



Higher Education Review of Southport College

November 2015

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Southport College. The review took place from 2 to 6 November 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Miss Maxina Butler-Holmes
- Professor Jonathan Scott
- Mr Harry Williams (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

In reviewing Southport 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 Southport College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Southport 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 **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The close engagement of programme teams with employers, which enhances students' professional development (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

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

By April 2016:

- meet its awarding organisation's requirements to articulate programme learning outcomes and develop a single definitive programme record (Expectations A2.2, A1 and A3.2)
- confirm and communicate the procedure for handling late submissions of assessed work in line with the awarding organisation's requirements (Expectation B6)
- ensure the appeals procedure is accessible and equitable for all students (Expectation B9)
- clarify the appeals process applicable to University of Cumbria students (Expectation B9).

By June 2016:

- ensure that records of meetings demonstrate reflection, decisions and actions (Expectations A3.3 and B1)
- implement, monitor and evaluate the Collaborative Delivery Plan with the University of Cumbria (Expectations A3.3 and A3.1).

By September 2016:

- ensure the effective operation of processes for course design, development and approval (Expectations B1 and A3.1)
- strengthen and monitor the opportunities for students to engage as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5 and Enhancement)
- integrate enhancement initiatives and monitor their effectiveness (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The introduction of the College's higher education course review procedure (Expectation B8).

Theme: Student Employability

Southport College's Higher Education Strategy articulates enhancing employability as a key strategy aim, underpinned by an objective to ensure that each student is able to experience a work placement, a live brief with an external client, careers module, or a research project. Programmes have embedded employability modules to support skills development, informed by engagement with local employers and by staff undertaking scholarly activity. Students on Pearson programmes pursue personal and professional development portfolios. A placement coordinator and Guidance Team provide support for students engaging with employers and preparing for employment.

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

About Southport College

Southport College (the College) is a medium-sized further education college established in 1983 following a merger with a local technical college. It offers a range of vocational programmes, including apprenticeships, with qualifications from entry level to level 6. It has nearly 3,000 students across these programmes, with about half being adult learners. The College has worked to grow its higher education provision, developing a suite of Access to HE programmes to provide progression into its higher education programmes. Its higher education student numbers have grown from 99 students in 2011-12, to 165 in 2015-16, aided by directly funded places from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Contextually, the College operates in a region that has a higher unemployment rate than the regional and national averages, and a lower than average proportion of people at working age qualified at levels 3 and 4 or above. Small and medium-sized enterprises predominate among employers in the region, with key sectors including health and social care, hospitality, construction and retail.

The College's strategic mission is to 'provide outstanding education and training for individuals and employers'. This is supported by nine aims covering responsiveness, quality, and resources, including the intention to 'significantly expand opportunities for university level study while maintaining high standards'. To enable this, the College has a Higher Education Strategy, which aims to: enable students to aspire and succeed; grow higher education provision through widening participation; develop a responsive curriculum, which enhances students' employability; maintain and develop resources to support high quality higher education; and work in partnership with student, staff and university partners. The College is managed by a small Executive Team reporting to its Governing Board. The Executive Team comprises the Principal and two Vice-Principals, who are responsible for the effective implementation of the Higher Education Strategy. The Director of Quality, Support and Higher Education, and the Director of Teaching and Learning and External Relations, lead on the management of quality and standards, reporting to a cross-College Quality Improvement Group, and its sub-group, the Higher Education Quality Improvement Group.

Since the last QAA review in 2011 the College has experienced major changes, which include securing HEFCE-funded places, and developing two new partnerships with awarding bodies. In 2012 it opened a University Centre, with a large Library Learning Centre aimed at higher education students in order to provide a distinctive experience and support. Since 2013-14 it has invested significantly in upgrading resources across the College, including teaching resources.

The College considers its key challenges to include student retention, aiming for overall retention of 85 per cent; the College reports that the current first-year retention has thus far improved significantly on last year (by 14 per cent to 93.81 per cent), and retention rates for second-year students are higher.

The College recognises that accommodating a growing number of higher education students is a challenge it needs to anticipate and manage, and notes that in 2015-16 it can recruit an uncapped number of students. In order to ensure that teaching at higher education level is distinct from teaching at further education level, the College continues to refine its tutor observation process and criteria for higher education.

The College works with four awarding partners. It has a long-standing partnership with Pearson to offer Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNC/Ds) across nine subjects, including Business, Computing, Games Design, and Health and Social Care. A partnership with the University of Central Lancashire offers a Foundation Degree in Children, Young People and their Services, and part-time certificate and postgraduate certificate in Education. In 2014-15, it offered for the first time a BA (Hons) Health and Social Care top-up degree under a new partnership with the University of Chester, aimed at College students completing the HND Health and Social Care. In 2015-16, it is offering for the first time a BA (Hons) Working with Children and Families top-up degree under a new partnership with the University of Cumbria. The work of the College's Business Development Department complements the College's courses by coordinating employer activity across all courses, including work placements, and employer engagement with higher education programmes.

The College has further developed the areas of good practice identified in its last QAA review. It has also taken action in relation to three advisable and two desirable recommendations. It has provided allocated minute-takers to higher education meetings in order to improve the documentation of processes, decisions and actions in relevant minutes. This is further discussed under Expectation A3.3. The College responded to a recommendation about reflecting on students' perceptions for those on a Foundation Degree in New Media Design and Technology, which it no longer runs. It audits all work placements prior to students commencing their placement, and has increased mechanisms for disseminating good practice between curriculum teams, through having 'good practice' as a standard agenda item on course and College-level committees. It has also taken action to consolidate systems for gathering and addressing student feedback by establishing a systematic annual focus group calendar and developing an action plan in response, shared with support departments.

Explanation of the findings about Southport 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](#) 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* (FHEQ) 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's higher education programmes are managed through three degree-awarding bodies and an awarding organisation: the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), the University of Chester, the University of Cumbria, and Pearson respectively. It offers foundation degrees and initial teacher education programmes through a partnership with UCLan; level 6 top-up bachelor's degrees through the universities of Chester and Cumbria, and HNC/D programmes through an arrangement with Pearson.

1.2 UCLan and the University of Chester maintain responsibility for assuring alignment of their programmes with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), Subject Benchmark Statements and qualification characteristics statements, requiring the College to maintain that alignment. In the recently established partnership with the University of Cumbria, more responsibilities are shared with dual delivery. The three universities maintain oversight of threshold academic standards, through the processes of validation, periodic course review and external examiner reports.

1.3 The HNC/D programmes are subject to Pearson's quality assurance procedures, and the College confirms the alignment of programmes with the FHEQ through Pearson's approval processes. Pearson remains responsible for the design and approval of its qualifications and their recognition through Ofqual. These programmes are monitored through the College's annual self-assessment reports. The processes of the College's

awarding bodies and Pearson approving and monitoring programmes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.4 The review team reviewed responsibilities allocated by the College's awarding partners, and considered the ways they were addressed through the programme approval documentation, programme specifications, annual and periodic reviews, and external examiners' reports. The team also discussed the processes of oversight in meetings with College staff.

1.5 The review team confirmed the effective operation of the approval and monitoring processes managed by the awarding partners in securing the standards of awards. Annual and periodic course reviews had been undertaken by UCLan. The College's programmes with the universities of Chester and Cumbria are in their first year of delivery, and processes have been developed for annual course reviews. In all cases, the external examiners' reports confirm the standards of the programmes. External examiner reports and self-assessment reports also confirmed the standards for the HNC/D programmes awarded by Pearson.

1.6 The positioning of programmes at an appropriate level, structures and overarching intended learning outcomes, along with their articulation against relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, are described through programme specifications and approval documentation for programmes delivered with awarding bodies. The programme descriptors for the HNC/D programmes, managed through Pearson, contain generic statements specifying alignment of the qualifications with levels 4 and 5 of the FHEQ, and the relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statements and qualification characteristics statements. They also contain the lists of units constituting the programme, but there are no overarching programme specifications articulating the intended programme learning outcomes as required by Pearson (see also the recommendation under Expectation A2.2).

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8 Responsibility for higher education quality and standards rests with the College Executive Team, which reports to the Governing Board. The Governing Board also has a reporting committee, the Standards Committee, which monitors the Quality Strategy and standards, and whose membership includes a member of the Governing Board with specific responsibility for higher education.

1.9 The College is required to adhere to the requirements of its awarding partners in assessing, monitoring and reviewing its programmes as set out in the partnership agreements. Responsibility for meeting these requirements rests with the Director of Quality, Support and Higher Education, who reports to the Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality).

1.10 The College's strategic approach to quality and standards is set out in the Quality Strategy 2015-16, which includes operating principles and a description of the underpinning processes of quality practice. The Strategy sets out the cycle for annual monitoring and self-assessment reports for the level 6 and the Higher National programmes respectively, and their final validation by the Executive Team and Standards Committee.

1.11 In response to the growth in higher education provision, the College established the Higher Education Quality Improvement Group (HEQIG) in 2014 with responsibility for monitoring standards, quality and compliance, and considering external examiners' reports. The HEQIG reports to a Quality Improvement Group, chaired by the Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality). The Quality Improvement Group in turn reports to the Executive Team and produces an annual quality and standards report for the Governing Board. Also, in response to the growing higher education cohort, the College has developed a specific Higher Education Strategy with an associated action plan.

1.12 The structures and frameworks established through the awarding bodies would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.13 In considering this Expectation, the review team reviewed the partnership agreements with the College's awarding partners, the Quality Strategy and Higher Education Strategy, and reporting lines between, and terms of reference of, senior committees. The review team assessed the operation of processes through reviewing minutes of the HEQIG and Quality Improvement Group, and considering external examiners' reports. The team also explored the operation of the quality systems with staff.

1.14 Through examination of the committee minutes, the review team found that the College adheres to its reporting cycle, and that the groups and committees within the College receive and consider the reports, as set out in the College's quality assurance processes. The minutes of those meetings, however, did not reflect detailed discussion of the reports, and this finding supports the recommendation under Expectation A3.3. The College confirmed that reports are discussed extensively by the relevant committees and that there is a clear view of the operation of the quality assurance processes.

1.15 The external examiners' reports, and the external reviews, confirm the standards of the awards being made according to the frameworks and regulations of the awarding partners.

1.16 The review team found that the College has appropriate structures in place and operates them so as to manage its responsibilities for academic standards in line with the requirements of the its awarding partners. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.17 Responsibilities for the production, development and maintenance of definitive records, in the form of programme specifications, vary between the College's awarding partners. These responsibilities are detailed in each university's Memorandum of Agreement/Understanding and the Pearson guides. In all cases, it is the College's responsibility to ensure that programme specifications are made readily available to students and to ensure that they are used as a reference point in the delivery and assessment of programmes, and for monitoring and review processes.

1.18 The processes and procedures in place at the College, supported by its degree-awarding bodies and organisations, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.19 The review team tested the Expectation by evaluating programme specifications, module/unit specifications and course handbooks. The review team also met senior staff, support and academic staff, and students.

1.20 Programme specifications produced by UCLan, the University of Chester and the University of Cumbria confirm the level of the programme, and learning outcomes are mapped against assessment requirements. These are used as the definitive record of each programme by staff in the delivery of each programme.

1.21 In relation to the College's Higher National provision, the College provides information relating to unit learning outcomes and assessment in handbooks, in some cases in the form of unit specifications from Pearson. However, the College has not produced overall programme specifications that articulate overarching programme learning outcomes mapped to assessments. This leads to a risk that programme learning outcomes are not articulated, assessed and achieved by students on HNC/D programmes. The College highlighted national Pearson specifications, published course and unit summaries, and student handbooks as the definitive reference point for delivery and assessment, which is also contrary to requirements set out by Pearson. The review team **recommends** that, by April 2016, the College meet its awarding organisation's requirements to articulate programme learning outcomes and develop a single definitive programme record.

1.22 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met, as the programme material provided by the College's awarding partners is of sufficient detail so as to be a reference point for the delivery and assessment of the College's higher education. The associated level of risk is moderate, however, due to the College's unclear understanding of its responsibility to produce definitive programme records with programme learning outcomes for its Higher National provision.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

1.23 The College's awarding partners maintain responsibility for setting and approving academic standards, and they have approved the College for the delivery of their higher education programmes. The College states that it 'works closely with awarding bodies during the programme approval process'. The collaborative agreements with each of the three university partners define each party's responsibilities, and the College follows the policies and procedures for programme approval as established by each University. The College observed these procedures during the development of new programmes at level 6 with both the University of Cumbria and the University of Chester in 2014-15. The PGCE/CertEd and Foundation Degree in Children, Young People and their Services provision is approved by UCLan and was revalidated during 2015. UCLan produces a partnership handbook aimed at supporting partner colleges within a geographical cluster. The approvals and validation panels, which are conducted by the awarding bodies, test the organisation and validity of course proposals to ensure that they are aligned with threshold academic standards, the Universities' academic standards, and the FHEQ.

1.24 Pearson maintains responsibility for the approval of Higher National awards and the College informs the awarding organisation of the chosen units, observing the rules of combination.

1.25 The oversight provided by these external processes enables the College to ensure that academic standards are set at an appropriate level. The College, through the Higher Education Quality Improvement Group and the Executive Team, has a framework for the systematic maintenance of the processes for approval of taught programmes. The Curriculum Development Group (CDG) oversees the production of the Curriculum Plan in response to the College's Strategic Plan for all provision, including higher education.

1.26 These arrangements would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

1.27 The review team tested the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining relevant university policies, partnership agreements, programme review reports and minutes of meetings. The team also met the Principal; senior staff, including representatives from the university partners; teaching staff; and students.

1.28 The review team found that, overall, the processes for programme approval work effectively to comply with the relevant academic frameworks and regulations of the awarding partners. The team saw and heard evidence of active involvement by several members of staff in recent programme approval and validation events with university partners. Staff had produced an outline planning proposal document for the University of Chester level 6 Health and Social Care degree, before holding an initial planning meeting with the University programme leader to develop the programme. The University of Cumbria's approval process is referred to as providing the reference point in the validation report for the foundation degree and BA (Hons) provision. The report evidences the formal approval of these franchised programmes and recognises the collaborative approach taken by the University and its partner colleges towards the design and approval of programmes.

1.29 The University of Cumbria produced a Collaborative Delivery Plan to implement all aspects of its programme and partnership agreement. At the time of the review visit, however, there was no agreed action plan to demonstrate how the College would effectively ensure it met these delegated responsibilities during the first year of this new partnership; this contributes to a recommendation under Expectation A3.3.

1.30 In advance of final approval and recruitment to the BA (Hons) Health and Social Care course, the College completed a proposal for a new academic partnership, and mapped the HND units against the learning outcomes and module descriptors at levels 4 and 5 of the degree before a university panel for the site authorisation approved the provision. The proposal for a new academic partnership also aligned programmes in graphic design, photography and e-commerce for the approval of recognised degree progression routes. At the time of the review, these remained under development.

1.31 The review team heard that the CDG holds responsibility for internal programme approval processes. The terms of reference and membership encompass all of the College's provision. The team found that the College does not exercise a sufficiently rigorous approach towards the academic planning aspects beyond the initial business case for approval of a new programme. For example, the minutes of meetings that approve programmes lack dates for actions to be completed and contain very little reference to higher education provision. The College completes standard Pearson documents for approval by the awarding organisation; however, there is no evidence in the CDG minutes of how an academic case is considered through the deliberative structures (see also the recommendation under Expectation B1).

1.32 The review team found that the College works closely and effectively with its awarding partners. The review team 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

1.33 The College relies on the academic frameworks of its awarding partners to ensure the validity of assessment, and assessment strategies and grade criteria are determined by these awarding partners. The Assessment Policy states that 'Assessments for Higher Education courses with partnership institutions follow the assessment policy of the relevant awarding institution. Students on Higher National programmes are subject to College policies and procedures'. The Assessment Policy is subject to annual review by the Higher Education Quality Improvement Group, the Executive Team and by Pearson. The Curriculum Leaders' Quality Assurance Handbook provides a further reference point.

1.34 The programme specifications for university-validated awards set out assessment strategies to enable students to achieve module and programme-level intended learning outcomes. The programme handbooks provide clear reference to the academic regulations along with guidance relating to academic conduct and practice. The partnership agreements with the awarding bodies set out the mutual responsibilities in relation to assessment and the achievement of academic standards. Subject-level staff are involved in assessment processes through their engagement with peers at moderation meetings arranged by the awarding bodies.

1.35 The 2015 UCLan accreditation panel report confirmed that assessment meets threshold academic standards. The College is a member of a network of colleges, led and supported by a link tutor from the University. The design, approval and monitoring of assessment strategies lie under the awarding body's academic and regulatory framework. The University of Chester's marking and moderation process protocol provides a comprehensive reference point for assessment practice.

1.36 For Pearson programmes, the College relies on the awarding organisation's generic guidance documents. It uses the BTEC Centre Guide for Assessment and Standards Verification as its central reference point but does not interpret this into a document to reflect the College context. Standardisation takes place as required by Pearson. The internal verification of assessment is provided through the College's internal verification policy. There is an internal verification handbook specifically designed for Higher National programmes, the implementation of which is overseen by the relevant Curriculum Leader. This describes the roles and responsibilities for all aspects of the process and provides standardised documentation. The College's Quality Calendar lists monthly internal verification meetings.

1.37 These frameworks and approaches for the design, approval and monitoring of assessment ensure that credit and qualifications are only awarded when intended learning outcomes and threshold academic standards are met. This would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.38 The review team tested the effectiveness of the assessment arrangements through the examination of minutes of course meetings, higher education Curriculum Leaders meetings, external examiner reports, programme handbooks, validation and approval events, and the higher education internal verification policy documents. The team also held meetings with teaching staff; senior staff, including representatives from the awarding bodies; and students.

1.39 The evidence reviewed showed the policies and procedures to be effective in practice. Teaching staff involved with University partners participate in moderation meetings and events arranged by the awarding bodies. There are marking and moderation days planned into the academic year for Pearson programmes. Students whom the review team met confirmed that they understood the requirements of assessment and of their experiences at both levels 5 and 6. Analysis of the range of external examiner reports confirmed the achievement of relevant learning outcomes being demonstrated through assessment.

1.40 The review team found that assignment briefs are scrutinised by Pearson's external examiners, and that appropriate levels of assessment are confirmed through external examiner reports after mid-year sampling and at the annual visits to the College. The internal confirmation of standards through assessment is the responsibility for the College's internal verifier. Curriculum Leaders are responsible for planning and carrying out internal verification to meet the requirements of the awarding organisation. The College uses 'standardised Pearson paperwork' for assignment briefs and recording assessment decisions; these are scrutinised and approved by external examiners. For example, the report for Graphics states that the 'assessment strategy is linked to unit learning outcomes...interim and summative assessment' while in Health and Social Care 'sound assignment briefs...permit aims and learning outcomes to be met'. However, the College's assessment practices for Pearson programmes do not assess programme-learning outcomes, since these are not articulated. This finding supports the recommendation under Expectation A2.2.

1.41 The University of Chester's Marking and Monitoring Protocol defines the steps involved in assuring academic standards through assessment setting, and first and second marking. The review team found that subject staff had engaged effectively during the first year of the level 6 provision. The external examiner's report confirms the achievement of threshold standards through assessment.

1.42 The report from UCLan's periodic course review in 2015 noted the wide and varied range of assessment as a strength of the foundation degree. For the PGCE/CertEd provision, the 'extensive' partnership arrangements with UCLan provide opportunities for assessment moderation and standardisation, and were cited as a strength of the partnership.

1.43 The College's Assessment Policy covers all areas of provision and is reviewed by the Quality Improvement Group and Executive Team. The range of policies relating to assessment, including malpractice and academic appeals, each contain a paragraph stating that for students following university programmes the policies of the awarding body apply. The College policies have recently been reviewed. Students met by the team confirmed their understanding of the relevance and requirements of assessment, including the internal verification procedure.

1.44 The review team concludes that the Expectation 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

1.45 The College's agreements with its awarding bodies define the responsibilities of both parties for the monitoring and review of programmes, including periodic review. UCLan conducts a periodic course review, with the most recent in April 2015. The College prepares for these reviews through the completion of audit forms and a critical appraisal following the University's processes. The UCLan Partnership Forum produces a summary of all annual monitoring reports and external examiner reports across all college partnerships. The University of Chester's Programme Management Document articulates arrangements for annual monitoring

1.46 Implementation of the Higher Education Strategy is led by the Executive Team, which is also responsible for the oversight of academic standards and quality, reporting to the College Standards Committee. The Principal presents an annual higher education report to the Standards Committee. The College also states that the Higher Education Strategy action plan is monitored by the Standards Committee.

1.47 The Executive Team meets weekly and includes the Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality). The Director of Quality, Support and Higher Education, reporting to the Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality), holds responsibility for quality assurance and relationships with the awarding bodies. A Higher Education Manager who reports to the Director of Quality, Support and Higher Education provides the 'link' between the Curriculum Leaders and heads of departments. The Higher Education Manager chairs a monthly higher education Curriculum Leaders' meeting, which forms part of the Quality Calendar. This presents an operational forum for discussions on quality assurance, curriculum development, handbooks and programme documentation, the virtual learning environment (VLE), teaching and learning, and university partnerships.

1.48 The Quality Improvement Group, chaired by the Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality), meets monthly. Its remit and membership indicates it oversees the self-assessment review cycle and the observation of teaching and learning processes, and is responsible for the effectiveness of the student voice. In 2014-15 the College established the Higher Education Quality Improvement Group (HEQIG) as sub-group of the Quality Improvement Group; the HEQIG reports to either the Executive Team or Quality Improvement Group depending on the mechanisms considered to be appropriate. The expanded remit and terms of reference of the HEQIG for 2015-16 provide focus specifically upon higher education. The HEQIG provides oversight of, and advises on: higher education annual monitoring and reporting; the College's Quality Development Plan, Learner Voice; external examiners; and the development of teaching observations. The Higher Education Annual Report 2015 refers to the HEQIG as taking a leading role in adapting course review and observation processes to meet the needs of higher education as well as monitoring progress against the objectives of the Higher Education Strategy. Beneath the HEQIG, there are departmental boards of study and course team meetings, which provide operational oversight.

1.49 The Quality Strategy describes the self-assessment review cycle. An annual higher education self-assessment review is produced, which covers Pearson provision and derives

information from student data, external examiner reports, student evaluations, survey results and termly course reviews. A resulting improvement plan contains key actions for the following year. Self-assessment reviews are reviewed by the Quality Improvement Group, the Executive Team and the Standards Committee. These arrangements provide the framework for monitoring and review. The College's own processes and those of its awarding partners would enable it to meet the Expectation.

1.50 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's arrangements for the monitoring and review of its higher education provision through the reading of documents, including departmental self-assessment reviews, the higher education self-assessment review, the UCLan periodic review report, and minutes of meetings. The team also met the Principal, representatives from the partner universities, students, senior and teaching staff.

1.51 Overall, the review team found that the processes for programme monitoring and review work effectively. Internal oversight is provided through the annual self-assessment review cycle. The higher education self-assessment review and College Quality Improvement Plan extract higher education aspects from the individual departmental self-assessment reviews. The College introduced a validation panel for the 2014-15 reporting cycle, chaired by the Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality), to formally receive and comment upon both the higher education self-assessment review and all of the partner university annual reports. Progress updates on the Quality Improvement Plan are discussed at Executive Team meetings, and the HEQIG will monitor progress at its meetings. As such, these deliberative meetings play a key role in the assurance of academic standards. The minutes of these meetings, however, in many cases comprise brief notes with no evaluative commentary and vague actions. During the College's Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review in 2011, it received an advisable recommendation to 'ensure that the documentation of processes and subsequent actions, as recorded in the relevant minutes, should be sufficiently detailed'. The College reported that, in response, 'all departments have access to a departmental secretary and all meetings are minuted'. At the final meeting, senior members of staff acknowledged that the full extent of discussions is not captured, as some minutes are not detailed. The review team **recommends** that, by June 2016, the College ensure that records of meetings demonstrate reflection, decisions and actions.

1.52 The team heard that the College plans to build upon the lead student representative role as assumed in the preparation for the review. It also established that there are no immediate plans to expand the membership of the HEQIG to include students; the College position is that the student voice is reported indirectly through the deliberative structures, by senior managers who have attended focus group meetings with students. This supports the recommendation made under Expectation B5, and repeated in the Enhancement section of this report.

1.53 The University of Cumbria approval concluded with a Collaborative Delivery Plan for 2015-16 to ensure the success of the first cohort of level 6 students. At the time of the review visit, however, there was no in-year agreed action plan for how the College would effectively exercise oversight to ensure it met these delegated responsibilities during the first year of this new partnership. The review team heard that there was no detailed action plan in place at institutional level at the time of the review, as it has been received from the awarding partner only two weeks beforehand, but that the HEQIG would monitor progress. The review team **recommends** that, by June 2016, the College implement, monitor and evaluate the Collaborative Delivery Plan with the University of Cumbria.

1.54 The review team found that, overall, the College is managing its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing its higher education programme and is operating in accordance with the requirements of its awarding partners. The recommendations in this area, however, reflect the fact that the College is entering into a new strategic partnership and that, although

the quality assurance procedures are broadly adequate, there is a lack of rigour in relation to the management of the Collaborative Delivery Plan to assure institutional-level oversight. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

1.55 The responsibility for setting and maintaining standards, including the provision of external examiners and external advisers for programme approval, rests with the College's awarding partners. In the case of partnerships with its awarding bodies, validation panels test the capacity of the College to deliver the programmes, and the design of the programme proposals confirm that they are aligned with threshold academic standards, the FHEQ and the awarding bodies' standards.

1.56 As noted, Pearson approves the College to act as a delivery centre for Higher National programmes and selected programmes are approved through Pearson's quality processes. The College states that it values and seeks external opinion when selecting relevant higher education programmes, and subsequently, modules. In their reports, external examiners are required to confirm the maintenance of standards, and these are considered through the annual monitoring processes. External examiners and standards verifiers are also involved in the approval of assessment briefs.

1.57 The review team reviewed documentation used in approving programmes and also tested the Expectation through consideration of external examiners' reports and annual monitoring processes, and in discussions with staff from the College and local employers with which it works.

1.58 The review team found that College staff have a clear view of the requirement for externality in assuring standards, and that programme approval processes comply with the requirements of the awarding bodies in engaging external advisers in setting appropriate standards for the programmes. External examiners confirm the ongoing maintenance of those standards, as does the periodic review process. The team also found that local employers are closely involved in the development of vocational programmes in order to support the development of graduates with the expertise needed by local industries.

1.59 The review team found that the processes in place at the College are aligned with the requirements of its awarding partners, and that it engages with external advisers and examiners to confirm that threshold standards are set and maintained. 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/or other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

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

1.61 The College has met each of the seven Expectations in this area. Five of the Expectations have low associated risk and two have moderate associated risk, in particular Expectation A2.2 (definitive records of individual programmes and qualifications) and Expectation A3.3 (monitoring and review of alignment with UK threshold academic standards and degree-awarding bodies' own standards).

1.62 One recommendation derives from the moderate risk related to Expectation A2.2 and relates to weaknesses as a result of a lack of clarity about responsibilities in relation to academic standards, specifically the provision of a definitive programme record and articulation of programme learning outcomes, for programmes delivered with its awarding organisation. Two recommendations derive from the moderate risk related to Expectation A3.3. The review team found that quality assurance procedures are broadly adequate but have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied, owing to weaknesses in the recording of deliberative processes and actions, and weaknesses in the implementation of a Collaborative Delivery Plan with the University of Cumbria.

1.63 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 Programme approval processes are specified by the College's awarding partners, and the College follows the procedures for programme design and approval as laid out by them. For Pearson programmes the College selects units from the subject specification publications, observing rules for combining units.

2.2 The Higher Education Strategy and action plan contain a strategic aim to grow higher education in all curriculum areas. The College's Curriculum Development Group (CDG) has a cross-College remit to scrutinise programme proposals in light of the business planning process. The CDG has oversight of the College Curriculum Plan, which aligns with the Strategic Plan. The CDG is also remitted to update the business plan annually, to approve new courses for inclusion in the departmental plans, review entry and progression requirements, and ensure all programmes are approved and meet awarding body requirements. The CDG also monitors a curriculum development action plan. Heads of departments have responsibility for curriculum planning, supported by the Higher Education Manager. These systematic approaches would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

2.3 The review team analysed whether the College meets the Expectation through examining minutes of meetings, validation and approval reports, and background documentation, and minutes and terms of reference of key academic committees. In addition, the team met the Principal, senior and teaching staff, employers and students.

2.4 The review team sought to establish whether the processes for the design, development and approval of programmes were robust, particularly within the context of growth of the provision. The team found that the College follows each awarding body's processes for the design and approval of new programmes. The team saw evidence of proposal documents produced in advance of all University approvals. However, the team heard conflicting messages relating to the origin and development of proposals, and of the role of the CDG as the decision-making point for the academic approval of a programme.

2.5 The development of the University of Cumbria partnership involved College subject teams working collaboratively across two colleges and with the University team. Initial planning activities were followed by a process of mapping the College's existing HND programmes to the learning outcomes of the degree to enable the College's existing students to enter the University level 6 programme. The minutes of the Curriculum Leaders' meeting noted the importance of continuing this mapping process as the College seeks to expand the level 6 progression pathways. Following the successful validation of the foundation degree and BA (Hons) course, the College is committed to realising several actions articulated in the Collaborative Delivery Plan. It followed a similar process with the University of Chester in 2014 to gain approval for the BA (Hons) Health and Social Care. The College involved programme team members in the design and development of programmes, and the review team found evidence of student feedback being gathered at the student representative meetings.

2.6 The review team explored the role of the Higher Education Quality Improvement Group (HEQIG) and the CDG in leading the programme development and approval processes. Examination of the minutes of the CDG meetings showed little consideration of the higher education provision and no evidence of discussions and scrutiny leading to an ultimate decision to approve a programme. Minutes of meetings are brief and contain actions that are often unspecific and predominantly focused on the further education provision. This finding supports the recommendation under Expectation A3.3.

2.7 The review team discussed business planning and academic approvals processes with senior and teaching staff and heard conflicting messages and perceptions. The team heard that the CDG approves new courses and that there was a process in place; there were some instances of mixed terminology being used to describe the committees, reflective of title changes from the former 'Curriculum Planning Group'. Some staff referred to a higher education group looking at the development of new courses during a four-month period prior to presenting cases to the CDG, but no evidence was presented to support this. Staff met by the team did not provide a clear and coherent view as to the process through which a proposal would arrive at the CDG. There was inconsistency relating to the Chester and Cumbria proposal documentation: the team heard that some documents went through the CDG or the former Higher Education Steering Group, which preceded the HEQIG, but not all. The College provided examples of business case proposals and costings but not of where robust discussions and academic approval takes place within the College. Given the lack of evidence contained within the minutes of the CDG or HEQIG, the lack of clarity heard from staff, and the College's plans to increase the higher education provision, the team found that the internal processes for course approval require strengthening.

2.8 The review team learnt that Pearson is seen as approving programmes but heard inconsistent evidence of how a programme would be designed, developed and approved. Although discussion relating to the selection of units takes place among subject staff and draws upon relevant employer input, the team was unable to confirm how these operate to help form a coherent programme structure. The team heard varying perceptions, including that Pearson 'sends' the programme specification, that the lead internal verifier discusses unit selection with staff and then applies for approval, and that the formal route for approvals is 'an IV process'. Neither the minutes of the CDG or the HEQIG demonstrate the critical appraisal and approval of a Higher National programme.

2.9 Given the conflicting messages and inconsistent practices referred to above, in addition to the plans for growth of the provision, the review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College ensure the effective operation of processes for course design, development and approval.

2.10 Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is not met. This is due to the lack of tangible evidence through the meetings and deliberative structure to demonstrate rigour in the scrutiny of academic decision-making. The quality assurance procedures for approving programmes are broadly adequate but have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied. As such, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not 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

2.11 The College's Higher Education Strategy and Admissions Policy inform the recruitment of higher education students. Formal agreements assign the College with the responsibility for setting student numbers; matching students to appropriate programmes; developing recruitment staff training programmes; and monitoring their policies on a regular basis. Staff involved in the recruitment, selection and admission of students undergo annual professional careers and guidance training. Open events facilitate external prospective students with information relating to the transition into higher education. The College's Guidance Team provides information relating to student finance for prospective applications, and supports them throughout the admissions process. All applicants are invited to a one-on-one interview to ensure students make informed decisions about the suitability of the course. All prospective students follow the same application process and can apply directly to the College or through UCAS. These processes and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.12 The review team evaluated the Expectation through meetings with senior staff, support and teaching staff, and students. The review team also examined documents that inform recruitment, selection and admission to the College.

2.13 The College's Higher Education Strategy and Admissions Policy is maintained, monitored and approved by the Executive Team. The Admissions Policy suggests the College attempts to match suitable candidates to appropriate programmes.

2.14 The Admissions Group reviews admissions data throughout the year and is responsible for ensuring that, when a programme is unlikely to run, all prospective students are informed. The College is responsible for setting student numbers and ensuring resources are made available for those students; this is a role discharged by the College's Executive Team, which has oversight of the accommodation strategy.

2.15 The College writes to applicants with additional support requirements immediately after they begin the application process, in order to organise support during the process and support they may need during their studies.

2.16 The College informs all students that, in addition to their tuition fees, they must pay an annual administration fee to the College if they are admitted to a programme.

2.17 All applicants are invited to an interview to discuss their programme choice. Prospective students can opt to take a trial guidance interview prior to their admissions interview. The College uses the programme admissions criteria and the judgement of academic staff to determine if prospective students are likely to succeed on their programmes.

2.18 Non-academic staff involved in the recruitment, selection and admission of students undergo annual professional careers and guidance training. Roles and responsibilities of staff in recruitment are outlined in the College's Admissions Policy. Prior to enrolling, open

events provide prospective students with information about the transition into higher education. Once enrolled at the College, students receive course handbooks outlining their working environment and potential study routes.

2.19 The College has an appeals policy that covers appeals and complaints relating to recruitment, selection and admissions, and which is also outlined in the College's wider Admissions Policy. Applicants for HND programmes may appeal directly to the College, while applicants for other programmes may also appeal to their awarding body.

2.20 The College's Exceptional Review Policy also applies to prospective students and allows the College to refuse admission to a student in the interests of health and safety, or safeguarding. The outcomes of exceptional review and appeal are final and not subject to appeal themselves. The College provides guidance for students involved in these processes through its guidance centre.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.22 The College has adopted a Strategic Plan that outlines its offer of learning and teaching, noting that one of the strategic aims is 'To enable all learners to succeed and progress through providing excellent teaching and learning and support within a secure, welcoming and inspiring learning environment'. The Higher Education Strategy further underpins this theme.

2.23 The College has taken deliberate steps to focus on expanding the higher education provision that it offers. These include, in 2014, the establishment of the Higher Education Quality Improvement Group (HEQIG), whose responsibilities include monitoring programme quality and considering external examiners' reports. The HEQIG reports to the Executive Team through the Quality Improvement Group, ensuring that higher education is represented in the setting of annual priorities with respect to the College's overall Strategic Plan and mission.

2.24 Both the College's staff and governors are involved in the review of teaching and learning practices. Annual away days enable the discussion of the enhancement of teaching and learning at the College and members of teaching staff attend a two-day teaching and learning programme with specific focus of activities, such as peer observation of teaching. While the majority of staff teaching on higher education programmes also teach further education programmes, those staff who deliver the higher education programmes also attend an additional two days specialist higher education training.

2.25 Oversight of staff development is the responsibility of the Director of Human Resources, who ensures the annual review of the Staff Development Policy. Staff development is considered a strategic priority, and the Staff Development Strategy intends to complement the College's Teaching and Learning Strategy. The College expects all higher education teaching staff to have, or be working towards, a full teaching qualification. Staff new to the College receive an induction, supported by a Staff Induction Guide and a professional development mentor.

2.26 The College has introduced a Scholarly Activity Policy, which expects all higher education teaching staff to undertake specific annual scholarly activity. During an annual proposal round, each member of staff presents a proposal for their activity, which has to be approved by a panel including the Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality) or the Director of Quality, Support and Higher Education. The staffing workload model allows staff time for undertaking the activity. Following completion of an activity, staff prepare a report on the outcomes of the activity that has to be approved by a validating panel.

2.27 In 2014, the College established a Teaching and Learning Group to identify effective teaching, learning and assessment approaches. Its work has included the development of the VLE and the new initiative of the 'expert learner'. The Group's membership rotates annually, ensuring wider participation in the College's learning and teaching approaches.

2.28 The College aims to provide safe and accessible physical, virtual and social learning spaces for students. In 2012 it established a University Centre as part of its accommodation strategy to contribute to the establishment of a separate identity and spaces for higher education students. There is a student charter, and associated statements, regarding access for all students and support for those with additional learning needs. The College also supports learning and engagement for all higher education students through a structured tutorial system where specific tutorial hours are built into higher education programmes. In-class tutorials also take place, and the College has extended the academic year to include formal individual tutorials across study weeks for the next academic year.

2.29 The structures for articulating, reviewing and enhancing the provision of learning opportunities would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.30 The review team tested the College's approach to this Expectation through meetings with staff and students and an extensive review of documentation. This included the minutes and reporting of the quality committees and the Executive Team, the staff development provision and events, and the scholarly activity programme and mentoring provision. The team also considered the evidence provided in relation to provision of specific higher education teaching, support for teaching, and the students' views regarding the quality of staff and their experience as learners.

2.31 The teaching staff met by the review team recognised and valued the specific support they received in enabling them to develop their approaches to teaching the higher education programmes, and demonstrated an awareness of the different expectations of teaching at higher education level. The records of the development events, including those with a specific focus on higher education development, evidence the College's approach to supporting those staff. Staff value being able to attend a range of development and benchmarking events delivered by the partner organisations. Students are positive regarding staff qualifications for the subjects they are taught, and students met by the team strongly expressed their satisfaction with the quality of the teaching staff and their support for the students' academic development.

2.32 The College supports staff to engage with the scholarly activity programme through reduced classroom contact; this activity enables them to focus on their development and engagement with higher education provision. Validation panels evaluated the outcomes of scholarly activity, which are then disseminated through an annual report and through the course team meetings. Staff reflected positively on the mentoring for new staff and on the support available for gaining additional academic qualifications. The College is engaged in discussions with other higher education providers to further develop the peer observation scheme, so that it is more specifically differentiated for higher education delivery.

2.33 The student body evidently appreciates the development of the University Centre and the steps the College has taken to ensure it is more exclusive to higher education students. Likewise, students recognised the effectiveness of the College's approaches to inclusivity and support for diverse groups.

2.34 Through its reviews of the documentary evidence, and meetings with staff and students, the review team found that the College has in place effective systems for evaluating and improving the quality of the students' learning experience. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.35 The College's Strategic Plan aims 'To enable all learners to succeed and progress through providing excellent teaching and learning and support within a secure, welcoming and inspiring learning environment'. This is contextualised in the Higher Education Strategy aim 'To maintain and develop accommodation and resources to support a distinctive, high quality HE experience'. The Executive Team and the Standards Committee monitors progress towards fulfilling these aims, through review of the Higher Education Strategy action plan. This plan has core objectives to further develop the higher education Library Learning Centre and the VLE, to ensure that the accommodation strategy reflects the planned growth in higher education provision and to continue to invest in new technology and specialist equipment.

2.36 The College has a range of mechanisms in place to support students' transition into higher education, including case studies, information about employment opportunities, progression events and open evenings, induction, and support from the College Guidance Team. The College holds the Matrix Standard for Student Services and Work-Based Learning, and the Guidance Team undertakes regular training to improve the quality of guidance available to the students. The College also has processes for supporting students who require additional support, revised in 2015 in response to student feedback, in order to better facilitate students' applications for Disabled Students' Allowance.

2.37 The College monitors internal survey and retention data and the results of the National Student Survey to review how the College's higher education provision meets the needs of its prospective, current and past learners, and to inform the development of quality assurance processes, operational arrangements and resources, which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.38 The College has established a University Centre, which is specifically resourced to support higher education and Access to HE students, including a dedicated Library Learning Centre. As well as physical resources, the Library Learning Centre provides support for study skills, academic writing and referencing, provision that is summarised in the Library Learning Centre Service Standard. In response to demand, the library has extended its opening hours and will requisition additional texts. During the development of new programmes, programme teams engage the library at an early stage to anticipate resource needs. Students indicated that they are generally satisfied with library provision.

2.39 The scheme of work pro formas require lecturers to identify learning styles and any additional learning needs for each group, and plan how to address them. Engagement of students with learning opportunities is also being supported through a tutorial structure, and the College has extended the academic year to include formal individual tutorials across study weeks for the coming academic year.

2.40 The College aims to offer vocational higher education courses and qualifications that prepare students for work, with employability specified as a strategic aim in the Higher Education Strategy. To support this, the College sets out that all higher education students should experience a work placement, linked to an external client, a research project or a careers module. When students experience difficulties in arranging placements, they receive support from a placement coordinator. Employability modules are embedded in all

programmes and include training in CV writing and skills development. The College monitors student progression data, and the Guidance Team offers support to students who have indicated that they have not identified a destination pathway prior to completing their studies.

2.41 The College engages with local employers, who, as well as providing placements, are involved in the development and unit selection of vocational programmes, and in the development of employability-themed elements such as live briefs.

2.42 The College VLE supports student learning, and students are introduced to it during induction. Year plans, handbooks, module information and assignment briefs, as well as links to additional resources, are available through the VLE. The Higher Education Strategy action plan includes recognition that there is scope for further development in the use of the VLE.

2.43 The processes and support mechanisms in place, and arrangements to monitor and evaluate them, would allow the Expectation to be met

2.44 To test the extent to which the College meets this Expectation, the review team met academic and professional staff, students and employers. It reviewed the Strategic Plan, and reports and minutes of the Standards Committee and the Executive Team. The team also reviewed the student submission to this report and the outcomes of student surveys.

2.45 Although the minutes of the committee meetings did not indicate detailed consideration of the support in place for the management of higher education provision, and the higher education action plan does not have target dates for its implementation, the review team found that students are positive about the support provided by the College, and its responsiveness to their feedback. In particular, students appreciate the contributions made by staff.

2.46 The College recognises the challenges of supporting students' transition into and through higher education and has in place effective support to facilitate this and their onward transition into employment, which was recognised by employers, external examiners, staff and students. Employers are actively engaged through advising on programme development. For those students who are already in employment, employers reported that the programmes are well designed in relation to the vocational context. The review team considers the close engagement of programme teams with employers, which enhances students' professional development, to be a feature of **good practice**.

2.47 Through consideration of student feedback, retention and progression data, the College is able to evaluate the effectiveness of the arrangements it has in place to enable students to develop to their full academic, personal and professional potential. The review team confirmed through meetings with students and employers, as well as the reports from external examiners, that students are enabled to develop to achieve their potential.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.49 The College outlines its approach to student engagement as part of its Learner Involvement Strategy and Higher Education Strategy. The College promotes opportunities for students to engage in quality assurance enhancement through the student charter and poster campaigns.

2.50 The College appoints a number of staff to facilitate the Learner Voice initiative within the College in addition to their normal portfolio. The College employs a number of student representation models, with direct student representation at College and course-level; student representatives are mentored and provided with extra support by the management team.

2.51 The College invites feedback and encourages students to interact with a number of institution-wide surveys throughout the academic year, the responses to which are then reported to a number of internal College committees. It uses survey results to evaluate the effectiveness of the Learner Voice, and provide qualitative and quantitative feedback on current issues within the College.

2.52 The policies and procedures in place at the College focus primarily on involving students in providing feedback to the College rather than engaging them as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. As such, its arrangements would not allow the Expectation to be met.

2.53 The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing key documentation relating to student engagement, including the College Strategic Plan; the Learner Involvement Strategy and associated action plans; student representative meeting minutes; and training and guidance documents provided to both student representatives and members of staff. The review team also met senior staff, support and academic staff and students.

2.54 The College has a Learner Involvement Strategy and action plan. However, the review team found that this had not been developed or indeed informed by students, rather it is the responsibility of the Quality Improvement Group. Students are not members of the Quality Improvement Group. The annual Learner Voice report is written by a member of the Quality Improvement Group and does not involve students in the analysis and consideration of student survey data. The College appoints members of staff to coordinate and facilitate the Learner Voice activity, and student engagement and responsibilities for the Learner Voice are included in some role descriptors.

2.55 Student representatives are provided with an induction to their role and function within the wider context of the College and given ongoing support. Student representation is present at College and course level (course representatives). Minutes indicate that student representatives attend most course team meetings, but that these meetings sometimes cover a number of programmes and so they are not specific to higher education. Minutes appear to demonstrate a focus on issues raised by students to which the College reacts and takes corrective action.

2.56 There is no direct student representation on College committees, or groups that manage quality assurance processes, such as the Quality Improvement Group, or departmental management groups. The review team noted that the College plans to build upon the lead student representative role, as assumed by students in the preparation for the

QAA review. It also established that there are no immediate plans to expand the membership of the Higher Education Quality Improvement Group (HEQIG) to include students; the College position is that the student voice is reported indirectly by senior managers, who have attended focus group meetings with students. The College highlighted that members of academic and non-academic staff on College committees feed the Learner Voice opinion into deliberations on behalf of students. However, this may lead to misinterpretation and may also precipitate a conflict of interest between a member of staff representing their own interests while also representing the wider Learner Voice. Without student representation on the HEQIG, students are not involved in developing and overseeing strategies for improving learning, teaching, assessment, retention, achievement and enhancement. Neither are they involved in monitoring progress in implementing the Higher Education Strategy, or monitoring the develop of key quality documents and systems. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College strengthen and monitor the opportunities for students to engage as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

2.57 While the College has a Student Council, it only undertakes one-off awareness projects rather than acting as a bridge between course-level representatives and College-level representatives. Student Governors, course representatives and members of the Student Council all receive training for their respective roles. Student Governors are further supported through a peer-to-peer mentoring system and have access to senior management. However, the same mentoring system does not exist for course representatives or members of the Student Council.

2.58 The College rewards student representatives that attend meetings with lunch vouchers. It rewards Student Councillors for their time and participation by giving them customised references; however, the same is not offered to Student Governors, or course representatives. The College acknowledged the positive impact of the lead student representatives involved in the Higher Education Review process and intends to keep the position, although this has yet to be formalised. The College uses annual student representative awards to celebrate student representatives.

2.59 Members of staff circulate minutes from course, departmental, and student representative meetings primarily by email. Minutes are available to staff and stored locally on the staff intranet. Action plans that arise from meetings are available to both staff and students accessible from the student VLE and staff intranet.

2.60 The College surveys and invites feedback from students at a number of points throughout the academic year. Results from these exercises are fed into a number of committees, none of which contain student representation, which indicates that students are in this respect involved in assurance enhancement through participating in surveys, but not engaged in the decisions and actions taken in response. The effectiveness of student engagement is monitored on a termly basis by the Executive Team and the Standards Committee, who use reports from student representatives and student survey metrics as key performance indicators. Students are not directly represented on these groups.

2.61 The review team found that, while the College works to support the student voice and does include students in discussions at course-level, it does not effectively or systematically engage with them at an institution-level as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is not met. The level of associated risk is moderate, as a result of the College's insufficient emphasis and priority given to assuring quality in its deliberative processes through engaging students as partners.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.62 The College's procedures relating to assessment, and its approaches towards complying with the requirements of its awarding partners, enable the fulfilment of its responsibilities for ensuring that students are supported to achieve each programme's intended learning outcomes. The College states that it 'reviews the effectiveness of assessment arrangements through moderation meetings, which are scheduled on the Quality Calendar, internal course reviews and annual monitoring reviews through its university partners'. The Higher Education Strategy states the College's commitment 'to ensure the consistent implementation of University assessment procedures'. The Recognition of Prior Learning Policy has been recently reviewed, and the College has consulted with its awarding organisation in the process and shared the policy with university partners.

2.63 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.64 The review team examined the effectiveness of the approaches and procedures through scrutinising assessment documentation, course handbooks, minutes of course team and Higher Education Quality Improvement Group (HEQIG) meetings, and annual monitoring and external examiners' reports. The team also met senior staff, representatives from the awarding bodies, teaching staff and students.

2.65 Overall, College documents seen by the review team showed its procedures to be effective in practice. Feedback to students on their assessed work is timely and developmental. Students' progress is tracked using standardised documentation and is discussed in one-to-one tutorial sessions. Students understand the grading criteria and welcome the vocational relevance of their assessments and the close engagement of their tutors with employers. The team heard that students feel prepared throughout their assessment experiences for the transition to the next level of study; this includes those who have progressed to the new level 6 bachelor's degree top-up programmes.

2.66 The College's higher education Quality Development Plan articulates a strategic objective to increase the number of higher grades across its Pearson provision to 70 per cent achieving a merit or distinction. The Plan refers to the monitoring of the quality of written feedback through the internal verification process in order to move towards this goal. The review team explored the integration of the strategic objective into common practice in meetings with staff, and found that, although it was still in the early stages of development, Curriculum Leaders sample the quality of feedback. In addition, students are encouraged to comment in module surveys and as part of the teaching observation process.

2.67 The assessment regulations of awarding partners apply to the respective programmes. Assessment strategies, marking protocols and grading criteria are considered as part of validation processes for programmes delivered with degree-awarding bodies. A staff handbook informs the delivery of UCLan programmes, and handbooks produced by UCLan inform students of information relating to assessment. The University of Chester's Marking and Monitoring Protocol provides a guiding reference point, and the Programme

Management Document provides comprehensive marking criteria grids. Academic staff meet regularly with peers in partner institutions for assessment-based discussions. The College arranges three quality assurance days each year, which enable staff to engage in moderation activities and performance review activities at programme level.

2.68 The College has its own regulations for extensions, reasonable adjustments and resubmissions for its Pearson provision, as described in the Assessment Policy. There is an outline policy regarding academic integrity, which also refers to the Plagiarism, Copying and Cheating Policy. The arrangements for the setting and internal verification of assessment briefs follow the procedure in the higher education internal verification handbook. The HEQIG has recently reviewed, and the Executive Team approved, the range of assessment policies, including those for academic offences and the recognition of prior learning. The Recognition of Prior Learning Policy was reviewed in consultation with Pearson and also shared with the university partners.

2.69 The Pearson programme handbooks provide an overview of the submissions procedure, arrangements for extenuating circumstances and feedback timelines. The course review report for the Higher National programme in Photography contains an action to ensure compliance with submission policies. The Assessment Policy states that students should be aware of the consequences of late submission; those consequences, however, are not made explicit in the document. The review team heard that the three-week feedback window on assessment may be delayed where some students have not submitted work on time. Staff held conflicting views regarding granting extensions to submission deadlines and the circumstances where late submissions would be accepted. For example, some stated that a one-submission approach applies to all, but the team also heard that in implementing the policy late submission could be acceptable on a case-by-case basis or not be acceptable in any circumstances. There was further ambiguity evident through reference to a discussion with the lead internal verifier and also to the requirement to meet with the relevant head of department following the guidance of the student conduct policy. The team found that such inconsistent perceptions and practice among staff could pose a risk to fair assessment. The review team **recommends** that, by April 2016, the College confirm and communicate the procedure for handling late submissions of assessed work in line with the awarding organisation's requirements.

2.70 The design of assessments for Pearson programmes is the College's responsibility and it uses standardised assignment briefs. The comprehensive higher education internal verification handbook provides a useful reference point for staff and moderation meetings are planned into the Quality Calendar. External examiners across all subjects confirm the satisfactory assessment processes, robust moderation processes and the effective tracking of students' progress.

2.71 The College's university partners conduct award boards, and course team members participate in accreditation panels at UCLan and the University of Chester. College staff attend the assessment boards conducted by university awarding bodies. External examiners confirm the level of assessment and marking standards.

2.72 The College conducts assessment boards for Pearson programmes following a set agenda and forwards minutes to the relevant external examiner. The external examiner for Graphics noted that 'assessment meetings are organised and minuted in full'; the external examiner for Health and Social Care noted the operation of assessment boards as an area of good practice. The external examiner for Computer Science, however, made an action point for the need to ratify the full range of grades and 'record decisions officially'. The completed set of minutes for the assessment board for the Graphics programme identifies actions that have in turn informed the course development plan. An action in the higher

education Quality Development Plan currently includes an action to monitor the consistency of practice across Pearson assessment boards.

2.73 Overall, the College operates equitable, valid and reliable processes that provide students with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the achievement of the learning outcomes for the award of credit or a qualification. The review team concludes 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

2.74 Responsibility for the selection, appointment and induction of external examiners lies with the College's awarding partners. The College retains responsibility for providing external examiners with programme and assessment materials and for providing suitable responses to any matters raised. It considers external examining processes as integral to its quality assurance processes.

2.75 The College's internal verifier liaises with external examiners in relation to Pearson programmes, and the Higher Education Manager in relation to the university partnerships. Review meetings with external examiners are attended and supported by senior managers. As well as the formal visits to the College, where external examiners meet programme teams and students, external examiners have ongoing communication with the College. The College receives and disseminates external examiners' reports to heads of departments for consideration by the course teams, and areas of good practice are shared through the Curriculum Leaders' meetings.

2.76 Annual monitoring and self-assessment reports capture outcomes of the external examiners' reports and identify action points, which are in turn considered by the Higher Education Quality Improvement Group (HEQIG) and the Quality Improvement Group. Cumulatively, these processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.77 The review team tested this Expectation through reviewing the responsibilities allocated by awarding bodies, the external examiners' reports, minutes of the HEQIG and Quality Improvement Group, and annual monitoring and self-assessment reports; in meetings with staff; and through the exploration of programme sites on the VLE.

2.78 Through the review of external examiners' reports across the range of programmes, the review team found that external examiners had confirmed that standards are appropriate for the FHEQ levels for each programme; that their comments were mostly positive regarding programme structures and assessment; and that they had met students. The annual monitoring and self-assessment reports read by the team set out the examiners' recommendations and the associated action points. Although the minutes of the deliberative committees did not record details of the discussions around the examiners' reports and the annual monitoring processes, the team found that processes operate effectively, as external examiners' reports also confirm that their recommendations from previous reports had been acted upon.

2.79 Inspection of the module sites on the VLE showed that external examiners' reports were also available to students, and the review team was informed that students have access to them and participate in discussions about them through their attendance at course team meetings.

2.80 Based on the evidence provided, the review team concludes that the College is complying with the requirements of the awarding bodies, and that the external examiners' reports confirm the standards of the awards being made. 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

2.81 The College follows its awarding partners' processes for programme monitoring and review and has its own internal processes, as described under Expectation A3.3. Under the partnership agreements, the College's responsibilities include the operation of annual monitoring processes and providing relevant information for periodic reviews; it also produces annual reports for each of its awarding bodies.

2.82 As noted under Expectation A3.3, the Higher Education Manager chairs the monthly higher education Curriculum Leaders' meeting; the review team found this to be an effective operational forum for systematic discussion on quality assurance, curriculum development, programme documentation, the VLE, teaching and learning, and University partnerships.

2.83 The Higher Education Quality Improvement Group (HEQIG) provides oversight of, and advises on, higher education annual monitoring and reporting, the Quality Development Plan, Learner Voice, external examiners and the development of teaching observations. The College course review procedure was amended for 2015-16 to produce documentation specifically tailored for higher education provision.

2.84 These processes would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

2.85 The effectiveness of the College's practices was tested by examining relevant documentation, including self-assessment reports; annual reports for university partners; annual course reviews; and minutes of the Curriculum Planning Group, HEQIG and course team meetings. The review team also held discussions with support staff, teaching staff, senior staff, awarding body representatives and students.

2.86 Overall, the review team found that the processes for programme monitoring and review work effectively. Programme teams produce annual monitoring reports for the university partners, which incorporate student performance, student feedback, external examiner comments and action plans for enhancing provision. The reports are reviewed at HEQIG meetings and have recently been included in the agendas for validation panels that scrutinise the higher education self-assessment report. Programmes also undergo termly course reviews, with reports considered at departmental boards of study. Curriculum Leaders meet the Higher Education Manager on a monthly basis, and the team found that this forum provides an important link between the HEQIG and departments.

2.87 Curriculum Leaders conduct termly course reviews, with action plans being monitored at departmental boards of study. Course review documents demonstrate little qualitative data or evaluation of aspects covering teaching and learning, external examiner feedback or results of module evaluations, and there are some inconsistencies in the updating of action columns. The action plans for quality improvement require the identification of impact on students and measurable targets. The review team heard that the College course review documentation had been revised for 2015-16 to provide a strengthened higher education approach for the Pearson provision. The College recognised that it was timely to move away from a generic document encompassing all provision to one tailored towards higher education and particularly to align with elements of the Quality Code,

in order to capture engagement and enhancement activities. The review team **affirms** the introduction of the College's higher education course review procedure.

2.88 The review team explored the effectiveness of student involvement in programme level meetings and found some inconsistencies across the provision. The team concluded that students are invited to attend course team meetings and most minutes record students in attendance. These meetings, however, take place at curriculum-level, include little specific reference to higher education and tend to focus on 'issues' raised by students to which the College reacts and takes corrective action. Meetings provide opportunities to involve students in discussions but do not demonstrate proactive engagement of students in quality assurance. Student unit evaluations have not been systematically adopted for Pearson programmes and the College identified this as a development area for 2015-16. The team heard that an end-of-unit evaluation, developed through the higher education Curriculum Leaders group, ran as a pilot with the HND Health and Social Care and was approved by the HEQIG. Module evaluation questionnaires are already completed for UCLan programmes.

2.89 The review team found that College processes are effective for managing its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the programmes delivered on behalf of its awarding bodies. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.90 The College has both a general complaints, compliments and comments policy, and an academic appeals policy. These policies outline the processes, along with the relevant timeframes associated with each stage, illustrated using flow charts. The College's website and individual programme handbooks inform stakeholders about the complaints and appeals process.

2.91 All students have use of the same complaints, compliments and comments policy at the College. Academic appeals relating to UCLan and the University of Chester programmes are dealt with by each university's academic appeals policy. All other academic appeals relating to Pearson programmes, and those run in collaboration with the University of Cumbria, are managed internally by the College's academic appeals policy.

2.92 According to the College's appeals policy, students on Pearson courses and programmes run in collaboration with the University of Cumbria may have to pay a fee during the course of an academic appeal if an external arbiter is required. This fee is refundable if the appeal is upheld and in other limited circumstances. This fee does not apply to students on courses run in collaboration with UCLan or the University of Chester.

2.93 The College's Quality Improvement Group, and Equality and Diversity Committee monitor complaint levels on a termly basis, ensuring that recommendations that arise from complaints are actioned. The College's Executive Team and Standards Committee also receive these termly reports.

2.94 The College is currently reviewing its complaints and academic appeals policy in line with the new requirement for the College to join the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's higher education scheme.

2.95 The processes and policies in place allow for academic complaints to be dealt with in an appropriate timeframe. However, the policies and procedures do not allow for academic appeals to be resolved in an appropriate manner; that students on specific programmes could pay a fee in order pursue an academic appeal renders the academic appeals process inequitable and potentially inaccessible. With this in mind, the policies do not allow for the Expectation to be met.

2.96 The review team examined a number of key documents, including the complaints procedure and information contained on the College's website, programme handbooks and the VLE. The review team also met senior staff, support staff and students.

2.97 The College's comments, compliments and complaints policy does not comprehensively define under what grounds a complaint might be considered by the College; conversely, the grounds are made clear for internal academic appeals. While not addressed by the complaints, compliments and comments policy, the College does permit group complaints and anonymous complaints.

2.98 Alongside information provided on the College's website and individual programme handbooks, the College also publishes information relating to complaints and academic

appeals as part of its Wider Information Set. The induction process informs students of the complaints procedure and academic appeals procedure.

2.99 For students registering an academic appeal with respect to Pearson validated and University of Cumbria programmes, the following applies: 'If at any stage the College needs to call in an external independent arbiter, you will be charged a fee of up to £25 towards expenses incurred'. This presents a potential financial barrier to those wishing to appeal their academic results on Pearson and University of Cumbria programmes, and it is not a fee faced by students on UCLan or University of Chester programmes, which means that the appeal process is inequitable. In meetings, the College defended the potential application of the fee on students. The review team **recommends** that, by April 2016, the College ensure the appeals procedure is accessible and equitable for all students.

2.100 The Collaborative Delivery Plan, which informs the College's operational partnership with the University of Cumbria, stipulates that students enrolled on the University's programmes should use its academic appeals process. However, the College directs students to their own internal academic appeals process. The review team **recommends** that, by April 2016, the College clarify the appeals process applicable to University of Cumbria students.

2.101 The complaints policy provides written guidance for staff and students in handling a complaint. The College's Guidance Team provides additional support for students, while support and guidance for staff involved with complaints is available from the Complaints Manager or the Director of Quality, Support and Higher Education.

2.102 The review team notes that the need to clarify the appeals policy for University of Cumbria students relates to a need to amend details in documentation where the amendment will not require structural change, and suggests a low risk. However, the team found that, while the academic appeals policy and complaints policy allow for the timely conclusion of complaints and enhancement, the addition of a fee that is only applied to some, rather than all, cohorts of students renders the academic appeals process inequitable and potentially inaccessible. The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met. The associated risk is therefore moderate, as the potential fee faced by students indicates the College places insufficient emphasis on assuring quality through the equity and fairness of the academic appeals process.

Expectation: Not 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

2.103 The College does not manage any collaborative arrangements for the delivery of its programmes.

2.104 As part of its Higher Education Strategy, the College aims 'To guarantee that all higher education students will have the opportunity to experience at least one of the following as part of their course: a work placement or internship; a live brief linked to an external client; a research project or a careers module'. In support of the delivery of this aim, a significant proportion of the College's higher education provision involves work experience placements. The College maintains oversight of these placements in accordance with the Work Placement Procedures. It encourages students to find their own placements; if they are unable to find a suitable position, the Work Placements Team can provide support. The College confirms the suitability of placements regardless of whether they have been provided by the College or found by the student.

2.105 The College's documentation sets out the procedures for checking the safety and well-being of the student during the placement and the provision of a safe working environment. The College also provides a detailed service-level agreement for operation of the placements with the provider, including guidance for the employer and specification of the requirements for tutor contact. There is also a process for ensuring that training for teacher training provision is appropriate. The students are not assessed during the placement for the HNC/D and foundation degree programmes but the professional experiences form part of their professional development portfolio.

2.106 These procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.107 In drawing its conclusions, the review team consulted a range of documentation, including the Work Placement Procedures, employer documentation, the Health and Safety Executive Policy Statement, the Safeguarding Policy, and the College's Employers' Charter. The team also met academic and professional services staff, students and employers.

2.108 In its meetings with employers and students, the review team found that both groups appreciated the benefits of the placements; students recognised the support provided by the College in finding placements. Staff and students also confirmed that there was regular contact with students during the placements, and, where issues had arisen with an employer, these were resolved. Students also confirmed that learning gains from the placements were evaluated through their portfolios.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.110 The College does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.112 The College has met seven of the ten Expectations in this area. Of the three that are not met (Expectation B1, Expectation B5 and Expectation B9) the review team considers the risk to be moderate, with four recommendations arising. There is a fifth recommendation in relation to assessment (Expectation B6) where the team judges the risk to be low.

2.113 Of the four recommendations deriving from the three 'not met' Expectations in this area, two relate to weaknesses where insufficient emphasis is given to assuring quality in the College's processes. A third recommendation relates to weaknesses in programme approval where quality assurance is broadly adequate but applied with insufficient rigour. The fourth recommendation reflects the need to update information for a small group of students.

2.114 The review team identified one feature of good practice in relation to enabling student development and achievement, as the close engagement of programme teams with employers enhanced students' professional development.

2.115 Most of the applicable Expectations have been met but some moderate risk exists that, without action, could lead to serious problems in time in the management of the quality of student learning opportunities. The College's response to the issues identified by the recommendations suggests it may not be fully aware of the significance of certain issues raised by the review team in meetings, for instance, of the expectations around student engagement, the accessibility of appeals processes, and the effectiveness of processes for programme design, development and approval. The team notes that most of the recommendations in this area reflect the examples given in the 'requires improvement' column in the published Handbook, and acknowledges that previous responses to external review activity suggest that the College will take the required actions, and provide evidence of action.

2.116 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 is responsible for producing information for the public, prospective students, current students and other key stakeholders that is fit for purpose and accessible. The College provides information relating to its higher education provision through prospectuses and other marketing materials such as course leaflets for both full and part-time courses.

3.2 Information for prospective students is contained within the College's prospectus and other such course documentation, including course leaflets. Students may access important documentation such as the College's student charter in print or through the VLE.

3.3 The College's Executive Team has responsibility for approving and developing current and accurate information, in collaboration with the College's Marketing Department, according to defined processes and procedures. Course documentation is generated by Curriculum Leaders and course teams, approved by individual heads of department and then validated by the College's Marketing Department. College-wide documents, such as the College's prospectus, are validated by the College's Executive Team in collaboration with the relevant degree-awarding bodies.

3.4 The information provided by the College and the processes in place would allow this Expectation to be met.

3.5 The review team tested the Expectation by examining key documentation and meeting members of senior, support and academic staff responsible for the production, maintenance and enhancement of information at the College. The review team also met students to explore their views on the quality of information.

3.6 College-wide information originates from course teams and is ultimately approved by the College's Executive Team, which ensures the sufficiency of the content and quality of information before publication. The College publishes its Strategic Plan and Higher Education Strategy online, as derived from the College's mission. The website also provides a portfolio outlining the role, remit and committee structures of the College's Board of Trustees; however, portfolios outlining the roles and remits of internal College committees are not provided for current students or staff.

3.7 The College's prospectus, course leaflets and website describe the higher education programmes available. Course materials, such as course leaflets, originate with course teams, are approved by the relevant head of department and then circulated by the College's Marketing Department. This higher education offer sets out the entry requirements, costs, award information, modes of study and module profiles. The College levies an annual administration fee but does not provide an explanation for this in marketing materials or the terms under which it would be refunded.

3.8 Open days for external candidates and progression events for internal candidates enable the College to further disseminate information about programmes and College

resources. The Admissions Policy is published online and through the VLE. The College also publishes some progression routes in its prospectus as part of the wider marketing of its higher education offer.

3.9 The College's marketing materials refer to, but do not publish details of, mandatory costs associated with courses, such as travel on field trips; these details are discussed at interviews and are also available from the Guidance Team. The College's expectations of students and students' expectations of the College are articulated in a published student charter.

3.10 The College provides current students with programme handbooks, electronically and in hard copy, which outline information on units (but, for Pearson programmes, not programme), learning outcomes, assessment details, academic and pastoral policies relevant to individual courses, and other such important information pertinent to a positive learning environment. It has plans to develop the VLE, including delivering some modules through it.

3.11 Records of academic achievement are provided by awarding bodies rather than the College; mechanisms and policies for reissuing certificates rest therefore with the awarding partners rather than the College. The College acknowledges students' participation on the Student Council in references; however, there are no official mechanisms that enable the College to recognise students' extracurricular activities.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.14 The College has clearly articulated roles and responsibilities for the management of information and processes to assure its quality that involve programme teams, marketing professionals, and Executive Team approval. The College fully recognises the range of materials it produces for its higher education provision and manages both publicly facing, and programme information appropriately.

3.15 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College states that it views enhancement as 'a process of self-reflection and robust quality improvement'. The Higher Education Strategy 2015-18 sets out five key aims monitored through the Higher Education Quality Improvement Group (HEQIG), the Executive Team, and the Standards Committee of the Board of Governors. The Executive Team oversees the action plan to develop the higher education learning environment and experience, and also reviews the Higher Education Strategy.

4.2 The College states that a fundamental aim is 'to work in partnership with students, staff and university partners to enhance provision and practice' and it has taken some deliberate steps to support the strategic development of higher education. These include the establishment of the HEQIG in 2014, the development of the University Centre, higher education training days, and the introduction of a Scholarly Activity Policy. The College states that it wishes to achieve planned growth in higher education student numbers and has the desire for the 'further enhancement of a distinctive higher education ethos'. The College has produced a summary higher education Learner Voice report, which collates all of the survey data and student feedback to inform enhancement. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.3 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the College's approaches by examining documentation and holding meetings with the Principal, senior staff, teaching and support staff, and with students.

4.4 The review team saw evidence of enhancement initiatives but sometimes with limited demonstration of an evidence-based strategic approach towards enhancing the student experience. Much of the material presented by the College for the review, and in the additional enhancement paper produced at the request of the team, represented core quality assurance rather than enhancement activities. Examples include enabling students in Graphic Design to undertake live briefs, ensuring that students have study skills sessions, and routinely gathering survey data, but with no evidence of the effectiveness of student engagement being reviewed and planned for. The College involves students in a consultative way in relation to improving facilities, the introduction of higher education lanyards and in the tendering process for the catering contract. These provide examples of student participation in decisions but not of engagement in quality assurance procedures or in improving learning opportunities. In meetings with the team, staff demonstrated some oscillation between responses more appropriate to enrichment as it is widely understood in further education through to a more secure view of the meaning of enhancement.

4.5 The College has introduced a higher education self-assessment report, which covers its Pearson programmes; annual reports for each university partner do not directly inform the higher education self-assessment report. The report focuses on the monitoring of performance indicators and targets for attendance, retention and completion, and there is less evidence of evaluation of aspects such as the student experience, and learning and teaching, or of the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms, including team meetings, the quality of annual reporting, or student engagement to promote a portfolio-wide enhancement-led future. Although the higher education self-assessment report contains a section entitled 'enhancement', it reflects enrichment type activities such as the arrangement

of trips or ensuring more interactive teaching resources. The new higher education course review document now includes a section on enhancement; the subheadings, however, refer to enrichment activities and student participation in awareness events, such as an 'equality and diversity week' and other citizenship-focused experiences. This terminological confusion was also evident in meetings held with staff.

4.6 The review team noted that the revised annual course review documentation has introduced a section on enhancement, but it did not hear a coherent view of how good practice has been identified and disseminated, or of how initiatives are integrated in a systematic way. For example, the Higher Education Strategy aspires to increase the number of students achieving higher grades across Pearson programmes but does not indicate how this would inform and promote integration with the learning, teaching and assessment strategies or student support strategies.

4.7 The committee structure maintains strategic oversight of enhancement, and the review team saw some evidence of it monitoring the Higher Education Strategy. Some of the planned actions that appear in the Higher Education strategy action plan are descriptive and do not identify the intended and measurable impact of the action. The team heard quantitative responses when asking how the effectiveness of enhancement-led initiatives would be evaluated. However, the HEQIG is still developing its remit and may yet have scope to demonstrate more evidence of reflection on academic standards and quality to inform the development of an enhancement-led culture. The team saw evidence of enhancement being introduced as a standing agenda item on the HEQIG for 2015-16, but the only discussion noted at the time of the review related to the VLE. The team noted the steps taken to produce the higher education Learner Voice report but students were not actively involved in its production. Although this provides a useful summary, there is little evidence of how the findings might identify lines of enquiry to progress enhancement-led initiatives, such as informing the learning and teaching or student engagement strategies in an integrated way across the whole higher education population. The team noted the introduction of the higher education self-assessment report as a further deliberate step; however, this does not encompass the University validated programmes. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College integrate enhancement initiatives and monitor their effectiveness.

4.8 While the College listens to the student voice and seeks to secure involvement in many ways, the review team found that student engagement is underdeveloped, especially in relation to representational structures and quality assurance processes. Objective 5.3 of the Higher Education Strategy aspires to 'developing their own structures for student engagement'. As noted in earlier sections, student engagement in processes such as annual reporting and the higher education self-assessment report, programme design, assessment strategies and evaluations, and the HEQIG is limited, and prohibits the engagement of students as partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of the education experiences. The higher education self-assessment report states that future student meetings will be co-chaired by students, and the College confirmed its intention to implement the role of lead student representative beyond the period of the QAA review. However, the College currently has no plans to introduce student membership on the HEQIG. The impact of this finding on the College's approach to enhancement supports the recommendation under Expectation B5.

4.9 The review team heard and confirmed the College's strategic approach to resourcing the higher education provision. The building of the University Centre aligns with the Higher Education Strategy. Dedicated learning resources have strengthened infrastructure and specialist learning support staffing. Students confirmed their satisfaction with the physical learning resources and their experiences as higher education students.

4.10 The College has taken steps to recognise the staffing commitment required to support higher education. The team heard that there is a model for remission of hours to reflect programme responsibilities. There is no evidence of a capacity-building strategy to support growth, particularly at level 6, but some fractional staff appointments are dedicated to teaching at higher education level.

4.11 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. However, the College's approach to enhancement is mostly in the early stages of development and requires greater integration at provider level. The associated level of risk is moderate, as shortcomings in the College's approach indicate that the procedures are broadly adequate but lack rigour, and that insufficient emphasis is given to assuring the quality of this area.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.13 The Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is moderate. The review team found that the Strategic Plan and Higher Education Strategy drive the College's approach to enhancement, and that progress is monitored through senior committees. There is evidence of the impact of this approach. The involvement of stakeholders in enhancement is limited in its use of students as partners, a finding that supports the recommendation under Expectation B5. In light of the limited identification of intended and measurable impacts in strategies and action plans, and limited discussion by the Higher Education Quality Improvement Group, which is remitted to advise on enhancement, the team makes one recommendation relating to a need to integrate enhancement initiatives and monitor their effectiveness. These findings lead to a moderate risk, as the team finds that the College's quality assurance procedures are broadly adequate but have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied.

4.14 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The College aims to offer vocational higher education courses and qualifications that prepare students for work. This is supported through the Higher Education Strategy, which includes employability as an overall strategic aim, underpinned by the aim that all higher education students should experience either a work placement, link to an external client, a research project or a careers module. The College's Wider Information Set includes an employability statement for prospective higher education students.

5.2 Work placements form part of the educational experience of a large proportion of students, with many of the programmes having mandatory placement elements or other forms of engagement with local employers. Where students experience difficulties in arranging placements they receive support from the placement coordinator, whose role is viewed positively by the students. Induction materials support employers hosting students for the first time and all placements are risk-assessed. The College maintains contact with students during the placement and where issues arise between students and employers, these are effectively addressed.

5.3 Programmes have embedded employability modules, which include training in CV-writing and skills development. Students studying HNDs maintain personal and professional development portfolios that incorporate reflections on the learning gained through their work placements.

5.4 The College maintains very effective links with local employers, which are also recognised by external examiners. The development and unit selection for vocational programmes involves employers in the selection to address local employment needs. As well as placement provision, employers engage in programmes through employability-themed elements, such as working on live briefs for companies and producing artwork for public display. For students in employment, employers reported that the programmes are well designed in relation to the vocational context. Students also benefit from teachers on vocational programmes, who have been or are currently employed within related industries.

5.5 The College holds the Matrix Standard for Student Services and Work-Based Learning, and the Guidance Team undertake regular update training to improve the quality of the careers guidance available to the students. The Guidance Team offers specific support to students who have not identified a career destination pathway, as identified through end-of-year surveys. The Guidance Team talks to students at initial interview about their career aspirations and also organises support from a national careers adviser, who provides additional generic guidance regarding CV preparation and job searching, and some one-to-one support.

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.

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