. The moderate risk in Expectation A2.2 centres around the College's lack of implementation of formal arrangements for maintaining the reference point for delivery and assessment of programmes through its governance and committee structure. The moderate risk in Expectation A3.3 centres around weaknesses in the College's academic governance structure.

1.59 There are no features of good practice or affirmations in this judgement area. Recommendations associated with this judgement area are located under Expectations A1, A2.1, A2.2 and A3.3. These concern the need to implement a rigorous ongoing College process for senior management oversight of academic standards (Expectations A1 and A3.3); to ensure that higher education staff are familiar with the external reference points for academic standards (Expectation A2.1); and to formalise systems for maintaining academic records (Expectation A2.2).

1.60 The review team noted that the College maintains effective relationships with its awarding body and organisation, and responds appropriately to their requirements. Many of the College's internal policies and systems intended to ensure that it can meet the requirements of the awarding body and organisation are newly introduced. Staff need to acquire a clearer understanding of these systems in order for the policies and systems to be fully effective. The moderate risks identified for four of the Expectations and the four recommendations are directed towards strengthening the College's management and implementation of its new policies and systems. The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 Responsibility for programme design and approval lies with the University for the College's foundation degree provision. The College operates within the quality procedures of the University for approval and modification of courses and units. The College has an internal process for programme approval. These arrangements would allow Expectation B1 to be met.

2.2 To review the effectiveness of these practices and procedures, the review team analysed the College's self-evaluation document and associated supporting evidence. It met awarding body representatives, senior, academic and support staff, and Subject Area Leads for Higher Education.

2.3 The University programmes are delivered in a franchise agreement. Foundation degrees are developed by the University and are delivered by the College along with other colleges in the University's partnership arrangements. The College supports validation by producing documents as needed, mostly those outlining physical and staffing resources. College staff attend validation events at the University. The validation requirements are well understood by College staff, who work closely with University Link Tutors to ensure that validation requirements are met. College staff attend planning meetings with Link Tutors and staff of other partner colleges to discuss revisions to programmes.

2.4 The College has an internal approval process for Pearson programmes that also operates for University programmes prior to external validation. The review team heard that subject area teams put forward ideas for new programmes. Key curriculum contacts such as course leaders provide subject input. Development plans are drawn up to take into account resources, demand and financial aspects in a process overseen by the Head of Higher Education. The relevant Head of Department presents the development plans to a senior management panel. The Senior Leadership Team makes the decision whether the development goes ahead. The review team did not see any documentary evidence of development plans or minutes of meetings where approval had been given.

2.5 The College acknowledges that greater external input, including employer advice, is needed to inform the programme development process. The review team met a group of employers, who were very enthusiastic about the College's approaches to work with them in developing higher education programmes to meet local industry needs in line with the College's Higher Education Strategy. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken by the College to engage with employers in the design and development of higher education programmes.

2.6 The College states that from September 2015 it will operate an internal validation process for all new programmes prior to validation by awarding bodies, although no detailed evidence of the proposed process has been provided. This is to ensure managerial oversight and will fit with the College's Higher Education Strategy. There are no plans currently to

include students in the process. The College has identified that it intends to establish a programme design and development focus group that will include students.

2.7 In view of the lack of formal documentation and new developments for approval (for example, including employers and possibly students more fully in the process), the review team **recommends** that the College formalise internal procedures for the development and approval of higher education programmes.

2.8 The review team concludes that the College operates satisfactory processes for the design, development and approval of programmes, which support the setting and maintenance of academic standards and assure the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities. The review team concludes therefore that Expectation B1 is met and 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 to Higher Education

Findings

2.9 The College is responsible for recruitment of students for both University of Bedfordshire programmes and Pearson programmes through their centralised processes. The College admits students according to University and Pearson requirements. The College operates its own higher education admissions processes and policy for recruitment and selection of students. In creative subjects, applicants usually present a portfolio or undergo an audition. The College provides entry criteria and programme details on its website for applicants. This would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.10 The review team examined the College Higher Education Admissions Policy, the APEL Policy, the UCAS higher education programmes listings offered by the College, the College website, and the College's higher education retention and achievement rates. The team also spoke to students, teaching staff, support staff and senior staff.

2.11 The Higher Education Admissions Policy was revised and consolidated in June 2015 but did not amend the admissions procedure for recruiting students. The Policy states that to be offered a place, a student must demonstrate their suitability for the course at interview. It also states that following the interview, an applicant may be offered a conditional or unconditional place on the course applied for, offered an alternative course, or be rejected. The recruitment process allows the students to make an informed decision about their course choice, but the requirement for an interview to determine selection is not published on UCAS, the College website or in the 2016-17 full-time prospectus for higher education courses.

2.12 The review team found that application of the Higher Education Admissions Policy was inconsistent across the College's higher education provision. Some staff members conducted interviews formally; most members of staff and heads of departments offered informal interviews. The College does not provide any instructions for conducting admissions interviews. The review team also found that students were not aware that they were required to participate in an interview until the time that they were being interviewed. This illustrates a lack of transparency in the recruitment and selection of students.

2.13 There is no mention of who is responsible for admitting students, either within the Higher Education Admissions Policy or otherwise. The review team found that all staff members are involved in making decisions on whether or not to admit a candidate. The College does not carry out any activities to ensure that teaching staff are assessed as competent to make decisions on its behalf. The College offers limited training for conducting student interviews in the form of observing two interviews.

2.14 The Higher Education Admissions Policy states that in some circumstances, students with appropriate experience will be considered. The review team found that there was disparity in application of the Policy within the College. The College was unable to establish how it monitors the admissions process across the higher education programmes it offers other than through student feedback.

2.15 The Higher Education Admissions Policy also refers to complaints and appeals for rejections. The review team was unable to find further evidence of a formalised process that is clear and transparent for students. The Policy is new, and is not recognised and implemented by College staff. Recruitment of students is not underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. The review team **recommends** that the College systematically implement the Higher Education Admissions Policy, including appropriate training of staff involved in admissions.

2.16 The review team found a lack of clarity regarding entry requirements for each course, which was inconsistent with the Higher Education Admissions Policy and information provided to students (see also Expectation C). The team found that the policy and procedures are not transparent, clear and explicit, and do not adhere to the principle of fair admission. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.17 The College's Higher Education Teaching and Learning Strategy is designed to enhance teaching and learning across the College's provision.

2.18 The College identifies teaching and learning outcomes as areas for development. Student satisfaction outcomes; observation outcomes; and outcomes from reviews such as the Teaching and Learning Review have not been efficiently captured in previous years. The College intends to oversee annual monitoring through a Higher Education Quality Group and Senior Leadership Team in the coming academic year. The restructure of governance by the College to provide an increased focus on higher education and integrate this through all levels of staff has the potential to enable a number of positive developments.

2.19 The College states that teaching teams possess sound subject knowledge and are qualified to teach at the appropriate academic level. The teaching staff possess an academic level of attainment that is one academic level above course delivery, with 20 per cent of higher education staff possessing Level 7 qualifications. A College review of the higher education teaching team's qualifications, experience and practice indicates that almost 90 per cent have previous career experience relevant to the area in which they are teaching, and many staff are engaged in professional updating.

2.20 The College also states that the majority of teaching staff delivering higher education are qualified teachers. Some more recently appointed staff are completing teaching qualifications on a part-time basis in line with the College teaching contract. The College confirms that the suitability of staff to deliver higher education programmes is checked by Pearson as part of the validation process and by the University at Joint Boards of Study.

2.21 The College states that all teaching staff engage in annual performance reviews where line managers monitor performance. Targets and goals (such as continuing professional development requirements) are identified through this process.

2.22 The College reports that it practices a robust performance management process that is evidenced by the performance management of any teacher receiving a grade 3 or 4 in observation, with the requirement that they are given two weeks to prepare for reobservation to demonstrate they can achieve at least a grade 2.

2.23 Teaching practice and performance is reviewed through the lesson observation process. Graded observations of higher education teaching staff were conducted during 2014-15, of which 80 per cent were graded as 'good' or better. The College notes the development of new initiatives such as peer observations, but identifies a need for a more consistent approach to staff consultation and even the delegation of developments to different teaching teams in the process of policy formation and review.

2.24 The College uses a VLE in addition to other online learning platforms, and FdA students have access to BREO, the University of Bedfordshire VLE.

2.25 The College's library staff maintain library stock. New materials are purchased on an annual basis. As well as College learning resource centre facilities, students on foundation degree programmes can access a wide range of services and facilities at the University of Bedfordshire.

2.26 The College considers encouraging student engagement to be central to its Higher Education Teaching and Learning Strategy. The Strategy outlines expectations of students, including attendance, engagement in class and formative assessment and engagement with independent learning. The College describes how it monitors student engagement at programme level through monitoring of attendance. The College takes a proactive approach to attendance, and if attendance falls, tutors make contact with students. All students have access to one-to-one tutorials and individual learning plans. The College intends to develop individualised targets and build strong professional relationships with students. Attendance and retention are monitored throughout the year by the Curriculum Learner Experience Group.

2.27 Student satisfaction with programmes is monitored through student survey and monitoring meetings. The arrangements above would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.28 The review team tested the effectiveness of teaching and learning and the engagement of students in learning by scrutinising the range of evidence supplied and meeting staff, students and student support teams.

2.29 The review team noted the College's restructure of governance to provide an increased focus for higher education. The College has been developing higher education resources within its VLE. Students can access plagiarism-detection software to check their work prior to submission. University of Bedfordshire students can also access the University's VLE for additional study materials and supporting information for their awards. Students are also able to access the University's physical library provision and visit the University as part of their induction.

2.30 The review team heard that both formal annual monitoring and informal staff-student liaison were key parts of systematically reviewing and enhancing the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The College conducts group meetings for student representatives with teaching and management staff, and makes time available during scheduled teaching times for student representatives to meet students. The College has embedded student survey training and support. Students are also supported in visits to the University.

2.31 The review team heard from students and teaching staff how the integration of academic disciplines in external events has enhanced learning opportunities, for example, by combining music and fashion students' activities. The team considers the engagement of students in internal and external interdisciplinary learning opportunities to be **good practice**.

2.32 The College's recording and reporting of higher education provision is accessed through retention and achievement spreadsheets, Quality Manager reports for Pearson awards and annual monitoring review reports. The review team found that without disaggregating the higher education metrics from the College's overall statistics, it cannot be established whether quality measures are actually able to enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The team also notes that without reporting of peer observations to senior management through a formal monitoring and review mechanism, establishing the approach's effectiveness is also difficult. The review team **recommends** that the College implement a rigorous ongoing process for senior management oversight of the learning and teaching practices.

2.33 The review team found that the methods of teaching observations and staff development support the College's potential to enhance provision of learning opportunities. At this stage in the development of the College's approach, these quality assurance procedures have some shortcomings in the rigour with which they are applied. For example, the design of the process to articulate and systematically review and enhance provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices currently does not make full use of students or external stakeholders. The approach also needs to complete a full academic cycle to demonstrate the effectiveness of the governance and reporting structure. Consequently, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.34 The College states that it has a clear strategic focus to offer intermediate higher education qualifications and allows students to identify the best exit points either into employment or further study elsewhere.

2.35 The College states that all higher education students have an academic induction to their programme within the first week of study, including introduction to English and mathematics, the programme structure and content, timetables, classrooms, programme staffing, assessment arrangements, services, facilities (including library and VLE), and expectations of students with a focus on academic integrity. Course documentation is also shared with students at this stage. Initial individual learning plan targets are also negotiated during the induction week.

2.36 The College's Higher Education Strategy outlines the importance of partnership arrangements with the University. The College also identifies that articulation to other Universities is an area for development.

2.37 The College details that the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Strategy was introduced in June 2015 with the purpose of focusing teaching staff on subscribing to the culture of a teaching and learning strategy for higher education. The Strategy highlights some key aspects of enabling student development, such as the promotion of independent learning, engagement with up-to-date research and encouraging individualised personal development.

2.38 The College identifies a number of aspirational initiatives to enhance the delivery of higher education teaching and learning. These include a comprehensive continuing professional development programme for higher education practitioners/teachers being rolled out during the 2015-16 academic year, and compulsory twilight sessions for all higher education practitioners each half term. Staff will be encouraged to engage independently in research projects specific to their practice by booking onto Active Research Modules provided by the University.

2.39 The College states that from September 2015 all students will experience scheduled one-to-one progression tutorials with their nominated Academic Progress Tutor. This process is to be managed by the Lead Personal Tutor for Higher Education, who will monitor attendance, provide advice and guidance on target setting and individual learning plans, and act as the conduit for assuring quality tutorial support across all higher education programmes. The Lead Personal Tutor for Higher Education will organise regular Academic Progress Tutor Forums, whose purpose will be to discuss cross-provision tutorial themes, including attendance, progress and achievement, to ensure a live and supportive dialogue. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.40 The review team tested student development and achievement through the analysis of the College's strategic approach and through meetings with staff, students and employers and scrutiny of the evidence provided.

2.41 The College has introduced a new approach for higher education programmes to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources that will enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. These metrics will be considered through the

recently implemented committee structure and reporting mechanism, offering the potential for oversight for maintenance of academic standards, as identified under Expectation A.1.

2.42 Students undergo a College induction, which includes library induction, VLE and IT. All courses issue a course handbook, and promote the need for attendance, student representatives, and the link to the award partners. Students' academic potential is developed through the induction, and sessions on personal development plans and academic writing skills. Students can also access pastoral support, and support for placement opportunities, as signposted in the course handbooks and on the VLE.

2.43 Mechanisms are in place to induct students effectively onto their awards and oversee transition between levels, but there is evidence that approaches to higher education standards to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources that will enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential are not clearly understood and expressed. The College staff's capacity for comprehending the higher education approach, including the UK Professional Standards Framework and the Quality Code, are weak. The review team **recommends** that the College formalise systems to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources that enable higher education students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.44 The review team heard plans for expansion of higher education, particularly in Higher National provision, where responsibility for securing academic standards is invested in the College. The team was not assured of the security and robustness of the new structures and their operation. Consequently, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.45 The College identifies in its three-year strategic plan that 'the voice of students at Barnfield College has been silent for too long'. As a result, the College recently developed a Higher Education Student Engagement Policy based on the definition of engagement in the Quality Code, *Chapter B5*. Students are provided with the Higher Education Student Engagement Policy on the student intranet. All higher education courses have elected student representatives who meet in groups and provide feedback on behalf of students on their course. These activities would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.46 The review team looked at the Higher Education Student Engagement Policy, the student intranet, and the student charter, and spoke to students, teaching staff and senior staff about their involvement in student engagement. The review team also examined the student submission.

2.47 The review team found that the College values student feedback and encourages students to provide feedback in order to monitor student engagement and student satisfaction. The review team found that the student representatives either volunteered or were elected to their roles. The College allows the student representatives to speak to students in their class in private for 10 minutes during lessons, which is then fed back into the student representative meetings. The students contribute to course development informally by speaking to their tutors, who then revise processes such as submission dates in response to student feedback. The student representatives felt supported in their roles by their tutors because of the student representative training provided by the College at the beginning of the 2015-16 year, despite no student representative training being provided in 2014-15. The College identified the lack of representative training in the previous year as a weakness and has acted to rectify this.

2.48 The review team found that the students are positive about the opportunities that they have to influence day-to-day occurrences within the College. Student feedback had been sought after induction and was used in writing the student submission for this review. Students also felt that there was a positive improvement to the rate that any issues raised to the College were resolved. The review team notes the College's plans to continue to engage students in its Higher Education Student Engagement Policy by providing further opportunities for students to participate in assurance and enhancement activities. The review team **affirms** the actions being taken to increase students' involvement in College committees.

2.49 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met, due to the College's continued development of student engagement at course level, and its application both formally and informally. The College plans to invite student representatives to attend joint staff-student meetings. The associated level of risk is low, as the College continues to develop its plans to increase student participation at meetings.

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

2.50 Assessments for University of Bedfordshire programmes are devised by the University in line with its assessment policy and processes. The College complies with the University's assessment regulations, policies and procedures, including processes for moderation and external examining. Assessments for Pearson higher education programmes are designed with reference to the College's Higher Education Assessment and Verification Policy, which was written to align with the awarding organisation's Centre Guidance on assessment. Assessment briefs are internally verified by a named verifier using the College's policy and standard templates. Assessed work is internally verified by appropriately experienced staff. Pearson appoints the external examiner, who ratifies and agrees the assessment decisions at College Assessment Boards. The College's own policies and procedures for assessment and its adherence to the University's regulations would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.51 The review team considered the College's self-evaluation document and associate documentary evidence, including student handbooks, external examiners' reports and College policies, and held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, Subject Area Leads for Higher Education and students to test the effectiveness of the College's practices.

2.52 The review team found these processes to work successfully in practice. All assessments are mapped to unit module outcomes for both University and Pearson programmes to ensure that students are given the opportunity to achieve all the learning outcomes at the appropriate level. The University has responsibility for verifying the assessment briefs of its programmes, and this is carried out by the Link Tutor (level 4 assessments) or referred to the external examiner for verification. Programme staff carry out marking according to the University's assessment guidance and processes. Moderation is managed by the University at partnership meetings. Examination Boards are held at the University and are attended by College staff. Assessment Boards for Pearson programmes operate according to College guidance. External examiner reports generally do not differentiate between the college partners in University franchises. Issues raised about second-marking or quality of feedback are discussed at partner meetings, and the University responds to these.

2.53 The programme team writes the Pearson provision assessments, and a qualified member of the teaching team internally verifies briefs. The College often makes use of the Pearson assignment checking service for advice on the suitability of the briefs. Once verified, briefs are distributed to students. Assessments are marked by the responsible tutor and moderated by the appointed moderator. The external examiner reviews assessment decisions and briefs. The Assessment Board agrees assessment decisions for the programme as a whole. Decisions made at the Board are then claimed through Pearson. Assessment rules are detailed in guidance documentation for teaching teams and handbooks for students. Students are provided with assessment guidance within handbooks. Guidance includes how assessment criteria are used, information about the different types of assessment, guidance surrounding academic integrity and plagiarism. Information about submission rules, academic integrity, plagiarism, extenuating circumstances, mitigation and

the College's plagiarism-detection software is also provided in handbooks. Students showed a clear understanding of assessment of learning outcomes, assessment, grading criteria and malpractice issues. They were appreciative of the constructive feedback and support they received from tutors.

2.54 Recognition of prior accredited learning is carried out according to University of Bedfordshire policies. The College has its own policy for accreditation of prior and/or experiential learning for admission to higher education programmes.

2.55 Assessment methods are designed or approved by the University to enable students to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The review team found evidence that the College has clear policies for assessment, verification and external examining to ensure the security of assessment decisions, and it complies with its awarding body and awarding organisation regulations. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation 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

2.56 The College states that it recognises the importance of external examiners in the quality assurance processes of higher education provision. The University and Pearson manage all external examiner appointments.

2.57 The Head of Higher Education and Vice-Principal (Curriculum) collate, analyse and grade external examiner reports.

2.58 The College identifies an aspiration for the coming academic year, stating that from September 2015 Heads of Department will be required to complete action plans following receipt of the reports, indicating any required action and summarising good practice or areas for improvement. Feedback also forms part of self-evaluation for each programme.

2.59 The arrangements above would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising external examiner reports, and meeting staff and students.

2.60 External examiners are appointed by the University, and standards verifiers are appointed by Pearson. External examiners and standards verifiers provide annual reports, which are discussed by programme leaders and Link Tutors, who note actions required.

2.61 External examiner reports confirm that standards and levels of attainment are comparable with other UK providers and that appropriate standards are being met. Standards verifier reports for Pearson programmes confirm that standards are being met and no essential actions are required within the reports.

2.62 External examiner reports are available to students through the College VLE, together with explanatory notes about how students can comment on reports. External examiners for the University of Bedfordshire visit College students at least once a year. Students confirmed that they knew who their external examiner was, and students from all but one course knew that their assignments may be viewed by the external examiner during the moderation process.

2.63 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.64 The College adheres to the University's processes for programme monitoring and review for setting and maintaining academic standards, and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. The College has its own annual programme review process for Pearson programmes (see Expectation A3.3). These arrangements would allow the Expectation B8 to be met.

2.65 The review team assessed the effectiveness of the College's practices by examining the College's self-evaluation document and associated documentary evidence, including course reports and enhancement plans, and course journals. The team held meetings with senior staff, student support and teaching staff, awarding body representatives and students.

2.66 The University reviews the College's higher education programmes annually. The College staff maintain close working relationships with the University's Link Tutors and contribute to partnership meetings to inform development and improve the quality of learning opportunities on foundation degrees. College staff are active participants in the routine monitoring that the University carries out for its provision. The University is satisfied that the College is working within the policies it sets.

2.67 Processes for the monitoring and review of University programmes work effectively, but the operation of practices within the College for Pearson programmes, and for providing an oversight of the entire higher education provision, need to be strengthened. The course report, enhancement plans and the course journal are the main documents produced by the College to monitor the quality of its higher education provision. Key information feeding into the course reports include external examiner reports, student survey outputs, recruitment, retention, attendance, staffing, resources concerns and staff continuing professional development activities. Staff explained that the course journals are working documents that are reviewed and updated throughout the year using student feedback. The College states that the Higher Education Quality Group, Curriculum and Learner Experience Group (CLEG), and Learner Leadership Group have regular meetings to carry out quality reviews. While the connections between the Higher Education Quality Group and the cross-College groups are identified the review team received no evidence to demonstrate its effective operation at the time of the visit. The review team examined minutes of CLEG meetings but no specific discussions of higher education matters were recorded. Staff reported that the Higher Education Quality Group met weekly, though minutes provided did not demonstrate this.

2.68 The College described a monitoring process that will operate from the beginning of the current academic year to involve regular systematic meetings between the Head of Higher Education and Heads of Department and the Subject Area Leads on an individual basis. Higher education provision will be reviewed on a termly basis by a newly formed Higher Education Achievement Tracking meeting. The review team found no evidence of the operation of these procedures so far. The College acknowledges that termly meetings for Pearson provision did not occur regularly in the last academic year, but that these would be scheduled for the current year to ensure that staff are aware of them in advance. The team found no evidence for these but heard that all higher education staff are expected to attend a

weekly meeting where quality issues are discussed and there is opportunity for sharing good practice. Therefore, the team **recommends** that the College implement a coherent procedure for the production and evaluation of annual course reports.

2.69 The College operates effectively in following the annual monitoring requirements of the University of Bedfordshire and produces timely, informative programme reports and periodic reviews. However, the review team found that the processes within the College for the production, verification, monitoring and review of programmes lack an appropriately rigorous approach, reporting structure and coherence at operational and strategic level. A recommendation is made accordingly. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B8 is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate. The level of risk is moderate because of weaknesses in the operation of the College's academic governance structure.

Expectation: Not 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

2.70 The College follows University of Bedfordshire academic appeals procedures. It also has its own process for dealing with student academic appeals for Pearson HNC/D programmes and all other programmes. The College has its own complaints procedure for students who make complaints about learning opportunities at the College, with complaints about the University of Bedfordshire being referred to the University.

2.71 The College Principalship Office logs, tracks, and monitors complaints to ensure their progression in a timely manner. Information, advice and guidance relating to complaints is available from College tutors, which would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.72 The review team tested the effectiveness of appeal and complaints procedures of the College by looking at the College and University policy documents for academic appeals and complaints. The team also spoke to students, teaching staff and senior staff, and College and University Link Tutors.

2.73 The College sends complaints to the Principalship Office, which assigns an investigator to the complaint report. The College acknowledges that some complaints are resolved jointly by the University and the College because of the combined work of Link Tutors for the relevant programme. The review team found that the students were able to speak to a tutor or student representative about complaints and could also look at the student College intranet and their course handbooks. The team found that the College provides little clarity between handling a formal and informal student complaint.

2.74 The review team found that the College procedure was the same for academic appeals as it was for its complaints procedures. Although there are separate policies for academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities for each relevant programme, the College was unable to make much distinction between the difference in their application and procedures.

2.75 The review team notes that the College has a complaints flowchart for student complaints regarding Pearson programmes, but the team found little application or knowledge of it in practice. The College has no clear procedure or timeline for handling academic appeals. It was unable to demonstrate that it applies effective monitoring and evaluation of student complaints and academic appeals. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure that complaints and appeals are systematically recorded, analysed and discussed, and that appropriate action is taken.

2.76 The review team found that the College is able to handle academic appeals and complaints within the College, and in conjunction with Link Tutors, informally in a timely manner. However, neither the staff nor students have a clear understanding of the different processes of the College and University for academic appeals and student complaints. The College lacks an effective and systematic approach to handling complaints and appeals. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and 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

2.77 The College does not have degree awarding powers, but there is an expectation that higher education providers without degree awarding powers arrange the delivery and support of learning by third parties, for example, within work-based learning and work placements. The College recognises that the main area in which it manages its higher education is the provision of work-based experience.

2.78 The College notes that for the HNC Health and Social Care and FdA Child and Family Studies programmes it is not responsible for securing work-based learning opportunities. Students are encouraged to arrange a placement opportunity to last for the duration of the course as part of the entry criteria. The College usually requests proof of placement during enrolment, and in the autumn term visits the setting and meets the employer.

2.79 The College undertakes a surveillance check to ensure the setting is suitable and provides documentation about the course for the employer. It explains how the employer can help facilitate learning and outlines arrangements for visits to the setting.

2.80 The College states that for teacher training, the College will seek placements internally at the College for any candidates who have not secured their own placements. Teacher training staff routinely develop relationships with mentors in the trainees' settings. Settings are provided with a handbook containing information about the programme, observation process, and qualification. The arrangements above would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.81 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising evidence provided, and by meetings with teaching staff, support staff, students, employers and Link Tutors from the University.

2.82 The College has well-established practices for student placements that are aligned with aspects of the Quality Code, *Chapter B10*. Tutors support students in their work and there are regular visits from tutors to check on progress.

2.83 While students are responsible for establishing their placements, the College also offers support, particularly offering teaching places.

2.84 The College has a risk assessment process for workplace learning. Regular contact with students means that any issues are picked up quickly. The review team considers the engagement of the Health and Safety Manager in due diligence reviews of placement providers to be **good practice**.

2.85 The review team concludes that, as a result of the significant interaction with employers, and the positive response from students and employers, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.86 The College does not offer research degrees and therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.88 Of the 10 applicable Expectations for this judgement area (the provider has no engagement with Expectation B11), four are met with low risk, four are met but with a moderate risk (Expectations B1, B3, B4 and B9), and two are not met, with a moderate risk (Expectations B2 and B8). The moderate risk in Expectation B1 centres around weaknesses in the College's academic governance structure. The moderate risk in Expectation B3 centres around the shortcomings and lack of rigour with which quality assurance procedures are applied, the lack of involvement of students and external stakeholders, and the need to complete a full academic cycle to demonstrate the effectiveness of the governance and reporting structure. The moderate risk in Expectation B4 centres around the review team's lack of assurance in the security and robustness of the new academic structures and their operation. The moderate risk in Expectation B9 centres around the staff and students' lack of a clear understanding of the different processes of the College and University of Bedfordshire for dealing with academic appeals and student complaints, and the College's lack of an effective and systematic approach to handling complaints and appeals. The moderate risk in Expectation B2 centres around the recently introduced Higher Education Admissions Policy, which is not recognised and implemented by College staff members, and the lack of underpinning appropriate organisational structures and processes for recruitment of students. The moderate risk in Expectation B8 centres around the lack of an appropriately rigorous approach, reporting structure and coherence at operational and strategic levels of processes within the College for the production, verification, monitoring and review of programmes.

2.89 The review team identifies two areas of good practice in this judgement area. The first is located in Expectation B3 and concerns the integration of academic disciplines in external events that has enhanced learning opportunities, for example, by combining music and fashion students' activities. The second good practice area is located in Expectation B10 and concerns the engagement of the Health and Safety Manager in the personal due diligence review of placement providers.

2.90 Recommendations associated with this judgement area are located in Expectations B1, B2, B3, B4, B8 and B9. These concern the need to formalise internal procedures for the development and approval of higher education programmes (Expectation B1); to systematically implement the Higher Education Admissions Policy, including appropriate training of staff involved in admissions (Expectation B2); to implement a rigorous ongoing College process for senior management oversight of learning and teaching practices (Expectation B3); to formalise systems to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources that enable higher education students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4); to implement a coherent procedure for the production and evaluation of annual course reports; and to ensure that complaints and appeals are systematically recorded, analysed and discussed, and that appropriate action is taken (Expectation B9).

2.91 There are two affirmations in this judgement area. The first, located under Expectation B1, concerns the steps being taken by the College to engage with employers in the design and development of higher education programmes. The second affirmation is located in Expectation B5 and concerns the College's actions to increase students' involvement in College committees.

2.92 The review team notes that while four Expectations in this judgement area are met with low risk, six Expectations are met with moderate risk, and two Expectations are not met (Expectations B2 and B8) with moderate risk. The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** 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 developed a Higher Education Publishing Policy in June 2015 to facilitate and manage the production and distribution of all information. The College maintains information for all higher education courses it provides on its website, UCAS, UCAS clearing, Unistats listing and its prospectus. College course listings are maintained by the Head of Marketing who has editorial control.
- 3.2 Information provided by the College for prospective students is checked annually by the Head of Higher Education when listings for the higher education course handbook are produced. Information about the College is mainly provided on the College website, which outlines a number of additional key policies, governance information and key contact information. Students noted in the student submission that marketing of the courses that are available at the College could be improved.
- 3.3 The review team examined the Higher Education Publishing Policy, the College website and intranet, and the UCAS course listings for higher education courses provided by the College. The review team also spoke to senior staff members of the College, University of Bedfordshire and College Link Tutors, in addition to support staff and students.
- 3.4 The aim of the College Higher Education Publishing Policy is to ensure that full, accurate and timely information is available to students, staff and awarding partners. The review team found the policy was applied inconsistently in practice. The team also found that the Marketing Department of the College had not published or posted for students the National Student Survey results for 2015.
- 3.5 Although the main source of information for students and prospective students is the College website, a number of students found out about their course from course tutors while they were studying on other courses at a lower level. A number of prospective students also spoke to course tutors to find out more about the higher education courses delivered by the College. The review team found on examination of the Higher Education Admissions Policy, and from speaking to both staff and students, that all students are required to complete a formal interview during selection processes. On examination of all publicised higher education course information, the team found that the requirement for an interview in order to determine selection is not published. The team also found that published selection criteria were unclear, indicating that information is not transparent (see Expectation B2). Because the College's provision of complete, useful and transparent information to prospective students is lacking, the review team **recommends** that the College provide clear information to prospective students on awarding bodies, how the recruitment, selection and admissions process will be conducted, and ensure that entry requirements are transparent.
- 3.6 The College is required to submit its promotional materials and information about University higher education courses to the University of Bedfordshire for prior approval. Where information updates are specific, the material is sent to Link Tutors for approval. Where information is generic, the proposed information update is sent to the Marketing

Department of the University of Bedfordshire. In addition, the University of Bedfordshire expects that the College will mention the University as an awarding body in publicised information. The review team found that no awarding body or organisation is mentioned in publicised course information. As a result, some students reported that they were not aware of the course awarding body or organisation until they arrived at their interviews. Students who attend for interview are provided with information, advice and guidance which the students rated as useful.

3.7 On joining the College, all students receive an induction, and course-specific handbooks, for both University and Pearson programmes. Students felt that this information was useful; this indicates that the information available to current students of the College is fit for purpose. In contrast, the lack of transparency of public information regarding awarding bodies and selection criteria produces untrustworthy information for prospective applicants. The review team concludes that Expectation C is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

3.8 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.9 Expectation C is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate. The moderate risk centres around the lack of transparency of public information regarding awarding bodies and selection criteria (see also Expectation B2).

3.10 There are no affirmations or features of good practice in this area. There is one recommendation that the College should provide clear information to prospective students on awarding bodies, on how the recruitment, selection, and admissions process will be conducted, and ensures that entry requirements are transparent.

3.11 As the Expectation is not met, the level of risk is moderate and there is one recommendation, the review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** 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 is responsible for enhancement of higher education provision. The College states that its Higher Education Strategy sets out priorities to improve and develop the provision over time. However, the Higher Education Strategy 2015-18 provided as evidence does not mention enhancement or improvement. A new Higher Education Strategy provided at the review team's visit is more substantial and asserts a commitment to high quality in all it does and 'the best possible experience' for students. The Student Enhancement Policy provides an appropriate definition of quality enhancement and a very detailed list of actions for the College and staff to undertake in pursuit of the continuous improvement agenda. There is no information of how they will be enacted and monitored or about the personnel responsible. The Higher Education Teaching and Learning Strategy has an aim to 'enhance learning activities within the College by bringing staff and students together to create a sense of belonging and of common purpose, enabling greater staff/student contact, more peer support and mentoring and a greater sense of ownership of academic agendas'. There is little evidence in the self-evaluation document, other documentation or from staff to demonstrate that these aspirations are being realised.

4.2 From September 2015 the College intends to make active use of key performance indicators. The Higher Education Quality Group plays a key role in monitoring key performance indicators. The new posts of Head of Higher Education, Head of Quality and two posts for Senior Area Lead Tutors for Higher Education will provide further support for the management of higher education quality assurance and enhancement. Senior staff explained that the Higher Education Quality Group has been meeting on a weekly basis since the start of the academic year and is the significant forum for higher education discussion and monitoring. The Higher Education Quality Group has the potential for effective oversight of higher education quality enhancement. Minutes of the higher level committee, the Curriculum and Learner Experience Group, provide no evidence of discussion to integrate enhancement initiatives for higher education in a systematic and planned manner at College level. The College was unable to articulate a coherent quality cycle, and there is conflicting information about quality improvement plans because staff said there were no separate ones for higher education. A Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan Draft was presented in the evidence, although no mention of this was made in the self-evaluation document.

4.3 The IQER in 2011 made a desirable recommendation for the College to 'foster a more collective and strategic approach to the review and enhancement of standards and the quality of learning opportunities'. This has not yet been addressed. While the College acknowledges that 'strategic enhancement is an area for development', the evidence provided to the review team was confused or not available, and the discussions with senior and College staff showed no indication of specific higher education quality enhancement as a strategic priority. Therefore, the Expectation about Enhancement is not met.

4.4 The review team analysed the self-evaluation document and met academic and support staff, Subject Area Leads and senior post holders. The team reviewed and evaluated a number of documents, including higher education policies, student feedback and annual monitoring reports.

4.5 The Pearson programme teams carry out annual monitoring using a course report and enhancement plan, and course journals that summarise good practice. For University programmes, the College follows the guidelines provided by the awarding body. While the review team saw evidence of some annual monitoring reports and action plans that addressed student issues and external examiner comments, there was insufficient evidence of deliberate steps being taken at College level to promote the enhancement of students' learning opportunities. Staff were able to explain the operation of a quality cycle for the development and monitoring of annual reports but reports lacked content about enhancement-led discussions. The reporting and committee structure that collated, evaluated and monitored the reports to develop strategic approaches to higher education enhancement was unclear. Staff expressed their understanding of enhancement as enrichment activities and additionality programmes, such as meetings with employers, work experience and trips, and made no reference to a Higher Education Student Enhancement Strategy.

4.6 The review team heard about opportunities for sharing good practice at weekly meetings for all higher education staff, but there was no documentary evidence. It was also unclear how the good practice identified in course journals is disseminated. The College describes how, where good practice is identified by examiners, peer observations and student feedback, a professional dialogue takes place within teaching teams, but no course team meeting minutes were seen, although requested. Prior to June 2015, these discussions and the impact upon improvement were rarely recorded. The College acknowledges that this is an area for development. The College also recognises other areas for improvement, such as the termly meetings for Pearson programmes' staff and their minutes being fed into the Higher Education Quality Group, improving the quality of course reviews and annual monitoring reports to ensure that enhancement is addressed, the active monitoring of meeting activity by the Head of Higher Education, and better collation and analysis of student feedback to inform improvements.

4.7 The College is in the process of rebuilding its management and academic infrastructure and has aspirations for the culture of the College to change so that there is a clear focus on improving the quality of the students' experience and learner success. While the review team appreciate the efforts of the higher education staff to make improvements to the management of higher education and the experience of students, at present there are limited deliberate steps and oversight mechanisms at College level to drive forward enhancement. A number of new policies have been written that address aspects of quality assurance and improvement, but systems and processes to enable them are not fully developed and embedded. The review team **recommends** that the College develop and articulate a robust strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

4.8 The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate. The level of risk is moderate because there is insufficient emphasis or priority given to enhancing quality in the College's planning processes, and there are weaknesses in the operation of the College's academic governance structure.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.10 The Expectation is not met and the associated risk is moderate. The moderate risk centres around insufficient emphasis or priority given to enhancing quality in the College's planning processes and weaknesses in the operation of the College's academic governance structure.

4.11 There are no features of good practice or affirmations in this judgement area. There is one recommendation that the College develops and articulates a robust strategic approach to enhancement of student learning opportunities.

4.12 Because the Expectation is not met, and the associated level of risk is moderate, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The College identifies employability as 'the capability of getting and keeping satisfactory work' through the acquisition of 'a set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and to be successful in their chosen occupations'. The College is committed to providing students with individual guidance, access to employers, careers information and work experience, and to promoting the development and use of transferable and career management skills to achieve rewarding and sustainable employment.

5.2 The College stated that it provides higher education programmes that educate and train its students to enable them to have a successful transition into the graduate employment market, or professional or advanced study. The College's purpose and ambition is to equip students with the skills for successful, sustained careers, using a curriculum that reflects and informs industry practice. The College's Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment, and Student Enhancement Strategies place professional practice and industry awareness at the centre of its approach to teaching.

5.3 The College acknowledges that students have not always benefited from 'planned' or 'readily identified' strategies to promote employability in recent years. Further, the College acknowledges that students have identified through informal discussions that they would like to have formal exposure to developing both their employability and entrepreneurial skills. The driver for this aspirational initiative is, according to the College, that since the last QAA visit, the collection of destination data for higher education students has been weak. Teaching staff in individual curriculum areas are able to provide anecdotal evidence, but there has been no systematic collection and analysis of the journey that individual students take upon completion of their studies. The College is aiming to implement a Student Employability Strategy in the coming academic year, although no evidence was offered in the College submission. The College's aspiration to promote effective employability skills is a key driver in the College's journey back to improve its performance. No documentary evidence was offered to support this ambition. In meetings during the review visit, there was little to demonstrate a systematic, integrated or comprehensive approach to employability within the curriculum or through extracurricular enhancement.

5.4 The College acknowledges that the learner voice has been too quiet for too long. The Leadership and Management Team rightly value the student voice process and see this as integral to the development of a wide range of employability skill building and opportunities for moving forward. The College concludes that the Employability Strategy, and the Learner Engagement Policy and Strategy, place great emphasis on the College to include students as part of the planning and review processes around making employability a tangible feature across programmes.

5.5 The review team tested the theme throughout its scrutiny of documentation provided, and in meetings with the Principal, senior staff, teaching staff, support staff, academic staff and awarding body partners, students and employers.

5.6 The review team heard from teaching staff that employability skills were discretely considered in the second year, and students confirmed that tutors teach workplace etiquette, behaviour and skills. Students report that discrete skills, including teamwork, problem solving and interaction with one another, offer insight into employability skills and awareness of personal capability. Students also report that their courses prepare them for placements and stimulate ambition for further study or career direction.

5.7 The review team also heard from support staff that while there previously had been a Careers Adviser, currently no one is in that post in the College, and it is unlikely that there will be a dedicated Higher Education Officer in the near future. Link Tutors identify that many students are already employed or undertaking a placement, and they support individuals' pastoral needs particularly, also monitoring the attendance of work experience students. Employers reported that currently no one is requested to deliver guest lectures or other employability-related events, though they would be open to such initiatives in future.

5.8 The review team explored elements of the College's Employability Policy with teaching staff. The review team struggled to discern a strong awareness of the Policy and how it is integrated into the teaching curriculum effectively to promote transferable skills or realise graduate attributes, nor were these terms confidently used. A discussion of Subject Benchmark Statements across the range of subjects offered by the College did not reveal a high level of understanding or recognition of their role in the Quality Code.

5.9 Consequently, the review team concluded that the College has been unable to demonstrate a systematic, integrated or comprehensive approach to employability and therefore this requires improvement.

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 30-33 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* (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.

QAA1487 - R4569 - Feb 16

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2016
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557 050
Web: www.qaa.ac.uk