

Higher Education Review of Nelson and Colne College

April 2014

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Nelson and Colne College. The review took place from 1 to 2 April 2014 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Elaine Crosthwaite
- Mr Matthew Kitching (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

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

In reviewing Nelson and Colne College the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/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 Nelson and Colne College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Nelson and Colne College.

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Nelson and Colne College.

- The flexible and highly supportive approach by the Learning Resource Centre enhances the learning experiences of higher education students (Expectation B4).
- The comprehensive approach taken to enhance the employability and career prospects of students (Expectation B4).
- The well organised assignment schedule, comprehensive formative feedback and rapid return of student assessments (Expectation B6).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Nelson and Colne College.

By September 2014:

- enable all higher education student representatives to attend the Course Committee/Student Panel (Expectation B5)
- ensure that external examiner reports are more effectively shared with students (Expectations B7 and C)
- ensure that the complaints procedures are made clearer for all students (Expectation B9 and C).

By January 2015:

- ensure that higher education staff engage more fully with the Quality Code to inform the ongoing management, delivery and evaluation of the courses (Expectation A5)
- expand and formalise feedback mechanisms for employers and workplace mentors (Expectation B4)
- make sure all higher education staff are aware of the College's strategic approach to enhancement (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The inclusion of a higher education student representative as a member of the Governing Body (Expectation B5).

Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

In the College there is a strong focus on the 'Learner Voice'. Students are involved in quality assurance through course reviews and module evaluations. Online evaluations are discussed at course team meetings. Postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) students meet with the University Link Officer at a Student Panel which produces a rolling log of issues to be addressed. This opportunity is not, as yet, available to foundation degree students. Through focus groups, the Principal and Centre Manager play key roles in involving students in the quality process. The College responds to student evaluations through formal and informal processes for 'closing the loop'. There is an affirmation that a higher education student will be a member of the Governing Body.

About Nelson and Colne College

The mission of Nelson and Colne College (the College) in the Lancashire borough of Pendle is to be the centre of excellence in education and training for all communities in the area. In 2005, the College was awarded outstanding status by Ofsted and became a Beacon College. In 2008, the College was again awarded outstanding status by Ofsted. The College faces the challenge of giving adults and young people access to higher education in the current economic climate. Pendle is ranked the 41st most deprived local authority in England, and 29.3 per cent of the population is economically inactive. Since the last QAA visit in 2009, a new Principal has been appointed and there have been changes in senior management.

The two higher education courses are delivered on behalf of the University of Huddersfield (the University) and are operated through the Consortium for Post-Compulsory Education and Training (CPCET) which is responsible for quality assurance and maintaining academic standards for the two awards. The College is part of the University of Huddersfield Distributed Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training.

The College underwent an Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in March 2009, which determined that confidence could be placed in the College's management of its responsibilities as set out in its partnership agreement for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of the awarding body, and for the quality of learning opportunities it offers. It also found that reliance could be placed on the accuracy and completeness of public information.

At the time, the College produced an action plan in response to the seven features of good practice, the single advisable recommendation and the six desirable recommendations.

The College has sought to build on the good practices and these have been discussed at the College Annual Reviews, although there is insufficient evidence that these have been fully implemented.

The need for more progress on the advisable recommendation regarding the Academic Infrastructure arose again in this review with a recommendation that higher education staff engage more fully with the Quality Code.

Regarding the desirable recommendations, the College decided not to set up a Higher Education Board of Study, but rather to evaluate the management of the provision through the Curriculum and Quality Committee. This is working well with higher education being thoroughly considered at all levels in the quality processes. Formal meetings now take place between the Centre Manager and mentors. Library provision is continually updated, and in this review, the contribution of the Learning Resource Centre (the Centre) is good practice. A virtual learning environment (VLE) has been developed which is used extensively by students and staff. Course information, especially on progression routes and employment opportunities, has been developed.

Explanation of the findings about Nelson and Colne 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 does not award higher education qualifications. The awarding body, the University of Huddersfield, has full responsibility for allocating qualifications that it awards to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. The College relies on the processes of the University to ensure that the outcomes of programmes are matched to the descriptors of the FHEQ.

1.2 The review team scrutinised the partnership agreement with the University and validation documentation, course handbooks provided by the University, and external examiners' reports. This evidence showed that the University holds responsibility for the alignment of their awards to the FHEQ and for the preparation of programme specifications. The external examiners' reports stated that appropriate standards are set for the qualifications at the level of the award. College teaching staff make effective use of the course structure provided by the University, which refers to the FHEQ.

1.3 The review team concludes that the College successfully meets its responsibilities, within the context of its arrangements with the University, for allocating qualifications to the appropriate level of the FHEQ and therefore meets Expectation A1 of the Quality Code. The associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level

Findings

1.4 As for Expectation A1, the University is responsible for the use of subject and qualification benchmark statements in the design and delivery of programmes. The College relies on the processes of the University to ensure that appropriate account is taken of benchmark statements. It works closely with the University to ensure the validity and relevance of programmes.

1.5 The review team considered the provisions of the partnership agreement, validation documentation and course handbooks. These show that the University designed the courses and holds responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards. The College undertakes delivery according to the curricula and syllabuses validated by the University as shown in course and module handbooks. Although there is no mention of benchmark statements in the course or module handbooks, teaching staff meetings include discussion of learning outcomes and how to adapt module specifications to meet individual student needs.

1.6 The review team concludes that the College discharges its responsibilities effectively to ensure that programme design takes account of relevant subject benchmarks and qualification benchmarks. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A2 of the Quality Code is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter A3: The programme level

Findings

1.7 The College provides definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for its courses through course and module handbooks. These are available through the VLE. The publications are provided to the College by the University.

1.8 The review team looked at the information given to students, met with staff about the procedure for maintaining definitive information and asked students about the information they received. Definitive information comprises a course handbook and module handbooks for both courses. These are provided by the University. There is some customisation of the handbooks by the College with the approval of the University, for example the tutor details and booklists. The College disseminates definitive information in both hard copy and electronically. Students are introduced to these sources of information at induction. Module tutors discuss the achievement of learning outcomes in their sessions. Students confirmed that they received clearly structured and helpful definitive information both in hard copy and electronically.

1.9 The review team concludes that Expectation A3 of the Quality Code is met and that the College works with the University to make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for the courses. The associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter A4: Approval and review

Findings

1.10 The College processes for approval and review of courses are determined by the requirements of the partnership agreement with the University. The courses are validated and revalidated by the University. The College undertakes annual monitoring and review in accordance with University policy. These external processes assure the College that the programmes are valid and relevant.

1.11 The review team considered the partnership agreement with the University and programme approval and review documentation and arrangements. These show that the curriculum is designed and validated by the University, with revalidation every five years. The College submits an annual review and action plan, termed an Annual Evaluation of Course Report, to the University, which provides evidence of a thorough process of monitoring and review, incorporating student feedback. The review team discussed with College staff the arrangements for oversight of higher education, and obtained information on a range of internal processes that contribute to the maintenance of the validity and relevance of programmes. These include the Curriculum and Quality Committee, the Curriculum Performance Monitoring Panel which meets termly and meetings of Improvement Practitioners.

1.12 Overall, the review team concludes that the College has effective processes for the review of programmes. Together with the processes of the University, these meet Expectation A4 of the Quality Code. The associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter A5: Externality

Findings

1.13 The College has independent and external participation in the management of its academic standards through the monitoring and review processes operated by the University. These include membership of a Consortium for delivery of University-validated programmes, which provides an exchange of practice with external partners, moderation of assessment and University-appointed external examiners.

1.14 The review team tested the College's use of external expertise in quality processes through scrutiny of external examiner reports, moderation reports and annual evaluation of course reports. The review team discussed with College staff how they obtained external participation in quality processes. The main sources are the Consortium partnership meetings, which the Centre Manager attends, and the peer review process operated with Oldham College.

1.15 The review team were satisfied that effective arrangements are in place to use external expertise in the management of academic standards. However, this relies on the processes operated by the awarding body in conjunction with partner colleges and there is limited engagement with external expertise in the processes for which the College is responsible, such as awareness of the Quality Code. In meetings at the visit, the review team found that staff were not fully familiar with the Quality Code. Also, the College has not fully addressed the recommendation of the IQER to ensure that staff are more aware of QAA expectations. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure that higher education staff engage more fully with the Quality Code to inform the ongoing management and delivery of the courses (by January 2015).

1.16 Overall, the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation A5 of the Quality Code through its use of the external expertise of its awarding body. The associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.17 The College ensures that the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes through implementation and compliance with the requirements of its awarding body. The College operates the scheme of assessment set out in the approved course document and undertakes moderation of marking.

1.18 The College's arrangements meet the Expectation in *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes* of the Quality Code since the design and moderation of assessments is overseen by the awarding body, who appoint external examiners to report on the rigour of assessment practices.

1.19 The review team considered a range of documentation that demonstrated the processes and procedures for the assessment of students. The Assignment Moderation and Marking Handbook outlines the procedures for setting, marking and external assessment through the Consortium. Moderation reports provide evidence of College participation in moderation events with other colleges overseen by the awarding body. External examiners' reports provide confirmation that the processes of assessment and determination of awards are rigorous and fairly conducted.

1.20 The review team explored assessment matters with College staff and students. The College obtains confirmation that assessments are valid and reliable through the processes overseen by the University. The design of assessments is discussed with partners in annual programme meetings. The assessments and assessment criteria are published in course handbooks. Students are given clear assignment briefs and marking criteria and they particularly value the extensive formative feedback the College gives on assignments.

1.21 The review team concludes that the College has effective arrangements for the assessment of students and meets Expectation A6 of the Quality Code, through implementation of the assessment strategies and academic regulatory framework of the awarding body. The associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.22 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. All the Expectations for this judgement have been met with a low level of risk. Although the awarding body has final responsibility for setting academic standards, the College is aware of its responsibilities for maintaining standards.

1.23 Responsibility for the higher education provision is clearly defined and there are well established reporting processes within the College and with the University. The Centre Manager and Course Team operate efficiently to manage the provision. External examiners state that the courses are delivered at the appropriate level.

1.24 The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered by the College on behalf of its awarding body **meets** UK expectations. There is one recommendation regarding student representatives attending the Course Committee/Student Panel.

2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 Responsibility for the design and approval of courses rests with the University as the awarding body for all higher education provision currently being delivered by the College. The University manages this provision through their CPCET. The design and approval of programmes is conducted within the University's Quality Assurance Procedures for Taught Courses. While the College has minimal formal involvement in the design of programmes, staff are able to provide feedback and tailor assessment through discussion and negotiation with the Consortium. Validation is overseen within the University's formal committee structure. The two courses are located in the School of Education and Professional Development.

2.2 The review team tested this Expectation by meeting with College staff. It was also reviewed by examining validation and revalidation reports and meeting the University's staff member responsible for coordinating these processes among partner institutions.

2.3 The review team found that the arrangements for the design and approval of courses are carried out effectively, with the College and the University working well together. Within the College, management of the courses is overseen by the Curriculum and Quality Committee. The review team also found that although the College is not developing the courses, there is a close working relationship with the University and therefore this Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B2: Admissions

Findings

2.4 The University maintains responsibility for admissions to the two courses at the College. The regulations relating to admissions are contained within the University of Huddersfield Regulations for Awards Section D: The Admission of Students to Courses of Study. This policy is available online and includes admissions principles and procedures for admitting students with certified prior learning and experiential learning.

2.5 The review team tested this Expectation by meeting with staff and students and examining the Admissions Policy. It was also reviewed alongside publicity material made available to prospective students.

2.6 While the University holds responsibility for admissions, College staff also play a key role in the process. The Centre Manager is responsible for conducting all interviews with applicants and undertakes these in line with the policy contained in the Regulations for Awards. The awarding body requires all centre managers to attend training which relates to admissions and there is also a focus on this in the mandatory University-led training undertaken by staff teaching on the programmes. Students whom the review team met reported that entry requirements had been made clear to them and that they had not found any problems with the admissions process. Students are required to use the standard procedure should they wish to make a complaint relating to admissions.

2.7 Due to the clear University policies, the training provided for College staff involved in admissions and the positive experience of students, the review team concludes that Expectation B2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*

Findings

2.8 A Teaching and Learning Policy is in place in the College and this, along with the partnership agreement and validation documentation, forms the basis for teaching and learning arrangements within the College. The College and University have a range of mechanisms in place to ensure that teaching practices are regularly reviewed and enhanced.

2.9 All appointments for staff teaching on higher education programmes must be approved by the University at its School Board. The College is required by the University to complete an Annual Evaluation of Course Report. This considers the performance of the courses at modular level and reviews student feedback and identifies good practice. The College also has a Curriculum Performance Review system in place where teaching observations are considered as part of the process. The Professional Development Manager is responsible for identifying suitable training and support based on needs identified through annual appraisals, teaching observations and annual course monitoring. This process is well managed.

2.10 This Expectation was tested by meeting with staff, reviewing the Teaching and Learning Policy, and examining annual evaluation reports, staff curricula vitae and documentation relating to the Curriculum Performance Review process.

2.11 The review team found that robust arrangements existed for the management of teaching and learning within the College and that support arrangements are well developed. Detailed annual evaluation of course reports identify areas for improvement and good practice. The termly system of Curriculum Performance Review means that annual evaluations are supplemented with a considered process in the interim which enables the focus on enhancing teaching and learning to be maintained.

2.12 College staff are eligible to receive funding from the Consortium to study at a higher level and the College itself has funding available for teaching staff to undertake master's-level qualifications. The review team were provided with evidence of staff development activities which were wide ranging, including sessions on e-learning, quality assurance and student support. Development activities related specifically to higher education appeared to be more limited.

2.13 Student handbooks cover the approach to teaching and learning employed at a modular level and students reported that they found the methods employed both varied and engaging, with examples ranging from debates and the use of external speakers through to practical activities and critical thinking exercises.

2.14 The review team concludes that as a result of the clear strategy, strong oversight and supportive arrangements for staff development, Expectation B3 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement

Findings

2.15 A wide range of resources are made available to students to support their learning. This includes the VLE, the Centre, personal development planning, careers, counselling and disability support. While they are on placements, students also benefit from the support of a workplace mentor. Funding for resources is identified through the annual College budget round with needs identified through the annual staff appraisal and course evaluation processes.

2.16 This Expectation was reviewed by meeting with the Principal, staff and students as well as by examining induction materials, course handbooks and student feedback. The review team were also given a demonstration of the College VLE.

2.17 Students confirmed that resources and support are readily available and of a high quality. Induction is thorough and supported by a Study Skills Handbook. Students on the foundation degree also welcomed a preparatory task between years 1 and 2 of the programme which aided their transition from one year of study to the next.

2.18 Students are able to book a computer from home or on their mobile device which, given the part-time nature of the student cohort, helps to ensure journeys to campus are used efficiently. The VLE is well appointed with detailed materials available in an accessible format. Students view this platform as their main resource and find it highly useful.

2.19 The review team found that the College is highly responsive to procuring new materials, especially through the Centre, where students reported they are always able to access the texts they need. Therefore, while students are able to access resources at the University of Huddersfield, they rarely need to do so in practice. In addition to the highly valued support it provides directly to students, the review team also found that the Centre is instrumental in the development of good practice. This is put into operation through the delivery of Learning Circle sessions, participation in showcase events and Learning Resource Centre Open Days. The Centre responds promptly to student requests for resources. It also maintains an effective working relationship with teaching staff to ensure resources, for example key books and journals, are kept up to date. The review team therefore views as **good practice** the flexible and highly supportive approach by the Learning Resource Centre to enhance the learning experiences of higher education students.

2.20 Although many students are already in employment when they undertake their studies, employability is nonetheless embedded into both programmes. The PGCE in particular benefits from a considered approach whereby members of College staff from a cross-section of departments give guest lectures on what is involved in running their services. The review team saw this as an innovative approach to supporting the ongoing career prospects of students. This is further supplemented by attendance at a conference run by the University for students at all delivery centres. Students across both courses benefit from the significant work-based elements within the programme. The use of innovative teaching methods such as micro teaching sessions also support skills development and employability. The review team considers as **good practice** the comprehensive approach taken to enhancing the employability and career prospects of students.

2.21 Due to the clear process for the allocation of resources, proactive approach of service departments and wide-ranging positive feedback, the review team considers Expectation B4 to be met and the associated level of risk to be low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student engagement

Findings

2.22 The College has a range of mechanisms in place for gathering student feedback which are articulated in the Learner Voice Procedures. These are applicable to further and higher education students. Mechanisms include Course Committee Student Panel Meetings, module evaluations, end-of-year course reviews, the Principal's Forum for higher education students and the National Student Survey. In addition, the PGCE students meet with the University of Huddersfield Designated Academic Liaison Officer and provide feedback which informs the College Annual Evaluation Report.

2.23 This Expectation was scrutinised by meeting with staff, students and student representatives. The review team also viewed annual evaluation reports, the College's rolling log of issues and actions arising from Student Panel meetings and the minutes of Course Committee Student Panel Meetings. The review team also viewed the Learner Voice Procedures and University course evaluation survey results.

2.24 The review team found that arrangements for the involvement of students in quality assurance and enhancement activity are appropriate given the small scale of higher education provision at the College. Students spoke positively about arrangements for student representation and elected representatives reported that training was available. An open-door policy existed whereby they could raise issues with staff informally, for example with the Centre Manager. PGCE students played an active role in the Course Committee Student Panel Meetings. However, the review team found that students on the foundation degree were unable to take part in the meeting because it fell on days they were not attending campus. While arrangements were made for students to submit a written report, the review team viewed this as limiting the scale of engagement for foundation degree students in relation to quality assurance and enhancement, and the review team therefore **recommends** that the College enable all higher education student representatives to attend the Course Committee/Student Panel.

2.25 Students are able to view a rolling log which tracks issues raised through student feedback. This contributes to students being well informed about actions taken to deal with any issues raised and with developments taking place at the College. The College is also in the process of discussing the inclusion of a higher education student governor on its Board. This has the potential to contribute further towards students' understanding of action being taken in response to their feedback and the review team therefore **affirms** the inclusion of a higher education student representative as a member of the Governing Body.

2.26 There is no significant student involvement in validation and revalidation activity, for instance as panel members. The review team found, however, that students were content with the scale of their involvement and that the College was very responsive to any concerns they may have.

2.27 Given the range of feedback mechanisms for relatively small-scale provision, the culture of embracing student opinion and evidence of decisive action in response to student feedback, the review team considers Expectation B5 to be met and the associated level of risk to be 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

2.28 The University is responsible for designing assessment used in all delivery centres across the Consortium. The College is able to adapt elements of assessment, such as essay titles, although they do this in consultation with the University. Although the responsibilities checklist supplied to the review team indicated that the College has no responsibility for this Expectation, they are in fact directly involved in the marking of assessment.

2.29 This Expectation was tested by meeting with staff and students, reading course and module handbooks and examining the Assignment Marking and Moderating Booklet 2013-14.

2.30 Handbooks provide students with detailed information on learning outcomes, formative and summative assessment, word counts, academic misconduct and the process surrounding the submission of draft work. Students are permitted to submit drafts and are provided with detailed formative feedback, although the work is not graded.

2.31 There is clear guidance for staff involved in the marking of assignments. Students are provided with equally clear guidance which outlines both the mode of assessment and the time in the academic year at which the assessment will take place. Students praised the fact that they are able to view assessment across the whole academic year, for all modules, in one chart. This enables them to manage and plan their work throughout the year. Similarly, students spoke highly of this chart which enables them to view grading criteria for their assessment.

2.32 Students confirmed that feedback on assessed work is returned promptly but always before the next scheduled class, which is normally one week after the submission deadline. The review team therefore views as **good practice** the well organised assignment schedule, comprehensive formative feedback and rapid return of student assessments.

2.33 The review team concludes that due to the high involvement of the awarding body, robust guidance for staff, clear information to students and high degree of student satisfaction regarding assessment, Expectation B6 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External examining

Findings

2.34 The University has responsibility for appointing external examiners. In addition to the external examiner, the Consortium operates a system of internal moderation whereby delivery centres are organised into regional grouping. A University Coordinator is responsible for coordinating the process which is clearly outlined in the Consortium Handbook 2013-14.

2.35 The Expectation was tested by meeting with staff and students and viewing external examiner reports as well as reading the relevant sections of the Consortium Handbook 2013-14.

2.36 External examiner reports are detailed. However, they provide commentary across a number of centres and it is not always easy to distinguish which comments relate to which college. In an attempt to address this, external examiners are able to provide comments relating to particular colleges. This option is not always exercised in practice and the reports could be made clearer. Despite this, the College is proactive in addressing the contents of external examiner reports. The Centre Manager leads a discussion with staff as to which comments apply to the College and any associated actions are then subsumed into standard quality assurance procedures. The College also emphasises that a significant amount of College-specific verbal reporting takes place with the external examiner at examination boards.

2.37 Reports are made available to students through the VLE. However, students were unaware of this and did not recall having seen an external examiner report. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College ensure that external examiner reports are more effectively shared with students.

2.38 Because the University is primarily responsible for the external examiner system and the College is responding to reports effectively, the review team considers Expectation B7 to be met and the associated level of risk 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

2.39 The University is responsible for validating and revalidating courses under review. They also require the College to undertake an annual evaluation of each course on offer. These formal processes are supplemented by a further, more innovative, Consortium-led measure whereby another college within the Consortium undertake a peer review of trainee experience.

2.40 The review team explored this Expectation by meeting with staff, students and a University Designated Academic Liaison Officer. The review team also viewed peer review of trainee experience summary forms, completed annual evaluation of course reports and documentation relating to revalidation.

2.41 The processes for reviewing the currency, quality and validity of programmes on an ongoing basis are detailed and effective. Annual course evaluations are discussed by course teams with the Centre Manager and ultimately viewed by the Assistant Principal - Advanced and Principal before being sent to the University for consideration. Documentation relating to revalidation demonstrates that the College has responded to conditions and recommendations in a timely fashion and these are subsequently monitored through the annual course evaluations themselves.

2.42 The peer review of trainee experience system is beneficial in supporting the identification of good practice and evidence presented to the review team shows examples where the use of guest speakers, structure of the course and focus on continuing professional development have all been identified as strengths. Similarly, these reports draw out areas for improvement and enable the College to act on them.

2.43 Although there is room for greater involvement of students in review processes and in considering the outcomes of annual monitoring, based on the detailed nature of the documentation, combined with the innovative use of other colleges in the Consortium in a review capacity and the University's overriding responsibility in this area, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals

Findings

2.44 The University of Huddersfield Student Complaints Procedure is articulated in the Students' Handbook of Regulations Section 8. This is made available to staff and students online via the University website. The University Handbook for Collaborative Provision Section Q also details the expectations of the awarding body in relation to the management of student complaints within collaborative partners. In addition, the College has its own Complaints Procedure which is readily available to students on the suggestions, compliments and complaints section of the website. Information relating to complaints is also available within course handbooks.

2.45 The review team examined this Expectation by meeting with staff and students, considering the University Complaints Procedure and College Complaints Procedure, and reading information available to students on the website and in handbooks.

2.46 Although a system exists whereby students can raise both informal and formal complaints, ultimately with the University, this is not consistently communicated to students. Students reported to the review team that they were uncertain as to how they would go about making a complaint. The University of Huddersfield Student Complaints Procedure is clear that students should raise the issue with the collaborative partner first and may then progress it to the University. The diagram provided by the College does not show the interface with the University procedure and information relating to complaints on the College website.

2.47 The PGCE Teacher Training (Lifelong Learning) In-Service Course Handbook explains the informal element of the process and how to register a complaint about the course across the various delivery centres. Contact details for University staff are not up to date in the version of the handbook supplied and there is also no reference to the internal College procedure or how a student ought to distinguish between a complaint relating to College responsibilities or responsibilities of the University. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College ensure that the complaints procedures are made clearer for all students. Nevertheless, the review team concludes that Expectation B9 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others

Findings

2.48 Due to the work-based nature of the higher education programmes on offer at the College, a significant amount of interaction takes place with employers. The University rather than the College holds responsibility for developing the programmes and therefore the review team did not explore employer involvement in programme design and approval. The College provides students with a mentor for the work-based element of their programme and offers guidance and support to mentors on their role.

2.49 This Expectation was tested by meetings with staff, students, mentors and employers. The review team also viewed the Mentor Handbook, mentor observation reports, training materials for mentors and course handbooks.

2.50 Employers and mentors confirmed that the College provides them with clear information, in a timely fashion, about their responsibilities and the responsibilities of the students involved. Mentors are invited to a meeting at the College to brief them on their role, and where they are not able to attend, mandatory online training is in place. College staff undertake visits to meet with the mentor and students at the placements. These are formally recorded and involve a discussion with the mentor about the students' progress. Mentors are also involved directly in assessment, and undertake joint observations with College staff and negotiate the mark awarded to the student with the staff member following the observation.

2.51 Employers and mentors reported that there is well organised and extensive communication with the College. They also reported that they expected more formal opportunities to provide feedback. They suggested that they could enhance the provision by providing more feedback in areas such as qualification pathways for mature learners and innovative delivery models for awards. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College expand and formalise feedback mechanisms for employers and workplace mentors.

2.52 Students made it clear to the review team that they felt well supported by their mentors and that this made a positive contribution to their overall learning experience. Because of the clear guidance provided to mentors on their role and the formal recording of placement visits, the review team concludes that Expectation B10 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research degrees*

Findings

2.53 The College does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.54 In reaching its positive judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified and the review team noted that all the Expectations have been met.

2.55 Factors contributing to the positive judgement include: the College has taken steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities by the work of the Centre in enhancing the availability of resources, including texts and journals. The assessment process is well organised, especially the rapid return of student assessments. The approach to learning and career support enhances the employability of students. These factors are identified as good practice.

2.56 There are four recommendations concerning student representation, access to external examiner reports, making the complaints process clearer for all students, and obtaining feedback from employers and workplace mentors. There is one affirmation concerning a higher education student representative on the Governing Body.

2.57 The review team concludes that the College **meets** UK expectations in relation to the quality of student learning opportunities.

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 publishes promotional leaflets and information on its website; provides current students with information in the form of course, module and other handbooks both in hard copy and electronically; and provides mentor handbooks for employers. Under the terms of the partnership agreement, this information is either provided by, or subject to the approval of, the University.

3.2 The review team scrutinised the partnership agreement with the University and associated handbooks to verify the responsibilities for provision of information delegated to the College. These state that the University Link Officer is responsible for monitoring and approving the College's publicity and public information in both hard and soft copy, in relation to the University's provision, including regular checks of the partner institution's website. The College fulfils this responsibility through a sign-off procedure whereby the Centre Manager approves annual updates of promotional material in conjunction with the Marketing Team, prior to forwarding to the University. In relation to course and module handbooks, the College receives a framework document and is able to customise handbooks with details of tutors and booklists, particularly for the FdA in Learning Support.

3.3 Limited promotional material is accessible for prospective students and their employers through the website, and enquirers are advised to contact the Centre Manager for more information. Course and module handbooks and other useful information on study skills and assessment procedures are issued to students at induction. Students confirmed that they obtained well structured and accurate information both prior to enrolment and at induction. Assignment briefs and marking guidelines issued during their programme were detailed and helpful.

3.4 The College VLE is highly informative and an excellent resource on teaching, learning and assessment and College policies. Students indicated that they were made aware of academic regulations during induction and that information was available on the College website. However, a check by the review team found that the procedure for complaints was not specific to higher education programmes, and that students would have to access the awarding body website. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College develop and publish explicit guidance on the Complaints Procedure which is readily accessible to students by September 2014 (see recommendation under Expectation B9). Furthermore, although the recent external examiners' reports are available, students are not familiar with them, and the review team **recommends** that the College take a more proactive approach to sharing the reports with students (see recommendation under Expectation B7).

3.5 Overall, the review team concludes that the information provided is fit-for-purpose, accessible and trustworthy, and that the College procedures meet the Expectation in *Part C* of the Quality Code. The associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

3.6 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. Although the University is responsible for key information, the College works with the University to modify the documents to refer to special features of the College.

3.7 The information from application through to induction, course handbooks and career information meet UK expectations. There are two recommendations regarding sharing external examiner reports with students and the complaints procedures being made clearer for students.

3.8 The review team concludes that the quality of the information produced about the provision at the 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 The College operates a 'three-strand' approach to enhancement, the strands being curriculum and quality, resources and strategic. Areas for enhancement are identified through the annual course self-evaluation process and Quality Improvement Plans. Following this, identified actions are embedded into the College's annual business and budget planning process.

4.2 The review team tested this Expectation by meeting with the Principal, staff and students. They also reviewed the Self-Evaluation Document, College Rolling Log and annual evaluation of course reports.

4.3 The strategic approach is effective, especially given the scale of higher education provision within the College. The review team found evidence that resources are subject to enhancement in line with that strand of the strategy. Students reported that books are regularly purchased following their requests and that access is not a problem. New technological developments have enabled computers within the College to be booked by students remotely.

4.4 With regards to the Curriculum and Quality Strand, the review team heard that staff are engaged in customising assessment so it is relevant for students at the College. Students informed the review team that staff teaching the programme are very receptive to student views and that they analyse learning styles to tailor delivery to the entire cohort. Improvement Practitioners also play a vital role in enhancing curriculum and quality, especially through their participation in regular team meetings.

4.5 The Strategic Strand of the College approach focuses on the broader role of higher education within the College. This involves reflection on any potential growth in the programme range offered by the College but it also encompasses staff development and the identification of suitable training opportunities to ensure staff are best placed to deliver higher education.

4.6 The College possesses a culture of identifying and sharing good practice. This is done via its own Quality Improvement Plans but also the annual course self-evaluations which the University requires of the College. In addition, a series of Learning Circle events support the identification of good practice as do showcase opportunities and College Development Days. While some of these include further education, the College also benefits from network events led by the awarding body which enable delivery centres across the Consortium to share good practice.

4.7 Students are readily involved in identifying areas for improvement both informally and through Course Committee Student Panel Meetings, where foundation degree students submit a written report. Students are apprised of progress via the College Rolling Log which tracks these actions over a sustained period. The review team found satisfaction among students was high and that the majority of students were unable to suggest any improvements that could be made to their student experience.

4.8 While the review team found the strategic approach to be well embedded into College processes, it does not emanate from a formal policy document and not all staff were

aware of the three strands which constitute the approach. If they were, the review team believes this may support the identification of further good practice. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College make sure all higher education staff are aware of the College's strategic approach to enhancement.

4.9 Overall, the review team found that as a result of the clear strategic approach, demonstrable sharing of good practice and culture whereby student feedback is embraced, this Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.10 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. Senior staff were able to articulate the College's strategic approach to enhancement and provide examples of enhancement; the review team made a recommendation that higher education staff should be made more aware of this.

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

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

Findings

5.1 The College did not provide a separate commentary on the theme. The approach to student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement is contained at several points within the Self-Evaluation Document, in a statement on Learner Voice Procedures, and in a list of student feedback activities provided at the visit.

5.2 The College employs a range of mechanisms to support and promote student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement within the context of small numbers of part-time students, and the requirements of the awarding body. Students are involved in College activities to seek, listen to and act upon student views, and in awarding body processes that include online evaluation surveys and course committees.

5.3 Within the College, there is a strong focus on the 'Learner Voice' led from the top by the College Principal, and expressed in a policy document which details the roles and responsibilities of various categories of staff, and the activities to engage students. The review team found evidence of the student voice being heard through course reviews and module evaluation, and their contribution to quality assurance being valued in forums such as the Principal's focus groups and subject focus groups administered by the Quality Team. There is currently no formal student representation on College-level committees, although the College is working towards the inclusion of a higher education student representative on the Governing Body. The review team affirms this action (see Expectation B5).

5.4 Awarding body activities include online surveys, and meetings of students with the University Link Officer at a Course Committee incorporating a Student Panel. This committee meets twice per year to obtain student feedback, and produces a 'rolling log' of issues that is forwarded to the University's Course Committee for consideration. The review team established that foundation degree students had not been represented at the Course Committee/Student Panel meetings over two academic years due to the timing of the meetings. The Committee receives written feedback from students. However, the review team recommends that the College take steps to enable all groups of students to be represented at the Committee/Student Panel (see Expectation B5).

5.5 The review team found evidence that senior management, teaching staff, and heads of support services were aware of the learner voice strategy, and acknowledge the importance of student involvement in quality processes. Staff are committed to encouraging and responding to student feedback including having an 'open-door' policy and being receptive to feedback by informal and formal means. Teaching staff discuss the results of online evaluations in team meetings, and a commentary on student participation and the effectiveness of student engagement with quality processes is included in the annual course evaluation prepared for the awarding body.

5.6 The review team are able to confirm the finding of the previous QAA review: that high priority is given to the Learner Voice at the College and there are effective mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of higher education learners in canvassing student opinion.

5.7 The College effectively considers and responds to student feedback. The College has both formal and informal mechanisms for 'closing the feedback loop'. Formally, the College completes a rolling log of issues, actions and outcomes of the Course Committee/Student Panel Meetings. The rolling log is in place for the period of enrolment on the course and is an effective procedure for obtaining a timely response and communicating

the outcomes to students. In addition, the Centre Manager plays a central role in collecting and responding to student feedback, including providing informal feedback on the outcomes of online evaluations and other matters discussed at team meetings. Students confirmed that they were satisfied with their level of involvement in quality assurance processes and the actions that have been taken in light of their input.

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 degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning

A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'. See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

Expectations

Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

Flexible and distributed learning

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations. See also **distance learning**.

Framework

A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

Framework for higher education qualifications

A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland* (FHEQIS).

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject benchmark statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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