Higher Education Review of College of North West London

December 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 the College of North West London. The review took place from 1 to 3 December 2014 and was conducted by a team of 3 reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Debbie Lockton
- Ms Sarah Riches
- Mr James Freeman (student reviewer)

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

In reviewing the College of North West London 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 2014-15 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/quality-code
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review

Key findings

QAA's judgements about the College of North West London

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

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at the College of North West London.

- the engagement with employers and professional bodies to develop curricula to meet sector-specific needs for higher level skills (Expectation B1).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to the College of North West London.

By May 2015:

- establish terms of reference for examination boards and ensure the assessment status of all students is recorded (Expectations B6, B5).

By June 2015:

- devise a more systematic and differentiated approach to higher education staff development (Expectations B3, A1)
- develop a formal system for the internal academic approval and modification of Pearson programmes (Expectation B1, A3.4)
- document and continue to develop processes for monitoring actions arising from external examiner reports at all levels (Expectation B7)
- make all external examiner reports available to all students (Expectation B7).

By September 2015:

- develop and implement strategies to engage higher education students more actively in quality assurance and enhancement (Expectation B5, Enhancement)
- further ensure greater consistency in VLE and programme handbook content so that these are fit for purpose and trustworthy sources of information across all programmes (Expectations C, B9)
- develop a strategic approach to the enhancement of higher education student learning opportunities, including the identification and dissemination of good practice (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

- There are no affirmations.

Theme: Student Employability

The College has an Employer Engagement Strategy and a Work Experience and Employability Policy that support employer engagement and the development of student employability skills. It has good relationships with employers, particularly in the construction and engineering curriculum areas, and has developed a construction and built environment Higher Apprenticeship framework that combines an HND with a level 5 NVQ. This enables students to achieve an academic qualification while developing industry-relevant skills and experience.

The Work Experience and Employability Policy commits the College to provide work placement opportunities for all students. The Employability Team plays a significant role in fulfilling this commitment and also supports students in the development of curriculum vitae and job interview practice. At curriculum level employability skills are developed and enhanced through the use of guest speakers, visits to employers, mock interviews, mentoring and involvement in internal and external competitions. Students are encouraged to become members of professional bodies and achieve additional vocational qualifications where appropriate.

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

About the College of North West London

The College of North West London is a general further education college based in the London borough of Brent. The College has two sites: one in Wembley and one in Willesden. There were approximately 9,700 students studying at the College in 2013-14. Seventy-five per cent of all students who enrol at the College are aged 19 or over and 78 per cent of students study part-time. Sixty per cent of the provision is within four curriculum areas and over 80 per cent of the curriculum is at level 2 or below. There are over 1,000 students enrolled on apprenticeship programmes.

The College has a vision to be London's leading skills college with a mission 'to support economic opportunity through the provision of high quality education, business solutions and skills for work'.

Higher education students represent 2.8 per cent of overall student numbers. In 2013-14 there were 176.65 full-time equivalent students enrolled on higher education programmes. The curriculum offer is within four curriculum areas and includes computer software engineering, computing and systems development, construction and the built environment, vehicle operational management and business. The College delivers Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Diplomas (HNDs) through the awarding organisation Pearson and foundation degree qualifications with the universities of Middlesex and Westminster. It offers a franchised Foundation Degree in Construction with the University of Westminster, a validated Foundation Degree in Computing (Software Engineering) with Middlesex University and four Higher National programmes in Computing and Systems Development, Business, Construction and the Built Environment and Vehicle Operations Management. The contract with the University of Westminster is reaching its conclusion and will terminate in 2015 when the current year three cohort completes its final year.

Since the last QAA review in April 2010 the College has been through a period of transition. A planned merger with another further education college did not progress, the Principal retired after 10 years in post, the Chair of the Corporation retired after 14 years in post and there was a long-standing vacant Vice Principal post. As a result, there was no action taken to address curriculum issues across an imbalanced faculty structure, a limited capacity across quality functions and some unclear communication of expectations and organisational values. Following the departure of the Principal, Deputy Principal and a number of senior managers in the autumn term 2013, a new Principal and Vice Principal were appointed and took up their posts in January 2014.

During the spring and summer terms of 2014 the College underwent a repositioning of its curriculum and a restructure of curriculum management at all levels. This resulted in the realignment of delivery schools under three directorates and a new Directorate of Improvement and Standards from April 2014, plus a new post of Head of Assessment and Quality from November 2014. The three directorates have curriculum specialisms clustered in departments and sections. Higher education courses sit within two of the directorates and are managed from within the curriculum area by a designated lead. The part-time Academic Standards Manager, who is being replaced by the full-time cross-College Head of Assessment and Quality, supports and monitors quality processes for higher education.

The three key changes in the College's quality assurance framework since the review in 2010 have been: the revised strategy for supporting the development of teaching, learning and assessment entitled 'engage, support, challenge and progress' (ESCP); the renewed Standards Review process; and a stronger focus on the learner voice.

Over the past five years there have been substantial improvements to the College's physical environment, including a refurbishment of parts of the Willesden centre. There are plans in place for a new build at the Willesden site to be completed in 2017 which will include a new block with a higher education floor.

The College is reviewing its higher education strategic aims and has developed a draft eight-point higher education strategy to support the overall College strategic aims. The College focus is on the development of vocational skills and its strategy at higher levels is aimed at emphasising the need to enhance employability opportunities for all its learners. A key development in 2013-14 was the consolidation of higher education provision with the introduction of higher apprenticeships. As part of the consolidation, the number of partnerships with awarding bodies/organisations has been reduced to two: with Middlesex University and Pearson. In 2013-14 the College became one of the first to develop a higher apprenticeship framework with the Pearson HND in Construction and the Built Environment that embeds a level 5 National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). These new programmes of study enable learners to gain a level 5 HND and a level 5 NVQ linked to the National Occupational Standards (NOS). This development was in part driven by employers in the construction industry who expressed a preference for the higher apprenticeship framework consisting of the HND rather than a foundation degree.

The College has made some progress in addressing actions arising from the previous QAA review. An action plan was developed, signed off and is being monitored by the Higher Education Board, which has revised terms of reference that include monitoring of quality outcomes and the development and monitoring of the emerging higher education strategy. Recommendations from 2010 review included ensuring more accurate recording and tracking of actions from the Higher Education Board, updating the quality manual, mapping against the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards*, published by QAA (now the Quality Code), monitoring staffing levels in construction and ensuring accuracy and completeness of all programme handbooks. Since February 2014, the Higher Education Board has met monthly and there is some evidence of a more systematic

approach to following through action points with the Quality Manual updated yearly. While the Quality Manual is mapped to specific parts of the Quality Code there has been no mapping of College practices to ensure alignment with the expectations of the Quality Code. Good practice was wide ranging and in some cases has been built upon, for example in the College's relationship with employers. In other cases, given the significant changes that have taken place at the College since the 2010 review, the review team found it difficult to identify clear evidence of good practice being further developed.

Explanation of the findings about the College of North West London

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College delivers foundation degree programmes on behalf of two degree awarding bodies and Higher National programmes on behalf of Pearson. The Higher National (HN) programmes are designed by Pearson. The Foundation Degree in Construction is designed by the University of Westminster and its delivery franchised to the College. The College designed the Middlesex University-validated Foundation Degree in Computing (Software Engineering) based on modules already approved by the University. As degree-awarding bodies, the universities are responsible for ensuring that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) are met; in the case of HN awards, Pearson is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) are met. The foundation degrees delivered by the College incorporate work-based learning units into their design and there are defined progression routes to honours degree programmes in accordance with the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark.*

1.2 The College states that staff refer to the FHEQ to ensure that programme delivery meets the requirements of awarding bodies and Pearson. Recent staff development events have included briefings on the Quality Code which referred to the use of external reference points to set and maintain academic standards.

1.3   Student handbooks, which incorporate programme specifications, include references to national qualification frameworks, Subject Benchmark Statements and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional bodies and National Occupational Standards. Assignment briefs identify the learning outcomes to be assessed. These processes, and the use of awarding body and Pearson frameworks, enable the College to meet Expectation A1.

1.4   The review team tested whether the College meets its responsibilities by examining approval documentation for the Foundation Degree in Computing (Software Engineering), programme handbooks, which incorporate programme structures, programme and module/unit specifications, assignment briefs, and by meeting academic staff.

1.5   All the College's programmes adhere to national expectations and the awarding bodies' and Pearson's requirements in the volume and level of credit to be achieved for an award; this information is communicated to students in programme handbooks. Staff have limited awareness of the relevance to their role of national qualification and credit frameworks and benchmark statements and greater use could be made of these external reference points to enable the College to fulfil its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards. The validation of the Foundation Degree in Computing (Software Engineering) required amendment of learning outcomes to reflect FHEQ levels 4 and 5. External examiners have commented on the poor integration of work-based learning in a foundation degree and the academic level of assignment tasks. Higher education 'Learning Walks' at the College have identified concerns about the academic level of some higher education teaching and learning, and strategies to enable students to achieve higher grades. Although staff have attended development sessions on assessment at level 4 and above offered by its partner universities there is no systematic and ongoing approach to staff development which incorporates the use of external reference points in setting and maintaining academic standards.

1.6   Overall, the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation A1, taking account of its limited responsibilities for setting academic standards. However, there is a moderate risk to the maintenance of academic standards arising from the limited awareness of and engagement with external reference points by staff. This risk contributes to the **recommendation** in Expectation B3 that the College devises a more systematic and differentiated approach to higher education staff development.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

1.7   The academic frameworks governing the College's higher education provision are determined by the relevant awarding bodies and by Pearson. For foundation degrees, legally binding memoranda set out the respective responsibilities of the universities and the College. These memoranda specify that the universities' academic and assessment regulations apply but grant delegated authority to the College in respect of such matters as investigating academic misconduct and consideration of extenuating circumstances. The responsibilities of the College in respect of Pearson programmes is set out in guidance published by the awarding organisation. The Assessment and Internal Verification Policy and Assessment and Verification Handbook contain the College's assessment policies, including special arrangements and academic appeal. Programme handbooks contain adequate information about the applicable academic and assessment regulations. These agreements, frameworks and College policies and handbooks enable Expectation A2.1 to be met.

1.8   The review team explored the College's engagement with the academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding bodies and Pearson by talking to staff and students, scrutinising the agreements with awarding bodies, the guidance provided by Pearson, and programme handbooks.

1.9   Staff understand the differences in the frameworks and regulations governing foundation degree and Higher National awards and the extent of their delegated responsibilities. Students confirmed that they are aware of the assessment regulations and other academic policies; and relevant information is available in programme handbooks and on the virtual learning environment (VLE), and is discussed during induction.

1.10   The review team concludes that, taking into account the College's role as a delivery provider, Expectation A2.1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.11   The College works in collaboration with its awarding bodies and Pearson to produce definitive information about its programmes' aims, intended learning outcomes, structure, and assessments. For Higher National programmes, Pearson publishes generic programme specifications and detailed unit-level specifications. Course teams translate these national-level documents into contextualised programme specifications. Such specifications form one section of programme handbooks, which also contain further provider-specific information. For foundation degree programmes, specifications are produced during the awarding bodies' validation processes. Programme handbooks based on awarding body templates include these specifications or equivalent information.

1.12   Course teams review programme handbooks annually, seeking approval from the relevant higher education section manager and coordinating with link tutors where necessary. External examiners comment on the quality of programme information, including handbooks, and awarding bodies formally review programme documentation periodically.

1.13   In addition to specifications, teaching and marketing staff use a course file database to ensure information is drawn from a single source. Maintained by the Management Information Systems (MIS) department, the course file system is audited annually.

1.14   In principle, the documentation produced by the College and the established procedures for approval and review allow Expectation A2.2 to be met.

1.15   The review team evaluated the above processes through internal documentation, scrutinised materials available to students, and held detailed discussions with teaching staff, marketing professionals, and students to assess the effectiveness, trustworthiness, and accessibility of definitive programme information.

1.16   Students receive clear information about their awards' titles, level of study within the QCF and FHEQ, their programmes' intended learning outcomes, the structure of core and optional modules, and the relevant frameworks for the award of credit. Students can easily access this information from programme handbooks, available in print or downloadable from the VLE, as well as being briefed on this information during induction.

1.17   Module leaders' reports and Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) take account of information given to students. The responsibilities and procedures for modifying and approving programme specifications are well understood by staff and operate effectively, notwithstanding some variation in the comprehensiveness and presentation of handbooks as discussed in section 3, paragraph 3.8.

1.18   The review team concludes that, based on the combination of contextualised programme specifications and effective procedures for the management of definitive information, Expectation A2.2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.19   The College offers a franchised foundation degree with the University of Westminster, a validated foundation degree with Middlesex University and three Pearson Higher National programmes. The Memorandum of Collaboration with Westminster University has been extended to cover the closure of the franchised foundation degree this academic year. The validation documentation which relates to the foundation degree awarded by Middlesex University is thorough. The College uses Pearson-validated modules on its Higher National programmes.

1.20   The College directorates conduct annual curriculum planning which feed into a directorate annual business plan. This identifies any proposed changes to provision, including higher education provision, and any proposals for new programmes. These are presented to the Principal and Vice Principal. If a new programme is approved the programme development team develop the programme according to the validating body's processes, which include externality. The programme development team consults with employers, particularly in the areas of engineering and construction. As an example of such consultation, the College decided to offer higher apprenticeship frameworks within the construction and built environment curriculum consisting of an HND and a level 5 NVQ linked to the National Occupational Standards and based largely on employer preference. The College's process for new programme approval enable it to meet Expectation A3.1.

1.21   To consider the effectiveness of these processes the review team looked at course team meeting minutes and a validation report, and talked to senior staff, academic staff and employers,

1.22   As mentioned on page 4, the College has recently been through a period of significant transition and as a result was unable to provide copies of course team meeting minutes prior to 2012. Course team meeting minutes from the beginning of 2012 do not show clear evidence of discussion of new programme development. However the Higher Education Self-Evaluation 2012-13 and Quality Improvement Plan 2013-14 include references to new programme proposals and the review team saw evidence that employers provide input to programme development.

1.23   The College confirmed that the relevant curriculum director would require the Section Manager to research issues such as the market and resources before putting forward new programme proposals. While this process is based to some extent on a business model, which will be discussed more fully under Expectation B1, the review team considers that the processes for programme approval are effective, The Foundation Degree in Computing (Software Engineering) was developed by the College using existing Middlesex University modules and College academic staff were members of the programme development team. The review team was assured that validation conditions and recommendations were met and completed actions were signed off by the Section Manager working with the University link tutor.

1.24   In the context of the College's limited responsibilities for setting academic standards through programme approval processes, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.2): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:

- **the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment**
- **both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.**

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

Findings

1.25   The College has a Higher Education Quality Manual which includes, as an appendix, the relevant Expectations in the Quality Code. It also has an Assessment and Internal Verification Policy and an Assessment and Internal Verification Handbook. The policy, at paragraph 10.1, states that standards of assessment as detailed in the *Code of practice* on Assessment (now subsumed into *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code) will be overseen by the Higher Education Board. The College has recently reviewed the Higher Education Board's terms of reference which now include this, and which are specifically related to the Quality Code.

1.26   Assessment boards take a variety of forms depending on the awarding body. For the Middlesex-validated Foundation Degree in Computing (Software Engineering) the team holds an internal assessment meeting before the external examination board. Directorate higher education exam boards consider student results for Higher National provision and the University of Westminster holds examination boards for the franchised Foundation Degree in Construction.

1.27   Programme handbooks, which are checked annually by the University link tutor, detail learning outcomes to be achieved by each module. External examiner reports confirm that academic standards are met and there is evidence that external examiners appointed by Pearson meet students. External examiner issues lead to action plans and feed into directorate and College-wide Higher Education Self-Evaluations and Quality Improvement Plans. The College's processes enable it to meet Expectation A3.2.

1.28   The review team looked at the relevant documents including the Higher Education Quality Manual, the Assessment and Internal Verification Policy and the Assessment and Internal Verification Handbook. It also looked at the minutes of team meetings, the minutes of Boards of Studies, the minutes of the Higher Education Board, the minutes of the higher education Standards Review and held meetings with academic staff and senior staff.

1.29   The Higher Education Quality Manual and the Memoranda of Collaboration state that University assessment regulations apply to relevant provision.

1.30   Examples of assessment briefs which the review team saw contain details of the learning outcomes being assessed. There is an HE Assessment Quality Check template that is used to assure the quality of feedback to students on assessment and which asks, among other things, if assessment is linked to outcomes and if feedback is appropriate and allows improvement. Assessment titles are internally verified and marked assessments are internally moderated.

1.31   External examiner reports are received by the Academic Standards Manager, the Section Manager and relevant curriculum Director. Module delivery and action in relation to external examiner issues are monitored at the Board of Studies for Middlesex University provision, and at Directorate higher education management meetings. The Board of Studies is chaired by the curriculum Director and attended by the University link tutor. The Vice Principal (Curriculum and Quality), the Director of Learning, Improvement and Standards and Directors of Curriculum are members of the Higher Education Board and the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) which enables informal reporting to SLT of issues discussed at Higher Education Board. The Academic Standards Manager draws together actions from external examiner reports into summary reports which contain some information on progress made against individual actions. Annual Monitoring Report action plans also show some evidence of monitoring and review of actions from external examiner reports.

1.32   The review team regard the processes and mechanisms for ensuring the awards of qualifications are aligned to Expectation A3.2 of the Quality Code and concludes therefore that Expectation A3.2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.3): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.

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

Findings

1.33   The Higher Education Quality Manual states that the processes for monitoring and review include termly curriculum reviews and Standards Reviews. Annual Monitoring Reports are prepared by programme leaders using a university template. In addition, there are annual evaluations at module level which result in module leaders' reports that consider module delivery, student achievement and any future module developments.

1.34   Directorate Higher Education Self-Evaluation and Quality Improvement Plans (HE SED and QIP) are developed and these would normally feed into an overall College HE SED and QIP compiled by the Academic Standards Manager. However, in 2013-14 the College did not develop a separate HE SED and QIP but made use of the self-evaluation document submitted for this review and will develop an action plan following the review. The HE SED and QIP will be monitored by the Director of Learning, Improvement and Standards and the Higher Education Board. These mechanisms draw upon, among other things, external examiner reports, student satisfaction surveys, and progression and completion data. The College's processes enable it to meet Expectation A3.3.

1.35   The review team read relevant documents, including the Higher Education Quality Manual, Annual Monitoring Reports, directorate HE SEDs and QIPs, HE Standards Review meeting minutes and module leaders' reports, In addition the review team met academic and senior staff.

1.36   The Annual Monitoring Reports seen by the review team were mostly very detailed although one had not been completed fully. The directorate HE SEDs and action plans were also very detailed, as was the College overall SED and action plan. The module leaders' reports seen by the review team were, however, very brief and while they detail student achievement they do not consider student feedback or external examiner reports.

1.37   The College has a Standards Review process which is conducted each term. The Standards Review meetings are led by the Principal with the Vice Principal and the Director of Learning, Improvement and Standards. The process looks at targets, attendance, retention, courses at risk and action taken, assessment schedules and reports from teaching observation. There is then a follow-up to ensure actions identified are taken. The College has instigated a dedicated HE Standards Review process which took place for the first time in November 2014 and will be followed up with another review in March 2015.

1.38   The College conducts 'Learning Walks' within specific curriculum areas. This process is defined in Appendix B2 of the 'Moving from Teaching to Learning; the Development of Teaching and Learning 2014-15' document. Appendix B2 also contains guidelines on how to grade areas which are based on Ofsted grades and Appendix C contains note-taking sheets to use for the 'Learning Walks'. A higher education 'Learning Walk' took place in March 2014. This identified strengths and actions to be taken and was considered in summary by the Higher Education Board in April 2014.

1.39   The review team considers the College's processes for monitoring and review of programmes is sound and aligns with Expectation A3.3 of the Quality Code and therefore concludes that Expectation A3.3 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.40   The College works closely with employers to develop its curriculum offer. Recent examples include the development of a higher level apprenticeship framework comprising an integrated HND and NVQ level 5 for the construction industry. In computing there are plans to offer a new programming language to meet demand in the information technology sector.

1.41   The Foundation Degree in Computing (Software Engineering) was designed by the College and approved by Middlesex University. The programme team consulted employers during the development of the programme and the University validation panel included an employer as well as an external academic assessor. All other programmes delivered by the College are designed and approved by external awarding bodies or Pearson in accordance with their policies and procedures. These processes enable the College to meet Expectation A3.4.

1.42   The review team examined the use of external expertise to maintain standards by scrutinising academic planning and approval documents; external examiner reports; action plans; and by talking to staff.

1.43   The College does not have an internal programme approval process which would provide a structured opportunity to draw on external academic expertise in designing its Higher National programmes. The recommendation in Expectation B1 that the College develops a formal system for the internal academic approval and modification of Pearson programmes should facilitate more structured opportunities to incorporate external expertise into these processes.

1.44   The College's University partners and Pearson are responsible for the appointment and management of external examiners. External examiner reports for foundation degree provision confirm that academic standards have been set and delivered appropriately and achieved by students. External examiners for Pearson awards have indicated their general satisfaction with the College's management of academic standards, although the failure to use plagiarism-detection software on the Higher National Business programme resulted in an essential action to be completed before awards could be released. The College's link tutor receives external examiner reports for University awards; College staff access Pearson external examiner reports online. Issues identified by the external examiner are included in action plans and the action plans are incorporated into Annual Monitoring Reports. A College-wide summary of key issues is prepared by the Academic Standards Manager.

1.45   The review team noted that, at the time of the visit in December, the College had not received an external examiner report for the Foundation Degree in Construction for the preceding academic year and there had been a delay in the appointment of a Pearson external examiner, resulting in a hold-up in the approval of assignment briefs. The use made

of external examiner reports by the College will be considered in more detail in relation to Expectation B7.

1.46 The review team concludes that, overall, the College makes appropriate use of external expertise to maintain the academic standards of the awards it delivers on behalf of its partner universities and Pearson. Expectation A3.4 is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.47   In reaching its judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

1.48   The College works effectively with its partner universities and Pearson in the maintenance of academic standards. The relevant university and Pearson regulatory and quality assurance frameworks are used and adhered to. The College has mechanisms to ensure standards are maintained and use is made of external expertise where appropriate; the development of an internal process for the approval and modification of programmes, as recommended in Expectation B1 would further facilitate this.

1.49   All Expectations in this area are met and all apart from one have a low risk associated with them. There is a moderate risk to the maintenance of academic standards arising from the limited awareness of and engagement with external reference points by staff which impacts on Expectation A1 and contributes to the recommendation in Expectation B3 on higher education staff development.

1.50   Overall, the review team concludes that the College **meets** UK expectations in the maintenance of academic standards of awards it offers on behalf of its awarding bodies and Pearson.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 All the College's higher education programmes are validated by the University of Westminster and Middlesex University or awarded by Pearson. Proposals for new programmes are set out in a business plan and curriculum planning forms are completed for any proposals to go forward for development and approval. The University of Westminster provision is franchised with the College having no involvement in the design of the curriculum; the Middlesex provision is validated and the College designed the programme and was involved in the validation event. The College's processes enable Expectation B1 to be met.

2.2 The review team read relevant documents, including memoranda of collaboration, business plans and resulting curriculum planning forms, a validation report, programme handbooks and programme specifications and the staff training and development plans. The review team also met academic and senior staff.

2.3 Business plans are thorough and identify the need for new programmes or adjustments to existing programmes based on the needs of the market or of employers. Staff confirmed that curricula, particularly that of the HNDs, are designed and modified at the request of employers and there is substantial evidence of employers contributing to curriculum design in the Construction and Engineering directorate and also the engagement of professional bodies with the staff and students. The engagement with employers and professional bodies to develop curricula to meet sector-specific needs for higher level skills is **good practice**.

2.4 For the university-validated provision, the academic coherence of the programme is explored as part of the validation event. While the business planning model identifies the business reason for a new programme, the review team found no formal internal process which interrogates the academic coherence of the College's Higher Nationals. The review team **recommends** that, by June 2015, the College develops a formal system for the internal academic approval and modification of Pearson programmes. This would also enable further use of external academic expertise where appropriate, as explained in Expectation A3.4.

2.5 Each awarding body provides its own programme specifications, These are communicated to students in the programme handbooks which are available in hard copy and on the College's VLE.

2.6 Overall, the review team considers that the College's processes meet Expectation B1. The associated risk is moderate as there is no mechanism for internal academic approval and modification of Pearson programmes which could result in the College developing programmes which lack overall academic coherence.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission*

Findings

2.7   The College is responsible for admitting students to both its Higher National programmes and foundation degrees validated by awarding bodies. A College-wide admissions policy outlines key roles and responsibilities as well as applicants' duties and entitlements. The Head of Student Development Services reviews the policy annually, which commits the College to monitoring the effectiveness of admissions procedures via feedback.

2.8   The Course Information team, course teams, and the Admissions team all have a role in the recruitment process, which is managed centrally by the Head of Student and Development Services. Recruitment targets are identified annually during curriculum planning. Where applicable, validation proposals agree entry requirements and a typical student profile. The course file database logs programmes' entry requirements, which are displayed in the prospectus and on relevant website sections.

2.9   Applicants can receive advice from the Course Information team, the Student Finance and Welfare team, or programme staff at enrolment events. Following their application, course teams interview prospective students to ensure that they enter an appropriate level programme. Interviews and initial assessments assess academic suitability, recognition of prior learning opportunities, or any additional learning needs. 'Enrolment passports' ensure all stages of the recruitment process are completed. The Admissions team hold records of interviews, and verbal offers made at interview are confirmed in writing within seven days. Unsuccessful applicants are referred to the Careers Advice team. In the event of changes to a programme, course teams write to and meet the affected applicants and make referrals to the Careers Advice team if necessary. The College's complaints procedures discussed under Expectation B9 allow applicants to lodge complaints. These are initially considered by the Pre-Entry Information, Advice and Guidance Manager, but can be escalated to Academic Standards Manager if required.

2.10   The College's transparent, fair, and reliable policies and procedures for recruitment and enrolment allow Expectation B2 to be met.

2.11   Having scrutinised internal documentation, including procedures, minutes of committee meetings, and published information, the review team held meetings with students, professional and academic staff, and employers to examine the effectiveness of the admissions policy and procedures.

2.12   Although the admissions policy is only available on request from the Course Information Team, the process itself is outlined on the website and in student handbooks. Staff and students have a clear understanding of entry requirements and the application process. Successful applicants receive an effective induction, which includes both a generic orientation and key information about their programme, resources, College policies, contacts, and procedures. Staff are supplied with higher education induction checklists to ensure students receive full information at enrolment.

2.13   The College provides students with helpful information about progression routes, and those involved in admissions and careers advice are appropriately qualified to offer

impartial guidance. The Admissions and Careers Advice teams sit within the Student Development Services team, which is externally accredited and reviewed. Academic and professional staff are effectively briefed on the enrolment and interview processes, and equality, diversity and safeguarding training ensures staff can raise concerns about an applicant's progress or needs.

2.14 The College monitors admissions, retention, progression, and destination data, all of which can be analysed during Standards Reviews and annual monitoring and are discussed at the Higher Education Board. The College is aiming to improve the recruitment of underrepresented groups and recognises the tension between meeting recruitment targets and maintaining offer integrity. For example, the College set up female focus group as a result of a perceived gender imbalance in construction courses. Moreover, the College now holds progression days to redress an internal progression weakness. Likewise, the College is addressing a high drop-out rate for year one students on some programmes.

2.15 The review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B2 through the effective operation of fair and transparent admissions policies and procedures, suitably qualified and well-supported staff, and a responsiveness to trends identified in admissions, retention, and progression data. The associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.16   The College's approach to learning and teaching is set out in its learning strategy, Moving from Teaching to Learning, which applies to all its provision. The key themes of the strategy are to engage, support, challenge and progress learners. The strategy seeks to promote a range of learning approaches such as personalised and differentiated learning, the use of e-learning and other technologies and skills development to support employability. The strategy does not assign responsibility for its implementation nor does it specify how its effectiveness will be measured.

2.17   The College has in place generic criteria for the appointment of teaching staff which sets out the minimum requirements. Teaching staff are expected to hold a level 5 Diploma in Teaching or be willing to acquire one within three years. There are no general academic criteria for staffing teaching on higher education programmes, although in practice staff are expected to be qualified to at least one level above the level at which they will be teaching. Teaching staff are well qualified and the College provides support for those who wish to enhance their qualifications. All new teaching staff are assigned a mentor for up to 12 weeks and undergo two developmental lesson observations during their first half term to enable them to understand the expectations, approaches and teaching and learning culture of the College. There is an appraisal system in operation, which provides an opportunity for staff to identify any development needs.

2.18   Learning and teaching practice is developed through a range of activities, including developmental and peer teaching observations, 'Learning Walks', and by an extensive continuous professional development (CPD) programme and coaching and mentoring support, supplemented by online resources. Good practice is shared at cross-college teacher forums, higher education team meetings, teaching and learning fairs and monthly 'mini-bites'. College staff can access Middlesex University staff development events and a number of staff are undertaking further study at Westminster University. Directors produce a costed CPD plan each year with proposed staff development clearly linked to strategic priorities.

2.19   The College draws on a range of information to measure the effectiveness of its learning and teaching strategy; including student surveys and focus groups, outcomes of 'Learning Walks', lesson observations, internal reviews and key performance indicators relating to student attendance, retention and achievement. Teaching quality is considered at termly Standards Reviews, which, from the current academic year, are higher education specific.

2.20   The strategies, policies and procedures in place enable the College to meet Expectation B3.

2.21   The review team tested whether the Expectation is met in practice by holding meetings with senior staff, teaching and support staff, and students, and by scrutinising the College's learning and teaching strategy and associated policies and procedures, reading

the minutes of meetings, staff development, plans and records and CPD resources. The College also provided access to material on the VLE.

2.22   Students commented that at higher education level there is an expectation of more independent learning, greater student involvement and interaction in classes, but within a structured and supportive environment. The material used is relevant to the workplace, providing an appropriate blend of theory and practice. Additional maths classes are provided in some curriculum areas, and in Computing second year students run programming workshops to support first year students. Staff commented positively on the availability of staff development, particularly in relation to the development of the VLE and learning technologies, and the support provided by the College to undertake external courses.

2.23   The review team considers that the College's approach to learning and teaching provides a sound basis for enhancing the quality of learning and teaching across the whole College but that it takes insufficient account of the specific requirements of higher education delivery. The College has not formally articulated its minimum academic qualifications for teaching at higher education level; on occasion some staff have not been adequately prepared to undertake higher level teaching; common issues identified by external examiners have not directly informed College-wide staff development activities; and insufficient use has been made of the Quality Code to enhance policy and practice. The College has recognised the need to adapt its strategy for higher education and has begun to develop a more bespoke approach. The College has recently completed a higher education 'Learning Walk' and provided staff development specifically for higher education staff. However, these initiatives are not systematic and embedded. The development of specific Standards Reviews for higher education should provide the means for the College to provide a focus on the quality of higher education learning and teaching and thereby to develop initiatives targeted more precisely at higher education.

2.24   Overall, the review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation in B3. Students are supported to become independent learners and their studies enhance their employability. Staff are appropriately qualified and are supported by the College to develop their qualification and teaching practice. However, strategies to support and develop higher education teaching and learning practice are the early stages of development and as such present a moderate risk. The review team therefore **recommends** that, by June 2015, the College devises a more systematic and differentiated approach to higher education staff development, which would also enable better engagement with external reference points as explained under Expectation A1, paragraph 1.6.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.25   The College's Higher Education Strategy recognises the need to enhance resources to meet the needs of its higher education students both in terms of physical resources and more effective use of learning technologies and managed learning environments. The College has invested in a number of refurbishment projects in recent years to improve the student learning experience, including the provision of a specialist centre for construction and technology; new science laboratories; a supported studies centre for students with learning difficulties; improved social space and a project to upgrade the information technology infrastructure. Further work is planned to improve the accessibility of the College's estate and to create a new floor for higher education as part of a new build at the Willesden campus expected to be completed by early 2017.

2.26   Students have access to a Learning Resource Centre (LRC) at each of the College's campuses and at Willesden there is a dedicated room for higher education students, which provides bookable computers with access to networked specialist software, Students on the Foundation Degree in Computing validated by Middlesex University have no access to the University's learning resources; student studying for the Westminster Foundation Degree in Construction have reference access only to the University's library, VLE and intranet, The College's LRC staff provide tutorial sessions on online research, Harvard referencing, copyright and plagiarism and offer a drop-in service and bookable sessions for individual students, Higher education students enjoy enhanced borrowing rights.

2.27   Students can access teaching material and online databases via the VLE. Users are required to agree to the College's Acceptable Use Policy and e-safety is emphasised at induction and reinforced throughout the year. The platform is checked for functionality and accessibility, including on mobile devices. Content is reviewed by course teams and managers, In July 2014 all the materials were removed from the VLE with the intention that updated materials would be uploaded in time for the new academic year. This target was not achieved for all courses and there was some unavailability of materials for the first few weeks of term, which was offset by providing access to an archive of the material removed from the VLE.

2.28   All students receive an induction to the College, their course and sources of information, advice and guidance on entry in accordance with a checklist. The effectiveness of induction processes are monitored by an induction survey but as response rates are low the College has instigated a series of 'Meet the Learner' and 'Meet the Manager' activities with higher education students to gather student feedback.

2.29   Information, advice and guidance is available at both of the College's campuses during the day and in the evening by request. The team provide pre and post-entry advice and guidance on matters such as progression to work and/or further study, curriculum vitae building and interview skills. Centrally provided careers advice is supplemented by programme-specific workplace visits and guest speakers. Information about financial support is provided by the Student Finance and Welfare team.

2.30   The College has a Tutorial Policy which sets out what students can expect, including an induction, an assessment of their learning needs, individual learning plans, and individual or group tutorial sessions; the support available to staff in the form of staff

development, toolkits, handbooks and other resources; the responsibility for implementation and the means by which the policy will be monitored and reviewed. There is flexibility in the way in which the student tutorial entitlement can be delivered depending on 'the type of teaching programme, the mode of study and the needs of the students'. Some higher education groups have timetabled tutorial sessions. Personal development planning (PDP) or its equivalent is used on a number of courses, including the Foundation Degree in Computing. Individual learning plans are designed to allow students to set and monitor their personal objectives; these are managed electronically. Student progress is tracked by academic staff and monitored at management meetings. The College has recently invested in electronic software to replace the different tracking tools previously used; it is anticipated this will improve the quality of data available at Standards Reviews.

2.31   Where possible, the additional learning support needs of students are identified during the application process; such students are referred to the Additional Learning Support team for a discussion about support needs, applications for Disabled Students Allowance and the need for reasonable adjustments. Assistive technologies are available in the LRCs and, where appropriate, the College liaises with publishers to provide material in alternative formats.

2.32   The strategies, systems and processes for the support of student development and achievement enable the College to meet Expectation B4.

2.33   The review team tested the College's approach by discussing the arrangements for student support and the provision of learning resources with students and staff and by scrutinising the College's policies and procedures and minutes and notes of staff and student meetings, other working documents and external examiner reports to assess how well these worked in practice.

2.34   The College obtains feedback from students about its facilities and services in cross-College learner voice forums which are attended by student representatives and management staff. Students and the external examiners have raised a number of concerns related to information technology resources, including the reliability of computer systems, the availability of software, and timetabling. The College has increased its e-book provision, albeit from a low base, and LRC managers liaise with higher education staff to enhance the provision. Students report that library resources are adequate for their needs. Students appreciate the availability of learning materials on the VLE, which can be accessed remotely. They were a little unsettled by the non-availability of materials at the start of the new academic year but did confirm that the archived VLE system was available while the new system was being updated. Students spoke positively about the academic and pastoral support available to them and the helpfulness of staff.

2.35   The team concludes that the College's arrangements for enabling student success are effective and meet Expectation B4 and that the 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

2.36   A Learner Voice Strategy, reviewed annually by the Deputy Head of Student Development Services, reflects the College's renewed focus on student feedback and recognises a weakness regarding higher education students' involvement in quality assurance. At a strategic level, the College has partly incorporated its Learner Voice initiatives into its quality processes through the Quality Calendar. The new Learning Improvement Coach role is designed to help staff use student feedback to improve learning, teaching and assessment in higher education.

2.37   Having recognised that students' part-time mode of study limits their engagement with quality assurance mechanisms, the College now operates a revised system of representation. Higher education programmes elect class representatives who meet termly. A subgroup of these represent their directorate and a further subgroup attends the Student Council's monthly meetings. Representatives can attend Course Team meetings, 'Meet the Manager' meetings, course boards, and the Board of Studies for the Foundation Degree in Computing (Software Engineering) programme. Although none attended, the review team was concerned that students were invited (and sent apologies) to a Board of Studies meeting in July 2014, the business of which included assessment decisions on individual students. When asked, senior staff confirmed a statement in the programme handbook that the meeting should include a student representative and was not divided into open and closed agendas. Programme handbooks for a Higher National programme in the same directorate indicate that, as well as attending four Course Representative meetings, elected students can attend Assessment Boards. The team concludes that this situation arose from the lack of distinction between the business of a Board of Studies as intended by the awarding body with that of an annual exam or assessment board. Under Expectation B6 the review team recommends that the College establish terms of reference for examination boards which will enable it to clarify the role of student representation at such boards.

2.38   Recent updates to the Higher Education Board's terms of reference make provision for two 'higher education representatives', but their status, ability to receive papers, terms of office, or from which programmes they are drawn remains unclear. Likewise, the College has developed generic job descriptions for class representatives and Student Council roles, but these do not detail the meetings specific to higher education that representatives may attend. Lack of a clear definition of representatives' roles on high-level higher education deliberative committees and the potential for students to attend meetings used to consider individuals progression contributes to the recommendation made in paragraph 2.46 below.

2.39   Following a period in which the Higher Education Board recorded a concern that students did not have enough opportunity to talk about their programmes, the College ran a series of higher education focus groups. More regular forums now include 'Meet the Learner' and 'Meet the Manager' sessions held within directorates. A Female Focus Forum ensures that all students' views are heard, despite the Computing and Engineering directorates' gender imbalance. More broadly, the 2013-14 Learner Voice conference on resources, at which staff listened and responded to feedback, has become a regular event and a means of closing the feedback loop. A 'You Said We Did' conference updates student representatives on the College's actions.

2.40   The College participates in the National Students Survey (NSS) and conducts its own internal College-wide survey in addition to module evaluations. Directorates and

programmes have opportunities to consider student feedback during the course review process, module leaders reports, and Annual Monitoring Reports. Support Services capture student feedback through online surveys and through the above forums.

2.41   While the College should better define student membership of deliberative committees as part of an attempt to deepen their active engagement in quality assurance (see paragraphs 2.44 and 2.46 below), in principle the opportunities for student representation and use of student feedback are sufficient to enable the College to meet Expectation B5.

2.42   To evaluate the effectiveness of student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement, the review team met academic and support staff, students, and senior College managers and scrutinised committee minutes and other internal documentation.

2.43   Despite committing the College to training representatives so that they can participate effectively, the Learner Voice Strategy is not higher education-specific and focuses on collection of feedback rather than engagement of students in quality assurance and enhancement. However, the revised strategy and discussions at Higher Education Board demonstrate the College's willingness to review the effectiveness of representation and set targets against relevant metrics.

2.44   Student representation on deliberative committees is not well embedded. Until very recently representatives did not attend the Higher Education Board, and the Lead Student Representative for the current review has attended recent meetings, rather than course representatives. Student representatives do not attend course team meetings, although they can raise issues with the programme leader. While compulsory training for representatives is available, none of those met by the team had been trained. As discussed under Expectation B7 (see paragraph 2.60), students have not seen external examiner reports and these are not available on the VLE. Much of the Learner Voice and Student Council initiatives are further education-focused and not directly concerned with higher education students' engagement in quality assurance or enhancement.

2.45   Generally, the College is responsive to students' views. Directorate management meetings and course team meetings discuss the results of 'Meet the Learner' and 'Meet the Manager' meetings, and both students and staff cite instances of improving resources and teaching in response to feedback. However, many staff and students are unaware of declining NSS results, and, despite some analysis and action planning, Higher Education Management team meetings and the Higher Education Board have not recorded detailed discussion of the issues. The College makes more extensive use of the College's own cross-College survey, which can be disaggregated by programme. While some Annual Monitoring Reports use student feedback as a source of evidence, others leave feedback sections blank. Likewise, module leader reports and evaluations record little consideration of student feedback.

2.46   Given the lack of extensive engagement in deliberate committees and variable use of student feedback, the team **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College develop and implement strategies to engage higher education students more actively in quality assurance and enhancement.

2.47   The review team considers that the College meets Expectation B5 through its representation and feedback systems combined with a track record of responsiveness to student views. The moderate risk in this area relates to the need to deepen student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement through deliberative committees and more formal consideration of some forms of student feedback.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.48   The programme handbooks seen by the review team are clear on what students have to do to achieve certain grades. Handbooks tell students when and what they will be doing and have specific sections on plagiarism. Assessment tasks are internally verified and then sent to the University before being sent to the external examiner for approval. Marked work is internally moderated before a sample is sent to the University (in the case of Middlesex, all work is double marked by the University) and it is then sent to the external examiner. The College's Higher Education Quality Manual has College standard documentation. One document is an assignment sheet identifying what learning outcomes are being assessed. The College has a Recognition of Prior Learning Policy. The College holds assessment boards. Boards relating to the Westminster provision are held at the University; those for the Middlesex and Pearson provision at the College The College's policies, processes and procedures enable it to meet the expectation in Expectation B6.

2.49   The review team looked at relevant documentation, including programme handbooks, the Assessment and Internal Verification Policy and Handbook, external examiner reports, minutes of assessment boards, and the Recognition of Prior Learning Policy. The team also looked at minutes from the 'Meet the Learners' meetings and met academic staff and students.

2.50   The review team saw evidence of mapping of module outcomes against programme learning outcomes in some of the handbooks but not in all, and also saw a number of assessments which listed the learning outcomes to be achieved.

2.51   Students confirmed that it is made clear to them how their work is graded and what they need to do to achieve certain grades. This is conveyed to them in the programme handbooks which are available on the VLE or in hard copy. They are very clear about the definition of plagiarism and the consequences of such. All assignment work is submitted through a plagiarism-detection tool. In year one they are able to submit early drafts for formative feedback; this is less frequently available in year two. Students find the feedback on their work formative and it enables them to improve. They also stated that when there was an issue with bunching of assignments this was resolved and that they are clear on the policy for mitigating circumstances.

2.52   Staff have attended a Higher Education in Further Education session in the College and there is a Higher Education in Further Education online training course available to them. There is also evidence that in a higher education team meeting staff had looked at coursework marked anonymously by colleagues and comments noted. In addition, staff training plans from the two directorates which deliver higher education show some development planned for lecturers teaching higher education. Staff confirmed that they had attended partner training events on assessment practice.

2.53   The review team looked at minutes of assessment boards held at the College. In one case, while the title of the meeting was Board of Studies, it was an assessment board with the link tutor present. The meeting noted that there were no student representatives

present because the date of the meeting had been changed, but the meeting discussed individual student achievement. As explained under Expectation B5, the College should clarify the role of student representation in assessment boards and Boards of Studies (see paragraph 2.37) and this contributes to the recommendation below. The review team also saw a report from an external examiner stating that three inactive students had not been withdrawn from a HND programme despite this being a recommendation from the external examiner in the previous year. The review team **recommends** that, by May 2015, the College establish terms of reference for examination boards and ensure that the assessment status of all students is recorded.

2.54   The College has a Recognition of Prior Learning Policy which is based on the Pearson policy and NOCN (formerly the National Open College Network) policy. The policy is clear on the process involved, the evidence needed and where responsibility for the process lies. In addition, the foundation degree course handbook seen by the team describes the process of an application for recognition of prior learning. The review team saw no evidence that the policy had been used recently.

2.55   Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B6 is met with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.56   The College's university partners and Pearson define the role of and appoint external examiners. They are briefed on appointment by the relevant awarding body or Pearson, with the College providing more detailed background information subsequently. External examiners visit the College annually and meet staff and students. Pearson and the College's awarding bodies provide standard templates for external examiner reports. Reports relating to foundation degrees are received initially by the universities and then forwarded to the link tutor at the College. Responses to module-specific recommendations are captured in end-of-module reviews. Pearson reports are made available online. Reports are considered by relevant curriculum areas, action plans are drawn up by section managers, in the case of foundation degrees in consultation with university partners, to address issues identified by the external examiner. External examiner action plans are signed off at directorate management committees, and in the case of foundation degrees by partner universities, and incorporated into Annual Monitoring Reports. Annual Monitoring Reports feed into directorate SEDs and QIPs, which in turn inform the College HE SED and QIP. The Academic Standards Manager prepares a College-wide summary of key issues raised by external examiners which will in future be discussed at the Higher Education Board. The role of external examiners is explained to staff in the Higher Education Quality Manual. Students are briefed about the role of the external examiner in programme handbooks. The College stated that external examiner reports are made available to students via the VLE. These procedures would enable the College to meet Expectation B7 in principle.

2.57   The review team tested the College's procedures by reading the Higher Education Quality Manual; external examiner reports; end-of-module reviews; action plans; annual monitoring and self-evaluation reports; minutes of the Higher Education Board, Boards of Studies, management team meetings and programme team meetings; and met senior and academic staff and students.

2.58   As noted in A3.4 (see paragraph 1.45) at the time of the review, the College had not received an external examiner report for the University of Westminster Foundation Degree in Construction for the previous academic year; an essential action required by a Pearson external examiner relating to the use of plagiarism-detection software had led to awards being withheld until the matter was resolved. External examiner reports generally confirm that actions identified in earlier reports have been acted upon by the College, although on occasion the College has not addressed recommendations promptly and fully. For example, the external examiner for the Foundation Degree in Computing (Software Engineering) raised concerns about the provision of work-based learning and the structure of the course in two consecutive reports and noted that he had not received feedback on actions taken in response to a previous report. The external examiner for the Higher National programmes in Vehicle Operations Management noted that an action relating to staff development on assessment design and management was still work in progress.

2.59   Although the Higher Education Quality Manual refers to external examiners, little detail is provided on the College's procedures to ensure that the reports are acted upon robustly at all levels. The review team notes the existence of action plans to address external examiner reports but was unable to track how matters identified by external examiners are incorporated systematically into directorate level self-evaluation documents and action plans and institutional level actions, for example, in relation to the need for staff

development. The review team found little evidence that external examiner reports are given due consideration at programme, directorate or College level, nor that progress in completing recommended actions is monitored effectively. Although the Higher Education Board's terms of reference include monitoring quality outcomes on higher education programmes, there is no evidence that the Board had considered external examiner reports in the previous academic year. The College intends to review external examiner action plans during the next Higher Education Standards Review to be held in March 2015. The absence of any consideration of external examiner reports and resulting actions plans during the autumn term reviews means that the College cannot be confident that action plans are robustly addressing concerns and that cross-programme themes are identified and acted upon promptly at College level. The review team **recommends** that, by June 2015, the College documents and continues to develop processes for monitoring actions arising from external examiner reports at all levels.

2.60   At the time of the review visit, external examiner reports were not available on the VLE as claimed by the College and none of the students the review team met had seen one. In October 2014 the Higher Education Board agreed to make reports available to students on the VLE but the completion of this action was not followed up at the subsequent meeting. The review team **recommends** that, by June 2015, the College makes all external examiner reports available to students

2.61   The review team concludes that the College does not make scrupulous use of external examiner reports and therefore Expectation B7 is not met and the level of risk is moderate. The College procedures and practices for receiving, responding to and monitoring external examiner reports are not documented in sufficient detail to ensure that effective use is made of such reports and they are not currently made available to students.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*

Findings

2.62   The Higher Education Quality Manual states that for Pearson validated provision, at the end of every year, each directorate offering higher education is expected to produce an annual action plan using the criteria in the QAA SED template. It should incorporate all actions identified throughout the curriculum review process, including progress against key performance indicators, the recommendations and actions arising from the external examiners reports and outcomes of the student questionnaires and student voice. In practice, the College produces Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) for its non-university provision using a standard template that contains a quality improvement plan in the final section of the report. Middlesex University and the University of Westminster have a similar process with slightly different templates but covering all essential information. The relevant Section Manager produces the AMR, which incorporates module reviews. The AMRs are considered at directorate management meetings and feed into the directorate SED and QIP which is monitored by the directorate Higher Education Management team meeting. The University link tutor reviews the AMRs for Middlesex University programmes and College staff then set the programme-level action plan. There is an overall College HE SED and QIP, although in 2013-14 the College chose to replace this with the self-evaluation submitted as part of this review, and resultant action plan. The College's processes enable it to meet Expectation B8.

2.63   The review team read various documents including AMRs, directorate self-evaluation documents, directorate Higher Education Management team meeting minutes the College's self-evaluation document and minutes of the Higher Education Board. The review team also met academic and senior staff.

2.64   The module reviews seen by the team were very brief and did not address external examiner comments. However, the AMRs seen by the team were very detailed and identified the issues stated in the Higher Education Quality Manual, although one was not fully completed. The AMRs submitted to the universities of Westminster and Middlesex were also very detailed and, as with the College's AMRs, identified actions for improvement. The review team noted that an AMR 2013-14 for the Foundation Degree in Construction was not required by the University of Westminster as the course is closing. Course AMRs and directorate SEDs are presented to the Higher Education Board, however the overall College HE SED for 2012-13 was not considered by the Board as a result of the significant changes, including to academic personnel, experienced by the College in recent years.

2.65   The College has recently undertaken a dedicated higher education Standards Review based on its further education Standards Review process. This took place on 21 November 2014 and will be repeated in March 2015. The minutes of the November 2014 Standards Review meeting focused on a number of areas, including progression data; curriculum targets; teaching, learning and assessment; and the learner voice. It drew on a body of evidence including achievement statistics, areas for concern and action taken to address those concerns, and student feedback. Areas to be explored further during the follow-up review include AMRs and external examiner action plans, employability and staff development.

2.66   The team considers that the design and operation of the College's processes for the monitoring and review of programmes meets Expectation B8 and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.67   A College-wide complaints policy details an appropriate set of regulations and procedures that distinguish between informal complaints resolved by course teams and formal complaints, which are dealt with at directorate level and referred to the Academic Standards Manager or other senior managers. The policy permits higher education students to escalate complaints to the awarding bodies having exhausted the College's procedures. The Vice Principal has overall responsibility for the policy, but the Academic Standards Manager is responsible for implementation and preparing reports. Suitable time limits and an appeals process against decisions are in place. The Curriculum and Standards Committee of the Corporation receives an annual summary report of complaints to identify potential improvements.

2.68   An appendix to the Assessment and Internal Verification Policy sets out the College's academic appeals procedures. These include time limits for making an appeal and encompass a system of escalation ranging from an informal conversation with assessors or the Course Team Leader, to lodging a formal appeal with the curriculum Director, which must be reported to the external examiner, and finally escalating an appeal to the awarding body where relevant. Memoranda of Collaboration between the College and its awarding bodies state that the academic appeals regulations of the latter apply to the College's validated programmes, and, in the case of University of Westminster, appeals are investigated by the awarding body.

2.69   Fair and transparent complaints and appeals procedures allow Expectation B9 to be met.

2.70   To test the effectiveness of the College's complaints and appeals procedures the review team met staff and students, analysed past complaints, and scrutinised the information available to stakeholders.

2.71   The College operates its procedures effectively, allowing complaints to be recorded and dealt with in a fair and timely manner. The Academic Standards Manager effectively monitors complaints and appeals data by programme.

2.72   Students receive information about complaints during induction and the appeals procedures are reprinted in students' handbooks. Appeals and complaints policies and procedures are available on the College VLE and website and are referenced in the Higher Education Quality Manual for staff. Staff are aware of the relevant procedures and policies, and students know where to find complaints and appeals information if required. However, an assertion in the Foundation Degree in Computing (Software Engineering) handbook that awarding body appeals procedures do not apply contradicts both the Memorandum of Collaboration with the awarding body and the College's policy. Despite some uncertainty on the part of students, staff assured the team that this was a typographical error, rather than any dilution of students' rights to use awarding body regulations. This inconsistency between handbooks and policy contributes to the recommendation made under Expectation C that the College further ensure greater consistency in programme handbook content so that handbooks are fit for purpose and trustworthy sources of information across all programmes.

2.73   On balance, the effective operation of robust procedures, adequate information to staff and students, and the regular recording and reporting of complaints and appeals meets Expectation B9 and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.74   A key focus of the College's higher education provision is to ensure that students are employable and have high level work-related skills to meet the needs of employers in specific industries and sectors. Higher education programmes are offered flexibly in different modes of study and the majority of students combine working with studying. Nearly all of the students in the Construction curriculum area are sponsored to attend College by their employers.

2.75   The College has an Employability and Work Experience Policy which commits the College to providing students with the opportunity to undertake work experience. The Policy sets out the role of the Employability Team in sourcing and vetting placements and the entitlement of students to a programme of tutorials to prepare for the placement, to receive at least one visit while on placement and access to ongoing support, and to give feedback on their experiences. The Employability Team have produced handbooks, guides and packs for tutors, students and employers which are available in hard copy or from the staff intranet.

2.76   The College would not normally draw up contracts with employers, although there is provision to do so for the higher level apprenticeship scheme if the number of apprentices exceeds 20.

2.77   Work-based learning units are incorporated into the structure of the foundation degrees and placements are arranged for students not already in relevant employment to enable them to develop work-related skills. A number of units on the Higher National in Construction and the Built Environment involve students drawing on their workplace experience; College staff provide tutorial support and assess the outcomes.

2.78   The policies and procedures relating to work experience and work-based learning enable the College to meet Expectation B10.

2.79   The review tested the College's approach to managing its higher education provision with others by talking to staff, students and employers and scrutinising policies and procedures relating to work experience and the role of the Employability Team; correspondence with employers and external examiner reports.

2.80   The College is able to demonstrate a high level of engagement with employers, particularly those representing the construction industry, in relation to the curriculum offer. Work-based learning is incorporated into the design of the foundation degrees, but the plans for placements on the Foundation Degree in Computing (Software Engineering) discussed at the validation event have proved more difficult to realise in practice, leading the external examiner to recommend better integration of industrial experience into the programme and increasing the practical content. The College has developed a relationship with The Football Association for some placements and also makes use of internal College projects to provide relevant experience. The review team noted that there are plans to secure 10-week placements for second year Foundation Degree Computing (Software Engineering) students, although many of the employers are yet to confirm the arrangements.

2.81   The team concludes that, notwithstanding the difficulties in securing industry-specific placements for some students, the College's arrangements for managing placements, particularly as exemplified by the work of the Employability Team, is effective and that Expectation B10 is met with a low associated risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.82   In reaching its judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

2.83   All Expectations in this area are met apart from B7, External Examining, which has a moderate risk associated with the lack of rigour with which external examiner reports are received, responded to and monitored by the College and the fact that, at the time of the review, external examiner reports were not available to students.

2.84   Of the remaining nine relevant Expectations, three are met with a moderate risk and all others are met with a low risk. The moderate risks relate to the lack of a formal system for the internal approval and modification of Pearson programmes (B1), the need for a more systematic and differentiated approach to higher education staff development (B3) and a need for more strategic engagement of higher education students in quality assurance and enhancement (B5).

2.85   Notwithstanding the one Expectation that is not met and the four in total that have an associated moderate risk, the review team judges that, overall, the College **meets** UK expectations in its management of the quality of student learning opportunities. The Expectation not met does not present any serious risk and the recommendations are generally minor omissions or oversights, a need to amend or update details in documentation and in some cases the completion of activity that is already underway.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, *Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision*

Findings

3.1 The College publishes information through its website and a higher education prospectus available online and in print. Enrolment and induction days familiarise new students with College processes, programmes, resources, and support services. In particular, students receive useful information about the Employability Team's services both in print and on the VLE. The College mandates that all programmes produce handbooks that include definitions of plagiarism, breakdowns of assessments and submission dates, Colleges policies and appeals procedures. The College also has policies regarding the content and format of assignment briefs, which must be verified internally before publication and supplemented by an assessment plan. A VLE provides students with access to electronic copies of the above information and to a range of learning resources. However, there is no minimum content policy for the VLE. The Higher Education Quality Manual and the Assessment and Internal Verification Policy ensure that academic staff have the necessary reference information to operate quality assurance processes.

3.2 The College is responsible for producing information about its programmes that is fit for purpose, accessible, and trustworthy, although awarding bodies and Pearson monitor this through annual monitoring procedures and external examiners. Awarding bodies also retain the right to require approval and changes to handbooks and marketing material about their programmes. Consequently, published information must be jointly agreed between the College and its awarding bodies. Teaching and marketing staff use a course file database to ensure published information is derived from a single source. Maintained by Management Information Systems, the course file system is audited annually. Marketing must sign off all information for publication on the website, but course teams are responsible for maintaining handbooks, entries to the course file system, and VLE sites. The Head of Student Development signs off all information relating to student support.

3.3 The College reviewed the quality and completeness of programme documentation during its internal review of higher education in May 2012 and considers reviews of marketing and VLE information at Higher Education Board. Course team meetings regularly consider VLE content. External examiners monitor programme handbooks and information given to current students, as do awarding body AMRs completed by the College. Some, but not all, AMRs completed internally for Higher National programmes also monitor information available to students. The HE Learner Focus Groups held in March 2014 considered the trustworthiness and suitability of information on the VLE. Although the response rate is low, the College runs an induction survey.

3.4 The range of published material available to students, a well-understood division of responsibility, and suitable processes for the review and approval allow Expectation C to be met.

3.5 The team scrutinised information published online and in print, compared that available for each programme, and met staff and students to ascertain the trustworthiness of published information as well as the effectiveness of monitoring and review procedures.

In general, students confirm that published information is accurate, timely and helpful, and staff are aware of their responsibility to update and review information.

3.6   A 2012 internal review found that the College's website was outdated and gave inaccurate information about fees, although these particular issues have been resolved. A wide range of governance information and policy documents are available online, including corporation membership and minutes, Corporation Curriculum and Standards Committee minutes, complaints and equality policies, and the College's Strategic Plan. As noted under Expectation B2 (see paragraph 2.12), the Admissions Policy is not directly available online, although a description of the process is. The website's higher education section lists all relevant programmes and offers funding advice and information. Programme pages contain start dates, fees, and basic information about the programme, including award titles, codes, and entry requirements, alongside summary information about College support services and resources. Key Information Set (KIS) data is available for some programmes. Programme pages identify the awarding body, but do not fully explain the relationship between the College and its partners in terms of access to resources. An Applied Biology HND is still advertised, despite the College deciding it does not have the resources to run the programme.

3.7   A higher education prospectus is available online and contains helpful summary information about programmes and entry requirements. However, foundation degree pages do not include references to awarding bodies.

3.8   Handbooks are produced for all of the College's higher education programmes. Most contain two parts: a programme specification and a broader introduction to the programme, directorate, and the College's procedures and support services. For Higher National programmes, Pearson publishes generic programme specifications and detailed unit-level specifications, which course teams translate into contextualised programme specifications. Specifications and handbooks for foundation degree programmes are produced and approved as part of the awarding bodies' validation processes, often following an awarding body template.

3.9   Course teams review handbooks annually, gaining approval from higher education section managers and University link tutors where necessary. While those produced using awarding body templates are generally comprehensive, programme handbooks vary in quality and the range of information they contain is inconsistent. Many do not comply with the College's Assessment and Internal Verification Policy's requirement to include a schedule of assessments or 'detailed information concerning the assessment methodology'. Furthermore, the HND Business 2013-14 handbook lacked a section on student representation present in other handbooks and, despite being rewritten for 2014, misleadingly directs students to the HNC/D Computing VLE section to access assignment schedules. Others, such as the HNC Construction handbook, contain helpful reading lists, although equivalent lists for the HND programme are either missing or pending updates. As noted under Expectation B9 (see paragraph 2.72), the Foundation Degree in Computing (Software Engineering) handbook includes a potentially misleading statement concerning the applicability of awarding body appeals procedures. Finally, there is some evidence that one programme started the 2014-15 session without a programme handbook or assessment schedule.

3.10   Students and staff consider the VLE a key source of information. Staff receive support in developing resources for the VLE. The 2012 internal higher education review concluded that some programme information was outdated and that not all resources promised by staff had been uploaded to the VLE. Recent audits again suggested that outdated information needed to be removed; in consequence, the VLE was 'reset' over the summer of 2014. Although this action guaranteed the removal of outdated information,

some students experienced a short period without resources. Furthermore, audits of the HND Business VLE site found that key documents were missing, such as assignment briefs and the assessment plan. Although some programmes' sites offer a comprehensive range of resources and documentation, others remain sparse.

3.11   Given the variation between programmes discussed above, the team **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College further ensures greater consistency in VLE and programme handbook content so that these are fit for purpose and trustworthy sources of information across all programmes.

3.12   The team concludes that, based on the extent of accurate information available generally and the operation of processes for managing published information, and notwithstanding the need to ensure greater comparability of information across programmes, Expectation C is met with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.13   In reaching its judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

3.14   Information provided on the quality of learning opportunities is largely trustworthy, fit for purpose and accessible. The Expectation in this area is met with low risk. The review team makes a recommendation to address inconsistencies across programmes in the information provided in programme handbooks and on the VLE, but these are related to minor omissions and the need to amend or update details in documentation, where the amendment will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change.

3.15   The review team therefore judges that the College **meets** UK expectations in respect of the quality of the information produced about its provision.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College has recently been through a phase of transition involving significant change to its organisational structure and Senior Leadership Team members. Its approach to enhancement is through strengthening management posts and investing in quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms to support future developments. These mechanisms include activities such as 'Learning Walks' and the newly instigated higher education Standards Review, and processes being driven by the refreshed Higher Education Board terms of reference and the focus on the learner voice. Future developments include a significant rebuilding project at the Willesden campus that will include a higher education floor and the provision of separate facilities for higher education students by 2017.

4.2 The full-time cross-College Head of Assessment and Quality post will replace the part-time Academic Standards Manager and the new Director of Learning, Improvement and Standards commenced in April 2014. These new posts and the increased time allowed for managers to undertake management and quality assurance duties are expected to enable the College to develop a more focused enhancement approach. This is being further strengthened by redressing the balance of academic staff which was formerly characterised by an over-reliance on hourly-paid lecturers.

4.3 There is no overall quality strategy but the College has a draft Higher Education Strategy, a cross-College Quality Manual and comprehensive Higher Education Quality Manual. The draft eight-point Higher Education Strategy includes strategic aims to enhance the student learning opportunities through effective use of learning technologies and managed learning environments, and to encourage and support the development of a stronger learner voice for higher education. This draft strategy will be subject to detailed review once the new management structures are embedded.

4.4 The review team looked at relevant documents, including AMRs, the Higher Education Strategy 2009, the draft Higher Education Strategy 2014-15, the higher education Standards Review report and minutes of the Higher Education Board. The team also met the Principal, academic staff, support staff and senior staff.

4.5 The College conducted a review of higher education provision in May 2012 and an action plan was produced, although the review team could not identify any evidence to show that this action plan had been discussed and monitored. In addition, a higher education 'Learning Walk' took place in March 2014 and in November 2014 the College conducted a higher education Standards Review. The Standards Review did not look at enhancement specifically but identified enhancement for learners as an item for the next higher education Standards Review in March 2015. The College also conducted an audit of VLE sites in 2013. The audit and its recommendations were discussed in directorate management meetings.

4.6 Enhancement is not discussed formally at the Higher Education Board although the review team notes that minutes of the meeting in November 2014 mentioned the impending Higher Education Review and the need to demonstrate that the College is meeting the expectation on Enhancement at a strategic level, or beginning to meet the expectation. Senior staff confirmed that, previously, the Higher Education Board had not been particularly focused on enhancement as there have been of a number of interim senior managers with a higher education quality remit. The remit of the Board has been refocused since the

appointment of the new Principal, Vice Principal and a new role of Director of Learning, Improvement and Standards. The Vice Principal (Curriculum and Quality) has been identified very recently as the champion for higher education at a strategic level. The terms of reference of the Higher Education Board have been updated and while these do not identify enhancement as part of the core business of the Board, a primary objective is to ensure policies and procedures are followed in aiming for the highest quality higher education provision.

4.7   The SED states that there are a number of trips by students to employers and visits by employers to the College although the review team found that these are primarily based in the Construction and Engineering directorate. Students in computing can gain a vendor qualification and the College holds internal competitions and as a result chooses students to enter regional and, if successful, national competitions.

4.8   The team considered evidence of the sharing and disseminating of good practice in higher education in the College. While AMRs identify good practice, these are focused more on curriculum enrichment than strategic enhancement. Examples of good practice identified in AMRs included the range of teaching materials used, the sharing of module evaluations, additional maths support provided for students and the introduction of vendor certification for foundation degree students. The review team notes that the Teacher Forum Schedule for 2013-14 included many workshops on sharing good practice but that none were specific to higher education. The review team also notes the sharing of good practice at a higher education team meeting and staff stated that good practice was shared between the College and another college which also worked with the University of Westminster, although this partnership no longer exists.

4.9   The review team considers that many of the examples of enhancement given by the College relate to curriculum enrichment, programme-level enhancement and strategies to improve student employability rather than strategic enhancement that involves deliberate steps taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The team **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College develops a strategic approach to the enhancement of higher education student learning opportunities, including the identification and dissemination of good practice. This should also enable more active engagement of higher education students in quality assurance and enhancement as recommended by the review team under Expectation B5.

4.10   The team acknowledges that the new management structure, the refocusing of the Higher Education Board, the creation of a champion for higher education at a strategic level and the creation of a new post of Director of Learning, Improvement and Standards have the potential to create a strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. These developments could also lead to the integration of enhancement initiatives and enable the College to identify, support and disseminate good practice in higher education. At the time of the review visit, however, the new structure and related developments had not had the opportunity to prove their efficacy, and the College could not demonstrate in other ways that it was taking deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of learning opportunities for higher education students. As such, the review team concludes that the Expectation on enhancement is not met. The team further concludes that the associated level of risk is moderate, rather than serious, given the potential for improvement presented by the changes outlined above.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11   In reaching its judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

4.12   The College has undergone a significant period of change and the new senior management team are in the process of reshaping and refocusing all the College's business, including higher education. While the review team found examples of enhancement activity at programme level, and the development of structures and initiatives that in time should enable a more strategic approach to enhancement, these are not yet embedded and have thus not yet impacted on the management of the quality of student learning opportunities in a systematic and managed way at provider level. In a similar manner, while curriculum level examples of the sharing of good practice exist, these are not built upon systematically or in a way that enables broader sharing of good practice across the whole of the higher education provision. The review team found limited evidence of deliberate steps being taken at provider level to enhance the learning opportunities of higher education students.

4.13   The review team therefore judges that the College **requires improvement** to meet UK expectations in this area and recommends that the College develops a strategic approach to the enhancement of higher education student learning opportunities, including the identification and dissemination of good practice. The Expectation on Enhancement is not met but does not currently present any serious risks; however the moderate risk associated with the Expectation could lead to serious problems with the management of enhancement over time, should the planned changes not be implemented effectively.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The College has a draft Employer Engagement Strategy which is designed to increase the involvement of employers in shaping the curriculum and improve students' employability skills. The College makes good use of labour market intelligence to plan its provision to meet the needs of specific employment sectors. It hosts breakfast network events to discuss employer needs, higher level apprenticeship developments and funding opportunities. The College is a member of the London Technician Apprenticeship Consortium which has led to the development of the College's Higher Level Apprenticeship programme in Construction which combines a Higher National Diploma with an NVQ level 5. Employers who met the review team commented on the College's responsiveness and flexibility in accommodating their requirements.

5.2   The Employer Engagement Strategy is complemented by a Work Experience and Employability Policy which sets out the College's commitment to providing all students with the opportunity to undertake a work placement. The Employability Team has a significant role in fulfilling the College's commitment by providing, securing and vetting work placements, supporting students with curriculum vitae preparation and mock interview practice. The team also provides a range of information packs, handbooks and guides for staff, students and employers.

5.3   At a curriculum level, student employability is enhanced by the use of guest speakers in construction and computing, visits to employers, mock interviews, mentoring schemes and participation in internal and external competitions. On some Higher National programmes in the Directorate of Construction and Engineering there is a wide choice of options to meet the needs of individual employers, and in computing there is an emphasis on specific programming languages and robotics to match the needs of potential employers. Students are encouraged to become members of relevant professional bodies and also acquire additional vocational qualifications where appropriate.

5.4   Student handbooks contain a useful section on employability and the various opportunities on offer to support students. There are clear progression routes to honours degree level for foundation degree students with evidence of good outcomes.

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 29-32 of the Higher Education Review handbook.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

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

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

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

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

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