Higher Education Review of West Herts College

February 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at West Herts College. The review took place from 11 to 13 February 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mrs Sally Powell
- Dr Fiona Thompson
- Mr Duncan Lean (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by West Herts College and to make judgements as to whether 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 each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of threshold academic standards
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the information provided about learning opportunities
  - 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 West Herts College, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The themes for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[3] A dedicated page of the website explains the method for Higher Education Review of higher education providers in England and Northern Ireland[4] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about West Herts College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies **meets UK expectations**.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets UK expectations**.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **good practice** at West Herts College.

- The transfer of consortium quality assurance practices to other higher-level provision (Expectation B1) (Enhancement).
- The comprehensive approach at strategic and operational level which effectively facilitates students' transitions to higher levels of education (Expectation B4).
- The integrated approach to the provision of support which enables students to achieve their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4).
- The extensive and effective ways by which the student voice is used to inform enhancement and create a positive impact on the learning experience (Enhancement).
- The embedded culture of enhancement exemplified through strategic leadership and staff commitment (Enhancement).

Recommendations

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

By the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year:

- ensure that there are effective mechanisms which enable the College to have central oversight of external examiner reports pertaining to all courses (Expectation A5) (Expectation B7)
- ensure external examiner reports and details of their authors are accessible to students or their representatives (Expectation B7).

Affirmation of action being taken

No affirmations have been identified.

Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The College takes effective steps to involve their student body in the whole student experience, through the use of traditional representational structures and informal structures such as making use of social media. The College has suitably resourced mechanisms for capturing the student voice and clear examples of where they have acted on feedback to

improve the learner experience, leading to a strategic emphasis on involving the student body as partners in the College.

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

About West Herts College

West Herts College (the College) is a large general further education college based in South-West Hertfordshire with three campuses located in Watford, Hemel Hempstead (Dacorum Campus) and Kings Langley. The majority of learners accessing the College reside in South-West Hertfordshire and North London.

The College's vision is to play a leading role in transforming the lives of local people, its communities and its shared economic prosperity - working in partnership to meet needs through innovation, outreach and technology. The College's mission is 'to do the ordinary things extraordinarily well [in] our increasingly complex world … inspiring success through learning that stimulates a competitive edge in our students and a sense of fulfilment across our communities'.

The College offers a broad vocational curriculum across qualification levels from pre-entry to level 7. The College delivers programmes of learning to nearly 12,000 students each year including 4,500 full-time further education students, 400 higher education students, 800 apprentices and 5,000 adults on a range of provision from professional programmes, leisure courses and pre-employment programmes for job seekers. Higher education students are based at the recently constructed (2010) Watford campus. The Dacorum campus has been the base for delivery of Initial Teacher Training courses.

The College works with three awarding bodies for delivery of its higher education provision:

- University of Hertfordshire - all foundation degrees
- University of Greenwich - Initial Teacher Training Prof Cert and Prof Grad Cert in Education in the LLS (DTLLS)
- Pearson - All higher nationals.

The majority of higher education students (395, 84 per cent) are enrolled on University of Hertfordshire courses. The College is a long-standing associate College member of the University of Hertfordshire and a consistent, proactive member of the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium with three other Hertfordshire colleges. Delivery of Learning and Skills teacher training via the University of Greenwich is currently in its final year (17 students on the programme) and will cease in 2014.

The College has experienced a number of changes since the last review, including:

- appointment of a new Principal
- introduction of a new strategic plan (2013-16)
- relocation to the new Watford campus (2010)
- allocation of 50 directly funded places from September 2013 leading to the expansion of the College higher national profile
- appointment of a new lead for higher education and a new structure for management of College higher education.

Recent changes to higher education funding have presented challenges to College recruitment and the rise in fees has resulted in a rise in student expectations regarding the quality of higher education programmes. The College continues to liaise with the higher education student body to ensure enhancements to student learning opportunities are prioritised.

The move to a new campus initially provided the College with a fresh challenge, with higher education learners actively seeking their own identity within a predominantly further

education environment. In addition a recent restructure of higher education at the College has resulted in a less autonomous higher education provision with higher education now based within respective schools as opposed to being a stand-alone provision.

The move to the new Watford campus contributed to raised expectations from students and has presented the College with an opportunity to review and enhance its focus on higher education provision. The move to new premises has provided new opportunities for students including access to industry-standard resources and facilities campus-wide which have enhanced and enriched higher education provision. In addition it has presented staff with improved technical resources, facilities and equipment to deliver and support learning.

The College was recently successful in receiving an additional allocation of 50 learners for its own funded numbers. This is strategically favourable for the College. The University has responded positively to the new directly allocated student numbers and demonstrated willingness to allow Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium processes and materials to be adapted and used with Higher National Diploma provision. The offer of College-owned provision has enabled the College to expand its portfolio of higher education courses to better meet the needs of its current further education students and profit from the skillset of its dedicated staff. New places have offered the College an opportunity to increase its responsibility to define and manage these programmes while monitored by Pearson.

The change in leadership at the College has resulted in a range of minor restructures. The focus of the College has recently been revisited in the College's Strategic Plan which was developed with a strong focus on preparing young people for employment. The change in leadership has also resulted in the College continuing to improve student success rates.

During the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) of higher education at the College, conducted in 2009 by QAA, the review team expressed confidence in the management of the standards of the awards of its awarding body and the quality of learning opportunities to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Reliance was placed upon the publishing of information about the College and the programmes it delivered.

The resultant action plan following IQER Summative Review addressed the six areas of good practice as well as one advisable and three desirable recommendations. The advisable recommendation was addressed appropriately. The College has taken proactive steps in addressing the desirable actions, in some cases enhancing the provision.

Explanation of the findings about West Herts College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: The national level*

Findings

1.1　The College currently delivers programmes through the University of Hertfordshire as part of the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium (HHEC), the University of Greenwich and Pearson. The College procedures support their partners to ensure each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level in the FHEQ.

1.2　The College has robust procedures for ensuring that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level in the FHEQ. This is articulated in the University of Hertfordshire Validation Handbook. In addition the College uses the SEEC credit level descriptors for Higher Education 2010 to complement the FHEQ. Guidance is also provided by the HHEC on using the FHEQ. Programme specifications refer to the FHEQ and reflect the taxonomy of learning outcomes.

1.3　Periodic review (known as revalidation) is used to ensure the appropriateness of the level and content of programmes. The implementation of this is evident in subsequent periodic review reports.

1.4　The review team tested the arrangements by examining relevant handbooks, revalidation reports and programme specifications. Familiarity with and use of the FHEQ was discussed with staff.

1.5　The College states that 'FHEQ and subject benchmark statements are shared with College staff development teams for them to consider' and this was confirmed to the review team by teaching and learning staff.

1.6　Current University of Greenwich provision in Initial Teacher Training delivered by the College is a franchise programme and the University of Greenwich Quality Assurance Handbook details expectations concerning use of the FHEQ.

1.7　Pearson qualifications are set at the appropriate level by the provider.

1.8　Overall, the review team concluded that effective guidance and processes are in place to ensure that provision is allocated to the appropriate FHEQ level for the award. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated risk is deemed to be low.

Expectation:　Met
Level of risk:　Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level*

Findings

1.9   The College takes into account the relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements during programme design and these are used in association with the FHEQ and the SEEC credit level descriptors in defining the programme learning outcomes.

1.10   The University of Greenwich Quality Assurance Handbook details expectations concerning use of the subject benchmark statements. Pearson has responsibility for ensuring provision is in line with relevant subject benchmark statements.

1.11   The review team tested this by examining relevant handbooks, revalidation reports and programme specifications. Familiarity with and use of the subject and qualification benchmark statements was discussed with staff.

1.12   The review team noted that reference to the subject benchmark statements and *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* is detailed in the University of Hertfordshire Validation Handbook, the HHEC Quality Handbook 2013-14 and the University of Hertfordshire Periodic Review Handbook. In addition, reference to the subject benchmark statements can be found in the programme specifications and the periodic review/revalidation reports. The College states that 'FHEQ and subject benchmark statements are shared with College staff development teams for them to consider' and this was confirmed to the review team by teaching and learning staff.

1.13   Overall, the review team concluded that effective guidance and processes are in place to ensure that relevant subject benchmark statements and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* are taken into account, the Expectation is met and the associated risk is deemed to be low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: The programme level*

Findings

1.14   The College provides definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements through a combination of programme specifications and definitive module documents. Definitive module documents provide more detailed information on the teaching, learning and assessment methods, learning outcomes and content for each module and prerequisites where appropriate. Detailed information on the teaching, learning and assessment methods, learning outcomes and content for each module can be found in module guides and the student handbook.

1.15   The review team tested this by examining relevant handbooks, revalidation reports, programme specifications and definitive module documents. In addition the team examined module guides and student handbooks.

1.16   The review team considered the process for approval and the documentation examined to be fit-for-purpose. The documents reviewed by the review team demonstrate that modules are normally validated as part of the process of validation for the programme(s) to which they contribute. Evidence of modules being discussed is clear in periodic/review revalidation reports.

1.17   The review team noted that the process for annual monitoring known as the Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report is detailed in the Quality Handbook and this includes a report on changes to programme specifications and the outcomes of periodic review/revalidation.

1.18   The team found that programme specifications lay out the relevant information including mapping intended learning outcomes to learning and teaching methods and the assessment strategy. Reference is also made to relevant subject benchmark statements, the FHEQ and the SEEC. In addition the programme specifications indicate that further information is available via definitive module descriptors, module guides and the student handbook.

1.19   The review team concluded that the complete and accurate definitive module documents and programme specifications provide appropriate information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements. Therefore the Expectation is met both in terms of guidance and practice, and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A4: Approval and review*

Findings

1.20   The College operates processes for approval and periodic review as prescribed by its awarding bodies. Higher education provision is managed within the Schools of the College and is overseen by the Higher Education Operational Group and the Head of Higher Level Learning.

1.21   For the majority of the College's offer, the HHEC Quality Handbook and supporting documentation are used to guide validation and reviewing practice. The College's own quality processes underpin and reflect this practice.

1.22   Written guidance is supported by peer activity within the consortium partnership, the work of link tutors and the direct relationship of the College with the University of Hertfordshire's Quality Office. The Consortium Management Committee and its subcommittees play a significant role in formal communications with and oversight of the College's higher education provision validated by the University of Hertfordshire. Programme, School and senior College staff are all involved in consortium activity.

1.23   The University of Greenwich provision's periodic review is conducted in accordance with the University's Quality Assurance Handbook and was last undertaken in 2012.

1.24   As an experienced provider the College has been able to use Pearson Online validation processes. This process is led by a senior member of College staff, for example the Head of Higher Level Learning. Pearson conducts regular quality reviews of its provision in conjunction with the external examiner system. The College also undertakes strategic review of its higher national offer and this has contributed to the development of its directly funded provision of higher nationals. The College has negotiated with the University of Hertfordshire for beneficial engagement of its higher national students with the University, to further secure overarching standards of higher education provision.

1.25   Periodic review/revalidation takes place on a six-year cycle. Validation takes account of national and local subject developments, particularly those relating to employability. External advisors sit on validation panels. External examiners' reports feed into the processes for revalidation (see Expectation B7). Past and present students are involved in programme development and validation events. Validation and review events are led by the University with active involvement by the College and other HHEC partners.

1.26   These processes provide a clear and comprehensive framework for the validation and review of all higher education provision at the College. Collaboration, externality and oversight are incorporated in this framework. Respective responsibilities of the College and its awarding bodies are clearly defined.

1.27   The team examined handbooks, policies, approval and review reports relating to the Expectation. Engagement with and understanding of the processes involved was discussed in meetings with staff, representatives of awarding bodies, employers and students.

1.28   The team noted the strong relationships within the consortium and were told that the College values the structure and support thereby offered to its higher education provision. The College intends to continue with these arrangements for the foreseeable future and has signed a five-year agreement to this effect.

1.29   The team found that validation and review events closely follow the guidance set out in University documentation. The College has taken a lead within the consortium on initiatives such as the Foundation Degrees Creative Enterprise and Public Services.

1.30   Pearson Quality Review and Development Reports comment favourably on the operation of Higher National programmes and further units in Public Services were approved for delivery commencing September 2013. Employers are encouraged to contribute to programme development. In Public Services as with other subject areas this process goes beyond simply attending meetings and seeks to appropriately equip students for standards expected of them in the workplace.

1.31   Periodic review by the University of Greenwich in June 2012 commented favourably on provision. Students met by the team found they had been enabled to develop their own role as teachers because of high standards of teaching on the programme. Further approval to continue the programme was granted.

1.32   The team concluded that the College, through its well established and continuing relationships with its awarding bodies, has effective processes in place to undertake approval and periodic review of the validity and relevance of its higher education provision. The Expectation is therefore met. On the basis of their discussions with the College and the awarding bodies the team formed the view that College and consortium arrangements were robust and that planning was taking full account of relevant sector developments. The level of risk for this Expectation is therefore low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality*

Findings

1.33   Policies and processes of the College's awarding bodies set out guidance for using external expertise in quality assurance processes. Formal arrangements for involvement of external advisors in approval and review and the role of external examiners are described in detail. Under the University of Hertfordshire/HHEC arrangements these two processes are kept separate and distinct.

1.34   The HHEC offers the opportunity for the College to engage with its partner organisations for peer review and support during quality assurance activities. Programme development and validation events include representation from across the consortium, providing a wide base of experience and expertise. The Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report process involves peer review from a partner college before sign-off by the University School and Quality Office.

1.35   The University of Hertfordshire takes responsibility for receiving, disseminating and responding to external examiner reports. Reports are communicated to programme teams via University of Hertfordshire StudyNet. Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports incorporating external examiner comments are compiled at programme level and copied to the Head of Higher Level Learning. An overview of programme delivery using Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports is undertaken by the University Link Tutor and discussed through consortium committees.

1.36   The University of Greenwich uses external examiner reports to inform their periodic review process. The College engages with a cluster of network colleges for standardisation and moderation purposes; the external examiner reports across provision in the cluster.

1.37   Pearson operates an external examiner system as set out in its BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment. The appointed external examiner undertakes both an annual review of assessment practices and an annual Quality Review and Development visit. The College Quality Nominee liaises closely with the external examiner in these activities.

1.38   The College has a wide variety of employer links across its provision which support a range of activities including programme development, placement and work-based learning and assessment. Employer engagement is a strategic objective for the College and it seeks to increase the employability of its students by taking advice from employers on skills required in the workplace. The above processes provide clear guidance for the involvement of external expertise in quality assurance activities.

1.39   The team examined handbooks, policies, approval, review and external examiner reports during the course of the review. Engagement with and understanding of processes for involvement of external expertise were discussed in meetings with staff, representatives of awarding bodies, employers and students.

1.40   The team found staff are able to clearly identify the value of external expertise in the development and operation of their higher education provision. They show understanding of procedures for approval and review, involving external advice through the development phase to the validation event through personal contact or the use of 'employer questionnaires'. The need for appropriate external input is recognised. Improvements to programmes as a result of external contributions are noted at all stages of the student

journey. Programme enrichment through visits to work environments and specialist centres was evident.

1.41 Employers met by the team had a variety of associations with the College and were very positive about their involvement and experience with students from the College. Relationships are supported at a range of levels from the Principal downwards, with much work taking place at subject/programme level. Although these links are in several instances long-standing and substantial (for example in Public Services), they have not been formalised by the College through written agreements.

1.42 The team found staff are familiar with systems for external examining in their area, and how this contributes to standards for assessment through reporting and the Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report process. Pearson and University of Greenwich reports are primarily dealt with at programme and school level.

1.43 At present the College does not take a formal overview of external examiner comments relating to its own provision through its internal committee structure. The team therefore **recommends** that the College should ensure that there are effective mechanisms that enable it to have central oversight of external examiner reports pertaining to all courses by the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year (Expectation A5, Expectation B7).

1.44 The team found that through its effective working relationships with the awarding bodies and in particular with the HHEC, the College makes appropriate use of external advice in its quality assurance processes. The Expectation is therefore met. In the light of the College's intent to continue its work with HHEC partners and promote its links with employers, the risk for this Expectation is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes*

Findings

1.45   Assessment strategies are considered as part of programme design and approval processes, as described in guidance documentation set out by the College's awarding bodies. The College takes into account the views of employers and the needs of students in assessment design. The College works closely with HHEC partners in designing assessments. Assessments at level 5 and above are submitted to University subject specialists and approved by external examiners.

1.46   Examinations are conducted in accordance with University of Hertfordshire regulations, and scripts are marked anonymously. Assessment panels and examination boards are arranged, managed and chaired by the University. College Programme Managers attend examination boards. External examiners attend to confirm the validity and reliability of assessment (see Expectation B7). University regulations for managing requests to review assessment decisions are applied within the College for foundation degrees.

1.47   Assessment processes for the Initial Teacher Training programme are determined by the University of Greenwich. All assessments are written and provided to the College by the University. The College is responsible for the issue, marking and internal moderation of these. Results then go to the cluster (subregional group of providing colleges) and then network/external moderation. Feedback is shared with cluster group members following moderation events and actions identified.

1.48   The College has an Internal and External Verification (Moderation) Policy that applies across all provision. The Policy specifies training required of those involved in moderation. There is also a College Guide to Verification interpreting this policy, but at present this does not include specific reference to level 5 study or higher education. The Quality Nominee/Head of Higher Level Learning oversees internal moderation.

1.49   Internal verification and standardisation meetings for Pearson higher national assessments are conducted by the College and are monitored in conjunction with the external examiner by the College Quality Nominee, who has overall responsibility for Pearson Internal Verification requirements.

1.50   The review team examined a range of documentation relating to assessment, including policies, guidance, validation records, definitive programme information, reports and records of relevant discussions. Meetings were held with College and awarding body staff, students and employers.

1.51   The team found that programme specifications and definitive module documents clearly state intended learning outcomes and assessment requirements. Module evaluation forms include a data-based review of assessment and are used to inform assessment design during the Annual Monitoring Evaluation Review.

1.52   The team found the College operates assessment policies in line with the stated regulations and guidance of its awarding bodies. The comprehensive and clear processes established for the conduct of assessment create a suitable framework for robust, valid and reliable assessment of student achievement.

1.53   The review team concluded that the College has effective working relationships with its awarding bodies and effectively interprets their policies and guidance for the conduct of assessment. Systems for internal and external examination and moderation are well established. The Expectation is therefore met. The secure arrangements within the HHEC and the continuing enhancement of practices within the College confirm to the team that the level of risk for the Expectation is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.54   In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. All expectations relating to the College's maintenance of threshold academic standards are met, and the risk for each is low.

1.55   Any need for action has been acknowledged by the College in its review documentation or during the review visit, and the College has provided clear evidence of appropriate action being taken within a reasonable timescale. There is evidence that the College is fully aware of its responsibilities for maintaining standards. Previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally.

1.56   The team identified that at present the College does not take a formal overview of external examiner comments relating to its own provision through its internal committee structure. The resulting recommendation relates to a minor oversight.

1.57   The review team concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of the awards offered at West Herts College on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **meets UK expectations**.

2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval*

Findings

2.1   The College works closely with its partners in the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium (HHEC) to develop and approve programmes which may be offered by one or more of the partner colleges. Processes for periodic review and approval/reapproval of programmes are described in the section on Expectation A4.

2.2   The well established Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report process, described in the section on Expectation B8, plays a significant role in the College's evaluation of the effective design and operation of programmes, particularly with regard to employment-related content (see the section on Expectation A6 regarding assessment briefs).

2.3   The College Leadership Group discusses the strategic fit of potential new programmes with Heads of School who are responsible for completing proposals. Staff involved in resource and estate planning contribute to discussions at higher education committee or Higher Education Operational Group meetings. The College operates its own course approval system which feeds into HHEC discussion through the oversight of the Consortium Management Committee. This group also acts to withdraw programmes if necessary in its consideration of the overall offer of the HHEC.

2.4   The above processes are clearly set out in advisory documentation from the awarding body which takes account of the Quality Code. The College's own procedures are similarly clear. The HHEC is well established and takes an overview of provision across all partner colleges. The University of Hertfordshire is supportive of the College's directly funded higher national provision.

2.5   The team examined documentation relating to design and approval of programmes, including examples of recent revalidations, and conducted meetings with staff, representatives of awarding bodies, students and employers.

2.6   Staff met by the review team had a thorough understanding of the processes for programme design and approval and had been involved in revalidation activity. They value the support offered by the University Link Tutors and the opportunity to work with peers across the consortium. They were able to describe situations where programmes were suspended using the University's guidance. They also described an exception to the progression arrangements, where in Performing Arts falling recruitment and advice from employers led to a decision to replace that part of the Creative Media (now Creative Enterprise) portfolio with an HND. Staff and employers noted the importance of creating learning opportunities relevant to the workplace. Students were able to describe their involvement in programme development and valued the relevance of their studies and assessment to workplace situations. College staff have been proactive in leading new developments across the consortium and seeking additional University support, such as library access, for Higher National programmes. HHEC annual monitoring practice has been adapted for Pearson programmes. The team considered that this transfer of consortium quality assurance practices to other higher-level provision is **good practice** (see also section on Enhancement).

2.7   The team concludes that on the basis of the clear guidance and support offered by the awarding body, the robust oversight of the HHEC and the effective interpretation and application of prescribed systems by staff, the College has effective processes in place for programme design and approval. The Expectation is therefore met. The well established working within the consortium and the forward planning in place for ongoing approval activity leads the team to conclude that the risk for this Expectation is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions*

Findings

2.8   The College has clear and comprehensive policies and procedures for the admission of students. The College takes a holistic approach towards recruitment, involving academic and support staff as well as initiatives such as 'the one-stop shop'.

2.9   The College follows University of Hertfordshire admissions policies for foundation degree courses with applications via UCAS. The HHEC monitors the admissions statistics to ensure fairness across the consortium. Staff involved in clearing activities are provided with guidance and training from the University of Hertfordshire.

2.10   Students follow College processes and policies for admission to Pearson and University of Greenwich courses, including interviews where required, all overseen by a central admissions unit. The College undertakes a survey of all new starters, which allows for oversight of students' views on pre-admissions information at a strategic level through the higher education committee.

2.11   The review team looked at the policies and processes for admissions by talking to staff and students as well as analysing the minutes and papers from relevant meetings. The team also looked at review mechanisms in place in the College.

2.12   The team found a wide range of opportunities are offered to prospective students to ensure they are applying for an appropriate programme. The College supports prospective students prior to and throughout the application and admissions process. Prospective students have the opportunity to access academic guidance and student support including additional learning support. The College benefits from a significant number of students progressing internally onto higher education and provides a high level of support to manage their progression, especially through the use of upper-level students, Additional Learning Support and the Learning Resource Centre.

2.13   The team concludes that the policies, procedures and practices for recruiting and admitting students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied. The Expectation is therefore met. The rigorous and consistent application of the admissions policies led the team to conclude that the risk for this Expectation 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

2.14   The College takes deliberate and strategic steps to enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The College systematically reviews and works to enhance learning opportunities and teaching practices throughout all levels, forming a key strand of the Quality Strategy.

2.15   The College supports higher education staff well through time allowance, access to in-house training specific to higher education, and HHEC training events as well as actively promoting University of Hertfordshire training events. Additional staff development opportunities are available as needed. The College actively supports and enables all higher education staff (academic and support) to seek external professional development, including seeking Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy, becoming external examiners and higher-level study.

2.16   The College has a strategic commitment to personal development and employability which is evident across the College and opportunities for professional development are embedded in the curriculum. At the school level, staff are encouraged to develop partnerships with external organisations which has led to the extensive and effective use of 'live briefs' embedded into the curriculum as well as placements and guest lectures where appropriate.

2.17   The College uses a range of internal and external information sources for the continual review of teaching and learning, including student feedback, programme committee minutes and teaching observation as well as link tutor reports. In 2011-12, the College undertook internal reviews of individual schools and its higher education provision, leading to the further development of a lesson observation process.

2.18   The review team met with staff and students and looked at strategic documents, internal College reviews and minutes of meetings where learning opportunities and teaching practices were discussed. The team also reviewed lesson observations.

2.19   The College's commitment to staff development is strong and staff met during the review visit confirmed that needs are identified through peer observation of teaching, annual staff appraisal and capturing student feedback on individual tutors through module evaluation forms.

2.20   Staff are encouraged to gain a teaching qualification and are able to study for this at the College. Staff are also supported in higher-level qualifications and two are currently undertaking an MA. Five members of staff have recently gained Higher Education Academy fellowship status. Continuing professional development includes staff being seconded to other colleges to study their practices. Senior staff reported that there is an 'integral' approach to supporting staff, particularly when undertaking new initiatives. This was endorsed by staff who spoke of their involvement in development days at the College and University. Processes for moderation include feedback to assessors and planning for future development.

2.21 The team confirmed with staff and students that student feedback on teaching practices and learning opportunities is used well and issues are responded to effectively and efficiently.

2.22 The team therefore concluded that the College has a comprehensive approach, takes strategic and collective steps to ensure that learning and teaching are systematically reviewed and works to continually enhance its provision. Therefore, the team decided that Expectation B3 of the Quality Code was met and the risk for this Expectation 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

2.23   Through strategic and operational planning, the College effectively determines and evaluates how they enable student development and achievement. Learning resources and student support are thoroughly considered and promoted through students' entire experience at the College from expression of interest to progression to employment or higher learning.

2.24   Resources are considered at programme design and approval stage and are subsequently monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis by both staff and students. The use of new learning opportunities and resources is guided by both formal and informal requests from staff and students. Resources are considered annually through the annual monitoring process. This has resulted in significant enhancements in student learning opportunities and resources such as the Degree Centre and the development of new pathways.

2.25   The College operates a successful virtual learning environment (VLE), which is supported through the appointment of a Blended Learning Coordinator and IT facilitators within schools, all of whom are academic tutors. The Blended Learning Coordinator monitors staff engagement with and use of the VLE and the College has an agreed minimum usage expectation. The Blended Learning Coordinator reports to the Higher Education Operational Group, leading to a College-wide approach. The Blended Learning Coordinator also offers staff development opportunities in using electronic technologies. All higher education students have access to the College's own VLE as well as the VLE provided by the University of Hertfordshire.

2.26   The College has invested significantly in its Learning Resource Centre and provides a wide range of services to both staff and students. The College continually monitors performance through surveys and student representatives as well as engaging teaching staff and using recent graduates. The Learning Resource Centre is instrumental in providing resources, support and guidance to students at all stages. A member of the Learning Resource Centre staff has gained Higher Education Academy fellowship. The College has taken an innovative approach in hiring a recent graduate in the Learning Resource Centre to support both students and staff in higher education-appropriate study skills. The Learning Resource Centre also provides staff development sessions to College staff, especially around issues such as plagiarism.

2.27   All student support services are regularly evaluated through student feedback and internal review. The College is continually assessing its resourcing and support needs using the first impressions survey and National Student Survey. Actions identified are addressed appropriately across the College.

2.28   The review team tested the support and resources for students by meeting with students and staff, observing the use of the VLE and ProMonitor and reviewing minutes of meetings where support and resources were discussed.

2.29   Students confirmed that support needs are assessed as early as initial enquiry. As part of a tailored induction programme, all students are assessed for additional needs support and use 'Skill Builder', allowing for the provision of personalised support. The College actively monitors and reviews inductions through student feedback and surveys, and actively encourages students to take part in induction design and content.

2.30   The team found students are monitored throughout their time at the College through a range of means including an electronic performance monitoring system and weekly target-setting meetings with appropriate triggers used to ensure that students' needs are met. The effective use of all parts of the College, such as the Additional Learning Support and Learning Resource Centre team, as well as study skills sessions combined with electronic media such as YouTube and Twitter support individual student development.

2.31   Students met by the review team were extremely content with the student support they receive and highlighted many support and resource options available to them. The review team considered that the integrated approach to the provision of support which enables students to achieve their academic, personal and professional potential is **good practice**.

2.32   The team found that students who are transitioning internally have the opportunity to engage in additional levels of support, including the innovative use of upper-year students, 'keep warm' events and open days, thus helping to ensure that students are knowledgeable about the programme requirements as well as the future opportunities available to them. The College uses the HHEC and University of Hertfordshire to actively support student progression, including organising and accompanying students to events both at the University of Hertfordshire and beyond as well as organising internal College progression days and the provision of student disability services with input from the University of Hertfordshire. These activities are monitored and resourced at a strategic level. Students consider them to be of a high standard. The team considered that the comprehensive approach at strategic and operational level which effectively facilitates students' transitions to higher levels of education is **good practice**.

2.33   The effective support for students progressing between levels, the integrated and holistic nature of student support services, the emerging opportunities for employability and professional development, and the College's strategic commitment to grow and improve these areas led the review team to conclude that Expectation B4 of the Quality Code had been met.

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

2.34   The College provides students with multiple formal and informal opportunities to engage in the quality assurance and enhancement of their programmes and the wider student experience. The formal opportunities are detailed in the learner engagement strategy and student charter, both of which are reviewed regularly. Opportunities are promoted to students extensively through various means including print materials during induction, student handbooks and the VLE.

2.35   The College actively promotes informal means of student engagement, leading to a close working relationship with its students. The College engages in dialogue with its students in class, at weekly target-setting meetings and on social media.

2.36   The review team looked at the effectiveness of student engagement by talking to staff and students, reading minutes of meetings that students had attended and investigating the support provided to student representatives.

2.37   The team noted the prominence the College places on the student voice at strategic and programme level. The College has recruited a Student Engagement Leader. Students are represented on relevant College committees and their views are identified through standing agenda items. Students also engage in quality assurance of their learning through student council forums and participating in revalidation events.

2.38   The team found that student representatives feel they are given appropriate support to carry out their roles including ensuring that there is adequate provision for students who are unable to attend formal meetings. There are two student representatives on the Board of Governors, one of whom is a higher education student. These student representatives are offered full training and induction for the role. The effective use of survey data at a strategic level and the analysis of module evaluation forms have led to an increase in student satisfaction ratings.

2.39   Students and staff were able to demonstrate to the team examples of the College both responding to the learner voice and working in partnership with their students to enhance learning opportunities. These have included the development of the Degree Centre, the development and offer of new pathways and the evolution of both College and module induction. The College effectively uses student feedback on module evaluation forms.

2.40   Overall, opportunities for students to engage in the quality assurance of their learning is widespread and varied. The formal student representation system is efficient and effective and is supported by a number of informal mechanisms that combine to form an ethos of engagement. There are numerous examples of the College taking on feedback from its learners and working in partnership with its students, thereby enhancing the learning experience. The review team therefore concluded that the emphasis on student engagement and consideration of student feedback at all levels by the College meets Expectation B5 of the Quality Code. The risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B6: *Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning*

Findings

2.41   The College works closely with its awarding bodies to ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes for their award. Assessment strategies, including formative and summative components, are designed to maximise learning and provide a range of methods to test students' abilities. Assessment is regularly reviewed through module and annual monitoring and review, and forms a significant part of periodic review/revalidation. Students are given clear information and appropriate support regarding assessment. Staff receive training and development for their roles in assessment. Staff from awarding bodies provide ongoing support to the College through formal and informal arrangements.

2.42   Assessment practice for the University of Greenwich provision is described in Expectation A6. For Pearson, the College manages the assessment of higher nationals in its capacity as an approved BTEC Centre for Assessment. Support from the HHEC for Higher National programmes has been negotiated by the College, and assessment practice for higher nationals is as close to HHEC foundation degrees as practicable.

2.43   The review team examined a range of documentation relating to assessment. This included policies, guidance, validation records, definitive programme information, monitoring and review reports, student information, assessment and moderation reports, and notes of relevant discussions. Meetings were held with College and awarding body staff, students and employers.

2.44   The team found that the HHEC Quality Handbook contains detailed information on the preparation for and conduct of assessment. College processes closely follow this guidance. Staff explained how they incorporate discussion of learning outcomes and formative and summative assessment into their teaching to ensure students' full understanding.

2.45   Student handbooks and module guides include information on mapping learning outcomes to assessment as contained in programme specifications and definitive module documents, as well as schedules for completing work. Detailed assignment briefs are provided at the start of each unit and students find these very helpful since the College improved them during the past academic year. Assessment information is also provided through the VLEs, which students find convenient and accessible. The majority of programmes have a facility for online submission although this is not feasible where logbooks or practical materials are the subject of assessment.

2.46   The team found that students value the opportunities for group and individual tutorial discussions of their preparations for assessment. They are able to receive feedback on preliminary drafts and are set targets for development. They also noted the support available from the Learning Resource Centre on referencing, and additional learning support for those with specific needs. A student with a disability had been worried about working at foundation degree level but said all the support needed had been put in place.

2.47   The team found that students understand the processes for marking and moderation, including anonymous and second marking. They are aware of procedures for academic appeals and serious adverse (mitigating) circumstances. Student handbooks contain guidance for students' conduct in assessment, including avoiding plagiarism. This refers to the University's regulations and a range of helpful resources. Students are aware of this information.

2.48   Students reported that they know when to expect feedback from assessments, and that it is available in good time to be useful in developing their work. They are satisfied with the quality of feedback and value the frequent interactions with their tutors to discuss assessment. The College sought to improve this area following a recommendation in the 2009 IQER visit.

2.49   When asked about the level of challenge provided by their studies and related assessment, students met by the team were able to confirm they are being sufficiently stretched, and that they are aware of differences in assessment requirements when progressing from one level to another. Several students observed that the assignments give scope for them to 'push themselves' if they wish, and that this is important in giving them the impetus to progress from one level to another.

2.50   The team found that employers are not directly involved in summative assessment but are widely involved in support and preparation for assessment, in a number of cases providing 'living briefs' - real-life projects relating to the workplace. Students are supported by their tutors in canvassing for these opportunities. Briefs include safety advice posters for the police, marketing plans for a major confectionery business and the Hertfordshire Sports Village, and production-related projects for local theatre and film companies. One external examiner had identified an issue concerning the consistency of briefs and the College is working to improve this while retaining the relevance and value to the curriculum of these assignments.

2.51   The team conclude that the comprehensive written guidance, close and supportive relationships cultivated within the consortium, and effective relationships with other awarding bodies enable the College to create appropriate opportunities for students to demonstrate their achievement of learning outcomes. The Expectation is therefore met. The well established quality assurance practices and degree of oversight exercised within the College, the consortium and other awarding bodies is such that the risk for this Expectation is considered to be 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

2.52   The College's awarding bodies are responsible for all processes relating to the operation of external examiner systems. The College facilitates the engagement of external examiners with its assessment processes and uses comments provided through its quality assurance processes, specifically Annual Monitoring Evaluation and Review. Requirements and guidance for external examiner systems are set out in handbooks provided by awarding bodies.

2.53   The University of Hertfordshire nominates, appoints and provides training to external examiners acting across the HHEC. Reports are received by the Vice-Chancellor's office and read by a member of the senior team at the University. Following identification of key action points, reports are disseminated to College programme leaders via the University VLE. Following local discussion, which normally includes consortium partners, the College contributes to a formal response sent out by the University.

2.54   The University of Greenwich operates similar arrangements, with external examiners appointed to oversee a 'cluster' of colleges offering their teacher training programmes.

2.55   Procedures for Pearson provision are set out in the section on Expectation A5.

2.56   Clear expectations for establishing and operating external examiner systems are in place and are understood by the College. External examiners are appointed for all higher education programmes offered. Comments from external examiners are incorporated into the Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report process, and where appropriate may be included in the associated action-planning activity. Comments also feed into periodic review and programme revalidation.

2.57   The team considered policies and procedures in place to support the effective operation of external examiner systems by reviewing awarding body handbooks, guidance, documentary trails of external examiner reports, and management of their comments and responses. Examples of Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports, senior and programme-level College committee minutes and consortium committee minutes, including reports of University validation committees, were also considered. Meetings were held with students and staff of the College and its awarding bodies.

2.58   College and awarding body staff are fully aware of the significance of external examiner input to assessment practice and value this contribution to standards and quality assurance. Processes for receiving and addressing external examiner comments are well understood and effectively administered.

2.59   Senior College-level consideration of external examiner comments is undertaken only through receipt of programme Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports by the Head of Higher Level Learning. At present there is no formal oversight of all College external examiner comments by relevant committees (see the recommendation in paragraph 1.43).

2.60   University of Hertfordshire and Pearson students met by the team were aware of processes for external examining of their assessed work. Student representatives have been present at meetings where external examiner comments were discussed. These students believe that external examiner reports are available to them should they wish to view them,

but are unclear about how to access them. They do not know the identity or location of the external examiners on their programmes.

2.61   The team found that the University of Hertfordshire VLE advises that external examiner reports are available to individual students upon application to the University Quality Office. External examiner reports are not posted to programme areas on the site.

2.62   University of Greenwich students met by the team had no awareness of processes for external examining or of the contribution that external examining might make to their programme. As these students are members of the College's teaching staff, this suggests an area for further development.

2.63   The team therefore **recommends** that the College ensures that external examiner reports and details of their authors are accessible to students or their representatives by the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year.

2.64   The team concludes that arrangements for external examining of the College's provision are robust and comply with the policies of the relevant awarding body. The Expectation is therefore met. The College has well established partnerships with its awarding bodies and the HHEC, providing a stable environment to continue embedded practices for the collection and use of external examiner comments. The risk for this Expectation is therefore low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review*

Findings

2.65   The College operates periodic review and annual monitoring and review processes following the policies and guidance set out by their awarding body partners. For an outline of the processes for periodic review, see the section on Expectation A4.

2.66   For programmes validated by the University of Hertfordshire and offered via the HHEC, the College conducts Annual Monitoring Evaluation Review. Module leaders prepare module evaluation forms which then feed into the Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report. The Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report collects together all elements of programme operation and delivery, including progression and achievement data, external examiner comments and student feedback. These are compiled and analysed by the programme leader and an action plan is prepared. Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports are discussed at programme committee meetings and are subsequently peer-reviewed by another HHEC partner. Before formal submission to the University Quality Office for evaluation and sign-off they are presented to the College higher education committee. The University Key Account Manager prepares an annual summary of Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports from across the consortium provision which is considered at the Consortium Quality Committee.

2.67   University of Greenwich provision is monitored by College staff through Annual Programme Review. This has similar content to Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports and is presented to the higher education committee before submission to the University.

2.68   Annual monitoring of Pearson programmes to date has been via the Centre Quality Review and Development report, prepared by the external examiner in conjunction with the Quality Nominee of the College. The report is a standard template provided by Pearson, addressing assessment, learning, teaching and other quality objectives. There are plans to commence an Annual Monitoring and Evaluation-style report for new higher national provision from 2014.

2.69   There are established systems in place for routine monitoring and periodic review of programmes. The results of annual monitoring and periodic review are systematically used to inform programme development and student experience within the College and across partnership arrangements.

2.70   During the review the team considered awarding body and College policies and guidance documents, examples of periodic review, Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports and supporting documentation, and notes of relevant committees. The team met with staff from the College and awarding bodies, students and employers.

2.71   Staff met by the team were able to clearly articulate processes for regular monitoring and periodic review of programmes and provided examples of issues addressed through these processes. These included the development of new programmes bringing together 'clusters' of subjects and the development of resources and facilities for the College. Training for Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports and revalidation activity has been provided by the University of Hertfordshire. Staff are encouraged to attend and value the sessions offered.

2.72   Staff were also able to explain how the action-planning process associated with Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports provided an opportunity to monitor progress on

significant issues, such as concerns about consistency in assessments raised by the external examiner in Creative Enterprise. The Head of Higher Level Learning takes a lead on checking progress with action plans in preparation for each Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report cycle.

2.73   During the past year, improved module evaluation forms have been introduced following a pilot in Sport. This includes a greater emphasis on data commentary, which has enhanced the overall quality of Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports.

2.74   The team particularly noted the proposal, supported by the University of Hertfordshire and HHEC, that the Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report template should be adapted for use by Pearson programmes from 2014.

2.75   The team conclude that processes for routine monitoring and periodic review are well embedded in College practice, and that they follow guidance set out in awarding body documentation. The College is active in reviewing its practice in conjunction with its partners, and has taken steps to enhance established procedures. The Expectation is therefore met. In the light of the robust nature of the monitoring and periodic review processes, the risk for this Expectation is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals*

Findings

2.76   The College has a published complaints process for all students and all provision which can be accessed via the West Herts College website. While the policy is for all students, the review team considered that the process itself, with support from the Student Services team, is satisfactorily inclusive.

2.77   Student-facing information about complaints (known as grievances) and appeals is provided in programme handbooks and reference is also made in the student handbook.

2.78   Complaints relating to University of Hertfordshire provision are managed via the Quality Manager and team in line with the College complaints process and the University of Hertfordshire complaints process. Appeals are also covered in University of Hertfordshire Academic Regulations.

2.79   The team examined handbooks and policies relating to complaints and academic appeals. Engagement with and understanding of the processes involved were discussed in meetings with staff and students.

2.80   The review team met with students and they indicated familiarity with the process for appeals and complaints which matched information provided by the College and published in handbooks.

2.81   As well as formal complaints and appeals processes, there is a range of informal processes for capturing student concerns including effective use of social media. Through meetings with staff and students the review team concluded that student concerns are picked up at a very early stage and satisfactorily addressed before they reach the point of a formal complaint. The review team consider this to be a positive reflection of cohort sizes as well as a student-centred ethos evident in all meetings with College staff and students. The review team also noted the effective use of the student representation system for capturing the student voice (see the section on Expectation B5).

2.82   Overall, the review team regarded the College to have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals. Staff both informally and formally respond to complaints and appeals appropriately. Therefore, the review team concluded that the Expectation is met and the associated 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

2.83   The College provides work-based and work-related learning opportunities for all foundation degree and higher national provision and employers play an important part in supporting curriculum developments and operation. In addition, employers are consulted in the programme development process.

2.84   Each programme approaches work-based and work-related learning in a bespoke way relevant to the discipline and this is evident in the programme specifications and periodic review/revalidation reports.

2.85   The review team examined handbooks and approval and review reports relating to the operation of work-based learning and employability within the College. Engagement with and understanding of the processes and expectations involved were discussed in meetings with staff, representatives of awarding bodies, employers and students. The College's approach to work-based learning and employability was a focus for meetings, and a key focus when the team met with a range of employers across programmes.

2.86   For students on placement there is a work-based and work-related learning handbook and module guide which clearly sets out expectations and requirements. Support is provided for students and employers. Employers are not involved in assessing students although they may produce an evaluative report which students can submit as part of their portfolio. Responsibility lies with the College to approve any placement and/or work-based and work-related learning project, and employers are required to complete a range of documentation relating to the workplace including health and safety.

2.87   The review team noted the enthusiasm of employers for their engagement with students and their commitment to the College and the learning environment. The embedding of employability into the curriculum and the effectiveness of the processes support the student experience. It was clear to the review team that the use of live briefs provided appropriately challenging opportunities for students that were carefully managed and valued by both staff and employers.

2.88   Overall, the review team found that the College satisfactorily manages its relationships with employers and processes are in place to secure the quality of student learning opportunities. The team concluded the Expectation is met and the associated 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

2.89 The College does not offer research degrees.

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.90   In reaching its judgement about the quality of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. All expectations relating to the College's quality of student learning opportunities are met, and the risk for each is low.

2.91   Any need for action has been acknowledged by the College in its review documentation or during the review visit, and the College has provided clear evidence of appropriate action being taken within a reasonable timescale. There is evidence the College is fully aware of its responsibilities for the quality of learning opportunities. Previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally.

2.92   The team noted the comprehensive approach at strategic and operational level which effectively facilitates students' transitions to higher levels of education. In addition the team identified an integrated approach to the provision of support which enables students to achieve their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.93   The team identified that at present the College does not take a formal overview of external examiner comments relating to its own provision through its internal committee structure. The team also identified that students know external examiner reports are available to them but are unclear how to access them. The resulting recommendations relate to a minor oversight.

2.94   The review team concludes that the quality of learning opportunities at West Herts College **meets UK expectations**.

3   Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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

Quality Code, *Part C: Information about higher education provision*

Findings

3.1   The College provides a wide range of information in various formats including information about the provider, its programmes and support services. The systems the College has in place and its procedures for monitoring them ensure the information the College produces about itself is accurate and the processes used for review are appropriate.

3.2   Although approval and review of College marketing materials is made within the College, due to the relationship with the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium (HHEC) there is a well established process of approval and review for programmes awarded by the University of Hertfordshire, involving peer-led cross-consortium audit. This activity is overseen by a HHEC subcommittee on which College representatives sit. The College monitors student feedback on the information it produces through surveys which are considered by relevant College and student committees. The College has a dedicated part of its website for higher education provision which students are involved in auditing and developing.

3.3   The College website, in combination with the downloadable prospectus, provides relevant and accurate information regarding the programme of study, process of application and entry criteria, additional learning opportunities, student support and, where applicable, possible progression routes. The College website is peer-reviewed by other colleges within the HHEC. All applicants are provided with information regarding student support and additional needs support, allowing for early identification of needs. Students, academic and support staff are engaged with promoting the College at open days and the College makes good use of current students for marketing to internal students.

3.4   The review team analysed the information the College produces about itself and met with students and staff to confirm the process for approving information and ensuring that the information produced is fit-for-purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.5   The team found that programme specifications for foundation degree programmes are the responsibility of the awarding body, while programme specifications for internal programmes are the responsibility of the Head of School. There is ample opportunity for staff (both academic and support) and students to feed back on materials regarding course content. All students are provided with a programme handbook, with higher national students receiving a College-produced handbook and foundation degree students receiving a University of Hertfordshire handbook. Handbooks contain programme specifications and information regarding key policies such as appeals and advice for academic integrity. Handbooks are available to students through the virtual learning environment (VLE).

3.6   The team found that the VLE, which is subject to an annual usage audit and scrutiny by appropriate committees, acts as a repository for key student information such as complaints, appeals and mitigating circumstances. The VLE also acts as a hub for module-based information such as assessment information and briefs as well as a gateway to learning resources. Although external examiner reports are stored on the VLE, they can only

be accessed directly by staff. However, the VLE contains information about how students can access them. Students are satisfied with the level and accuracy of the information provided to them by the College.

3.7   Overall, the review team concluded that the information about learning opportunities the College produces is fit-for-purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The College uses a variety of means to ensure this including the College website, printed materials and the VLE. The team also concluded that the processes the College has in place for approving and reviewing information are appropriate. The team decided that the Expectation in Part C of the Quality Code is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.8   In reaching its judgement on information about higher education provision, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. The Expectation relating to the College's information about higher education is met, and the risk is low.

3.9   Any need for action has been acknowledged by the College in its review documentation or during the review visit, and the College has provided clear evidence of appropriate action being taken within a reasonable timescale. There is evidence the College is fully aware of its responsibilities for the information it produces about learning opportunities. Previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally.

3.10   There are no features of good practice, affirmations or recommendations for this judgement area.

3.11   The review team concludes that the information the College produces about learning opportunities at West Herts College **meets UK expectations**.

4 Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 Enhancement is embedded at strategic and operational levels and embraces staff and students holistically. At a strategic level enhancement is evident through the College Strategic Plan 2013-16 which states that: 'For West Herts College the challenge is to make the most of education's new freedoms and flexibilities, moving away from traditional models to ones offering people of all ages a clear line of sight to the world of work'. In meeting this challenge the plan identifies five aims which implicitly identify enhancement. The College's vision and values include a commitment to enterprise and innovation: 'At the heart of our innovation is an enterprising spirit seeking fresh ideas and opportunities'.

4.2 The review team examined strategic plans and policies and tracked through actions via emails and meeting minutes as well as leaflets and other evidence of outcomes. In addition, the review team tested this approach operationally in meetings with College staff and staff spoke of self-evaluation as being key to their role. In meetings with students, they identified the range of ways in which their voices were heard both formally and informally.

4.3 The review team heard about and read of a number of examples of enhancements that reflected top-level strategic improvements to the student and staff experience as well as enhancements initiated by the student voice. Paragraphs 4.4 to 4.10 are a representative sample.

4.4 With the development of a new building on the Watford campus, the decision was made to move all higher education provision to the new campus and locate it within relevant academic schools where it could be situated within its discipline. This was considered to be a positive move by staff with higher education seen as core business rather than a sideline, and as an aspiration for further education learners. While students welcomed the move to the new campus they fed back to the College that they felt they had lost their specific higher education identity. This led to the establishment of the Degree Centre.

4.5 The development of the new Degree Centre involved and continues to involve student input to provide an appropriate environment within which they can work (including group work) and socialise. As a space with a separate identity it can also be used by staff to target specific higher education information. The Principal indicated that the next stage is to discuss with students the branding of the Centre as the word 'Degree' no longer encompasses all higher education provision on offer.

4.6 The College gained its own funded numbers and offered Pearson higher national provision from the beginning of 2013-14. Having experience of working within the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium and its quality assurance framework (aligned to the awarding body), the decision was taken to adopt the same framework, where appropriate, to the new provision while also working within Pearson's processes. This was further extended to adopt similar approaches to employability including the use of live briefs and support in terms of work placements. The review team considered the transfer of consortium quality assurance practices to other higher-level provision to be a clear sign of enhancement and **good practice**.

4.7 In 2012-13 students on the Foundation Degree Business with Law expressed concern at the lack of a progression route at the University of Hertfordshire. The College

addressed this through appropriate processes which can be effectively tracked through the annual review process and relevant committee minutes. This involved mapping the curriculum to identify gaps and approving a new module to ensure and assure progression to the University.

4.8   Delivery of the programming modules for the Foundation Degree Computing Technologies takes place on University of Hertfordshire premises. This was positively welcomed by the students and reinforced their identity as higher education students.

4.9   Staff development opportunities are provided in a carefully managed and strategic way, based on individual and College needs, to ensure and enhance the quality of the student experience. Recent engagement in Higher Education Academy activities led to five members of staff, spanning academic and support areas, gaining Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy.

4.10   Research and study skills were identified as a strategic area for enhancement and the Learning Resource Centre plays an important role in supporting these activities with a targeted focus for higher education students and staff. Through SmartSkills sessions (one-to-one and group sessions) students are provided with the skills they need to study effectively at higher education level. Through annual self-assessment reports the Learning Resource Centre reviews its performance - drawing on student input via feedback questionnaires - and identifies actions to enhance activities including promoting and taking Learning Resource Centre support into the Degree Centre in 2013-14.

4.11   Having reviewed the evidence, the review team consider that the extensive and effective ways by which the student voice is used to inform enhancement and create a positive impact on the learning experience is **good practice**.

4.12   In addition, the review team consider that deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. Indeed the review team recognised that the self-reflective approach was integrated across activities, individuals and departments. As such, the embedded culture of enhancement exemplified through strategic leadership and staff commitment is **good practice**.

4.13   In conclusion, the review team considered that enhancement is embedded effectively and that deliberate steps - both strategically and operationally - are being taken to improve the quality of the student experience. The review team acknowledged that a culture of enhancement was demonstrated both horizontally across and vertically through the College structures with the student voice being both captured and heard. The review team considered that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.14   In reaching its judgement about enhancement of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. The Expectation relating to the College's enhancement of learning opportunities is met, and the risk is low.

4.15   Any need for action has been acknowledged by the College in its review documentation or during the review visit, and the College has provided clear evidence of appropriate action being taken within a reasonable timescale. There is evidence the College is fully aware of its responsibilities for the information it produces about learning opportunities. Previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally.

4.16   The review team consider the transfer of consortium quality assurance practices to other higher-level provision to be a clear sign of enhancement. Having reviewed the evidence, the review team consider that the extensive and effective ways the student voice is used to inform enhancement and create a positive impact on the learning experience is **good practice**. The embedded culture of enhancement exemplified through strategic leadership and staff commitment is also **good practice**.

4.17   The review team concludes that the enhancement of learning opportunities at West Herts College is **commended**.

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

Findings

5.1 The College involves its students at all levels including through formal representation, more informal mechanisms such as conversations in the programme setting, and the effective use of both modular and wider College surveys.

5.2 The student body has formal representation at the College Board of Governors where it has two annually elected student representatives, one of whom is a current higher education student. Students are formally represented at programme committees and the Higher Education Operations Group, and have their own student council as well as student representation forums. Student representatives are given dedicated time with their cohorts for them to gain an understanding of issues.

5.3 The College has invested resources into ensuring that the student voice is gathered and their views and needs are properly documented. This includes the adoption and continual revision of both a learner engagement strategy and student charter and the addition of a Student Engagement Leader. The College dedicates staff time to recording meetings and following action points as well as adopting standing agenda items regarding the student experience (whether about teaching and learning or facilities) on College committees.

5.4 The College also employs a number of informal mechanisms for ensuring the student voice is recognised. This includes the use of social media and the continual conversational tone that this brings. There are several examples of the College responding to feedback from both prospective and current students through Facebook and Twitter. Although the College's weekly target-setting meetings with its students are primarily a means of delivering student support, tutors also use these meetings to gather informal feedback.

5.5 The College uses a variety of surveys to understand the views and needs of its students: the National Student Survey, the internal first impressions survey and modular-based surveys. The College analyses these against comparable data and forms action plans at appropriate committees, allowing for reflection.

5.6 The College appreciates that student needs are continually changing and there are several examples of the College involving students in processes such as transition, induction or recruitment. The College has employed student interns in the Learning Resource Centre, allowing the College to proactively respond to their students' needs.

5.7 The College engages student representatives who are unable to attend programme committees by gathering their input before meetings and ensuring that minutes are distributed in a timely manner for them to further distribute to students. Combined with the College's willingness to allow time for student representatives to gather the views of cohorts, this means that there are ample opportunities for student representatives to feed back where appropriate.

5.8 There are several examples of the student voice leading to enhancements in the College. This includes the creation and continual evolution of the Degree Centre, which is appreciated by both students and staff and offers a good example of the partnership between the College and its students. Other examples include the development and subsequent adoption of new pathways, allowing student progression onto appropriate

programmes at awarding partners and further interaction with awarding bodies in terms of visit days.

5.9   The College has recognised ways of ensuring that students are kept aware of actions pertaining to the feedback they give to the College through both formal and informal mechanisms.

5.10   The College and its management support student council meetings and higher education representative meetings well. There are standing agenda items for student issues, feedback from surveys in senior meetings, and appropriate representation across committees. This helps to ensure that issues are raised and closed as well as appropriate feedback delivered.

5.11   Furthermore, the College makes good use of 'You said: We did' posters showing where changes have been made or where changes are not possible and the reasons why.

5.12   Staff at all levels of the College are knowledgeable about the importance of involving students in quality processes. The College has taken deliberative steps to ensure there are dedicated forums for capturing the student viewpoint, as well as representation on programme committees and senior College committees. The College has dedicated staff resources towards supporting engagement through the addition of the Student Engagement Leader who supports student representatives as well as ensuring adequate staff representation on student committees. There was clear evidence of enhancement where students and staff had worked together in areas such as induction, programme pathways and the Degree Centre.

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 27 to 29 of the Higher Education Review handbook.

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

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

Academic standards
The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Award
A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

Blended learning
Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology-enhanced or enabled learning**).

Credit(s)
A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

Degree-awarding body
A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degreeawarding powers, research degreeawarding 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* (FIS).

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.