Higher Education Review of Sunderland College

March 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Sunderland College. The review took place from 29 February to 1 March 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Jenny Gilbert
- Ms Elizabeth Shackels
- Mr Daniel McCarthy-Stott (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided Sunderland 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 Sunderland 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.

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[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 Sunderland College

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

- The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body and other awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Recommendations

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

By September 2016:

- formalise progression of curriculum proposals to the awarding body into the existing programme approval procedures (Expectation B1)
- ensure effective engagement of Higher National students with quality assurance and enhancement activities (Expectation B5)
- articulate the differences between the University Collaborative Periodic Partnership Review and the Periodic Review of taught programmes in the Higher Education Quality Handbook to clarify understanding by staff (Expectation B8)
- develop and implement an internal process of annual monitoring and periodic review at programme level for the College's Pearson Education provision (Expectation B8).

Theme: Student Employability

The College does not have an overall strategy on employability but has devised a College-wide strategy regarding employer engagement, and each department develops its own mechanism to engage with employers. The College appoints staff with recent and relevant work experience to teach on vocational programmes and provides staff with opportunities to maintain their experience as part of their continuing professional development (CPD).

Much of the College's engagement and activity around employability is influenced by whether the programme has a mandatory work experience or placement component, such as on the HNDs in Health and Social Care, and Sport or the Foundation Degree in Counselling, where there is a policy on fitness to practise. It is the students' responsibility to locate and organise placements with help from the College where necessary.

Within course programmes, staff have attempted to contextualise assessments to reflect industry standards and practice through simulated exercises, and used case studies to promote skills such as employability. Students indicated that report writing and presentations are key ways in which staff attempt to promote these skills. External examiner reports are generally positive about the value and experience students receive from their placements. The opportunities provided for students to engage in placement or work-based activities, including live briefs, are sound and students value the experiences. In addition, student

services, in conjunction with course teams, also provide information, guidance and workshops on employability skills.

The relationship with employers in relation to assignment briefs and assessment opportunities is less well developed and there is no formal structure to evaluate the impact that the work-based placement is having on student learning or to identify and disseminate good practice.

Employers provide a valuable interface by affirming College provision and by highlighting current employer needs. In addition, the College has commenced a programme of establishing Industry Advisory Boards within each department. The College recognises a need to develop a more formal approach to working with employers. In turn, employers expressed the view that they would welcome opportunities for greater involvement with the College.

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

About Sunderland College

Sunderland College is a large tertiary and general further education college situated on the coast in the North East of England. The College is a member of the Mixed Economy Group, and the Association of Colleges.

The College is in the middle of a three-year strategic plan, which has five ambitions: to transform the organisational culture, to be responsive to local and national priorities and opportunities, to strengthen the College's position within a range of market sectors, to provide an outstanding experience for learners and to manage the College's estate and resources, with a new campus due to open in September 2016.

There are four campuses across the city offering a wide range of academic and vocational provision for school leavers and adults. Three of the campuses, at Bede, St Peter's and Washington, are sixth form centres, and the Hylton campus provides programmes in construction, engineering, motor vehicle, hospitality and catering, travel and tourism, and hair and beauty.

The College is located in a region that continues to feel the impact of the decline and loss of traditional sources of employment such as ship building and coal mining. This has left a legacy of low aspirations, poverty, poor levels of health and, although improving, low levels of educational achievement. The North East area traditionally has low entry numbers progressing into higher education, compared with other regions. Only 23.5 per cent of adults in Sunderland are qualified to Level 4 or above, with 11 per cent of people aged 16 to 64 in the North East Local Enterprise Partnership area having no qualifications.

There are a number of emerging employment sectors in the city and beyond, including advanced manufacturing and engineering, automotive, sustainable construction, digital technologies and media, health and well-being, and professional and business services. Locally and regionally, there is demand from the business community for more skilled people to meet the needs of these emerging industries.

The College enjoys a strong relationship with local partner schools, with head teachers sitting on two College Sixth Form Strategy groups, one for Sunderland Sixth Form and one for Washington Sixth Form. This approach has built on a very strong tradition and ensures that the College is intrinsically linked to the city's secondary education providers.
The College has a strong relationship with its partner, Reed/NCFE, which focuses on filling

apprenticeship and employment opportunities as well as sourcing appropriate work placements.

Currently the College has 600 students enrolled on its higher education provision: 331 full-time and 269 part-time students. The College offers a range of higher education qualifications, through a franchised model with the University of Sunderland (UoS) for foundation degrees (Fds), Joint Scheme of Extended Programmes and Certificates in Education and Training, and through Pearson for Higher Nationals.

There are eight foundation degrees including performing arts, photography, counselling, health and education. There are Higher National certificate (HNC) programmes in the built environment, manufacturing, electrical and electronic engineering, computing, business, health and social care. Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) are offered in the built environment, manufacturing, electrical and electronic engineering, computing, business, health and social care, art and design, public services, sport and travel and tourism. There are three Joint Scheme of Extended Programmes in science and two programmes leading to a PGCE in Post Compulsory Education and Training, and a Professional Graduate Certificate in Post Compulsory Education and Training.

Since the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER), by QAA in July 2011 there have been two new Principals, the most recent appointed in January 2016. The College has reorganised its staffing structure and has provided two state-of-the-art multimillion pound academies at the Bede Campus for sport and visual and performing arts students, with an extended and refurbished learning centre at its Bede campus. In 2015 a strategic decision was made to partner exclusively with the UoS, resulting in the removal of Teesside University as a partner. There is more focused higher education student representation at all levels across the College and the ongoing programme of upgrading and replacement of facilities ensures that students are provided with industry-standard equipment.

The College's Higher Education Strategy has five ambitions relating to higher education provision. These ambitions focus on development of higher education provision during a period of tremendous change. They ensure that Sunderland College continues to focus on quality provision offered through direct and collaborative partnership and that there is continued research and scholarly activity within a sound framework.

In July 2011, the IQER evaluated the provision with 'confidence' judgements in all areas and with six areas of good practice for dissemination. There were four desirable recommendations around the development of effective quality assurance policies and procedures, assessment feedback, employer engagement and the higher education tutorial system. All of the recommendations have been addressed by the College although the success and impact of the measures taken is not fully made clear.

Explanation of the findings about Sunderland College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

Explanation of the findings about Sunderland College

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1   The College does not have degree awarding powers but has formal partnership arrangements with the University of Sunderland (UoS) and Pearson Education. Consequently, responsibility for positioning qualifications in line with the relevant framework rests with the awarding body and organisation.

1.2   For UoS provision there is a Collaborative Provision Agreement which lists the courses covered. The agreement includes a checklist and comprehensive breakdown of the Joint Franchise Model responsibilities of the College and of the University.

1.3   The University is governed by its own academic regulations and is responsible for validating programmes, approving entry standards, class size, monitoring and review arrangements, mechanisms for quality assurance, academic standards and quality of learning opportunities through the programme specifications and module specifications. The University's validation and approval process documents outline the process for panels to ensure that programmes are designed to meet the Academic Infrastructure and subject benchmark requirements.

1.4   HNC/D programmes are developed and awarded by Pearson, who publish the specifications that provide reference points for staff and students for teaching, learning and assessment. Pearson publishes guidelines, including the BTEC Centre Guide to

Assessment (Level 4-7), which sets out its requirements for the operational policies and procedures that the provider is required to develop and implement. Pearson HNC/D programmes are located on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), and regulated by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual).

1.5   Both Pearson and UoS external examiners are required to comment on whether the programme is aligned to the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. External examiners are satisfied that threshold academic standards are secure. In addition, the UoS undertakes six-yearly periodic reviews.

1.6   The College also offers the Professional Certificate in Post Compulsory Education and Training, and a PGCE in Post Compulsory Education and Training, validated and franchised by UoS. These programmes have been appropriately aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework.

1.7   The awarding body and organisation ensure that the academic standards are set at a level that meets UK threshold standards. This is supported by College-designed policies and procedures, meaning that the Expectation would be met.

1.8   The team tested the Expectation by examining a range of documents including partnership agreements, programme specifications, validation documents, College quality manuals, procedural and policy documents, and external examiner reports, as well as by holding meetings with academic and support staff, including representatives from the awarding body and organisation.

1.9   The College has a process for course design and approval detailed in the Higher Education Quality Handbook and further articulated in course handbooks for each programme. The approval process is summarised in a flow diagram. All new programmes are approved by the College Higher Educational Management Committee and Assistant Principal. Programme specifications are the products of both internal consideration and the requirements of the University and Pearson. The processes are understood and the College adheres to the policies and procedures for programme approval. Validation documents indicate that the external reference points, such as Subject and Qualification Benchmark Statements, are addressed and discussed during the approval process. External examiner reports provide further evidence that the standards of the awards are met.

1.10   The ultimate responsibility for ensuring that approved programmes meet threshold academic standards and that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) lies with the College's awarding body and organisation. The team concludes that the College is fulfilling its responsibilities in meeting this Expectation through adherence to awarding partners' policies and procedures. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk 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

1.11   As outlined in Expectation A1, academic governance of higher education provision at the College rests either with the UoS or Pearson. The University has control over academic credit and standards as outlined in the Collaborative Provision Agreement and has clear guidance on academic regulations, which is outlined in their Academic Quality Handbook .

1.12   Pearson's Centre Guidance to Assessment Levels 4 to 7, the Centre Guide to Managing Quality and the BTEC Quality Assurance Handbook provide similar guidance. Effective relationships exist between the senior managers within the College and UoS personnel, for example the University Partnership Office, and the Quality and Standards Department. Similarly good relationships exists between assistant programme leaders and University programme leaders.

1.13   Assessment boards are carried out externally by the University and in 2015-16 they have been conducted internally for Pearson provision. Both are scheduled and recorded with appropriate input sought from external examiners, meaning that the Expectation would be met.

1.14   The review team considered documentation produced by the awarding partners and the College that defines the academic frameworks and regulations relevant to higher education provision. In addition, the team discussed these frameworks with senior managers and academic staff.

1.15   The College produces its own quality handbooks, which have been aligned to meet the requirements of its awarding partner. These include a Higher Education Quality Handbook, Quality Procedures Manual, Internal Quality Assurance Handbook and a range of policies and procedures to support staff who deliver higher education programmes in understanding the responsibilities for academic standards. In addition to the University assessment requirements, a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and Policy applies to all qualifications delivered by the College and this recognises the academic regulations of the awarding body. An internal moderation procedure is applied to assess student work. The College organises its own assessment boards for the Higher National programmes and maintains a detailed record of the proceedings. The College policies and procedures are subject to regular review and staff are familiar with the requirements of the College and awarding partners' policies and procedures.

1.16   Programmes validated by the University complete an annual monitoring report (AMR) which is forwarded to the Head of Department and which feeds into the departmental self-evaluation report and action plan. These action plans are passed through the Quality and Standards Department (QSD) and to the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Group (HEQEG), which meets five times a year and which is responsible for ensuring that all actions are completed by the end of the academic year. The Head of Higher Education also produces an overall College Higher Education self-evaluation document (SED), which is scrutinised by a panel meeting that consists of senior management and external stakeholders.

1.17   The College does not currently complete individual self-evaluation reports and actions plans for Pearson programmes although a comprehensive departmental self-evaluation is completed, which takes into account the views of staff and students. These reports are also fed through to the QSD and the CRG.

1.18   The review team considers that academic frameworks and regulations are in place that govern how academic credit and qualifications are awarded. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (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

1.19   The responsibility for maintaining definitive records for each programme and qualification rests with the UoS or Pearson. As described in Expectation A1, programme specifications are designed by the respective awarding partner, who ensures that each programme is positioned appropriately on the FHEQ and uses relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and qualification descriptors.

1.20   The College has responsibility, under the joint franchise agreement, with the University and Pearson for implementing and monitoring any changes to a programme. Staff are aware of their responsibilities, which are articulated within the relevant checklists in internal quality handbooks.

1.21   UoS programmes are provided with the Programme Handbook containing references for teaching, learning and assessment, to which information is added that is specific to the College. For Higher National programmes the College uses Pearson's standard, national-level specifications and produces internal programme handbooks and unit guides which provide more in-depth detail regarding assessment and other activities.

1.22   The College also holds a record of both UoS and Higher National programme specifications on the internal College intranet. Students can request records of study from the University, although the College also makes these available to students on request.

1.23   The team reviewed a range of programme specifications, handbooks and unit guides and met senior staff, Heads of Department and curriculum leaders, as well as speaking to students.

1.24   Students confirmed that they had a good understanding of their programmes prior to entry and are aware of which awarding partner validates them. Programmes publicised on the website clearly state the awarding body, though the prospectus does not currently state that Higher National programmes are awarded by Pearson.

1.25   It is not clear whether Heads of Department are required to hold and store programme specifications in addition to the centrally stored copies on the College's intranet. Heads of Department confirmed that they access the current copy of the programme specification from the College intranet and explained that they also hold a related file either in hard copy or electronically. These are audited during internal inspections to ensure accuracy.

1.26   Formal records of study and academic transcripts are produced by the degree-awarding body and organisation and they are also responsible for producing certificates. External examiners for Pearson have confirmed that documented processes are in place to ensure that claims for certification are valid.

1.27   The awarding body and organisation ensure that definitive records of programmes and qualifications are maintained and therefore the expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.28   Responsibility for the design and approval of higher education programmes delivered by the College rests with the two awarding partners, as described in Expectation A1. They ensure that academic standards are set in accordance with their academic frameworks and regulations and at a level that meets UK threshold standards. The UoS describes the mechanism for programme approval in the University Academic Quality Handbook. The College is a centre approved by Pearson to deliver Higher National awards, and to deliver a new award the College must complete a Pearson vocational qualification approval form, in liaison with the Pearson regional representative.

1.29   The College has an internal programme validation process which is described in the Higher Education Quality Handbook. The process is expressed through the medium of a programme validation procedure flowchart. New course proposals are submitted through this internal process before progression to the accrediting body's obligatory approval process.

1.30   The University has an annual monitoring process which the College implements for its foundation degree awards. There is also a University periodic review of clusters of cognate programmes, which includes those delivered by the University, the College and other college partners. The periodic review of taught programmes takes place at six-yearly intervals and includes re-approval of the programmes in the cluster, for a period of six years. There is no annual monitoring process or periodic review of College delivery of Pearson programmes, but each department in the College undertakes an annual departmental review and produces a self-evaluation document (SED).

1.31   External examiners are appointed by the University for their awards and by Pearson for each Higher National programme. Both require external examiners to confirm that the award is aligned with the FHEQ and any applicable Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.32   The review team studied documents that describe the awarding body, awarding organisation and College's procedures, considered responsibility checklists, requested additional information and explored the approval and review processes with staff and students at the College.

1.33   The responsibilities of the College and the relevant awarding body or organisation are detailed in the responsibilities checklists for the University and Pearson respectively. It is clear that approval of programmes rests with the awarding body in each case.

1.34   None of the staff present at meetings with the review team had experience of external approval of a new foundation degree programme, as it is several years since the last approval event. Two proposals have recently been submitted and processed through the internal College validation process. However, as they were rejected by the University, they did not proceed to the University validation process. Staff are regularly involved in the approval mechanism for Higher National programmes.

1.35   The description of the College's internal programme validation process within the Higher Education Quality Handbook does not contain its articulation to the awarding body approval process. Senior staff, who liaise directly with the University Partnership Office, can explain the progression process but it is not well understood by other staff. This is explored further in Expectation B1.

1.36   Higher National programmes are not subject to internal annual monitoring or periodic review. However, some programme data is monitored within the departmental SED process that is undertaken annually for higher education provision, at departmental and at whole College level. This is explored further in Expectation B8.

1.37   The awarding body and organisation ensure that academic standards accord with UK threshold standards and therefore the expectation is met and the 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

1.38   The University Partnership Agreement specifies the responsibilities for the foundation degrees delivered by the College, including the responsibilities related to assessment. The module specification designed at approval outlines the learning outcomes that the assessment must achieve. The College designs all the assessments and submits them to the University for approval. Where programmes are shared between colleges assessment is coordinated across all partnerships by the University programme leader. The College undertakes first and second marking or moderation and submits the work to the University for further moderation. The University then arranges the necessary sampling moderation by the external examiner. One or more representatives from the College must attend the Module and Programme Assessment Board.

1.39   Higher National programmes follow a responsibilities checklist that indicates the College responsibility for designing effective learning materials to meet the learning outcomes. The checklist follows guidance from Pearson and the College implements internal verification against the programme specification, prior to checking by the external examiner. It is the role of the external examiner to confirm that the College has set assessments at the appropriate standard to test the learning outcomes. This is confirmed in the external examiner report. The BTEC Guide to Assessment indicates that the standards verifier has the responsibility for checking consistency of interpretation of national standards by each assessor.

1.40   There is a short reference section on assessment in the Higher Education Quality Handbook with links to the relevant awarding body documents. The Handbook could be improved by including a summary of the procedures for each awarding body as well as a web link.

1.41   The team read the College's, the awarding body's and the awarding organisation's guidance in quality handbooks, and studied policies, minutes of assessment boards and external examiners' reports in order to test the expectation. The team also verified the assessment process through discussions with staff.

1.42   The University external examiners confirm that the standards are comparable to those of other higher education providers. Pearson external examiners confirm that there is compliance with the relevant standards and that criteria are suitable to award a pass, merit and distinction level. External examiners from both awarding partners confirm that assessment is thorough and rigorous.

1.43   The College convenes an internal assessment board for its Pearson programmes and operates in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment (Levels 4-7).

1.44   University Assessment Boards process marks, consider student progression and make award decisions. The boards are chaired, serviced and managed by the University and assistant programme leaders from the College are given remission on timetable to ensure that they are able to attend.

1.45   The Higher Education Enhancement Committee monitors all higher education external examiner reports and provides a forum to share good practice.

1.46   The Expectation is met and the 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

1.47   The UoS manages programmes at the College under the joint franchise model that allows the University to retain ownership of the programmes, including intellectual property rights, so that they can be offered on campus and/or to other partners.

1.48   Responsibility for monitoring and review of the foundation degree programmes lies with the University, and the College undertakes annual monitoring of programmes as documented in the University Quality Handbook. A six-yearly Periodic Review of Taught Programmes is undertaken by the University. It assures the quality and standards of taught programme provision against internal and external points of reference, ensures that they align with UK threshold standards, provides a robust mechanism for re-approving programmes, takes an holistic view of taught provision in a subject area and supports the strategic planning of programme development.

1.49   Additionally, a Collaborative Periodic Partnership Review of the College is undertaken every six years. It considers whether the partner is equipped to deliver the programmes that are in validation to an appropriate quality and standard and also considers the strategic development of the partnership.

1.50   Pearson is responsible for ensuring the relevance and validity of the Higher National qualifications, identifying, implementing and approving modifications and ensuring recognition of these by Ofqual.

1.51   The departmental SEDs align with the Quality Code and feed into an annual College-wide higher education self-evaluation document.

1.52   The review team tested this Expectation by studying the SED, the University Quality Handbook, the College Higher Education Quality Handbook, Pearson documents, and annual monitoring and review guidelines and reports. The team also explored the College staff's understanding of the processes in meetings.

1.53   The University programme leader for each discipline area completes a programme AMR after receiving a written report from each assistant programme leader at the College.

1.54   Responsibility for periodic review and re-approval of Higher National programmes lies with Pearson. It does not engage with the College for either programme annual monitoring or periodic review, although in 2015-16 it introduced an annual quality management review that includes all higher education and further education provision. The lack of annual monitoring at programme level for HNC/Ds has led to a recommendation for Expectation B8.

1.55   The College requires departmental SEDs as part of an internal annual monitoring process and aligns the processes with the Quality Code. An annual College-wide higher education self-evaluation document is written and is peer assessed by a panel that includes external representation.

1.56   The University oversight of foundation degrees and Pearson's role in designing and approving Higher National qualifications with Ofqual, and setting learning outcomes and assessment criteria, ensures that UK threshold academic standards are achieved and that the academic standards required by each individual degree-awarding body are maintained. Therefore the expectation is met, with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.57   Overall responsibility for the quality and standards of provision within the College is as described in Expectations A1, A2, and A.3. Procedures are clearly outlined in the collaborative partnership arrangements with the College and through the University Academic Quality Handbook that also outlines the process for annual monitoring and periodic review.

1.58   In proposing new courses with the UoS, the College is required to send an Expression of Interest together with a course validation application to the University. This form requires the College to state any employer engagement activity that has occurred and the proposed involvement of external bodies. The University then responds with further questions for clarification and on the basis of this will approve or reject the application. Staff from programmes validated by the University complete an AMR that is forwarded to the Head of Department and which feeds into the departmental self-evaluation report and action plan. The action plans are passed through the QSD and to the HEQEG, which meets five times a year and which is responsible for ensuring that all actions are completed by the end of the academic year. The Head of Higher Education also produces an overall College higher education SED which is scrutinised by a panel meeting consisting of senior management and external stakeholders.

1.59   Pearson are responsible for devising course specifications; however, the College can influence the development of the specification around optional modules by selecting those modules which best reflect local employer and student needs. The College makes use of the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment (Levels 4 to 7), and the BTEC Quality Assurance Handbook to promote quality standards that are reflected in the Higher Education Quality Handbook and Quality Procedures Manual.

1.60   External input is achieved through the involvement of external examiners, appointed by the awarding organisation to each programme to ensure that the College is assessing to the appropriate standard. External examiners visit the College, audit a sample of assessment briefs and assessed work and produce a report. They are not required to attend the College assessment boards. Pearson appoints a Centre Quality Reviewer to produce an annual Quality Management and Review Report on the College's quality assurance systems, policies and procedures. Until 2014-15 this review covered the College's further education provision only, as the higher education provision was not in scope. In 2015-16 an annual quality management review, now including higher education provision, was introduced by Pearson.

1.61   The review team considered the approach to externality by reviewing documentation produced by the awarding partners and College and through consideration of reports from external parties involved in overseeing standards. In addition, the review team discussed the approach to externality with a range of staff and students

1.62   External examiners have been appointed to all awarding partner programmes. The University appoints external examiners to each of its awards to review assessment tasks, outcomes and module changes. The College QSD, Curriculum Review meetings and Higher Education Enhancement Group monitors all external examiner reports to ensure that all actions are completed by the end of the academic year. External examiner reports confirm that standards have been met.

1.63   Staff are conversant with the requirements for the external assessment of their awards and are aware of their responsibilities in providing information and responding to their external examiners. Reports from external examiners available to the team are comprehensive and predominantly positive, with action points addressed by the programme teams where appropriate. Outside the appointment of external examiners the College demonstrated limited awareness of the importance of liaising with external stakeholders/ expertise when developing and embedding higher education programmes.

1.64   The review team considers that the College engages appropriately with the awarding partner procedures for using external and independent expertise in setting, approving and maintaining academic standards. The review team therefore 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

1.65   In reaching its judgement about the College's maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding body, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.66   All of the applicable Expectations in this area have been met, with a judgement of low risk being reached in each case.

1.67   The College, in partnership with its awarding body and organisation, maintains academic standards by ensuring that each programme is located at the appropriate level of the FHEQ; ensuring that learning outcomes are aligned with the relevant qualification descriptor; assigning appropriate credit values; taking account of the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements; and checking that assessment schemes adequately meet the intended learning outcomes. Appropriate procedures and systems maintain, review and update definitive information. Consistent and appropriate academic and regulatory frameworks are used at all times and for all levels of award. Externality is achieved through involving appropriate external and independent expertise in programme approval and periodic monitoring, thereby ensuring validity and relevance of higher education provision.

1.68   No recommendations or good practice points relate to this area.

1.69   The review team concludes that the College's maintenance of threshold academic standards for awards **meets** expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College delivers programmes designed and approved by its degree-awarding body, the UoS and its awarding organisation, Pearson. It manages the standards of its academic provision through implementing the procedures of the two awarding partners.

2.2 For both foundation degree and Higher National awards, there is the same internal approval process that requires completion of an Expression of Interest form, which is considered by the Higher Education Management Committee. Following approval by the committee a course validation application is completed by the curriculum leader and discussed with the Head of Department prior to submission to the QSD, who check the necessary curriculum data for viability and eligibility. Once confirmed, the proposal is signed off by the Deputy Principal and Deputy Chief Executive.

2.3 For Higher National programmes the Curriculum Leader and Head of Department then apply to the awarding body using the Pearson vocational qualification approval form along with staff CVs, a completed programme specification and an example assignment design. The Curriculum Leader is required to produce a Higher Education Programme Specification that is cognisant of the Quality Code and which aligns with the Subject Benchmark Statement and the FHEQ.

2.4 For foundation degrees the UoS Academic Quality Handbook sets out the mechanism for programme approval. Following changes in the University designation of collaborative models all programmes are now designated as joint franchise. The College designs teaching materials based on the programme specifications and module descriptors approved, designed and issued by the University. The College is approved to run the programmes under a collaborative agreement that lasts until 2019. The collaborative agreement indicates that the programme specification may be amended from time to time by the University.

2.5 This Expectation was tested through consulting the higher education SED and the associated evidence plus additional evidence requested by the review team. Discussions were held with academic staff and an additional meeting with the Head of Higher Education and the Assistant Principal Sixth Form and Higher Education was convened specifically to discuss the approval, monitoring and review processes.

2.6 Programmes offered by the College are designed to meet student interests, to address local skills gaps, to satisfy employers' demands and to fit graduates for the local and national market. There is also consultation with local employers to design suitable programmes.

2.7 In order to determine the likely demand for a programme, informative and relevant reports are commissioned by the College from Economic Modelling Specialists International (Emsi) and these are appended to the Course Validation Application form. However, the College does not always effectively articulate the evidence from these reports, in writing,

to justify the course proposal. The College has a process to determine whether a business case exists before offering a new programme but this could be expressed more clearly in the Higher Education Quality Handbook.

2.8   The units for Higher National programmes are defined by Pearson and the College can select which options, offered within the HND specification, to include in their programme. In doing so it can map an HND to Level 6 of a cognate award at the University. As a result, progression routes are in place for a number of HND programmes to allow students to progress automatically to the final year of a specified degree programme.

2.9   The College's internal approval process is presented in the College Quality Procedures Manual and the Higher Education Quality Handbook. The stages are portrayed using a programme validation procedure flowchart but there is no accompanying description or checklist of activities at each stage. The flowchart indicates that all paperwork should be forwarded to QSD. To determine which documents are required it is necessary to consult the Expression of Interest form. A new step in the process, added at the start of the current academic year, is the submission of the Expression of Interest form to the Higher Education Management Committee for approval. The first programmes to be considered by the Higher Education Management Committee were discussed in the September 2015 meeting. The approval process includes checking the resources needed to deliver the programme, but the team received conflicting information about where in the cycle this occurs.

2.10   Discussions with staff indicate that the flowchart does not accurately describe the iterative process of curriculum development. The documented, formal process requires QSD to pass the Expression of Interest form and the Course Validation Application to the University Partnership Office. In practice, Expressions of Interest are often shared with the relevant University faculty directly, as was the case when two recent proposals were rejected by the University following the College's internal process.

2.11   Nowhere in the validation flowchart, or elsewhere in the Higher Education Quality Handbook, is there any reference to the approval processes of either the awarding body or awarding organisation. While a number of staff could demonstrate recent experience of the Pearson process, this was not the case for University approval. There was heavy reliance on the expertise held by individual staff for an understanding of the University approval procedure. Therefore the team **recommends** that the College formalises progression of curriculum proposals to the awarding body into the existing programme approval procedures.

2.12   The Expectation is met because the awarding body and organisation ensure that the design, development and approval process is rigorous, but the risk is moderate because of the lack of documented articulation between internal and external programme approval procedures.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.13   The College has devolved responsibility for all recruitment activities and is responsible for recommending students for admission prior to sign-off by the degree-awarding body. Full-time students apply to the College through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and part-time students apply directly to the College. Foundation degree student sign-off is required from the University prior to an offer being made. For Higher National students the College informs Pearson at the point of the student enrolling on the course.

2.14   The College has an Admissions Policy which outlines the ethos of 'Right student, right course' and a procedure that outlines the separate criteria for students applying for different levels and programmes. All students are required to attend a face-to-face or telephone interview prior to an offer being made. Where a student application is related to a performing arts programme the student is also required to undertake an audition. Students are informed whether they have been accepted or are being offered a conditional place on the programme by letter, either through UCAS or directly from the College. Students have a right to appeal, though decisions are made predominantly on the basis of UCAS points. The appeal process is discussed in more detail within Expectation B9.

2.15   Programme leaders work alongside professional staff throughout the admissions process to best support applicants. As all students are interviewed it allows the College to make an early assessment of any necessary additional support for many students and ensure that the appropriate support is made available. The admissions procedure outlined would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.16   The review team met with students, programme leaders involved with admissions, and professional support staff to review the effectiveness of the admission procedures. In addition, the team reviewed a sample of applicants' recorded journeys through the admission process and reviewed documentation including the Higher Education Prospectus and the College website.

2.17   Clear information about how to apply, including the admissions criteria for each programme, is presented on the College website and in the higher education prospectus. The College communicates clearly with both successful and unsuccessful applicants in a timely manner. To support recruitment processes the College has an Advice and Guidance Team which offers advice and tailored support from first contact. Students describe the application process as straightforward, and that they receive support filling out their UCAS form, attend an interview and receive a letter confirming their place at the College.

2.18   All students are enrolled by the College and receive a general induction. Foundation degree students are also inducted into the UoS, are given additional access to resources, and activities are arranged to support their transition. However, the overall quality and experience of induction by Higher National students is not always comparable to that of University students. The College has taken steps to improve the induction experience for all

students, including the introduction of a Freshers' Fair, though this was not highlighted by students when discussing their induction experiences.

2.19   The College recognises that recruitment, in particular for part-time students, has been challenging. The University sets a lower limit of 15 students to run a programme although it was explained that on occasions when a lower number is recruited arrangements are put in place with the University to ensure programmes can go ahead. Arrangements include teaching students at the University or joining cohorts together. On each occasion students were contacted in advance, and no negative comments were received from students.

2.20   The College is currently in the process of updating its admissions procedures in line with renewed guidance from the Consumer and Markets Authority. An annual review of the admissions and enrolment process takes place and Student Recruitment and Marketing produce an action plan that responds to any recommendations.

2.21   The College has effective processes and procedures in place to recruit, select and enrol students to programmes. These are transparent and reliable and therefore the Expectation is met and the 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 a well-established process of annual course review and monitoring for its University provision, which takes account of the views of relevant stakeholders, and this is monitored by the QSD. Currently, the College does not formally evaluate its Pearson provision programme by programme, although the annual departmental self-evaluation captures the key academic issues affecting the provision. The College has a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and corresponding policy ensuring that all staff are entitled to an observation of their teaching practice. The observation process is endorsed by the University through direct participation and through the design of relevant annual staff development activities.

2.23   The College uses a variety of mechanisms to gather student feedback and opinions including the student forum and module evaluations. The College has implemented its own internal student survey process at departmental and collegiate level; this is in addition to module evaluations and the use of National Student Survey (NSS) survey information.

2.24   The team tested the Expectation by examining a wide range of documentary evidence including minutes of relevant committees, AMRs, external examiner reports, reports of the observation process, the staff development strategy and staff development records. The team met staff, students and employers to assess the effectiveness of these processes and procedure in practice.

2.25   Responsibility for the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy rests with the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee, supported by the Advanced Practitioners. The College monitors the quality of teaching and learning in a number of different ways. For example, the College has introduced an internal observation process that consists of graded and ungraded observations and uses a teacher tracker to monitor the quality of teaching and learning within departments. There is an Observation Handbook that provides guidance on how the observation process will be undertaken. The observation process for higher education does have grading criteria that differs from the further education observation process although the same recording pro forma is used.

2.26   An internal inspection process has been introduced, which involves course teams being given a short period of notice before internal inspectors carry out developmental observations. On conclusion of this process, which may last up to four days, internal inspectors produce a report of strengths and areas for development. The reports are passed to the QSD and also to the HEQEG and the Higher Education Management Committee for consideration and further action if required. The re-focused Quality Enhancement Group reviews examples of good practice and areas for improvement within departments, and has recently introduced six projects including the introduction of different coloured lanyards for higher education students, a student fresher week, 'Meet the Team' profiles and a number of research projects.

2.27   Newly appointed academic staff follow a structured induction process entitled the 'Passport'. The College also provides a range of annual staff development opportunities

including mandatory CPD days, and opportunities to up-skill to Level 7 and 8 with remitted time. Staff are also allowed time to attend exam assessment boards at UoS. The UoS provides staff development days, and examples of activities have included an appreciation of the context and characteristics of higher education learning.

2.28   To promote greater learner independence the College has created dedicated Gateway rooms for higher education students, which are quiet areas where students can study, research and access computers. In addition, the College has appointed six Curriculum Liaison Officers who provide a range of planned and drop-in workshops around key areas such as referencing and plagiarism. A range of study skill help sheets have also been developed, which students are able to take away for future reference. A tutorial system now ensures that all students have at least one hour-long timetabled session per week. The College has invested in the technical and physical infrastructure to ensure that equipment and resources accurately meet the students' needs.

2.29   Students are kept informed of their progress through the College Pro-Monitor system and the virtual learning environment (VLE), which is also used as a repository for external examiner reports. Students are provided with both formative and summative feedback following assessment submission and they indicate that on some programmes additional time is timetabled to support them in completing assessments. In addition, the College has established a wider range of support strategies including a Disability Advisor, who works with students to ensure that appropriate support is provided or can signpost them to further internal or external specific support.

2.30   The College has developed a Student Forum consisting of the Lead Student Representative and Student Representatives from each programme. Training is provided to prepare student representatives for their role. Student Forum minutes are discussed at the Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Group, which includes the Lead Student Representative as a member. Course teams meet students through the student staff consultative process and Learner Voice meetings, which aim to improve the quality of the learning environment.

2.31   The College has established an effective Safeguarding Committee whose role is to protect and oversee the implementation of a range of policies and procedures designed to promote equality and diversity within the student population.

2.32   Overall the team considers that teaching and learning resources are adequate to support student learning and achievement at a level appropriate for higher education, and that there are effective assurance and review processes in place to ensure that the quality and standards of provision are maintained. Therefore the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.33   The College articulates a commitment to student development and the provision of learning resources, through the College Strategic Plan, the Higher Education Strategy and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. Student support and widening access are strategic goals in both the overall College strategy and the Higher Education Strategic Plan.

2.34   The College provides a wide range of services to support students including personal tutoring, careers advice and support, and support for additional needs. Other services available include a welfare team which administers the access to learning fund and travel vouchers. The Tutorial Policy entitles all higher education students to an assigned personal tutor and one hour of tutorial time per term. In some cases this is supplemented with additional time where a student or cohort of students requires additional study or support with assessments.

2.35   The review team tested the College's approach to the Expectation by considering the College's self-evaluation document, which was submitted as evidence as part of this review and scrutinising evidence provided, including the Higher Education Strategy, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and minutes of meetings, and by meeting senior staff, teaching staff and students.

2.36   Each student has an individual higher education tutorial plan, which tracks and monitors the development of higher education skills such as referencing as well as research skills. Student academic progress is monitored through the integrated student monitoring and support system which displays students' marks, attendance and targets. Students who are not performing can be flagged as amber or red and those identified as 'at risk' are offered additional support. This process has been favourably commented upon by the examiner for Health and Social Care. In addition, student progress is monitored at team meeting level and students 'at risk' are referred to the student support team.

2.37   Students are well supported with regard to student placements and future employability, particularly at a team level, through live projects and assessments, relevant placements, a high level of commitment from employers and effective support from student services.

2.38   The College continues to make significant investments in buildings to support student development and ensure adequate learning resources. The library has developed bespoke sessions to support students to develop academic skills to study at higher education level. This includes referencing and plagiarism, with one-to-one support available to supplement the regular sessions.

2.39   Learning technologists have been appointed to work with departments, particularly around access to the VLE and Bring Your Own Device (BYOD). The College VLE is being developed well and has devised a 'One-Stop Shop' for advice and guidance called the 'HE Toolkit'. The College is currently transitioning from using the VLE as a repository to a more interactive learning tool, to promote student independence.

2.40   While the College tracks and monitors student progress and progression rates there is no analysis undertaken of student retention rates across all programmes. Furthermore,

some students feel more could be done to make them feel part of the College, particularly HND students.

2.41   Students are generally positive about the support provided by the College to enable them to study at higher education level and achieve their potential, and describe it as comprehensive and effective. Personal tutoring arrangements are in place, and there are adequate learning resources available. Students speak positively about the support provided by tutors across the College's higher education provision; however, some are less clear about the term 'personal tutor' and what this constitutes. Students show a good understanding of academic regulations and express satisfaction with the support that they receive regarding employability.

2.42   The College has appropriate arrangements and resources in place to support students to develop and achieve their academic potential. Students are positive about the resources available to them, and the review team recognise the comprehensive academic support available to students. Therefore, the 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

2.43   There is a clear commitment to student engagement and a willingness, by staff across the College, to work with students as partners. The College has a Learner Entitlement Policy which outlines that students should expect the College to engage actively with all learners to improve their educational experience. Students are able to input their thoughts and feedback on the quality of learning opportunities through a variety of different formal and informal processes. Formal processes include programme course committees, end of programme surveys, the National Student Survey, and the Student Forum. All student representatives are invited to attend the Student Forum and raise concerns or suggestions that would enhance the student experience. Issues raised at Student Forums or course committees are discussed at the Higher Education Management Committee or are dealt with informally by the relevant staff. In addition to formal processes, students can also input their thoughts informally either on the VLE or by speaking with personal tutors, programme leaders or student representatives.

2.44   The College has a system of student representation and has a Lead Student Representative who sits on a number of senior committees including the Curriculum and Quality Committee, a subcommittee of the Board of Governors, and the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Group. The College has plans to further enhance student representation on senior committees, including the election of a student to the Board of Governors. The Lead Student Representative is responsible for gathering student views on the quality of learning opportunities and reports student opinions to the relevant committee.

2.45   Each department is responsible for identifying appropriate student representatives to attend meetings and gather student feedback. Each programme has one course committee per term and issues discussed are either addressed with the relevant staff member or passed to the Student Forum or Higher Education Enhancement Group.

2.46   Processes to capture the student voice have been in place for a number of years, although the College acknowledges that greater emphasis has been placed on student engagement over the last 18 months. The review team recognises that progress has been made, and the processes that have been put in place allow for the Expectation to be met.

2.47   The review team evaluated the steps taken by the College to engage students as partners by reviewing documentation including the Learner Entitlement Policy, minutes of Student Forums, course committees and student representative role descriptions, as well as minutes and terms of reference from committees overseeing Higher Education provision. The team also met students studying on foundation degree and Higher National programmes and staff members, and discussed the extent to which students were able to contribute to quality assurance and enhancement in a meaningful way.

2.48   Students are aware of those appointed to represent them and understand that they can approach them if they have any concerns relating to their programme. Training for student representatives is a recent introduction and the first training session took place in October 2015, during the first Student Forum of the year. Through the review of documentation, speaking with staff and meeting with students the team feels that further training for student representatives would be beneficial in supporting them to carry out their role effectively.

2.49   Students studying on foundation degree programmes awarded by the UoS feel involved in the enhancement of their own and others' learning experiences. Topics discussed at course committees and students forums are fed into work being undertaken by the College and directly impact on the quality of learning resources and the student experience. It was unclear as to how effective course committees and student forums were in capturing students' views on their programme and the team noted that course committees were often structured differently and varied in their coverage of levels and programmes. It was further found that when meeting students that those who were not student representatives on HND programmes were less aware of how to feedback on their programme than their UoS equivalents.

2.50   Attendance at student forums was also found to be variable and concerns were raised at the lack of representation of specific programmes such as Construction, Engineering, Science and Health and Education As the student forum is one of the main formal feedback mechanisms other concerns raised by the HND students such as those around induction highlighted in B2 have the potential to be missed.

2.51   Foundation degree students are able to articulate how module evaluations and feedback on programmes is gathered and how, through the process of annual monitoring, this has resulted in changes to their programmes. Module evaluations for Higher National programmes have only recently been introduced and the lack of annual monitoring, highlighted in Expectation B8, appears to inhibit students' ability to effectively influence staff to consider incremental changes to their programmes of study. Although departmental SEDs consider feedback from course committees and student forums, the review team does not consider this a sufficiently effective process to ensure that Higher National students are fully engaged at a programme or College-wide level. The team therefore **recommends** that the College ensures effective engagement of Higher National students with quality assurance and enhancement activities.

2.52   Students are aware that they can request sight of external examiner reports, and students studying foundation degrees explained that they can access external examiner reports on the VLE and that some lecturers discuss the report in class. Although one student indicated that they had met with an external examiner, no Higher National students had read an external examiner report.

2.53   A number of changes to student engagement processes, such as the introduction of the Lead Student Representative, the revised process for the appointment of, and training for student, representatives, and module evaluations for Higher National students, have been made over the last 18 months. The review team recognises that it is too early to monitor and evaluate their impact effectively.

2.54   The College recognises that part-time students have been particularly difficult to engage and have included this as part of their Higher Education Improvement Plan. Specific steps have been taken to include arranging meetings on different campuses and highlighting the benefits of participating in student engagement activities.

2.55   The review team concludes that the expectation is met and that the student engagement processes introduced by the College are beginning to have an impact. In particular, feedback through the Student Forum has resulted in a number of student-led changes. The associated level of risk related to this Expectation is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.56   The awarding body and organisation with whom the College works have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that assessment maps to learning outcomes, and this is described in section A3.2. However, the College is responsible for operating assessment.

2.57   The University Partnership Agreement includes a table indicating the responsibilities around assessment. The College designs all the assessments and submits them to the University module or programme leader to approve and edit where necessary. The module specification and the module guide outline the learning outcomes that the assessment must achieve. The College undertakes first marking and submits it to the University for moderation. One or more representatives from the College must attend the Module and Programme Assessment Board.

2.58   The BTEC Guide to Assessment (Levels 4 to 7) explains the need to deliver valid, reliable, fair, and manageable assessment, designed to develop skills and knowledge in line with the assessment criteria. It recommends using a range of assessment methods. The guide has a section on reducing plagiarism and includes a table identifying responsibilities at different stages of assessment. This includes the role of assessor, internal verifier and standards verifier.

2.59   The College has a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy that aligns with both the University Assessment Policy and the BTEC Guide to Assessment (Levels 4 to 7). The Higher Education Quality Handbook contains the main policies governing higher education including the accreditation of prior learning (APL) policy that has been informed by the University policy on APL.

2.60   Ultimate responsibility for the development of effective assessment rests with the University or Pearson which would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.61   Through studying policies, and documents, such as external examiner reports, together with discussion with staff, the team tested the Expectation.

2.62   External examiners confirm that assessment is thorough and rigorous. Due to the expansion in the number of HND programmes, an assessment training course for staff was provided recently. Attendance was good and it was well received. Higher National courses are moderated under the College Quality Policy with reference to the Internal Quality Assurance Assessment Handbook and the External Quality Assurance Assessment Handbook.

2.63   Submission methods for assessed work are documented in the Higher Education Quality Handbook. Permitted methods of submission are plagiarism-detection software as first choice, then the VLE drop box. For large work or other assessments that cannot be submitted electronically then submission is at a Learning Centre.

2.64   The College ensures that students receive appropriate information about their assessments in programme handbooks and also on the VLE. An assessment schedule, developed to spread the burden on students, is issued either at the start of the year or the start of semester. HND staff confirmed that hand-in dates are published at the beginning of each semester. The College policy indicates that marked work must be returned within three weeks and students confirm that feedback is given within the prescribed time. NSS (2015) scores indicate higher than average satisfaction with assessment, particularly the provision of feedback.

2.65   In addition to electronic submission of assessments, plagiarism-detection software is used. Students are well informed about academic malpractice and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy provides clear examples of plagiarism. University programme handbooks include URL links to University policy on academic misconduct. The BTEC Guide to Assessment (Levels 4 to 7) has a section on reducing plagiarism including a table of responsibilities, the HND handbook discusses academic malpractice and the HND module guides include a warning about avoiding plagiarism.

2.66   Assessment boards for Pearson provision take place three times a year within the College. Those permitted to chair are the Head of Higher Education or Higher Education Quality Enhancement Coordinator and minutes of the boards are recorded. Foundation Degree Boards are held at the University. The Higher Education Quality Handbook states that all assessment marks are provisional until confirmed by the Programme Assessment Board. Staff provided conflicting information about the practice as tutors on some programmes declare marks as provisional, while on others students are given feedback but not graded until the external examiner has confirmed the mark.

2.67   Foundation degree and HND programme grades are stored in the central integrated student monitoring and support system. Regular checks of students' in-semester progress are made at team meetings All higher education staff use the College integrated student monitoring and support system to record individual tutorial meeting details and the actions taken to address issues. Students are able to access their marks on the College system. Foundation-degree marks recorded on the Pro-monitor system are transferred to the University by email for the assessment board.

2.68   Students who may have special needs are assessed for learning support requirements, and in accordance with the referral flowchart, a 'Request for student assessment' form is then completed by a tutor. This form includes questions about additional time and any other support needed for examinations and other assessments.

2.69   The College has an APL system though it has never been used at higher education level. It aligns with the University APL system and the Pearson APL system. The awarding bodies' APL systems take precedence. Staff report that the judgement regarding consideration of APL is made by consulting the student's application form and provided an example of a recent case involving an HND student.

2.70   The College operates equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, therefore the Expectation is met and the 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

2.71 The awarding partners are responsible for the appointment and training of external examiners and ensure that they are informed of the required procedures, practices and academic regulations before visiting the College. External examiner reports are received by the QSD and are then forwarded to Department Heads. Programme leaders, assistant programme leaders and curriculum leaders are responsible for addressing any action points which are then monitored by the HEQEG which meets five times a year.

2.72 The review team considered documentation relevant to external examining including awarding partner requirements; reports from externals and minutes of internal meetings. In addition, the team met staff and students to discuss the approach to engaging with external examiners.

2.73 The College works effectively with its external examiners and engages them in the modification of assignment briefs and assignment setting, as well as in reviewing the outcomes of assessments. Opportunities are provided for students to meet external examiners during their annual visit to the College, but this varies between University and Pearson students. Students confirm that external examiner reports can be accessed on the VLE and it was noted that in one area, academic staff discuss the report with the whole student group and inform them of the response that is made.

2.74 External examiner reports are detailed and meet the guidance provided by the UK Quality Code. The Head of Higher Education completes a Higher Education SED based on the content and findings from external examiner reports, which is scrutinised by a panel consisting of both internal and external stakeholders. The outcomes of this scrutiny are then fed into the College improvement planning processes for higher education.

2.75 The UoS sends the external examiner reports to the College's QSD who share the information with the Head of Higher Education and the HEQEG. Any recommendations made by external examiners must be included in the programme AMR. The Higher Education Quality Enhancement Group also has a remit to consider all external examiner reports, and to identify good practice which can then be disseminated within the College.

2.77 However, as further discussed in Section B8, annual monitoring at programme level for Pearson provision relies on the production of a departmental SED. These self-evaluation documents are not focused on individual programmes and are inconsistent, with some departments reporting on one higher education programme while others report on four or five programmes that include foundation degrees as well as Higher Nationals. Additionally, although the departmental SED reports on various programme statistics, it does not undertake programme monitoring. Therefore there is no internal annual monitoring nor external annual monitoring of Higher National programmes

2.78 The review team considers that arrangements for engaging with external examiners and their reports at programme level are generally sound and appropriate actions are taken to address any issues raised. Reports from external examiners also confirm that arrangements for managing external input are appropriate, although the College does not currently use the outcomes of this process effectively for monitoring and enhancing higher education provision. Overall, 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

2.79   The UoS has responsibility for monitoring and review of the foundation degree programmes under the University joint franchise model.

2.80   The College is required to undertake annual monitoring of its programmes as documented in the University Quality Handbook. A standard template is completed by each assistant programme leader and an overall annual report is then compiled by the University programme leader using information from all of the partner colleges' reports. It is possible for the College to request and gain approval for a minor modification through the annual monitoring process.

2.81   Periodic review of cognate groups of programmes occurs every six years and the University has responsibility for initiating and coordinating this. Programmes are revalidated at this event and the University holds the schedule for the revalidation of programmes.

2.82   Additionally, a Collaborative Periodic Partnership Review of the College is undertaken by the University every six years, the most recent taking place in 2013. The Collaborative Provision Agreement between the University and the College was updated and signed at this point.

2.83   Pearson does not undertake an annual monitoring review of Higher National programmes and it is the role of the external examiner to confirm that the centre continues to meet Pearson's qualification approval criteria. Pearson does, however, undertake an annual review of quality systems across the College. Until 2014-15 this review covered the College's further education provision only, as the higher education provision was not in scope. In 2015-16 an annual quality management review, now including higher education provision, was introduced by Pearson. A centre engagement document is completed in advance, and this forms the basis of the review visit with the designated quality reviewer. Providers are required to submit information on College policies and procedures to be reviewed by the Pearson quality reviewer.

2.84   College internal procedures for monitoring and review are published in the College Quality Procedure Manual and the Higher Education Quality Handbook. The College plans internal inspections of themes or departments at the beginning of each year. Over a period of several years, there is an internal inspection of each area. The inspection involves lesson observation using a handbook of guidelines and inspection of students' assessment. There is also a curriculum review of each department conducted by senior management twice a term and an annual departmental SED leads to a Quality Improvement Plan. Thus the College implements a range of internal monitoring devices including self-evaluation, improvement planning, internal inspection, student surveys and in-year curriculum reviews, with performance reported to a scheduled Board of Governors.

2.85   Following the initial scrutiny of quality documents from the University, Pearson and the College, together with evidence from monitoring reports and events, the team requested additional information and evidence. In response to the team's pre-event questions about monitoring and review, and in subsequent discussions with staff, the team received

conflicting information. Further scrutiny of the Higher Education Quality Handbook was undertaken and an additional meeting was held with senior staff.

2.86   The partnership with Teesside University was terminated for strategic reasons following agreement by the Senior Management Team in June 2013. Arrangements were made to teach out the programmes and a memorandum of agreement for the year 2014-15 was signed. Remaining students were monitored by the external examiner. There are no remaining students at the College registered with Teesside University and the academic interests of students were protected during the closure of the programmes.

2.87   For the foundation degrees, each assistant programme leader completes the annual monitoring process using a University template. Comprehensive reports cover communication between the College and the University and reflect on all aspects of the programme including an action plan. Some staff have recently been involved in writing new modules for a programme periodic review and were able to explain the purpose of a programme periodic review.

2.88   One member of staff was able to clearly and accurately describe the purpose and operation of the Collaborative Periodic Partnership Review as an appraisal of higher education ethos, resources, and the culture of research and scholarly activity. However, the team received conflicting explanations when respondents were asked to differentiate between programme and collaborative periodic review and there were inaccurate statements about when revalidation of programmes takes place.

2.89   An additional meeting was convened to probe the issue and to consult the Higher Education Quality Handbook and this confirmed that the handbook contained no reference to the University monitoring and review systems. Therefore the team **recommends** that the College articulates the difference between the University Collaborative Periodic Partnership Review and the Periodic Review of taught programmes in the Higher Education Quality Handbook to clarify understanding by staff.

2.90   There is no Pearson process for annual monitoring of programmes. There is an internal College process for self-evaluation of higher education at departmental level. This comprises the annual production of a departmental SED that aligns with the UK Quality Code. Given that in many sections this reports on College-wide higher education policies and procedures, there is considerable replication of information across departments within the SEDs. The SEDs are not focused on individual programmes and are inconsistent with some departments reporting on one higher education programme while others report on four or five programmes that include foundation degrees as well as Higher Nationals.

2.91   Additionally, although the departmental SED reports on various programme statistics, it does not undertake programme monitoring. Therefore there is no internal annual monitoring nor external annual monitoring of Higher National programmes. As a result the team **recommends** that the College develop and implement an internal process of annual monitoring and periodic review at programme level for the College's Pearson provision.

2.92   The Expectation is met because there are monitoring processes in place. However, there is a moderate risk because the Higher Education Quality Handbook is not comprehensive, there is a lack of staff understanding about the monitoring procedures of the awarding bodies, and there is no annual monitoring or periodic review of Higher National programmes.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.93   The College follows UoS academic appeals procedures and operates its own process for dealing with student academic appeals for Pearson programmes. The College has its own complaints procedure that is clearly outlined in the responsibilities checklist and the College Charter. The procedure outlines the expectation that students are required to lodge any formal complaints with the College initially but also have the right to complain to the University after exhausting the College's internal processes. Similarly, Higher National students can appeal and complain to Pearson once they have exhausted all College internal processes.

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

2.95   The procedures regarding complaints and appeals are clearly communicated to students on the website and in the College Charter. This is covered further within induction and students are shown where to access information and make an appeal through the VLE. Further information regarding appeals and complaints is available to students within the programme handbook. The student submission articulates that all students are aware of the appeals and complaints procedures and that this is highlighted, particularly in relation to programmes where there is an attached voluntary or work-based placement. Students are able to confirm that they understand the appeals and complaints procedures, where to access them and can give examples of the use of the processes.

2.96   A formal process for a student to appeal an unsuccessful application is in place although it was noted that guidance to support any appeal submission was not present. The applicant experience would be improved if additional support was made available.

2.97   The College takes deliberative steps to audit and review complaints and this has led to recommendations that have been acted on by the College. A recent audit highlighted that not all appeals had been dealt with by the designated officer within the set timeframe and this prompted a recommendation to ensure that all complaints receive a response within the 10-day deadline. Further internal inspections found that a small number of student handbooks contained no information relating to complaints. This was quickly rectified through the College's internal processes.

2.98   From 1 September 2015, higher education students at the College have been able to raise a complaint with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. This is clearly articulated in student documents such as the Student Charter.

2.99   Additional support for students to make complaints or appeal a decision of academic misconduct is provided by the learning mentors and disability advisers, though staff explained that such instances are rare and that most concerns are dealt with informally.

2.100   The review team concludes that the policies in place and the support available to students confirms that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.101   The College does not hold degree awarding powers and has formal agreements with two awarding partners for the delivery of its higher education programmes. The University provides policies and procedures to govern its programmes and requires the College to adhere to its academic regulations and policies, as detailed in the UK Collaborative Handbook and the partnership agreement. For Higher National programmes, the College follows the guidance provided in the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment (Levels 4 to 7) as part of its agreement with Pearson.

2.102   The College delivers a number of programmes where a work placement or work-based project is required to meet learning outcomes. The College has policies and procedures to manage this component of programmes including a Health and Safety Management of Work Experience procedure, a Higher Education Work-based and Placement Learning Policy and Safeguarding Procedure. In addition, employers are very clear about their role and the College's expectations. Details of the requirements of placements and work-based learning elements within programmes are outlined in module and programme specification handbooks.

2.103   The team considers that the design of the College's processes and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.104   The review team considered documents pertaining to the management of placements including information provided for students and employers. During the review, the team met employers and staff with responsibility for placements and/or live briefs and also met students to discuss their experiences.

2.105   All placements and live briefs must comply with the College's Health and Safety Policy, which is a detailed and comprehensive document that clearly identifies the responsibilities of each participant in the process. Placement providers are very knowledgeable of their roles and responsibilities and are fully committed to supporting the College in its employability strategy. One employer is also a Governor of the College and sits on the Curriculum and Quality Committee of the Governing Body. Employers confirm that the College provides employers with a comprehensive overview of their role and that there are close links with lecturers who usually visit prior to the commencement of the activity to discuss the brief. Employer responsibilities are clearly understood, including the provision of mentors to support the student during placement.

2.106   Where programmes have a placement element, the programme team provides a module handbook to identify the requirements and additional support available. Students are generally responsible for finding their own placements but tutors assist if they are experiencing difficulty. The College maintains a database of providers who may be contacted should a placement be required. Students are aware of the importance of health and safety checks. Programme leaders are responsible for assigning visiting tutors to ensure the quality of the work experience and that the student remains in a safe and supportive environment. Students, staff and employers are positive about placements and live brief

provision, and although there are inconsistencies in the level of support provided and the number of hours required, all value the experience.

2.107   The review team heard of practices on some programmes where the live briefs and placements had clearly contributed significantly to the students' learning. Both visual art and travel and tourism programmes use live briefs verified by the employer involved with the Foundation Degree in Travel and Tourism. Employers are positive about their links with the programme area for which they provide a placement, although none has any input to programme design, assessment or other College management aspects. Senior staff recognise that there is more to be achieved and have taken a number of steps to enhance employer involvement, including the development of Industry Advisory Boards across all departments. The team recognises the deliberative steps being taken by the College to enhance the relationship with employers although it is too early to evaluate the development.

2.108   Overall, the College has policies and procedures in place to support students on placement and academic staff maintain close contact with employers and students during the placement. Students are positive about their work experience and are able to identify the contribution that this made to their learning. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (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

2.109   The College does not currently offer research degrees.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.110   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.

2.111   Of the 10 applicable Expectations, all are met, with two moderate risk judgements in Expectations B1 and B8.

2.112   The team makes four recommendations regarding learning opportunities - for Expectation B1 the College needs to formalise the progression of curriculum proposals to the awarding body into its existing programme approval procedures. The internal approval process is presented in the College Quality Procedures Manual and the Higher Education Quality Handbook with stages portrayed using a programme validation procedure flowchart, but there is no accompanying description or checklist of activities at each stage. Staff indicate that the flowchart does not accurately describe the iterative process of curriculum development and does not make reference to either of the awarding partner's approval processes. Without formalising the progression procedures the team considers that there is a moderate risk for the Expectation.

2.113   The recommendation made in B5 relates to the engagement of Higher National students in the quality assurance and enhancement activities of the College. Students who are not student representatives on HND programmes are less aware of how to feed back on their programme than their UoS equivalents. Module evaluations have only recently been introduced and the lack of annual monitoring appears to inhibit students' ability to effectively influence staff to consider incremental changes to their programmes of study. Although departmental SEDs consider feedback from course committees and student forums, the review team does not consider this a sufficiently effective process to ensure that Higher National students are fully engaged at a programme or College-wide level.

2.114   The team makes two recommendations in Expectation B8 resulting in a judgement that there is a moderate risk to the quality of learning opportunities. Scrutiny of the Higher Education Quality Handbook confirms that it contains no reference to the University monitoring and review systems and staff are unable to differentiate between Programme Periodic Review and Collaborative Partnership Periodic Review. There is a need to make clear the difference between the UoS Collaborative Partnership Periodic Review and the Periodic Review of taught programmes to clarify understanding by staff.

2.115   A further recommendation in Expectation B8 relates to the development and implementation of an internal process of annual monitoring and periodic review at programme level for Pearson programmes. An annual departmental self-evaluation document is produced but it is not focused on individual programmes and there is considerable replication of information across departments within the document. Therefore there is no internal annual monitoring nor external annual monitoring of Higher National programmes that signifies a moderate risk to the quality of learning opportunities.

2.116   On the basis of documentation provided and discussions with staff and students the team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations

3　Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1　The College outlines its commitment to current, accurate and accessible information within the Higher Education Quality Handbook. The College's Strategic Plan alongside its vision and values are published on its website. Information for all higher education programmes delivered at the College is available on the website and within the Higher Education Prospectus. For all full-time programmes the College has a UCAS entry and for foundation-degree programmes these pages are controlled by UoS. UCAS pages for Pearson Higher National programmes are maintained by the College admissions teams. Recently the College has undertaken additional work to improve the information available on the UCAS site and has included key fact sheets for each course on the College website.

3.2　The main source of information for enrolled students is the Programme Handbook, Unit Guide, or information uploaded to the VLE. Each programme has a dedicated VLE site and programme leaders are responsible for maintaining and uploading information. The College has in place guidelines for the use of the VLE which clearly outlines the expectations of programme leaders.

3.3　The College works closely with a number of employers to deliver work-based learning activities and support student employability. The College provides information to employers through face-to-face meetings prior to the student starting a placement, as well as providing a booklet for students to complete while on placement. Programmes that include a work-based placement are clearly articulated to students at interview and through unit guides.

3.4　The review team examined a wide range of documentation and publicity, the College website and UCAS course listings. The team also met staff and students from across the College to discuss the quality of information.

3.5　Detailed information for each course is available through the website and many students also cited discussions with tutors and lecturers prior to commencing higher level study as an important tool for gathering information about the course.

3.6　For prospective students not currently engaged in lower level study at the College the Advice and Guidance Team produce website fact sheets for each programme detailing course requirements, possible future careers and salaries and what to expect while on a programme. Prospective students are provided with limited access to the College VLE in order to see non-specific information.

3.7　Data gathered by the College relating to student feedback on their pre-application and enrolment experiences is very positive. The data, and the team's meeting with students, suggests that the experience could be enhanced even further if improvements are made to the publicity and information the students receive prior to starting their programme. The College has taken a number of actions, though not directly in response to student feedback, to improve pre-course publicity and information including launching a new website and redesigning the prospectus. On an annual basis any recommendations or

enhancements are fed into the Guidance and Recruitment Quality Improvement Plan and any changes are fed into and discussed with the Advice and Guidance Team to ensure consistency of information communicated to students.

3.8   Programme handbooks and unit guides for UoS and Pearson programmes respectively are updated on an annual basis and the College has a clear process to ensure the accuracy of the information included. For all programmes the curriculum leader initially updates the handbook before it is passed to the Head of Department, and Head of Higher Education with final approval resting with the Assistant Principal and Director of Marketing. University programmes include additional checks carried out by the University programme leader and finally the University's marketing department.

3.9   Records of student progression and achievement are kept on the integrated student monitoring and support system and information relating to student achievement is confirmed with the University at programme examination boards.

3.10   To check the accuracy of all public information the College has a mystery shop process in place and this has been successful in identifying a number of areas where information is missing or inaccurate.

3.11   The team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low as the College has in place effective measures to monitor the quality of sources of information.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.12   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.

3.13   The College provides information about its higher education provision for prospective and current students, employers, staff, and public stakeholders, and for those with responsibility for maintaining standards and assuring quality. Information is accessible, appropriate and accurate.

3.14   No recommendations or good practice points relate to this area.

3.15   On the basis of the documentation provided, and discussions with staff and students, the team concludes that the College provides information that is fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible and in so doing Sunderland College **meets** UK expectations for the quality of information about learning opportunities.

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 A key aspect of the long term institutional strategy to enhance the learning experience for students is the improvement to accommodation captured in the Estates Strategy. New sports and arts academies have been built, and there is significant investment in new vocational programmes. Continuing investment in technology has enabled wireless computer access and enhancements to the VLE and electronic library provision.

4.2 Collaboration with the University of Sunderland has been strengthened partly as a response to the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP) strategic economic plan.

4.3 Finally the post of Higher Education Quality Enhancement Coordinator and the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Committee have enabled the College to focus on enhancement. Most recently the committee has sponsored six projects: staff biographies on the open-source software learning system; assessment submission; UCAS listing; video feedback and marking; scholarly activity network; and a higher education Freshers' Week.

4.4 The College has strategies in place to enable this Expectation to be met.

4.5 The team tested this Expectation by asking staff and students for their views on enhancement and from the scrutiny of minutes of meetings.

4.6 Higher education provision is routinely discussed in the Curriculum and Quality Committee. Many of the estate enhancements have focused specifically on resourcing the higher education provision and have enabled the development of vocational courses. During the last five years, under the higher education strategy, there has been a broadening of the higher education offer with HND courses in five new subject areas linked to the NELEP strategy. Improvements in technology have also supported curriculum development. Students reported positively on the quality of the campus, facilities and the improvements that have taken place.

4.7 The Higher Education Quality Enhancement Committee rolling programme of enhancements has addressed six projects that have been undertaken over the last 15 months. The projects are small scale and some are beginning to make an impact. While some departments have been using plagiarism-detection software for the last five years, it has now been agreed that all departments will use it for assessment submission, where feasible. The improvements to Freshers' Week were welcomed by some, though not all students were positive about the induction period. A new student mentoring scheme is being piloted; mentors have received training and first year students have been allocated and spent time with their second year buddy. The pilot scheme has not yet been evaluated. There is a recently convened research and scholarly activity group, and two staff have joined staff from two other local colleges to work on projects. Following consultation with students, actions were taken to differentiate the higher education students and thus strengthen the higher education culture. This has included the designation of higher education study spaces and provision of higher education-specific lanyards.

4.8 Student learning opportunities have been further promoted through the international link that the College has developed. There is an articulating progression agreement with the

University College of North Denmark that allows students from six HND programmes to top-up to a degree. To date no students have accessed this opportunity.

4.9   Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The level of risk is low and the Expectation is met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.10   In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against criteria specified within the Quality Code, summarised in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.11   The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

4.12   A key aspect of the long-term institutional strategy to enhance the learning experience for students is the improvement to accommodation. Two new sports and arts academies have been built and there is significant investment in new vocational programmes. Continuing investment in technology has enabled enhancements to wireless computer access, the VLE and electronic library provision. Students are positive about the quality of the campus, its facilities and the improvements that have taken place.

4.13   The post of Higher Education Quality Enhancement Coordinator and the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Committee have enabled the College to focus on enhancement. Six projects have been undertaken over the last 15 months and although small scale are beginning to make an impact. In particular, following consultation with students, actions were taken to differentiate the higher education students and thus strengthen the higher education culture. This has included the designation of higher education study spaces and higher education-specific lanyards. It is clear that deliberate steps are being taken at College level to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.14   On the basis of the documentation provided, meetings with staff and students, and the deliberate steps being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The College does not have an overall strategy on employability; however, it has devised a College-wide strategy regarding employer engagement. In practice, however, it is the responsibility of each department to develop its own mechanisms when engaging with employers. The College appoints staff with recent and relevant work experience to teach on their vocational programmes whenever possible, and they also are provided with opportunities to maintain their experience as part of their CPD. The College has also developed a curriculum development policy but there is little evidence how this relates to higher education provision around employability.

5.2   Much of the College's engagement and activity around employability is predicated on whether the programme has a mandatory work experience or placement component such as on the HND Health & Social Care, Sport or the Fd in Counselling, where there is a policy on fitness to practice. It is, however, the students' responsibility to locate and organise placements. Where difficulties do occur the College will support the student in finding a suitable placement. Monitoring is undertaken either by a visit or telephone call. Within course programmes, staff have attempted to contextualise the assessments to reflect industry standards and practice through simulated exercises and case studies to promote skills such as employability; evidence from students indicated that report-writing and presentations are key ways in which staff attempt to promote these skills. External examiner reports are generally positive about the value and experience students receive from their placements. The opportunities provided for students to engage in placement or work-based activities, including live briefs, are sound and students value the experiences.

5.3   In addition to this, student services in conjunction with course teams also provide information, guidance and workshops on employability skills.

5.4   Employers provide a valuable interface by affirming College provision but also by highlighting current employer needs. In addition, the College has commenced a programme of establishing Industry Advisory Boards across all departments. The College recognises a need to develop a more formal approach to its working with employers. Employers expressed the view that they would welcome opportunities for greater involvement with the College.

5.5   While the College has quality assurance processes in place supported by external examiner reports it is unclear how the College is developing its relationships with local employers, in particular involving them in the writing of assignment briefs and identifying suitable assessment opportunities. Furthermore, there is no formal structure to evaluate the impact that the work-based placement is having on student learning or to identify and disseminate good practice.

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.