Higher Education Review of Rotherham College of Arts and Technology

June 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 Rotherham College of Arts and Technology. The review took place from 10 to 12 June 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Seth Crofts
- Mr Christopher McIntyre
- Miss Lucy Bannister (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Rotherham College of Arts and Technology 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 (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 4.

In reviewing Rotherham College of Arts and Technology 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.

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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/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Rotherham College of Arts and Technology

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Rotherham College of Arts and Technology.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **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 features of **good practice** at Rotherham College of Arts and Technology.

- The rigorous and well embedded programme development and approval processes which involve extensive engagement with a range of stakeholders (Expectations B1 and A4).
- The wide-ranging opportunities provided to academic staff to develop learning and teaching practices informed by the reflection and evaluation of professional practice (Expectation B3).
- The engagement of students as partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5 and Enhancement).
- The College's effective deliberative and management structures, which enable a higher-education-specific culture of enhancement (Enhancement).
- The high level of engagement with employers, professional stakeholders and with external reference points to inform college-wide enhancement initiatives (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The significant investment underway to provide appropriate learning resources for new and existing higher education provision (Expectation B4).
- The steps being taken to formalise the processes for managing work placements (Expectation B10).

Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The College has established a culture whereby students feel valued and encouraged to express their views through a range of effective student engagement mechanisms. The student voice is an integral part of the College's processes for critically evaluating its provision and developing enhancement initiatives. Staff and students work as mutual partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of the educational experience.

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

About Rotherham College of Arts and Technology

Rotherham College of Arts and Technology (the College) is a medium sized mixed-economy further education college with over 9,000 students. The College operates from three main sites in Rotherham with the majority of its higher education based at the Town Centre Campus. The College serves a socio-economically disadvantaged population characterised by lower than national average academic attainment and above national average unemployment. The College's mission is 'to develop skills for the future of our students and community by delivering outstanding education and training'.

At the time of the review the College had 312 higher education students of which 155 were full-time and 157 part-time. The higher education offer at the College comprises a range of foundation degrees, a Bachelor's Degree in Education, a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), and several Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs/HNDs). The main subject areas in which higher education is delivered are computing, education, childhood studies, engineering, and the visual and performing arts. These higher education programmes are offered through partnerships with three degree-awarding bodies: the University of Hull, Sheffield Hallam University, and the University of Huddersfield; and Higher National programmes are awarded by the awarding organisation Pearson. The College is in the process of transferring most of its validated provision to the University of Hull and is currently teaching out a number of programmes delivered through its other two awarding bodies. This strategic decision has been taken to allow the College to streamline its higher education provision and to focus its attention on further developing its strong partnership with the University of Hull.

Since its last QAA review, the College has undergone a number of significant changes. In 2011 there was a change of Principal, following which there was a reorganisation of the College structure resulting in the faculty and curriculum areas being replaced by a single tier departmental structure. Heads of departments have day-to-day operational responsibility for higher education programmes located within their respective departments. The Assistant Principal Post 19 Curriculum is now responsible for the strategic oversight and quality assurance of all higher education within the College. There is also now a more simplified deliberative committee structure in place with the Higher Education and Academic Standards and Strategy Group (HEASS Group), which consists of representation from relevant academic and support departments, taking overall responsibility for the management of higher education. In May 2013 the College was inspected by Ofsted and given its first 'good' rating in the 21 years since it split from local authority control in 1992.

Current challenges facing the College include the recruitment of viable student cohorts and the effective management of resources and facilities in light of recent sector-wide changes to funding.

The College's last review, which took place in 2010, identified two advisable and four desirable recommendations. The present review team found that the College had generally taken effective and timely action in response to the recommendations made in the previous review report. The previous review team recommended that the College review the adequacy of resources available across the provision. While the present review team found that significant investment had already been made to ensure appropriate learning resources are in place, the action is not yet fully complete. This is reflected in the team's affirmation of the action being taken by the College to address this matter (see Expectation B4).

Explanation of the findings about Rotherham College of Arts and Technology

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's awarding bodies and organisation are ultimately responsible for setting threshold academic standards and ensuring that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level in the FHEQ. There is a comprehensive College Quality Code which sets out the quality assurance arrangements for all higher education provision. This includes a well established internal process for programme approval which ensures that appropriate consideration is given to the FHEQ during the developmental stages of programme proposals, prior to validation by the awarding body. The College also adheres to the quality assurance processes of its awarding partners for the approval of new awards. Pearson provides programme specifications for Higher National programmes and ensures that learning outcomes reflect the appropriate level of the qualification. Staff use these specifications as a reference point in the learning, teaching and assessment of programmes at the appropriate level.

1.2   The team tested the College's application of the FHEQ by reviewing documentary evidence of programme approval events, a sample of programme specifications, module and programme handbooks, and external examiner reports. The team also met with teaching staff to test their awareness and understanding of the FHEQ as a reference point in maintaining academic standards. During meetings with students the team explored the use of academic levels within learning and teaching activities.

1.3   The College Quality Code provides a readily-accessible framework of coherent guidance for all aspects of the management of academic standards within the College. The team found that the College's robust programme approval process ensures that appropriate consideration is given to the academic level of the qualification before proposals are put forward for external validation. Programme specifications and handbooks, which are either provided by the relevant awarding body for validated programmes, or developed internally for Higher National programmes, make appropriate reference to the level of study involved. External examiner reports also confirm that programmes align to the appropriate academic level.

1.4   Staff make effective use of College guidance on the development of assessment strategies to ensure assessment tasks are designed at the appropriate level and address the relevant learning outcomes. Teaching staff whom the team met also demonstrated a sound understanding of the FHEQ and its importance in maintaining academic standards. Students have a good understanding of the requirements of different academic levels and how these link to the process of assessment.

1.5   The team concludes that qualifications are allocated to the appropriate level in the FHEQ by the relevant awarding body or awarding organisation, and the College ensures delivery of the award at the correct level through close adherence to programme specifications and assessment strategies. Therefore, Expectation A1 is **met** and the level of risk 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

1.6   The processes for ensuring that programmes take account of the subject and qualification level are the same as those described in paragraph 1.1. The College does not have any direct accreditation with professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

1.7   The review team tested Expectation A2 by scrutinising records of internal and external programme approval events, programme monitoring reports, programme specifications and external examiner reports. The team also held meetings with teaching staff involved in the development and delivery of programmes.

1.8   Programme approval processes operated by the College give appropriate consideration to external reference points, including subject and qualification benchmark statements, during the formulation of new curriculum proposals. Initial consultations also involve employers to ensure the subject level is addressed in a meaningful way which is consistent with the needs of local employers. Awarding body approval events check on the use of external reference points during the programme design stage.

1.9   For university provision, programme specifications make explicit reference to relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements. Staff use specifications, including those for Higher National programmes, as a reference point in the teaching and assessment of awards. External examiner reports also confirm the application of external reference points in the maintenance of academic standards.

1.10   The College uses assessment moderation, teaching observations and feedback from external examiners to assure its self that the delivery of programmes is informed by appropriate benchmark statements. Staff who met the team also demonstrated a thorough understanding of the subject and qualification level, and the use of relevant benchmark statements in the delivery of both individual modules and whole programmes.

1.11   Overall, the review team concludes that the College, through the operation of its internal programme approval process and adherence to awarding partners' processes, **meets** Expectation A2, and the 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

1.12   For university programmes, the College uses standard templates set by the relevant awarding body to produce programme specifications which provide information about the aims and expected learner achievements that apply to individual programmes of study. Definitive information about the programme and module-level learning outcomes is also available through programme handbooks and, more recently, through individual module handbooks. These documents are subject to internal review and final approval by the relevant awarding body to ensure information is accurate and complete.

1.13   For Higher National programmes, the College employs standardised information produced by the awarding organisation to develop contextualised programme specifications. As for university programmes, definitive information is also made available through college-devised programme and module handbooks; these incorporate the aims and intended learning outcomes set by Pearson.

1.14   To establish how effectively the College manages the production and communication of programme-level information, the review team scrutinised a wide range of programme specifications, assignment briefs and handbooks. The team also held a number of meetings with staff and students.

1.15   Comprehensive information is made available to students on the aims, outcomes and expected achievements for their programme of study. For Higher National programmes, the College pays particular attention to the local dimension by including, for example, information on the optional units on offer. Students whom the team met confirmed that information about their programme of study is clear, readily accessible and helpfully contextualised by staff during teaching sessions. Assignment briefs also ensure that there is a clear link between assessment and programme learning outcomes; these provide detailed guidance for students and set out clear criteria for expected learner achievements.

1.16   The team concludes that the College makes available definitive programme-level information for all its higher education programmes. Therefore, Expectation A3 is **met** and the level of risk 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

1.17 The College's awarding partners set out requirements for the approval and periodic review of individual awards. For university programmes, the College is required to participate in formal approval and re-approval events on a fixed period, coordinated by the relevant awarding body. Similarly, Pearson is responsible for the approval and review of Higher National awards. The College applied to Pearson to first become an approved centre following which an application form is completed for individual qualification approvals.

1.18 The College takes ownership of its higher education provision and, prior to approaching an awarding body or organisation for approval, undertakes its own programme approval procedure. This is a comprehensive two-stage process, articulated in the College Quality Code, in which staff are expected to complete standard pro-forma to demonstrate the case for a particular programme. The first stage involves development consent by the HEASS Group and then a College Approval Panel convenes to consider whether full approval should be granted. This is intended to ensure consistency in how and why the College develops programmes. The detailed approval documentation includes checks on learning outcomes, alignment to external reference points, fit with the awarding body expectations, and the marketability of the programme in order to ensure a good student experience.

1.19 The review team tested the effectiveness of these processes by undertaking a review of awarding body agreements, completed programme approval forms, and records of College and awarding partner approval events. The team also met with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

1.20 The process of approval and review is driven by comprehensive guidelines contained within the specific provisions set out in collaborative partnership agreements. The available evidence confirms that the College adheres to the processes of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation in meeting Expectation A4. Where approval events result in recommendations or actions, then these are addressed by the College within the time constraints specified.

1.21 External approval is complimented by the College's own thorough programme approval procedure, which applies to both university and Higher National programmes. External engagement in these processes is systematically managed to ensure programmes at the College meet the needs of the local community and regional development priorities. Staff who met the team were fully conversant with approval processes and commented on their usefulness in assuring the College of its capacity to deliver a particular programme (Expectation B1).

1.22 Overall the review team concludes that the College effectively fulfils its responsibilities to its awarding partners for programme approval and periodic review. Furthermore, the College's own approach to approval ensures the validity and relevance of programmes. Expectation A4 is therefore **met** and the associated level of risk 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

1.23   There are established processes in place to ensure that extensive consultation with external stakeholders is deployed to develop programmes that are current and that support employability and economic regeneration. When applying for development consent for a particular programme, standard proforma expects a statement from an external stakeholder to support the viability of the intended provision. The awarding bodies' processes also dictate that an external member must be on the panel during approval events for collaborative provision. There are also clearly documented processes in place for the involvement of external examiners in the maintenance of threshold academic standards; these are set out in the awarding bodies' policies and the College Quality Code.

1.24   The review team tested the College's approach to achieving external participation in this area through the scrutiny of a range of documentation including collaborative partnership agreements, minutes of approval events, programme monitoring reports and external examiner reports. The team also met with staff and students that had been involved in these processes.

1.25   The College effectively obtains external input into the approval, development and ongoing review of programmes. The appointment of panel members for the approval of University programmes is the responsibility of, and managed by, the relevant awarding body. College Approval Panels often include an external representative, for example, a local employer or a staff member from a College that is already delivering the programme under consideration. The team found that an external perspective also forms part of the College's discussions in relation to appropriate programme content and levels of student achievement. For example, employers are consulted during programme design to inform the selection of optional units for Higher National programmes.

1.26   External examiners provide a positive account of their involvement with the College and the level of responsiveness to any issues raised. Actions arising from external examiner reports are addressed appropriately and inform programme, department and College self-evaluation processes. The systematic approach applied to responding to external examiner comments ensures effective peer review in relation to the management of threshold academic standards.

1.27   The review team concludes that the involvement of individuals external to the College ensures independence and objectivity in the management of threshold academic standards. Therefore, Expectation A5 is **met** and the 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

1.28   The College follows its awarding bodies' processes for the design, approval and marking of assessment. These are laid out in the relevant awarding body's collaborative handbook or quality assurance policies, and accompanied by the College's own guidance on assessment regulations described in the College Quality Code. For university programmes, the assessment strategies for individual programmes are predetermined by the awarding bodies. Assignment briefs are designed by programme teams in collaboration with corresponding staff at the awarding body, and approved before the academic year commences. The College Quality Code also provides clear guidance on the marking, second marking and moderation of assessed work with reference to the relevant awarding body's requirements.

1.29   The intended learning outcomes for Higher National provision are provided through generic Pearson programme specifications. The College Quality Code sets out principles that shape the design of assessment strategies for modules. The College is responsible for designing contextualised assessment tasks based on the learning outcomes set by the awarding organisation. Assignment briefs and marked work are subject to prescribed internal verification processes. External verification is undertaken by the external examiner during annual monitoring visits to the College.

1.30   To test Expectation A6, the team reviewed programme and module handbooks, programme specifications, assignment briefs, minutes from exam boards and external examiner reports. The team met with a range of staff and students to explore the operation of assessment in practice.

1.31   The College ensures that assessment is robust and valid through the design of tasks which are explicitly linked to the programme and module learning outcomes set out in the awarding partners' specifications. The team reviewed a sample of assignment briefs and is satisfied that assessment tasks give appropriate consideration to the academic level of study. Internal verification and moderation processes are operated effectively to maintain the security of academic standards. Teaching staff whom the team were clear about their responsibilities for managing assessment and their use of the College Quality Code as an internal reference point. Students who met the team confirmed that they are clear about what is expected of them to achieve their programme. In particular, Higher National students commented on the useful way in which grading criteria are contextualised to make clear the expectations for higher grades.

1.32   External examiner reports confirm that assessment processes for the awards delivered at the College are conducted in a fair and consistent matter. Some reports also comment positively on the comparability of standards between College and University provision. External examiners have an effective engagement with the College and work closely with academic staff to support the ongoing development of assessment practice.

1.33   Overall, the team concludes that there is reliable evidence to demonstrate that assessment is conducted with rigour and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation A6 is **met** and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.34   In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All expectations in this judgement area have been met with the associated level of risk low in each case. The College's main responsibilities for maintaining threshold academic standards are for adhering to the policies and processes set by its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. However, there is clear evidence that the College takes ownership for the delivery of its higher education and has in place a set of comprehensive processes to support the maintenance of academic standards.

1.35   In summary, all Expectations have been met and there are no recommendations in this area. The review team recognises the positive impact of the College's well embedded internal programme approval process on Expectation A4 and this is formally acknowledged under Expectation B1. The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation **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 processes for programme development and approval are described in paragraphs 1.17 and 1.18. The design of programmes is ultimately the responsibility of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. However, the College gives due consideration to the content and structure of proposed programmes during the developmental consent stage of its own approval process. For Higher National programmes, the College's responsibility for programme design is limited to the selection of optional units.

2.2   The review team examined the way in which policies and procedures for Expectation B1 work in practice through a review of completed programme approval pro-forma; reports from approval and validation events; and responses to conditions arising from approval events. The team also met with staff and students involved in programme development and approval.

2.3   Comprehensive processes are in place for programme design and approval. These are rigorously adhered to by staff, ensuring that full consideration is given to all aspects of programme approval in advance of submission to validating authorities, and that any conditions arising from programme validation events are addressed promptly. The two-stage process assures the College that new programmes fit within its strategic vision and that the necessary resources either are, or can be, put in place prior to recruitment. College Approval Panels provide rigorous peer review and engage a diverse range of stakeholders such as students, governors and employer representatives, who make specific recommendations to ensure that programmes are developed in the context of current sector needs. For Higher National programmes, employers are consulted on the selection of optional units to ensure students develop knowledge and skills which enhance their employability. The College reviews the approval process annually through the work of the HEASS Group and any changes are reflected in an updated process.

2.4   Staff whom the team met were fully aware of the guidance embedded in the College Quality Code and found the process to be thorough and objective. Staff also spoke positively of the continuous dialogue with employers during the development of new provision. The team met with a number of students who had been a part of College Approval Panels and saw their involvement as a way in which they could actively contribute to the development of programmes and testified to the responsiveness of the College in listening to student views. The team regards the rigorous and well embedded programme development and approval processes which involve extensive engagement with a range of stakeholders to be **good practice**.

2.5   Overall, the team concludes that the College's processes for programme design and approval are an essential part of its internal quality assurance system which involves critical self-assessment by a range of stakeholders. The team therefore concludes that Expectation B1 is **met** and the level of risk 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

2.6 The College Quality Code outlines in detail the processes for managing admissions which include: a procedure for admissions decisions; terms of reference for admissions staff; a code of practice on applying equal opportunities; and a complaints procedure for applicants. The College has devolved responsibility for admitting students to university programmes for all three awarding bodies. For Higher National programmes, students are recruited according to the general criteria prescribed by the awarding organisation. All students apply either via UCAS or directly to the College and applications are managed by dedicated admissions staff. Information about the College's provision and entry requirements for individual programmes is made available online and through a higher education prospectus.

2.7 The team tested Expectation B2 through a review of the procedures used to admit students and the information available to prospective applicants. The team also met with staff and students to understand their experience of the admissions process.

2.8 The College provides clear and accessible information on its higher education provision. The Student Services Team provides all applicants with personalised support and liaises with curriculum staff to handle requests for programme-specific information. Most students on higher education programmes have progressed internally from lower level study. Students whom the team met commented on the helpfulness of teaching staff in providing informal advice and guidance on their application. Students with additional learning needs are identified at an early stage of the application process and assisted in accessing financial and pastoral support.

2.9 The team is satisfied that assessment decisions are taken by competent staff and conducted in accordance with clear, fair and explicit procedures. Staff who met the team had a good understanding of their responsibilities in admitting students and confirmed their adherence to the College Quality Code. All applicants are required to attend an interview with the Curriculum Leader who acts as an Admissions Tutor, and carries out an objective assessment of whether an applicant satisfies entry requirements. For applicants with non-traditional qualifications, who may not meet standard entry criteria, the College consults with staff from the relevant awarding body before making a final decision.

2.10 The review team concludes that the College has in place admissions procedures which meet Expectation B2 in full, and that these procedures are systematically and consistently implemented across all its higher education programmes. Therefore, Expectation B2 is **met** and the level of risk associated 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

2.11	The College's approach to meeting Expectation B3 is articulated in its Teaching and Learning Strategy and Quality Improvement Strategy. However, the broad aims identified within these college-wide strategies are generic to both further and higher education, with a clear focus on achieving an Ofsted 'outstanding' rating. The HEASS Group is responsible for the systematic review of higher education, and monitors progress with programme, departmental and college-level action plans that address the outcomes of self-evaluation processes.

2.12	Academic staff involved in the delivery of university programmes are approved by the relevant awarding body. Pre-approval is not required for Higher National programmes but external examiners review the CVs of staff delivering on HNCs/HNDs during their annual visits. The College Quality Code sets out clear procedures for the observation of teaching and learning with a minimum expectation of one observation per academic year. The college-wide process requires the grading of all observations but observers are also expected to give consideration to criteria specific to higher education.

2.13	The College has in place an overarching Training and Development Policy which facilitates staff access to training activities, including support for qualifications requiring a long period of study. Staff are also expected to attend planned internal and external development activities to support their continuing professional development.

2.14	The team tested Expectation B3 through a review of the College's strategies and policies concerned with learning and teaching, College self-evaluation documents (SEDs), annual programme monitoring reports and minutes of relevant meetings. The team also met with a range of staff and students to understand teaching practices and the provision of learning opportunities.

2.15	The HEASS Group, through taking a holistic view of College higher education, is effective in assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. Minutes of meetings demonstrate that a high level of attention is given to the monitoring and review of programmes and departments. Membership of the Group includes staff from support functions such as student services, marketing, and learning resources to ensure a coordinated approach is taken to making improvements in the delivery of higher education. Student views inform the work of the Group through the results of surveys, including the National Student Survey (NSS), and feedback from higher education student representative meetings. The Group also acts as an effective vehicle for the dissemination of good practice across all programmes, for example through the collective review of actions arising from external examiner reports.

2.16	Although written strategies for learning and teaching may place a greater emphasis on further education, staff who met the team demonstrated a clear understanding of the differentiation between lower and higher levels of study. Learning is facilitated by competent and enthusiastic teaching staff who work in partnership with students to create an engaged learning environment. Staff draw on feedback from students, external examiners, awarding

partners and employers to reflect on their practice to enhance teaching practices. Due to the vocational nature of higher education on offer at the College many teaching staff are also practitioners and this ensures currency in the delivery of the curriculum.

2.17   The College is committed to supporting the development of its staff both through encouragement to attend external awarding body events and through internal training activities intended to facilitate a shared understanding of the College's approach to learning and teaching. College workshops often involve external specialists, such as representatives from awarding bodies, other local colleges and employers, providing a forum for sharing good practice more widely. Training events support staff in all aspects of their practice, and range from the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) to the development of pedagogical skills.

2.18   All new staff are provided with a comprehensive induction to support their transition to the College, and if relevant to teaching in higher education. Mentoring support is also available through both the programme teams and the Quality Improvement Practitioner Team. Teaching observations are used to encourage staff to further reflect and improve on their practice, giving appropriate attention to the knowledge and skills specific to teaching at higher levels. The College is further developing its observation process to develop a method and pro-forma specifically for higher education. Staff whom team met with spoke positively of the developmental support available from the College and the collegiate way in which programme teams work together. Students whom the team met regarded their tutors as highly knowledgeable, committed and experienced practitioners who make a positive contribution to their learning experience. The team concludes that the wide-ranging opportunities provided to academic staff to develop learning and teaching practices informed by the reflection and evaluation of professional practice is **good practice**.

2.19   The College provides a VLE and uses this as a tool for facilitating effective learning. Information uploaded to the VLE includes handbooks, assessment briefs and general College information. Minimum standards for the content to be uploaded by programme teams ensure consistency across all higher education provision, and this is regularly audited by the Head of Learning Centres. Students who met the team confirmed that they find the VLE a useful reference source and that information is clear and easily accessible. The College has recently employed a Web Developer to continue to improve the VLE interface and to provide a more interactive experience for students. Developments to the VLE are discussed and monitored through the Systems Enhancement Group and informed by student feedback.

2.20   Overall, the review team concludes that the College has an effective approach to maintaining and enhancing appropriate learning opportunities. The varied ways in which staff are supported to develop their teaching practices is regarded by the review team as a particular strength of the College. Expectation B3 is **met** and the level of risk 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

2.21   The Higher Education Strategy makes clear the College's commitment to raising aspirations and supporting students in achieving higher level qualifications. Higher education students are provided with an induction at the start of their period of study. The College uses Personal Development Plans (PDPs) and Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) to monitor individual student progress; the recording of which is facilitated by software (ProMonitor). Careers advice and guidance is provided through one-to-one sessions delivered by the Learning Centres. The Senior Management Team is responsible for the deployment of resources across the College. The HEASS Group monitors and evaluates the availability of appropriate learning resources and is informed by resource needs identified through programme and department reviews.

2.22   The team evaluated the College's approach to enabling student development and achievement through a review of minutes of relevant meetings and through discussions with staff and students.

2.23   Students are effectively supported to achieve their learning outcomes and to develop more broadly through a range of mechanisms. Induction meets the needs of higher education students and provides an opportunity to integrate into the College community. Students whom the team met found induction helpful and also commented on the inclusion of activities that are specific to higher education, such as referencing techniques and the use of higher level learning resources.

2.24   Individual students are provided with targeted personal support through one-to-one and group tutorials. The frequency and nature of tutorial provision varies across programmes but this allows the College to adapt its approach to the needs of particular learners. Some students who met the team had not had experience of the PDP process, but most students found tutorials useful in supporting their academic progression. In particular, Higher National students value the support provided by tutors in encouraging them to achieve higher grades through comprehensive formative feedback. Students whom the team met valued the willingness and accessibility of staff in supporting them to develop their personal and professional potential.

2.25   The previous review team recommended that the College review the adequacy of resources available across the provision. In response to this, the College has made a number of improvements including: an enhanced IT infrastructure to improve wireless access; a dedicated area for higher education students in College Learning Centres; refurbished learning space; and the purchase of specialist resources. However, students whom the team met still felt that further improvements, particularly to specialist resources, were required to ensure that the quality and quantity of equipment meets the requirements of individual programmes. The College has identified this as an area for ongoing improvement and further investment, carefully managed by the Senior Management Team, is underway to ensure appropriate resources are in place to support the student experience. At the time of the review, the College had purchased, and was in the process of refurbishing, a new building to provide a distinct social space for higher education students. The team **affirms** the significant investment underway to provide appropriate learning resources for new and existing higher education provision.

2.26   To conclude, the review team is satisfied that the College implements an effective approach to enabling the development and achievement of students. Expectation B4 is **met** and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student engagement*

Findings

2.27   The College's Student Engagement Strategy sets out its approach to creating an environment in which students are encouraged to take up opportunities to shape their own educational experience. The varied mechanisms by which student engagement is achieved are described in the Learner Voice Model. The structures for engaging all students include a student representative system; attendance at College meetings; student consultation events; student feedback surveys; and inclusion in College Approval Panels and SED Validation Panels.

2.28   The team tested the way in which Expectation B5 is met in practice through a review of minutes of meetings attended by students, programme monitoring reports, and records of programme approval and SED validation events. The team also met with a range of staff and students.

2.29   There are clear and effective systems in place to engage higher education students at all levels of the organisation. Student representatives provide a channel through which fellow students are able to express their views. Representatives are provided with informal but comprehensive support to fulfil their role and are also encouraged to attend external training events. The College has plans to provide a more formal coaching programme for its representatives in the next academic year. Issues arising from higher education student representative meetings are taken forward to the HEASS Group and responded to in an appropriate manner. The College is further enhancing student engagement through the implementation of the Student Experience Enhancement Group which is intended to provide a cross-college forum for raising issues that affect the wider learning experience.

2.30   Students are actively engaged in quality assurance processes at the College. College Approval Panels make decisions about whether or not a new programme should be offered by the College and always aim to include a student panel member. SEDs evaluate the quality of provision and are informed by student feedback through the results of module and programme reviews, and external surveys such as the NSS and Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE). SEDs and the action plans generated to address the issues identified are discussed and approved through validation panels. Membership of panels includes students to ensure that improvements made within the College are informed by the student voice. Students whom the team who had been involved in formal quality assurance processes, such as panel events, reflected very positively on their experiences. There is also an opportunity for students to become involved in decision-making at the most senior level by acting as a Student Governor. Some are also involved in 'carousel' events where individual students are able to meet with Governors and feedback their views. The team identifies the engagement of students as partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience as **good practice**.

2.31   The College employs a range of feedback mechanisms by which students are made aware of the action taken in response to issues raised. The College considers this to be important in encouraging further engagement and a shared sense of ownership of the educational experience. Improvements to the student experience are recognised through poster campaigns, discussions at student representative meetings and through the dedicated student voice area on the VLE. Students who met the team confirmed that the College was responsive to their feedback and always willing to make improvements when

issues had been raised. Examples of action taken in response to student feedback include: extended opening hours for Learning Centres; the development of the VLE which students have actively been consulted on; standardised module evaluation forms; and the introduction of a virtual higher education social space.

2.32 To summarise, the opportunities for engagement are effective, varied and facilitate the emergence of a distinct higher education student voice. Therefore, Expectation B5 is **met** and the level of risk 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

2.33   The College's responsibilities and the processes it follows for managing assessment are described in paragraphs 1.28 and 1.29. There are clear and documented regulations in place, prescribed in the College Quality Code, covering assessment conduct, the late submission of work, Exam Board conduct, the accreditation of prior learning and other assessment issues such as second marking and the provision of feedback. These processes are generally aligned to those of the awarding bodies and organisation, but the College Quality Code makes clear that, where there are discrepancies, the awarding partners' processes take precedence. Information on assessment is provided to students through programme and module handbooks, and detailed assignment briefs. The policies and procedures for the assessment of students are in alignment with Expectation B6.

2.34   The review team tested the application of these policies and processes by reviewing a range of documents including the College Quality Code, samples of assessment information provided to students, assessment regulations and minutes of Exam Boards. The team also met with staff and students to understand their experiences of assessment.

2.35   Clear and comprehensive information, support and guidance is provided to staff and students in relation to assessment. Detailed information in handbooks and assignment briefs makes clear to students the methods by which intended learning outcomes are assessed. Students whom the team met confirmed that they are provided with easily comprehendible written and verbal information on assessment, and that tasks provide appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes. Marked work is returned within a reasonable timescale, generally within three weeks. Students who met the team commented positively on the promptness and quality of both formative and summative feedback. The VLE is increasingly being used for blended assessments providing students with more opportunities for formative feedback. As the College's higher education provision continues to expand, the College acknowledges the need to review the role of the academic tutor in maintaining assessment records.

2.36   External examiner reports confirm that College assessment practices are in line with Expectation B6. Where assessment-related issues have been raised, such as the overburdening of students with multiple assessments at the same time, then these have been addressed promptly by programme teams.

2.37   There are clear processes in place for the operation of Exam Boards, but there have been some inconsistencies in the recording and communication of assessment outcomes for Higher National programmes. This issue has been addressed by supporting staff in adhering to the guidance set out in the College Quality Code. Standard spreadsheets are now used to facilitate the consistent recording of data and all boards are overseen by the Assistant Principal Post 19 Curriculum.

2.38   The review team is satisfied that assessment practices provide students with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the achievement of intended learning outcomes. The team concludes that Expectation B6 is **met** and the 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

2.39   External examiners are appointed by the relevant awarding body or organisation, with some input from the College for university provision. The College Quality Code outlines in full the processes for external examining which include: the induction process; the involvement of external examiners in assessment; and the protocol for reviewing, disseminating and responding to external examiners reports. For some programmes, external examiner reports do not distinguish the College's provision from other collaborative provision delivered through the same awarding body. In these instances it is the responsibility of the awarding body to ensure actions raised by external examiner are responded to appropriately by delivery organisations. External examiner reports are received by quality improvement staff and initially discussed with heads of departments. Actions to be taken in response to external examiner reports are then discussed in programme team meetings and fed into the annual programme monitoring reports. A collective view of external examiner reports is taken at department and College level through SEDs.

2.40   The review team tested the application of these College procedures by scrutinising a range of external examiner reports and associated action plans, departmental and College SEDs, minutes of exam boards and programme team meetings, and annual monitoring reports. The team met with staff and students to understand their engagement with external examiners.

2.41   External examiners are appropriately supported to undertake their role. Although it is the responsibility of awarding bodies to provide an induction, the College ensures external examiners are orientated to the local environment. Examiners confirm in their reports that they are provided with sufficient evidence, time and support to undertake their role.

2.42   Clear and well managed processes are in place for considering and responding to external examiner reports. The format of reports varies between the different types of provision but the College ensures that relevant actions are addressed. For university programmes, the awarding body is formally responsible for formulating an action plan to address the issues identified. However, College staff actively engage in discussions with link tutors to ensure, where necessary, the College also responds in an appropriate way.

2.43   Annual programme monitoring reports incorporate actions arising from external examiner reports into the review of the programme and action planning for the next academic year. The team reviewed a comprehensive sample of external examiner reports, including for subsequent years of the same programmes; these confirm that actions from previous reports are addressed. SEDs include a specific section in which staff are expected to draw on the feedback from external examiner reports at department and College level. The extent to which departmental SEDs explicitly comment on the collective strengths and areas for improvement identified by external examiners is variable. However, staff whom the team met provided assurance that discussions which facilitate the self-evaluation process are equally important, and allow the College to take a holistic view of feedback which may have been obtained through channels other than the external examiner reports.

2.44   Staff share a conducive working relationship with external examiners through their involvement in the sampling of assessed work, attendance at exam boards (in accordance with the awarding partner's requirements) and the provision of constructive feedback. For Higher National programmes, staff find the external examiner particularly helpful in

developing their understanding of grading criteria. Students who met the team also indicated a good awareness of the role of the external examiner in assuring the comparability of academic standards to other organisations delivering the same award. With the exception of the University of Huddersfield (due to the awarding body's protocol), all external examiner reports are made available to students and other stakeholders through the College's public website. Students studying on University of Huddersfield programmes can access external examiner reports on request.

2.45   In summary, the College, through its partnerships with its awarding bodies and organisation, makes effective use of the independent feedback provided by external examiners in the quality assurance of its provision. Therefore, Expectation B7 is **met** and the associated level of risk is 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

2.46   The College follows both the awarding partners' processes and its own internal process for programme monitoring and review. The College Quality Code expects heads of departments to take responsibility for organising the review of programmes in accordance with a prescribed timetable. The College Quality Code emphasises the need for critical reflection and summarises the evidence base to be employed during the review process.

2.47   Students are invited to complete a college-devised evaluation survey at the end of each module, and a collective view of feedback is taken by the Curriculum Leader and incorporated into an annual monitoring report. For university programmes, the relevant awarding body provides a standard template for annual programme monitoring which must be completed and returned to the university for sign-off. For Higher National programmes, the College has devised its own report template accompanied by a comprehensive set of instructions for staff. SEDs are then produced at department and College level, which take an overview of higher education programmes within a department and across the whole College respectively. College Validation Panels, whose membership includes a student, a College Governor and an external representative, convene to discuss, review and approve SEDs.

2.48   The review team tested the effectiveness of how these processes work in practice by looking at a sample of annual programme monitoring reports, departmental SEDs, College SEDs, records of SED Validation Panels and minutes of relevant meetings. The review team also discussed the operation of the monitoring and review process with staff and students.

2.49   The team found that annual programme monitoring reports and SEDs are comprehensive and evaluative in nature drawing on a wide evidence base, including student achievement and progression data, student feedback and comments from external examiners. The College has recently invested in a new system to support the development of more accessible performance data for programme review and monitoring. SEDs are mapped to the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and ensure a holistic view is taken of the student learning experience, and the development of learning and teaching within the College. Progress against action plans arising from the review process is continually monitored at programme and departmental meetings, and at a strategic level by the HEASS Group. Governors are also in receipt of the higher education SED which summarises all provision within the College and facilitates the enhancement of learning opportunities. Staff whom the team met confirmed that there is also ongoing informal student and staff evaluation at all levels that feeds into the higher-education-specific quality cycle enabling a differentiated consideration from further education.

2.50   Records of Validation Panels, which consider SEDs, evidence the importance placed by the College on embedding a culture of critical self-reflection and continuous improvement. Validation panels test the findings of SEDs through challenging questions to teaching staff involved in the delivery of programmes. Recommendations arising from panel meetings are used to further refine SEDs under the direction of the HEASS Group.

2.51   The College also has an annual Course Enhancement process which runs in parallel to other monitoring systems. This involves an in-depth annual review of an identified programme, for example, one where the success rate is lower than comparable provision.

This provides a high level of attention to a particular area of provision to facilitate more significant interventions in the delivery of the programme or shed the spotlight on good practice worthy of wider dissemination.

2.52   Student views are an integral part of College review processes from the incorporation of their feedback into annual programme monitoring reports and SEDs, to their attendance at committee and panel meetings where action plans are developed and monitored. Students who met the team confirmed their engagement in the review and monitoring process and took the view that the College met their feedback with a positive and responsive attitude. Staff whom the team met also emphasised the importance of collating student feedback, through both formal and informal mechanisms, to inform the improvements made to the delivery of programmes.

2.53   In summary, the programme monitoring and review processes are effective and allow the College to assure itself that appropriate learning opportunities are made, and continue to be made, available to students. The team concludes, therefore, that Expectation B8 is fully **met** and the 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: Complaints and appeals*

Findings

2.54   Academic complaints and student appeals are governed both by the awarding partners' regulations and those stipulated in the College Quality Code. The College regulations are clear, explicitly mapped to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and easily accessible through the College website. Information on appeals and complaints is also made available to students through programme handbooks. The procedures encourage constructive engagement with the appeals and complaints processes, and encourage early resolution through informal cooperation. The procedures make clear the indicative timelines associated with each stage of the process and are accompanied by standard proforma to ensure a consistent approach in handling appeals and complaints.

2.55   The team tested the operation of these procedures in practice through a review of the College Quality Code, monitoring reports on complaints and appeals, and through discussions with staff and students.

2.56   The College places great emphasis on resolving complaints and appeals informally, and as a result, the number of formal complaints is very small. Concerns and complaints are dealt with informally through College student voice mechanisms or directly with academic tutors. Given the lack of formal academic appeals, the team is not able to comment on the effectiveness of the formal procedures. However, students who met the team confirmed that they prefer raising any concerns, whether this be a complaint about a service or an appeal against a grade, through constructive discussions with College staff. Students have an open and productive relationship with staff which encourages them to engage in regular discussion to promptly resolve any issues as they arise, rather than having to escalate these through a formal process. Students confirmed that they are provided with information on appeals and complaints, and awareness of the process is raised during induction and through handbooks. Staff whom the team met also reflected positively on the low number of formal complaints and appeals, considering this to be a consequence of the responsiveness with which staff handle informal concerns.

2.57   The HEASS Group and the Senior Management Team have oversight of the complaints and appeals procedures and are in receipt of reports on trends over the previous three years. The Governing Body also takes a keen interest in the number and nature of complaints received by the College so that it is able to monitor the impact on the student learning experience and the local reputation of the College. The effectiveness of the complaints and appeals procedures are reviewed annually and updated if appropriate.

2.58   The review team concludes that the design of the College's processes meet Expectation B9. In practice academic complaints and student appeals are dealt with in an effective and timely manner, albeit through an informal approach. Students are aware of and are easily able to access formal processes, should they wish to do so. Therefore, Expectation B9 is **met** and the level is 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

2.59   The College has in place collaborative agreements with three degree-awarding bodies and is approved as a centre for the delivery of Higher National awards by Pearson. Under Expectation B10 the awarding bodies and organisation are responsible for managing the delivery of their higher education through the College. There is also an agreement in place with Dearne Valley College, whereby the College is sub contracted to deliver teaching to students registered on the HNC in Computing at Dearne Valley College. The effective management of this arrangement is outside of the scope of this review and falls under the responsibility of Dearne Valley College. Therefore, the College's main responsibility, for fulfilling Expectation B10, is in its management of arrangements with employers to deliver work-based learning. The College offers two foundation degree programmes which include a compulsory work placement where this contributes to the achievement of intended learning outcomes. This type of provision currently accounts for a small number of students and the College meets Expectation B10 through close adherence to the University of Hull's Code of Practice on placement learning.

2.60   The review team looked at programme specifications and handbooks, university guidance on work placements and annual monitoring reports. The team also met with staff and students involved in work-based learning.

2.61   Programme and module handbooks contain information about the learning outcomes students are expected to achieve while in placement. Students are generally expected to find their own placement but assistance is available from academic and support staff, if necessary. Students who met the team with reported positive experiences of their learning in the workplace and its contribution to developing practical skills.

2.62   Academic staff work with University guidance to arrange and manage work placements. Support staff from the College undertake an initial visit to the employer to carry out the necessary health and safety checks. Employers are provided with outlines of modules and this is verbally contextualised by academic staff so that those supporting students in the workplace are clear on what is expected of them. Responsibilities for the assessment of work-based learning rest with the College which ensures the quality assurance processes followed are the same as those for other assessments. After the initial vetting of employers, the ongoing monitoring of placements is undertaken in a relatively informal manner. The College has already recognised this as an area requiring improvement and is in the process of implementing new software to support the centralised monitoring of placement learning. The team **affirms** the steps being taken to formalise the processes for managing work placements.

2.63   Overall, the College **meets** Expectation B10 through the effective application of the processes of its awarding bodies. Given that the College has acknowledged the need for improvements in this area, with action already underway, the team considers the level of risk to be 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

2.64   The College does not offer research degrees and Expectation B11 is therefore not applicable.

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.65   In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All expectations in this judgement area have been met with the associated level of risk low in each case.

2.66   The College is fully aware of its responsibilities for managing the quality of its higher education provision and has in place quality assurance processes that are explicitly aligned to the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The team identified three features of good practice, in the areas of programme approval (Expectation B1), learning and teaching (Expectation B3), and student engagement (Expectation B5), which make a particularly positive contribution to the management of this judgement area.

2.67   There are no recommendations, although the team made two affirmations of actions being taken to address areas for improvement; these relate to the resources available to students (Expectation B4) and the management of work placements (Expectation B10).

2.68   In summary, the College makes available to its students appropriate learning opportunities to achieve the intended learning outcomes of the award for which they are studying. The College has also undertaken a number of recent improvements to further develop this area of its provision, some of which are in the early stages of their implementation and will be embedded over the coming academic year. The review team concludes, therefore, that the quality of student learning opportunities **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   Information about the College's higher education provision is made available to both internal and external stakeholders through a range of sources, the main one of which is the College website. The College also produces a higher education prospectus - as well as one jointly developed with Dearne Valley College, and programme leaflets. Information for internal audiences includes a range of policies and handbooks.

3.2   The College Quality Code sets out the protocol for the production and review of publicly available information. The Head of Marketing is responsible for liaising with programme staff to produce information for individual programmes. This is usually developed by the Curriculum Leader and signed off by the Head of Department and Quality Improvement Team before being submitted to the marketing department. Where appropriate, marketing staff ensure approval is received from the relevant awarding body before the publication of material. Information then continues to be reviewed on an annual basis unless there are changes to the structure or delivery of a programme. The College Quality Code also sets out guidance for the production of handbooks to ensure a consistent approach across programmes. Staff are provided with standard templates for programme handbooks, annual monitoring reports and SEDs. In some instances these are the templates prescribed by the awarding body.

3.3   The team reviewed the College website, the VLE, and a sample of programme and module handbooks and programme specifications. The team also met with a range of staff involved in the production and communication of information. Student meetings were also held to obtain views on the accessibility and reliability of information.

3.4   Prospective students are provided with clear and consistent information about the higher education on offer at the College. Where programmes are offered subject to approval by the awarding body, then this is made clear on the College website. A range of information is made available through the website including the College Quality Code and external examiner reports. Students whom the team met confirmed that the information available to them as an applicant enabled them to make an informed choice.

3.5   Current students are provided with detailed information about their programmes and individual modules through programme specifications and a range of handbooks. For some programmes, the College is obliged to provide students with the generic awarding body handbook, in which case the information is contextualised verbally during teaching sessions. The VLE is used as a tool to make information more readily available to students and the use of minimum standards ensures consistency in the content that is made available across all provision. Students who met the team confirmed that they are provided with the necessary information to complete their programme of study and that information is fit for purpose and trustworthy.

3.6   There is a clear audit trail in place for the management of information which is being further improved by the deployment of new software to facilitate a more centralised approach

to the collection and monitoring of data and information. College and departmental SEDs include an evaluation of the effectiveness of published information enabling any identified issues to be incorporated into relevant action plans. The HEASS Group has oversight of, and monitors, the overall quality of information produced by the College. The team is satisfied that the College exercises an appropriate level of governance over its internal and external publications. Expectation C is therefore **met** and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.7   In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information the College produces about its provision, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no recommendations or features of good practice in this area. The review team is satisfied that the College has in place effective mechanisms to ensure the information the College produces both for its internal and external stakeholders is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team concludes, therefore, that the quality of information produced about its provision **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's commitment to enhancement is clearly articulated in its Strategic Plan, Quality Improvement Strategy and Higher Education Strategy. The aims and objectives within these strategies set out the College's aspirations to develop the quality of learning opportunities and to provide an 'Outstanding' student learning experience. The Student Engagement Strategy identifies the mechanisms by which students are engaged in, and inform, enhancement initiatives within the College. The HEASS Group is the main vehicle through which these strategies are realised and priority is given to the enhancement agenda. A comprehensive three-stage self-evaluation process is in place which culminates in the production of a college-level higher education SED, which facilitates the identification of common areas for improvement and the dissemination of good practice.

4.2   The team reviewed the College's approach to meeting this Expectation through the consideration of minutes of relevant meetings, annual programme monitoring reports, departmental and College SEDs, minutes of College approval and validation panels, and external examiner reports. The team also met with a range of staff at all organisational levels and with students and their representatives.

4.3   Since the College's last QAA review in 2010, there have been significant developments in the College's management of higher education. The strategic oversight of higher education is now the specific responsibility of the Assistant Principal Post 19 Curriculum and there is a dedicated team of staff to support quality assurance processes. There is a clear deliberative committee structure in place, led by the HEASS Group, which provides a robust framework for driving forward the College's enhancement agenda. Minutes of the Group reveal the critically self-reflective and evaluative nature of discussions. A college-level quality improvement plan closely monitored by the HEASS Group enables higher-education-specific improvements to be made in a systematic and planned manner. Action plans accompanying SEDs are thorough and regularly reviewed to measure progress against intended outcomes. Information from the HEASS Group is effectively cascaded down through department and programme team meetings to create a well established ethos of enhancement shared by staff at all organisational levels.

4.4   Staff who met the team reinforced the effectiveness of the committee structure in facilitating good communication between senior management and teaching staff, and in creating a shared understanding of the College's strategic aims. Higher education student representatives have their own forum through which issues can be raised and fed directly into the HEASS Group. Enhancement initiatives, such as the continued investment in resources; the embedding of a College Quality Code across all higher education; and the implementation of a range of software to further improve the collection and management of data are testament to the effectiveness of the committee structure in identifying and responding to areas for improvement. Students whom the team met confirmed the tangible improvements made by the College through the ongoing review of its practices. The team concludes that the College's effective deliberative and management structures, which enable a higher-education-specific culture of enhancement is **good practice**.

4.5   The College engages with a range of stakeholders in a number of different ways to provide independent and objective input into its management of higher education.

This ensures that improvements in the College are driven by local, regional and national developments in the sector. Consultations with employers inform both the strategic development of the College portfolio of higher education based on the needs and demand of the local population and the design of individual programmes through contributions to College Approval Panels. Programme content, module choices and specialist software reflect local employment trends to improve student employability upon graduation. SEDs are considered and validated by College panels which include representation from an external body, such as a member of staff from an awarding body to ensure provision is aligned more widely to the sector. Panel members review SEDs in some detail and minutes of panel meetings demonstrate the external member's useful contribution in testing the thoroughness of the self-evaluation process and providing suggestions for further developments.

4.6   Through a strategic initiative, the College works with a number of local colleges to run joint staff development days and to share good practice so that teaching staff are effectively supported in developing their learning and teaching practices. The College is a member of the UCAS College Higher Education Advisory Group and a Higher Education in Further Education Benchmarking Group; membership of these groups facilitates a better understanding of how improvements in the College might be made through alignment to best practice in the sector. The College has also developed and implemented a comprehensive and coherent College Quality Code which is explicitly referenced and mapped to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The embedding of this College Quality Code has led to consistent practice across key areas of provision such as assessment and programme review. Staff confirmed that the College Quality Code is an essential reference point and recognise its importance in applying robust quality assurance processes. The team considers that the high level of engagement with employers, professional stakeholders and with external reference points to inform college-wide enhancement initiatives is **good practice**.

4.7   Student engagement in College enhancement activities is widespread and proactively informs the College's review of its provision. Students are an integral part of key quality assurance processes, such as programme approval, review and the self-evaluation process. These are College-level initiatives which ensure that the student voice is an important part of how the College makes decisions about prioritising areas for improvements and the way in which these improvements are made. For example, through student feedback the College prioritised the development of the VLE and the changes being made are directly informed by the views of students. Minutes of validation panels where SEDs are discussed provide evidence of the student member constructively challenging College staff on how changes have led to tangible improvements in the student learning experience. Students are able to influence decision-making at the highest level of the College through meetings with the Deputy Principal and Governors. The team also heard of examples where students had accompanied the Principal on visits to awarding bodies to discuss how the relationship, and in particular the student experience, could be further improved. Therefore, students are very much seen as mutual partners in assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities (see Expectation B5).

4.8   The team concludes that the College has a well embedded culture of enhancement led by senior staff and committees but jointly shared by other staff and students. Steps taken at College level to make improvements to higher education are planned through a comprehensive self-evaluation cycle and proactively informed by students and other stakeholders. Therefore, 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

4.9   In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are two examples of good practice in this area: one relating to the effectiveness of the College's management and deliberative structures, and the other to the use of a range of external stakeholders and reference points to inform enhancement initiatives. There are no recommendations for improvement.

4.10   The College has made, and continues to make, significant improvements to student learning opportunities through its coherent and well embedded approach to Enhancement. College strategies place a strong emphasis on the needs of students and a continuous culture of improvement. There is clear and comprehensive evidence of the tangible improvements made to the student experience through strategic enhancement initiatives. Student involvement in this area is widespread and supported at all organisational levels. In the view of the team, the feature of good practice in student engagement identified under Expectation B5 also makes a particularly positive contribution to this judgement area. Therefore, the team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

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

Findings

5.1   The College has effective and well developed systems for engaging with its student body as recognised by the feature of good practice identified under Expectation B5. The College has developed a Learner Voice Model and a Student Engagement Strategy that provide a clear steer in relation to student engagement in enhancement activities and deliberative forums. The College has developed an extensive range of opportunities to allow students to provide feedback and influence all aspects of the student experience.

5.2   The College encourages the involvement of students in all aspects of quality assurance and curriculum development. In the view of the team, particularly innovative mechanisms for involving students include their formal participation in programme approval and review through attendance at panel meetings. Students who met the team valued their involvement in these quality assurance activities both for providing an opportunity to influence College decision-making and for the benefit of their personal development.

5.3   The review team found evidence of a shared ownership of the student experience that is characterised by an evolving partnership between staff and students. This has led to strategic initiatives such as the development of the VLE, continued investment in resources and the creation of separate social and learning spaces specifically for higher education students. Staff value the feedback provided by students and see them as true partners in the development of their and future students' learning experience.

5.4   The College reviews the effectiveness of its engagement with students as part of its self-evaluation process and ensure mechanisms for listening to the student voice continue to evolve to meet the needs of its student body. There are plans to further enhance student engagement through a coaching and continuing professional development programme for student representatives, and a recently established Student Experience Enhancement Group.

5.5   Overall, the College has a number of varied and innovative approaches to effectively support involvement in quality assurance and enhancement. The team considers this to represent a particular strength of the College and forms a central theme in the College's approach to enhancement.

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 27-29 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.