Higher Education Review of Tyne Metropolitan College

March 2015

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Tyne Metropolitan College. The review took place from 16 to 18 March 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw
- Mrs Elisabeth Downes
- Mr James Freeman (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

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

The themes for the academic year 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/assuring-standards-and-quality/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/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Tyne Metropolitan College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Tyne Metropolitan College.

- The effective engagement with local and regional employers in the strategic design and development of programmes that are appropriate to their needs (Expectations B1, A3.4 and Enhancement).
- The effective use of the Higher Education Gateway to provide students with guidance, support and resources to facilitate their development and achievement (Expectation B4).
- The wide variety of staff development opportunities directly linked to employer needs that enhance the higher education provision (Expectation B3).
- The extensive use and review of feedback mechanisms to identify and respond to student needs (Expectations B5 and Enhancement).
- The effective use of live assignment briefs and projects that develop students' employability skills and make positive contributions to local employers (Expectations B6, B4 and Enhancement).

Recommendations

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

By July 2015:

- ensure that all students are aware of and have access to external examiner reports (Expectation B7).

By May 2016:

- ensure that teaching observations reflect the needs of higher education staff and students (Expectation B3).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to improve the institutional oversight, tracking and completion of actions raised in external examiner reports (Expectation B7).

Theme: Student Employability

The College has a key strategic focus on the needs of the local and regional economy. It works in partnership with a range of local employers and organisations to ensure that the higher education programmes offered meet current industry needs. Employers contribute to the design of programmes, and students also benefit from a range of work-based and work related opportunities. The use of live assignment briefs is supported by employers and these make valuable contributions to the students' programmes and the employment settings.

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

About Tyne Metropolitan College

Tyne Metropolitan College (the College) was established in March 2005 as a result of the amalgamation between Tynemouth Sixth Form College and North Tyneside Further Education College. The College's mission - 'Raising aspirations; changing lives' - is underpinned by its vision 'to excel in everything we do so that more individuals, businesses and communities actively plan their futures in partnership with us'.

The College is a medium-sized general further education college in the North East of England, offering a range of further and higher education courses.

The College had a QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in May 2010. This followed the appointment of a new Principal and Chief Executive in 2009, and a reorganisation of the Senior Leadership Team and curriculum departments. Since September 2010, all higher education has been managed directly within curriculum departments.

Higher education student numbers have increased over the last three years. There were 398 Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded students in 2012-13, of which, 112 were full-time and 286 part-time. In 2013-14, there were 432 students (99 full-time, 333 part-time) and in December 2014 there were 538 (99 full-time, 439 part-time).

The College is aware of the need to ensure that it continues to provide a high quality experience for students, based on programmes which meet (and ideally exceed) external requirements and remain highly valued by all stakeholders. In addition, the College aims to continue to improve student-related systems and processes, and respond to policy developments and revisions to the Quality Code.

The College works in partnership with the University of Sunderland to deliver a range of programmes; it also offers Pearson provision.

In 2010, the College's IQER resulted in the identification of three features of good practice, two advisable and four desirable recommendations. The College has responded to these by building on the good practice in areas such as support for students and for staff through continued professional development activities. The College has addressed the advisable recommendations by ensuring that staff are appropriately engaged with quality assurance processes and that there is an effective committee for the oversight of higher education. The College has also responded to the desirable recommendations, including the two concerning the accuracy of its prospectus material and Higher National programme handbooks. These actions have been addressed in terms of policies, procedures and practices concerning information.

Explanation of the findings about Tyne Metropolitan College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: 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 is not directly responsible for placing qualifications within the relevant framework because the content of its Foundation Degree, Higher National and higher education certificate provision is prescribed either by an awarding body, the University of Sunderland (the University), or an awarding organisation. In the latter case, Pearson positions its qualifications within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), which itself maps onto *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). These Pearson qualifications include modules at levels 4-5 on both the QCF and FHEQ. The processes for securing academic standards enable Expectation A1 to be met in design.

1.2   The review team tested this Expectation by examining the development and approval process for foundation degree programmes and Higher National qualifications. The team also considered the reports from University approval and periodic review events, along with external examiner reports and the Pearson Quality Review and Development Report. In addition to this, the team met a range of staff members from the College and the University.

1.3   All higher education programmes at the College are designed to take account of the relevant Qualification and Subject Benchmark Statements. Programme specifications for the University franchised provision are appropriate and fit for purpose, and the relevant benchmarks have been applied. The College uses standard Pearson programme specifications, which are fit for purpose, but has not customised them to show how the programmes meet the needs of students and employers.

1.4   The College uses the systems and procedures outlined in the University's Academic Quality Handbook to ensure that academic standards are maintained. The College and the University have shared responsibility for the development of intended learning outcomes and the annual review of quality. External examiner reports and the annual Pearson Edexcel Quality Review and Development Report confirm that programmes are set and assessed at the correct level of the FHEQ.

1.5   For Pearson Higher National provision the College contributes to ensuring alignment with the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements by selecting units and setting assessments that allow intended learning outcomes to be reflective of the level expected. Staff use Pearson's quality assurance system and the Guide to Assessment and Vocational Quality Assurance Handbook to ensure delivery is in line with the awarding organisation's standards.

1.6   The periodic review for the FdA Counselling course noted that the programme team needed to link the programme learning outcomes more closely with the recently introduced *Subject Benchmark Statement: Counselling and Psychotherapy* (2013). The external examiners for FdSc Sport, and FdA Education and Care, confirmed that the learning outcomes are aligned with the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Delivery teams confirmed that they had used the FHEQ in the development of new higher education programmes, for example, in recent foundation degree developments in art and graphic design.

1.7   The College processes work effectively, and the College adheres to the requirements of the University and the awarding organisation. The approval processes ensure that qualifications are allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. The College has a good track record of working with the University and is in the process of validating additional foundation degree programmes.

1.8   The review team concludes that effective processes are in place to ensure all higher education programmes take account of the FHEQ and, where relevant, Subject Benchmark Statements in programme design and delivery. Overall, the application of the FHEQ is effective and programmes are allocated to the appropriate level. The review team concludes, therefore, that Expectation A1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.9   All of the College's higher education provision is either validated by the University or Pearson. The University clearly articulates its control over academic credit and standards in the operating agreement with the College.

1.10   Both the awarding body and organisation produce extensive quality handbooks and guides to assessment regulations for College staff to follow. These guides are designed to ensure that the requirements of the Quality Code are met and partner reports are provided to review the College's processes. A College senior manager also conducts an audit of course handbooks to ensure that they are fit for purpose. The processes relating to the award of academic credit and qualifications enable Expectation A2 to be met in design.

1.11   In testing this Expectation, the review team reviewed the effectiveness of systems to ensure academic standards. The team considered policies, procedures and practices by looking at the minutes of meetings, including examination boards, partner reports, the Pearson annual quality report, and validation and periodic review reports. The team also held meetings with senior and academic staff from the College and a representative from the University.

1.12   The Pearson's centre risk assessment process, evidenced through an annual Quality Review and Development Report, allows the College to be confident that assessment is being carried out appropriately. The academic quality control procedure outlines a good set of processes for internal verification, and defines individuals' roles. The terms of reference for assessment boards on Foundation Degree programmes are also important for operating the academic framework, and confirm that decisions are made using the University's undergraduate regulations. The College convenes an assessment board for Pearson higher level qualifications and keeps a record of the discussion and student grades. External examiners comment positively on the operation of assessment.

1.13   Senior staff confirm that they know that academic standards are met through the receipt of external examiners reports, University reports and examination board minutes, and through the College's own self-assessment reporting process. The College Corporation, which has overall responsibility for the strategic direction and quality of provision, receives these reports and is kept informed about academic standards through reports from the College Principal.

1.14   The review team concludes that the College has clear and comprehensive academic frameworks to govern the delivery of academic credit and qualifications on behalf of its awarding body and organisation. Therefore, 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

1.15   Both the College and its validating partners require that all programmes maintain and refer to programme specifications. While the University and Pearson retain ultimate responsibility for specifications, the College must ensure that these are treated as the definitive record of its higher education provision.

1.16   For programmes validated by the University, the College is required to use the University's programme specification template. This is designed to ensure that the programmes are positioned appropriately on the FHEQ, and use relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and qualification descriptors. It also covers assessment strategies, programme structure and the intended learning outcomes. The College is required to follow guidance from the University on the approval and modification of specifications. For Higher National provision, the College refers to Pearson's standard, national-level specifications, which describe units, aims, QCF level and intended learning outcomes. Despite the absence of discrete, College-specific programme specifications for its Pearson provision, the College's version control and review procedures combine with validating-body documents and programme handbooks to allow Expectation A2.2 to be met in theory.

1.17   In testing this Expectation the review team scrutinised handbooks, programme specifications and other documentary evidence. The team also held meetings with senior staff, a representative from the University, students and programme leaders to test the effectiveness of the College's policies and procedures regarding definitive records.

1.18   College staff were unaware of Pearson's request that providers contextualise national-level documents in the form of delivery-specific programme specifications. However, programme teams do contextualise this national-level information in the form of programme handbooks, which are monitored by Heads of Department and senior staff. A course file maintenance procedure makes programme leaders responsible for keeping essential records of a programme secure, updated and complete to minimum standards. Heads of Department audit course files annually and the Quality Improvement Team carry out spot checks.

1.19   The College's internal programme approval process exercises a useful safeguard on definitive records by requiring proposers to obtain a definitive course list number. Website, virtual learning environment (VLE) and handbook information is consistent with programme specifications. Students can access programme specifications, either in print, via the VLE, or via links and extracts in programme handbooks. Specifications for the University programmes clearly display version histories and dates of validation, approval and review. Moreover, as noted under Expectation C, effective systems for ensuring the accuracy of published information, including student handbooks, are in place.

1.20   Staff members make effective use of specifications as a programme's definitive record; these specifications are referred to during validation and periodic review or when modifications are necessary. Programme teams use specifications when designing assignment briefs, particularly as a means of ensuring consistency across cohorts or sites.

External verifiers also check the use of the specification in teams' selection of units and design of assessments. Furthermore, the College's departmental self-evaluations include an update on actions raised by external examiners, and consider the match between pass criteria and the individual learning outcomes set out within specifications.

1.21   The review team concludes that the effective management and maintenance of programme specifications as the definitive record of a programme, their availability to students, and use by staff in quality assurance activities, ensures that 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

1.22   Ultimately, the responsibility for academic standards rests with the University and Pearson as the College's validating partners. The College manages the standards of its academic provision, and monitors the effective and appropriate implementation of awarding body and awarding organisation requirements, through implementing agreed policies and procedures. There is explicit reference to 'qualification level' and benchmarks in the section of the responsibilities checklist document describing the Pearson collaboration. The external processes for programme approval are described in Expectation B1, together with the internal approval process that coordinates with those of the University and Pearson. The processes at the College allow Expectation A3.1 to be met in design.

1.23   The review team tested this Expectation by considering a wide range of documentation describing the College and its two higher education partners, including programme specifications, programme handbooks and example programme approval documents. The team also held meetings with staff and students of the College and two representatives from the University.

1.24   Module and programme approval, including the associated academic standards, is closely regulated by the awarding body and awarding organisation, who both require proposals to consider alignment with external reference points, such as the Quality Code, the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements. The external approval mechanisms are complemented by an internal process that includes appropriate consultation with potential employers, existing students and external examiners.

1.25   The College works within the regulations set by the awarding body and the awarding organisation for Higher National provision. In the case of Pearson, the College can select optional units to deliver from a prescribed list. While this places the responsibility for maintaining academic standards firmly with Pearson, it also gives the College little flexibility to modify the programmes.

1.26   For University awards, the College follows the information about the programme approval process contained in the University Academic Quality Handbook. College staff can also access the programme specification section of the University website, which includes a guidance document on levels. The programme specification template has explicit reference to the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRBs. The checklist for programme approval includes Subject Benchmark Statements, FHEQ and PSRBs.

1.27   The review team concludes that the College, in association with its awarding body and awarding organisation, has effective processes for the approval of programmes and the securing of standards. Therefore, Expectation A3.1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.28   For Pearson programmes, the setting of assessments is a shared responsibility between Pearson and the College. The external examiner has a key role in confirming that the design and nature of the assessments permit the aims and learning objectives of a programme to be met, and that they are of a standard appropriate to the qualification level. Pearson Quality Review and Development reports detail the awarding organisation's expectations for the conduct and administration of assessments, including verification of assessment outcomes. In contrast, assessments on the programmes delivered in collaboration with the University are coordinated across all partnerships delivering the same programme. External examiners are required to confirm that standards are comparable to other higher education providers. The processes at the College allow Expectation 3.2 to be met in design.

1.29   The review team tested this Expectation by considering a wide range of documentation, including course and approval documentation, assessment guides, external examiner reports and assignment schedules. The team also held meetings with staff and students of the College and two representatives from the University.

1.30   College staff are clear about where the responsibility lies for awarding credit and the College's responsibilities under the agreements with the University and Pearson. The College's course and programme approval mechanism includes detailed consideration of the assessment associated with any proposed new provision. The award of credits to higher education programmes is regulated by the University or Pearson.

1.31   The assessments for Pearson programmes are set by the College, following guidance from the awarding organisation, and internally verified against the programme specification, before being checked by Pearson. Guidance for this process, the requirement for assessment to align with learning outcomes, and the requirement for verification by Pearson, are detailed in the Quality Review and Development Reports. External examiners confirm these arrangements in their reports.

1.32   College staff described the process for setting assessments for University programmes following the guidance provided on the University website, including the importance of matching assessment to academic standards as defined, for example, in the FHEQ. They also explained that assessments have to be consistent across all collaborative partners delivering the same programmes, so the process of setting assessments was coordinated by the University.

1.33   The College produces overview assessment plans for each year of each programme, which help it to ensure appropriate assessment loads are applied. Assessments are closely matched to learning outcomes. Scrutiny of external examiners' reports shows

that they fulfil the College's requirement to comment on the standards of the award, in terms of the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and academic standards relative to other higher education providers.

1.34   Students reported they had noticed a difference between the level of teaching and assessment on their higher education programmes, compared with previous study at a lower FHEQ level. They found the higher education assessments more challenging and more varied in style.

1.35   The College, in working with its awarding body and awarding organisation, has clear and appropriate processes in place for the assessment of learning outcomes, the monitoring of standards and the associated award of credit and qualifications. The review team 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

1.36   The University and Pearson bear ultimate responsibility for the quality and standards of the higher education provision at the College, including programme review. The College assures itself that academic standards are being met by aligning its self-evaluation processes with the Quality Code. There are internal review processes, including the annual self-assessment of individual courses and an annual College-wide self-assessment. There are clear divisions of roles and responsibilities with the awarding body; the awarding organisation and the College's processes in place allow Expectation A3.3 to be met in design.

1.37   The review team tested this Expectation by considering documentation from internal reviews and University annual review documents. The team also discussed the processes for monitoring programmes in meetings with staff and students from the College and staff from the University.

1.38   College documentation includes a College Quality Improvement Plan, course team self-assessment reports and departmental self-evaluation reports. While much of this documentation makes implicit reference to academic standards, the department self-evaluation document, in particular, explicitly addresses how well the programmes delivered by the department meet the Expectations of the Quality Code. The College's self-assessment report has a section on higher education, which refers to the requirements of the 'validating organisations' for consideration of the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. The College has a clearly coordinated sequence of annual review, including course team reports, Quality Improvement Plans and input from external examiner through their reports. These documents show explicit reference to the consideration of external examiner input, PSRB requirements, level of study, and Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.39   For programmes leading to University awards, the College follows the procedures for annual, periodic and PSRB review of taught programmes as described on the University website. The process for annual review of University programmes delivered by the College includes external representation on the panel and consideration of FHEQ levels and Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.40   The review team concludes that the College, in line with requirements of its awarding body and awarding organisation, has effective processes in place to monitor and review programmes and ensure that academic standards are being maintained. Expectation A3.3 is therefore 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

1.41   The content of the College's programmes is either validated by the University or Pearson. Therefore, the University and Pearson take ultimate responsibility for the design and approval of modules and assessment of learning outcomes through their own regulations.

1.42   Procedures are clearly set out in the University Academic Quality Handbook; these include the programme approval process, where arrangements for consultation with students and employers are outlined. Internally, programme approval involves a wide range of views, and this is followed by a strategic approval process at the University. Two further sources of externality are the College's participation in Pearson annual quality reviews, which check alignment with the Quality Code and its involvement in periodic review by the University. The processes for the use of external and independent expertise allow Expectation A3.4 to be met in design.

1.43   In testing this Expectation, the review team examined evidence, including College strategy documents, policies and procedures, and minutes of meetings. The team also held meetings with senior staff, academic staff, representatives from the University and employers.

1.44   The College has a thorough programme approval and review process, which seeks to engage a range of external partners, including liaison with schools, universities, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Local Enterprise Partnership. The College Principal and Senior Leadership Team have good links with the Local Enterprise Partnership, and there is evidence that the College aligns its strategy to the needs of the local and regional economy.

1.45   The College has received a Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) Assured Kitemark, which underlines the emphasis placed on provision in engineering, where the College has 253 students studying at a higher level. The College's Higher Education Strategy confirms this engagement has been very deliberate and clearly demonstrates the College's willingness to adapt its provision to local economic needs.

1.46   College staff use a range of sources of labour market information to ensure that the College can address current and future learning needs and skills gaps; this is particularly effective in engineering. These employers are routinely consulted about many aspects of provision; this informs annual review processes, choice of modules and validations. The Foundation Degree in Power Engineering enables learners to develop specific skills and knowledge in line with the requirements of employers, in power and renewable energies, precision engineering, oil, gas and subsea sectors, with whom the College works. College staff have adapted the choice of modules on Pearson Higher National programmes to meet the requirements of Siemens and British Engines. A partnership agreement is in place with

Siemens; representatives visit the College regularly, sponsor students on part-time provision, and support the curriculum through projects and guest speakers.

1.47   The validation of the FdA Graphic Communication course in 2014 provides further evidence of employer consultation impacting upon the content of the programme with, for example, the inclusion of motion graphics. There is also evidence that the College selects Pearson units to meet the needs of sponsoring employers. The College has not formally consulted students as part of the approval process, but their views have been taken account of through more informal channels.

1.48   All Pearson programmes are assessed through internally designed assignments, which meet the learning outcomes and, where appropriate, are contextualised to local needs. There are good examples of these tailored project briefs; employers Nestlé and British Engines, as well as voluntary sector organisations, confirmed that they allow students to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence.

1.49   The review team regards the engagement with employers in the strategic design and development of programmes as good practice, as outlined in Expectation B1, paragraph 2.9.

1.50   The periodic review process for the FdA and BA (Hons) top-up degree programmes in Counselling confirmed that learning outcomes and assessment criteria are sufficiently robust to support their continued operation. The programmes align with external reference points including the FHEQ, Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System descriptors and the relevant Foundation Degree Subject Benchmark Statements as discussed in Expectation A1. The course is well supported by employers in the voluntary sector, who value the work of students on placement and have helped the College respond to the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy requirement to increase the number of supervised counselling hours from 60 to 100.

1.51   The close relationship that the College has with its awarding body and organisation, together with the College's own strategic focus and processes, ensures that it does employ external and independent expertise when developing, approving and reviewing programmes. The review team therefore conclude that Expectation A3.4 is met and that 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

1.52   In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The team did not identify any recommendations or affirmations in this area, but did make a link to a feature of good practice in Expectation B1.

1.53   The College uses the processes of its awarding body and awarding organisation appropriately to ensure that academic standards are maintained. The internal College processes also support the effective maintenance of academic standards, for example, through the use of programme approval and monitoring. External and independent expertise is used extensively to secure academic standards and ensure that College programmes meet the needs of local and regional employers. The engagement of employers in programme design is therefore linked to the feature of good practice outlined in Expectation B1, paragraph 2.9.

1.54   All seven Expectations is this area are met with a low level of risk. Therefore, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College currently has programmes validated by the University and Pearson, and is required to follow the associated awarding body and organisation mechanisms for consideration and approval of new or modified courses and programmes. The external approval mechanisms are complemented by an internal approval mechanism that considers aspects such as any resource or staffing implications of the new provision. The processes at the College allow Expectation B1 to be met in design.

2.2 The review team tested this Expectation by considering documentation, such as programme specifications, programme handbooks and example programme approval documents. The team also explored the programme approval processes through meetings with staff and students of the College and two representatives from the University.

2.3 The College has an effective process in place for the design and approval of all higher level programmes, which is consistently applied to all new programmes or revalidations. These processes work well and ensure that new courses are compatible with the College's strategic aims, and that resources, staffing and non-staffing are in place prior to the start of the course. The processes map to the Expectations of the Quality Code, *Chapter B1*.

2.4 The curricula of programmes offered by the College are designed to meet the needs of local employers and the boarder community to ensure that current and future learning needs, skills gaps and skills shortages are met. This ensures that new developments are compatible with the College's objectives and that there is a specific local, regional or national need for any new programme. For example, the new Foundation Degree in Power Engineering will enable learners to develop specific skills and knowledge in line with the requirements of the employers in power and renewable energies, precision engineering and the areas of oil and gas subsea. The College selects non-mandatory units for Pearson programmes to meet the needs of employers, for example, British Engines and Siemens. In the case of the Higher National Diploma (HND) in Graphic Design, the team selected from an extensive bank of optional modules to meet the needs of students, often providing a customised course to meet their individual needs.

2.5 The nature of the College's relationship with each of the two awarding partners is very different, and this is reflected in the course and programme approval mechanisms. The College has centre approval with Pearson and is therefore able to use the Pearson automated online course approval system. The procedure includes a reviewer visit that assures the College is maintaining standards and meeting minimum indicators. There is limited scope for modification of Pearson programmes, except that the College is able to select from a portfolio of units to construct the curriculum.

2.6 As the majority of higher education learners in engineering, for example, are funded by employers, it is the employers who influence choices of units and ensure

these are suitable for the industry rather than the learners themselves. Employers confirmed that they had been involved in programme design by advising the College about the most suitable combination of Pearson units to ensure the students were appropriately qualified for employment. Students are able to provide feedback through surveys and meetings with University representatives at programme boards, which inform programme review processes, and reported that the processes worked well.

2.7   The College has effective mechanisms in place for the approval of new programmes validated by the University, in line with University procedures as described in the University Academic Quality Handbook. College staff have a good understanding of the programme approval processes and there is significant evidence of how the process has been applied to recent new course development with the University. The process begins with a trigger document that is effectively an expression of interest; at the University, the document is then logged with the quality and academic faculty. The academic faculty liaise with the College to develop the new course or programme, in line with the processes outlined in the University Academic Quality Handbook. Documentation for the approval of a programme such as the Foundation Degree in Power Engineering records that there was external representation on the approval panel, in addition to members of the University. The approval process includes detailed consideration of the financial aspects of the new programme, consultation with Student and Learning Support, the Employment Service, students and employers, and consideration of any relevant PSRB requirements. Although the University process does allow for student involvement, College students are not routinely involved in University programme approval processes.

2.8   The College has its own processes for approval of courses, which dovetail with the approval processes at the awarding body and organisation. In accordance with the College's Quality Improvement Strategy, proposals for new courses must take account of current demands, financial viability and reputation. College staff consider how the proposed teaching would fit with the College's objectives, and examine whether there is a specific local, regional or national need for the programme. The approval process examines the resources (staffing and non-staffing) that are available to ensure that the College is effectively able to deliver the qualification. All new courses require definitive course list numbers, the award of which requires approval by an internal course validation panel. The panel is Chaired by the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Business Development, and includes the Head of Quality Improvement and other co-opted members, as required. Proposals are prepared and submitted by the relevant Head of Department and, for higher education provision, must include approval by the relevant awarding body or awarding organisation. Internal processes include the establishment of course validation panels at the College. These panels are required to consider the level of the teaching and the requirement for external approval by the appropriate awarding body or organisation. External input to the process includes discussions with appropriate external organisations and the use of external examiner reports. The views of students are also sought through focus groups and any relevant module evaluations. Following consideration by a course validation panel, proposals are referred to the Higher Education and Higher Level Skills Committee.

2.9   The College has recently developed two new programmes, the Foundation Degree in Graphic Communication, and stages 1 and 2 of the BA in Graphic Design, to replace the existing HND in Graphic Design. The approval panel at the University noted that the proposal was based on extensive market research showing that the new programmes would be more attractive to potential employers. A design company helped the programme team to develop the new programmes and informed the employability agenda. The College also provided anecdotal evidence to the approval panel of other employers who had verbally expressed their support for the proposed foundation degree. The review team regards the effective engagement with local and regional employers in the strategic design and development of programmes that are appropriate to their needs as **good practice**.

The College's internal approval process is reviewed regularly to ensure that it is effective and meets the needs of the organisation, and reflects any updated QAA standards and organisational or awarding organisation requirements.

2.10   The review team concludes that the College has well developed processes for programme design and approval. Therefore, Expectation B1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.11   The College's awarding body and awarding organisation devolve many responsibilities for admissions, although the former retains the formal power to offer places on its programmes. Students are enrolled using a College-wide admissions policy, underpinned by the principles of transparent and inclusive procedures, fair recruitment decisions based on reliable entry criteria, and effective communication. Although the Director of Funding and Planning takes ultimate responsibility for admissions, the Senior Leadership Team monitor the policy while the Head of Gateway Services oversees the admissions process, reviews relevant procedures and supports programme teams. Process improvement groups review the admissions policy annually, using feedback from surveys and focus groups.

2.12   A clearly defined applications procedure outlines staff roles and prospective students' responsibilities. In addition, the University sets out an admissions process for its partners to follow and align their policies with. Prospective students can apply directly to the College, although those intending to study full-time are advised to apply via UCAS. The College sends acknowledgement cards on receipt of applications, which are entered into an electronic system and screened with reference to entry criteria set by either the College or its awarding body in programme specifications. All prospective students are invited for an interview or information session, held with programme leaders or the Senior Student Adviser respectively. Following interview, programme leaders make offers, where candidates meet the entry criteria. On University programmes, the awarding body is consulted, where applicants hold non-standard qualifications. The College confirms offers and any conditions in writing, before informing UCAS of their decision or relaying this to the University. Where no offer is made, applicants are referred to the Senior Student Adviser for further guidance and directed to the College's complaints procedure should they wish to appeal.

2.13   The transparent, fair and reliable policies and procedures for admitting students and the defined responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing these allow Expectation B2 to be met in design.

2.14   In testing this Expectation, the review team scrutinised programme specifications, website pages, survey data and committee minutes. The team also met programme staff, senior managers and students to test the effectiveness of the College's admissions procedures.

2.15   An admissions policy is available on the College's website and VLE, enabling stakeholders to access clear guidance regarding the processes described above. Both the higher education prospectus and programmes' webpages list the entry requirements detailed in programme specifications.

2.16   An electronic database and enrolment forms, which programme leaders sign-off, capture applicants qualifications effectively. Prospective students and staff receive appropriate guidance concerning interviews. Interviews provide students with useful

information, particularly about the Disabled Students' Allowance and the extra support available. Effective record-keeping assures the College that its processes operate effectively. Students receive helpful information about potential sources of financial assistance, and a National Scholarship Scheme assists those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Offer letters are followed up with enrolment letters, detailing arrangements for induction, during which students receive guidance on practical matters, information on accessing resources and an introduction to their programme.

2.17   A New Starters Survey monitors the effectiveness of these admissions activities, with the results considered at the Higher Education and Higher Level Skills Committee. Although many students are positive about their experience of admissions, enrolment and induction - and the Gateway service's role in particular - feedback has led the College to plan a differentiated approach to Engineering students' enrolment and induction, which will better accommodate their employment situation. The College monitors student retention and is able to spot trends in recruitment data regarding gender, age and disability. The high-quality advice and support services offered by the Gateway team are matrix accredited and regularly evaluated internally.

2.18   The review team concludes that the effective operation and monitoring of well understood and transparent admissions procedures enables Expectation B2 to be met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.19   The College's Quality Improvement Strategy was reviewed and updated in December 2012. This document clearly sets out the strategy in relation to teaching, learning and assessment, self-assessment, lesson observation, and e-learning, as well as workforce development, performance development and review to support quality improvement. The College's approach to teaching and learning is focused on delivering consistently high quality teaching, learning and assessment, which will positively impact on outcomes for learners. At the heart of the College's approach is the need to realise the vision that every learner is entitled to good quality provision and excellence in teaching, learning and assessment practice. The College regards teaching and learning as central to its continuous improvement drive and recognises the importance of investing in staff.

2.20   The College operates a system of graded lesson observations, ungraded learning walks and has a clear staff development procedure. The quality of higher education teaching and learning is monitored and reviewed through the lesson observation process, the personal development review (PDR) process, survey data, and reports to the College Corporation and Senior Leadership Team. There are links for the College, overall, between the policy and procedure for improving teaching and learning, and the continuous professional development opportunities provided for staff. The College staff development policy outlines how development contributes to the enhancement of knowledge, skills, competence or working practices to support the delivery of the College's strategic aims and priorities. There is a Training and Development Policy, awaiting Senior Leadership Team approval, which will be coordinated by the Quality Improvement Team. The College has a recruitment policy for staff and recruits those with specialist subject knowledge. All teaching staff must hold or be working towards a teaching qualification. Curricula vitae are held centrally and feed into the appraisal PDR mechanism to suggest further staff development opportunities. The College's processes for the management of learning and teaching enables Expectation B3 to be met in design.

2.21   In testing this Expectation, the review team scrutinised documentation, processes, policies and reports. The team also met senior staff, academic staff, employers and students to determine the ways in which the College monitors and enhances teaching and learning.

2.22   The College operates a lesson observation process where observations are completed by members of the Senior Leadership Team, heads of curriculum departments and the Head of Quality Improvement. The approach for higher education is not differentiated from the College-wide system and there were relatively few observations in 2013-14. A Quality and Business Review Report evidences ten higher education observations. Although there are some examples of lesson observation reports that include individual improvement plans, and some mention of teaching and learning in some performance development reviews, this is not consistently applied. In addition, there is no clear mechanism for reviewing and reporting on higher education development needs linked to teaching and learning for the College overall. Reports presented to the Senior Leadership Team include an analysis of teaching and learning, but aspects of good practice or areas for development are not separately identified for higher education. The review team therefore

recommends that the College ensures that teaching observations reflect the needs of higher education staff and students.

2.23   The College facilitates a range of development opportunities, including both internal and external events. These development opportunities are directed at improving teaching, learning and subject knowledge, although not all are specifically targeted at higher education. There are some examples of higher education specific events, for example, a Collaborative Action Research Network study day, a promoting independent learning, and a higher education VLE event. One initiative designed to support staff in the delivery of good teaching and learning includes a small team of innovation and improvement practitioners tasked with achieving and sustaining excellence across the College in teaching, learning and assessment. As part of their role they have developed a resource bank of teaching and learning materials on the VLE. Higher education tutors also receive updates through a regular staff briefing, which contains information on teaching, learning and assessment. Senior staff confirmed that one strand of enhancement relates to the further development of digital technologies, which is giving students greater flexibility and promoting independent learning.

2.24   Each department invests in a Teaching and Learning hour every week, which includes a variety of activities that relate to the needs of the College overall. Activities are identified on a departmental training plan and delivered through College-wide development days designed to facilitate the sharing of best practice and support the enhancement and continuous improvement of teaching and learning. Both academic and support staff were able to evidence how their own staff development has added value to the student experience. For example, teaching and learning in the curriculum has been enhanced by staff undertaking specific upskilling, such as the focus on counselling after traumatic events for staff associated with the counselling programme, and in sport the use of technology to record and provide feedback on practical sport sessions. Graphic design staff members have completed the award in Motion Graphics; these development opportunities all meet identified employer and sector needs. Some College staff have completed PhD qualifications and have been allowed time to attend conferences to enhance their academic practice. The College also offers secondments, for example, to Siemens in engineering, and the local football club for sports coaching and these opportunities inform teaching practice. Academic staff have also benefited from external funding to provide relevant staff placements. For example, funding from the NEF Industrial Fellowship Scheme placement enabled a teacher to identify links between creative industries and STEM subjects. The College is also exploring ways to involve staff in research; the current work with the Collaborative Action Research Network facilitates action research for teachers of professional education on the Certificate in Education/Postgraduate Certificate in Education programmes. The external examiner for teacher training provision notes that students continue to benefit from the research active curriculum, which underpins the good practice evidenced in action research. The review team regards the wide variety of staff development opportunities directly linked to employer needs that enhance the higher education provision as **good practice**.

2.25   Student feedback on teaching, learning and support is positive; the National Student Survey (NSS) scores for teaching and learning are excellent, and well above the further education college average. The results from the internal midyear College survey shows generally positive feedback, but the overall results are not specific to higher education. However, the student feedback in the Higher Education Review meetings and in the student written submission was positive about learning and recognised that tutors are well qualified. Students cite examples of where teaching has been influenced by tutors' industry knowledge or research. Students also report that staff are helpful and promote independent learning, and that they feel supported and encouraged by staff in their learning experience. Students are clearly able to explain what is different about higher education

teaching and how the ethos of courses is more professional and allows for greater independence.

2.26   The review team concludes that it has confidence in the College's approach to supporting and improving learning and teaching. In particular, the team noted the wide variety of development opportunities offered to staff and how many of these are linked directly to enabling staff to meet the needs of students and employers. Therefore, Expectation B3 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.27 The College's strategic objectives emphasise that all students are entitled to education and learning opportunities that are relevant, accessible and build on diverse strengths to enable independent students to reach their full potential. The ethos of widening participation is evident in the College's Higher Education Strategy, which states that 'the College provides opportunities for our employed students to progress to higher education programmes through 'non-traditional' part-time employer focused higher education'. The College monitors and evaluates support for student development and achievement through various processes, including annual review, periodic reviews and six week reviews at curriculum level.

2.28 The collaborative agreement with the University clearly outlines the areas of responsibility of each partner. The list of responsibilities includes significant areas of shared responsibility, for example, relating to information about learning opportunities, library and learning resources, as well as the quality and review of higher education provision. In the case of both University and Pearson provision the College has responsibility to assure itself of the quality of staff and their development, academic and pastoral guidance for students, liaison with employers and information about learning opportunities.

2.29 The College takes a strategic approach to resource allocation via the College Strategic Plan, Higher Education Strategy 2013-16, its teaching, learning and assessment observation procedures, and the Quality Improvement Strategy. These strategies fit within the College's quality and business review process, which is used to monitor performance against objectives. The Quality and Standards Committee, and now the reconstituted Higher Education and Higher Level Skills Committee, sit alongside the Senior Leadership Team, Head of Department and Board of Governor meetings. The six-weekly programme reviews, which normally include student representatives, form part of the process of reflecting on the delivery of higher education programmes, identifying good practice or underlying concerns leading to the implementation of support if required. The College's arrangements to enable students to develop their potential allow Expectation B4 to be met in design.

2.30 In testing this Expectation, the review team considered a range of documentary evidence related to resources and support. The team also held meetings with staff, University representatives and students to investigate the approach the College takes to ensuring that students develop and achieve.

2.31 The College is committed to partnership working as a means of providing opportunities for students, to broaden their horizons and prepare them for transition into employment or further study. The College has a strong relationship with the University, which has used part of its Student Opportunity Fund to develop and refurbish a Higher Education Gateway. The Gateway is open to all higher education students and has improved access to support services and enhanced student learning opportunities.

2.32 Higher education students at the College are positive about the support they receive from their tutors, with individual students citing examples of how their personal tutor has provided academic and pastoral support and helped to build their confidence. Tutors make effective use of the student progress monitoring system to track progress and record individual student targets, helping them to develop and achieve.

2.33   Higher education at the College is supported by the Higher Education Gateway, a dedicated facility which has enhanced the visibility of higher level provision. In particular, it has improved access to resources, including computers, as well as opportunities for learning beyond the classroom. The Gateway service provides a friendly and supportive area where higher education students can study, meet with an academic mentor or a student adviser and socialise with other students. Students can self-refer to an academic mentor or they can be referred by a tutor; the mentors will provide support with research skills, essay planning and the correct use of academic language and referencing. Qualified student advisers provide advice and guidance prior to joining a course, for example, regarding student finance; the application process, including initial assessment; and the Disabled Students' Allowance.

2.34   The Gateway teams communicate effectively with academic staff through the electronic student progress monitoring system and the quality of the service provided has been recognised by Matrix. Students are positive about the Gateway service and also appreciate the area as a separate social facility for higher education students. Student feedback has been used to inform improvements to the enrolment process, including a differentiated approach for higher education students in employment. Support staff working in the Gateway and the College library service benefit from development opportunities, including visits to the University to observe procedures in admissions and the library. Support staff have attended development events related to Student Finance England, and various Association of Colleges events; the academic mentors have undertaken English qualifications. The review teams regards the effective use of the Higher Education Gateway to provide students with guidance, support and resources to facilitate their development and achievement as **good practice**.

2.35   On awarding body validated programmes, students attend an induction at the University where they can visit key facilities such as the library and apply for a campus card, which gives access to other facilities. The College library provides access to online resources, including the VLE, online journals, e-books and paper based journals. Library staff provide an effective support service, including written guides and assist students with study skills and locating appropriate resources. The library service at the College has taken action as a result of student feedback, for example, with regard to loan periods and print credits, and the College is in the process of responding to Art and Design students who highlighted a need for a quiet study area at the Queen Alexandra campus. Resources to support the continued development of higher education provision are devolved to departments, and the Director of Learning Development attends the Higher Education and Higher Level Skills Committee and ensures the effectiveness of this approach in meeting student needs.

2.36   Focus groups and surveys show that students regard the VLE as a useful tool, and the team saw examples of very good VLE sites. There is, however, evidence through discussion with students and at a curriculum area review that some student groups are not making full use of this facility. A College innovation and improvement practitioner has been appointed specifically to support staff develop their VLE resources and has worked effectively with delivery staff, particularly in Engineering. The College is in the process of sharing good practice, in particular, encouraging greater interactivity on sites by rolling out a VLE bronze/silver/gold system which is currently used in the sport area. The College has also developed a teaching resource bank available on the VLE and monitors the quality of the VLE for higher education programmes, noting examples of interactivity and good practice, which informs the work of the innovation and improvement practitioner.

2.37   Student achievement and employability is supported at curriculum level, through a variety of work-based assessment activities across all curriculum areas, and at College level where students have the opportunity to participate in inclusion activities. Examples include:

a careers fair for the sport and fitness sector; and counselling related placement fairs where students are introduced to organisations that need volunteers (this enables students to gain hands-on counselling experience to meet the requirements of their course). Other events include College fundraising activities, such as the annual lecture held in memory of a late counselling teacher, which helps raise money for charity. The students are positive about placement opportunities and there are strong examples of how industry links enhance skills and employability. These industry links are also evident in the use of live assignment briefs and projects acknowledged as good practice in Expectation B6, paragraph 2.54.

2.38   Overall, College achievement data is good and evidences successful student development and achievement. Data is reported at the Higher Education and Higher Level Skills Committee and Corporation, where any issues are highlighted through a traffic light system. Achievement data for engineering provision is good for part-time groups, although there is some variability with lower cohort success data for full-time programmes in Art and Design, and sport. The small group sizes in Art and Design do have a negative impact on the success data. However, these small group sizes, along with a supportive teaching environment, especially in the early stages of higher education programmes, is appreciated by the students and contributes to success, especially for non-traditional entry routes where students can lack confidence. Destination data through the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey is positive, and confirms that 97.4 per cent of learners agreed that their overall experience in higher education prepared them for employment. The vast majority, 55 per cent of College graduates, secure employment within six months of completing their programme, and a further 22 per cent progress to additional study.

2.39   The review team concludes that the processes in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of support and resources for higher education effectively enable students to develop and achieve. This ensures that Expectation B4 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.40   The Learner Involvement Strategy contains well defined aims, articulates a notion of partnership and details a minimum student engagement framework and timetable, within which departments can vary representation structures. For full-time students, the minimum framework includes elected course representatives and, from within these, an elected curriculum area representative, who attends the student council. The Learner Involvement Strategy requires programme leaders to encourage a diverse range of representatives, hold learner forums with them to feed issues into departmental action plans, and facilitate feedback sessions in which representatives can gather feedback. Programme leaders inform Heads of Department or service of any issues arising, and keep representatives updated on actions, whom in turn inform peers during feedback sessions. For part-time students, there is a special provision for representatives to discuss issues at drop-in sessions. Heads of Department monitor and review each learner involvement activity they implement, and report changes to the Director of Learner Services. The Director of Learner Services reports on the strategy to the Senior Leadership Team and Governors. The Senior Leadership Team reviews the overarching Learner Involvement Strategy, with the results feeding into the Quality Improvement Plan.

2.41   Within the Learner Involvement Strategy, students have a range of other opportunities to participate in the quality assurance of their programmes. Students may meet external examiners and should, in theory, have access to their reports. There is provision for two student Governors, although these are not necessarily drawn from higher education programmes. Students have representation on the Higher Education and Higher Level Skills Committee and are invited to attend scheduled course team meetings by their programme leader. The end output of these weekly meetings, a course team review document, includes learner voice feedback. Programme leaders work with course representatives to organise termly focus groups for their programmes. Summary reports are produced and sent to the Director of Learner Services, and feed into Higher Education and Higher Level Skills Committee.

2.42   The College evaluates and plans improvements to its provision using a wide range of surveys. As well as participating in the NSS and DLHE survey, the College runs three internal online surveys: the New Starters Survey, the On Programme Survey and the Leavers' Surveys. Heads of Department can also request ad hoc thematic surveys, as required.

2.43   The combination of extensive feedback mechanisms and representation structures, underpinned by a well developed strategy on student engagement, means that Expectation B5 is met in design.

2.44   To test this Expectation, the review team considered the effectiveness of the above policies and procedures, and met senior staff, programme teams and student representatives. The team also evaluated supporting documentation, such as forum and committee minutes and survey analysis.

2.45   Representation structures at the College operate effectively, and a range of guidance and support is available for representatives. Although individual students' engagement levels vary, all programmes have elected representatives who attend forums

and focus groups, some of which are led by the Gateway team to encourage openness. With the help of marketing staff members, Heads of Departments produce a feedback poster within three weeks of focus groups. Gateway and programme staff members have provided opportunities for feedback from those students whose timetables would otherwise render them difficult to engage. Student representatives are effectively included in College-wide committees, although, as discussed under Expectation B7, many students have not seen external examiner reports. The College reviews the effectiveness of its surveying procedures. For example, recent reviews highlighted computer access, the number of questions, and excessive staff time commitments in setting up surveys as potential inhibitors. As a result, a new, centrally managed system was implemented, whereby the College's Quality Improvement Department oversees internal surveys using a new software system, which allows benchmarking, impact tracking and reaches a wider audience. Moreover, a large computer room now allows survey completion and the number of questions can be capped, having been vetted by student representatives. Staff members receive training on the software, their responsibilities, and how best to facilitate completion, while Heads of Department can track completion rates and ensure all programmes are surveyed. Higher education students' views can also be disaggregated within College-wide surveys.

2.46   Feedback is used to improve students' learning opportunities, and the student voice is heard at all levels of College management. The College's NSS results are excellent, and, although representing a drop on previous years, internal surveys show that students are very satisfied with their overall experience (93 per cent in 2013-14), with a high rate of participation. Survey results are analysed in detail; Governors and the Senior Leadership Team receive summary quality reports, which bring together the different survey strands and critically evaluate the College's performance using this data. Module reports and Faculty Partner Reports consider student feedback. Student feedback also contributes to a Quality Improvement Plan and has resulted in changes to programme content and resources, such as printer credit, the library catalogue and loan periods. The review team therefore regards the extensive use and review of feedback mechanisms to identify and respond to student needs as **good practice**.

2.47   The College successfully implements a range of mechanisms to engage students and encourage their participation in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B5 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.48   Assessments on higher education courses at the College are ultimately the responsibility of the awarding body or awarding organisation, with the College having delegated responsibility for setting assignments that match the learning outcomes for Pearson courses. There are defined procedures for setting, marking and moderating assessments, for dealing with mitigating circumstances and for accreditation of prior learning with each of the partners. The processes at the College allow Expectation B6 to be met in design.

2.49   The review team tested this Expectation by considering a wide range of documentation, including programme and course handbooks, assessment plans, external examiner reports and policy documents. The team also reviewed the VLE, and held meetings with staff and students of the College and two representatives from the University.

2.50   The College has robust practices to ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit. The College ensures the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable, and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and aligned to the Quality Code. The College's own Guide to Good Practice in Assessment assists staff in achieving this and deals with higher education assessment.

2.51   Assessment timing and load are well managed and ensure that opportunities for achievement of learning outcomes are maximised, and that students have the opportunity to balance workload and meet assignment deadlines. This management of assessment involves the production of overview documents for University and Pearson programmes of all assessments on a given programme, and summarises all assessments for a given cohort of students within one academic year.

2.52   Learning outcomes for the University programmes are provided in the programme specifications and handbooks. Pearson learning outcomes are on the VLE and appear on assignment briefs. The process of setting assessments for the higher education courses at the College is clearly documented. The process differs between the two higher education partners, as the setting of assessments for Pearson courses is initiated by the College. The lead tutor for any given unit prepares the assessment, which is then subjected to the College's standard internal verification process. Another academically or vocationally competent tutor will check that the assignment is fit for purpose, cross-referencing to the specification for the unit, in line with Pearson guidelines. Assessments are then verified by the awarding organisation. Assessments are further checked by the external examiner and during the Quality Review and Development Report process, Assessment sampling conducted by the awarding organisation shows that the process works well, with assessments aligned to learning outcomes and set at an appropriate level.

2.53   Assessments for collaborative provision with the University are coordinated across all partnerships delivering the same programme. External examiners are required to confirm

that standards are comparable to other higher education providers. Student assessment loads are considered on, at least, an annual basis, and these have been modified in response to comments by an external examiner.

2.54   The College deliberately designs assessments that develop students' employability skills and make positive contributions to local organisations. For example, one of the assessments on the Diploma in Art and Design is a live brief, in which students design a piece of work according to a commission from an organisation in the local community. This assessment was specifically designed to help develop employability, and employers also spoke of benefit to their companies, as well as to students. External examiners recognise that the experience of working on live commissions demonstrates commercial, professional and personal skills development. The review team regards the effective use of live assignment briefs and projects that develop students' employability skills and make positive contributions to local employers as **good practice**.

2.55   First marking and moderation of assessments is a shared responsibility for both University and Pearson courses. In the case of Pearson provision, moderation procedures, and their contribution to ensuring that assessments are set and marked in a way that fully reflects the intended learning outcomes, were cited as good practice in the previous IQER review. Pearson Quality Review and Development Reports and external examiner reports confirm that the procedures remain effective. Students also report that assessments are appropriate and that they understand the grading criteria. The College policy is for students to be provided with appropriate feedback on all assessed work, in a timely and appropriate way that promotes learning and facilitates improvement, and normally within 10 working days. Annual reports indicate that students are generally satisfied with the promptness and relevance of the feedback they receive, a view that was confirmed by the NSS scores and the students themselves.

2.56   For University assessments, following internal moderation at the College, the University moderates marks and standardises across all partners delivering the same courses. Student grades are ratified at examination boards, held by the College for Pearson programmes, and at the University for University programmes. The arrangements for mitigating circumstances differ between University and Pearson programmes, but in each case are handled according to the requirements of the awarding body or awarding organisation.

2.57   Requests for accreditation of prior learning (APL) rarely occur. During the 2013-14 academic year there were no applications for APL. Any applications would be dealt with under the University's APL Procedure or the Pearson Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and Process (RPL), according to the programme of study involved. The College has robust arrangements to ensure students are registered as soon as they formally start a programme and these ensure that records of assessment against prior learning are maintained, certification claims are made according to standard procedures, and all relevant evidence is assessed before assessment decisions are confirmed. There are designated personnel at the College with the appropriate expertise to support and assure the RPL process, if required.

2.58   The review team concludes that the College's processes for assessment are equitable, valid and reliable. Therefore, Expectation B6 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.59   The responsibility for the appointment and management of external examiners lies with the University as the awarding body and Pearson as the awarding organisation. External examiners appointed by the University attend examination boards at the University and submit an annual report, which may in some cases include comments on provision delivered at other Colleges in the partnership. External examiners appointed by Pearson examine student work and procedures and submit an annual report.

2.60   The University is responsible for responding to external examiners' reports following communication with the College. An annual partner report is completed by programme managers at the College in collaboration with the Partnership Manager at the University, and this makes reference to the external examiner report and any action required. The arrangements for the use of external examiners at the College allow Expectation B7 to be met in design.

2.61   In testing this Expectation, the review team considered the College's procedures, and met with senior and academic staff and students. The team also looked at Quality Improvement Plans, external examiners' reports and annual partner reports, and reviewed the minutes of assessment committees/examination boards.

2.62   Scrutiny of the reports for University provision shows that there is a thorough process where programme-level improvements are identified and resolved. These reports evidence a positive and mutually supportive relationship with the University. External examiner comments are also noted at University examination board meetings, for example, in the FdSc Power Engineering Board, the external examiner commented positively upon the form of assessment.

2.63   In meetings, College staff demonstrated that they are aware of the importance of external examiners and have within the last year recognised a need to improve the receipt and action tracking of external examiner reports. There was one instance where an essential action from a Pearson external examiner was not resolved and as a result it was raised again on a subsequent report the following year. The College has, within the last year, started to use an external examiner electronic tracking system, which is designed to ensure that all actions are completed in a timely manner. All reports are now reviewed by the Head of Quality Improvement and Senior Leadership Team, who then meet Heads of Department. The Quality Improvement Department logs actions and track these at quality review meetings. In future, University progress will feed into departmental and College self-assessment reports. Actions for University programmes are agreed with the programme leader and fed back to University. As some of these processes have been recently implemented, there has not been the opportunity for the College to evaluate the effectiveness of them. The review team therefore **affirms** the steps being taken to improve the institutional oversight, tracking and completion of actions raised in external examiner reports.

2.64   External examiner reports are scrutinised at the Higher Education and Higher Level Skills Committee. The remit states that this Committee will receive, review and record the College performance in relation to University examination board recommendations, and ensure integrity and compliance with the Quality Code. The committee will also receive,

review and record performance in relation to external examiner reports, but there is little evidence of this happening.

2.65 The College provided recent examples of improvements that had been implemented as a result of external examiner recommendations, including more formal recording of observations on the FdA Counselling course, using more visual evidence for the FdSc Sport and sharing of best practice on the teacher education provision. Some students had met with the external examiner for their programme and provided positive feedback to them. For example FdA Counselling students reported to the external examiner that they are very appreciative of the support they receive both academically and for personal difficulties. Similarly, the external examiner for the FsSc Power Engineering met students, and noted that students were enjoying the modules and greatly appreciated the availability of staff during the course.

2.66 The College has not yet formally published external examiner reports for students for all programmes. In limited curriculum areas the reports have been shared through the VLE, for example, for the FdA Counselling and Pearson engineering provision. However, student engagement with the information is limited and most students claimed that they were not aware that reports were on the VLE. In other areas, such as art and design, the tutors were, until recently, not aware of the requirement, but noted that classroom discussion with students was used as an alternative way of gaining feedback and disseminating comments from the external examiner. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College ensures that all students are aware of and have access to external examiner reports.

2.67 There is evidence to support effective engagement with external examiner feedback, and the systematic use of an improved reporting system is expected to lead to improvements in the response to external examiner feedback. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B7 is met. However, the team consider the associate level of risk to be moderate because there is currently insufficient evidence of, or priority given to, assuring standards or quality in the provider's planning process for communicating external examiner reports to students.

Expectation: 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

2.68   The College has an annual self-assessment and evaluation process that is based upon critical reflection by the staff responsible for the design and delivery of programmes. Programme monitoring feeds into this process, which involves a three-tier system where reviews occur at programme-level, feed into a department-level review, and then into the overarching College self-evaluation process.

2.69   The six-weekly programme reviews form part of the process of reflecting on the design and delivery of higher education programmes, facilitating the identification of good practice or underlying concerns resulting in the implementation of support, if required. The process also takes in feedback from the observation of teaching and learning, and reflects on other feedback from a range of sources, especially students and external examiners.

2.70   The College takes the programme review mechanisms of the awarding body and organisation into account in its own review processes. The processes at the College therefore allow Expectation B8 to be met in design.

2.71   The review team tested this Expectation by considering internal and external review reports, and through meetings with staff and students of the College and two representatives from the University.

2.72   The College has effective structures in place to oversee the quality and standards of its higher education provision. In 2013-14 the structure was not sufficiently focused on the separate needs of higher education, and in 2014-15 the Senior Leadership Team highlighted the need to reinstate the Higher Education and Higher Level Skills Committee to monitor higher education provision.

2.73   The mechanisms for reviewing higher education programmes delivered by the College are fit for purpose, and ensure that each course is reviewed individually and considered in a wider context at departmental and institutional levels. Each curriculum area at the College is subject to annual review, as explained in its Quality Improvement Strategy. The curriculum area reviews include the identification of key strengths and key areas requiring improvement, as well as examples of good practice and recommendations of good practice to be disseminated. Programme review at the College begins with course team reviews that take place every six weeks. The record of these reviews is compiled into an annual course team review report, which also contains reflection on the student voice and relevant management information. Course team reports are considered by departments and summarised in departmental self evaluations, which in turn contribute to the College-wide self-assessment that is provided to the Governors. Actions arising from the review processes are collated into a College improvement plan. For Pearson programmes, the self-assessment and evaluation process feeds into the awarding organisation's Quality Review and Development Reports that cover all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment on the programmes.

2.74   An annual programme review report is prepared for each University programme, and these are then considered by programme boards of studies at the University, together

with reports from other partners delivering the same programmes. Each board of studies also receives a verbal report from each of the student representatives. Periodic review of programmes by the University includes external representation and student representation in the form of the University Students' Union President and Vice-President, but not a College student representative.

2.75   Student input to the review processes is principally through the six-weekly course reviews, which involve student representatives in the reflective process on a range of issues, including the structure of their courses and the assessments. The course team reviews include a section entitled Learner Voice. This approach is an effective way of collecting student opinion and using it to influence course development.

2.76   The periodic review process, as illustrated for the FdA and BA (Hons) top-up degree in Counselling, is robust and leads to useful recommendations for improvement. The College and University have used the periodic review process to assess, identify and action areas for development. For example, the requirement on the FdA and BA (Hons) top-up degree in Counselling for students to complete a prescribed number of hours in counselling practice, to gain post-study membership of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, was reviewed and updated. The periodic review process also identified a need to review some of the programme learning outcomes more closely with the Counselling Subject Benchmark Statement. The delivery team were commended by the University for the forward thinking in adapting the structure of the programme to meet the new benchmark requirements and to improve the quality of the curriculum content (top-up).

2.77   The review team concludes that the College's processes for programme monitoring and review enable Expectation B8 to be met 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

2.78   The Deputy Principal Finance and Corporate Development takes overall responsibility for ensuring that the College has a complaints procedure that is fair, accessible and timely. The College is committed to resolving complaints promptly, sensitively, and informally where possible. Stakeholders complete a complaints and compliments form online or via reception. Initially, reception or Gateway staff direct complainants to the relevant staff member or pass their form to the Quality Improvement Team within 24 hours. If informal processes do not resolve the issue, a formal complaint can be submitted to the Deputy Principal, who will acknowledge and forward the complaint to the relevant manager, whom, in turn, will respond within a prescribed timeframe. If unsatisfied with the outcome, complainants can refer their concerns to a senior manager, with the further option of appeal to the Principal. After exhausting local processes, complainants can exercise a final right of review with the awarding body or organisation.

2.79   Where applicable, higher education appeals for University programmes are handled according to awarding body regulations. However, the College's internal appeals procedures apply to all students on Pearson Higher National programmes. While the Head of Quality Improvement has overall responsibility, Heads of Department ensure that the appeals policy is implemented across the College. Students are required to make appeals to programme team staff or the Head of Department in writing within 14 days of receiving the assessment decision. The policy clearly defines the grounds for appeal and the investigatory process by which a Head of Department or nominee collects evidence and informs students of their findings. Where grounds for an appeal are identified, actions taken by the Head of Department and programme staff will be logged at subsequent standardisation meetings and recorded on the student's file. Students have a further right of appeal to the Head of Quality Improvement, who convenes an academic appeals panel consisting of the Deputy Principal, Head of Quality Improvement, two academic members of staff and a student representative. The student can bring a friend and can see all evidence being presented. Transparent, fair, and proportional complaints and appeals policies with clear lines of responsibility and escalation enable Expectation B9 to be met in design.

2.80   In testing this Expectation, the review team met senior managers, programme staff, students and awarding body representatives. The team also examined anonymised complaints and appeals documentation, and assessed the College's ability to monitor related data.

2.81   The College publishes both complaints and appeals procedures on its website and VLE. The College effectively monitors the numbers of appeals and complaints, which are very low, and operates these processes effectively. All formal complaints are logged and reported to the Governors, and the Deputy Principal Finance and Corporate Development tracks outcomes and action plans. The Quality and Standards Committee and Equality and Diversity Committees review complaints data termly, and complaints and appeals procedures are regularly reviewed. Teaching staff and senior managers are knowledgeable about the procedures in operation and know which policies apply to specific groups of students. Students have a mixed awareness of how to appeal or complain, but most feel they could ask their tutors or consult programme handbooks for advice. The latter contain links to the appeals and complaints policies.

2.82   The review team concludes that, overall, the availability of policies, the effective operation of appeals procedures, and the College's proven ability to respond to complaints and monitor the resulting data, allow Expectation B9 to be met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.83   The College's Higher Education Strategy aims to prepare students for progression by cultivating their independent learning, enterprise, entrepreneurial and employability skills. The key focus of the Higher Education Strategy is linked to providing the programmes and skills that employers need. The majority of College courses include an element of work experience through group projects, live projects to a client brief, or work placements. This work-based element is approved by the awarding body as part of the validation process. Where the placement is an essential and integral part of the course, information on placements is communicated to students through the course handbooks, for example, on the FdA Counselling, and the Certificate in Education and Postgraduate Certificate in Education provision.

2.84   The College fulfils its responsibilities for managing student work experience and placements, and actively manages the oversight structures for placement learning. Health and safety issues are given priority on placements with the completion of an assessment of the risks entailed in each placement. Placements cannot begin until health and safety procedures are completed and signed off. The mechanisms that the College has in place allow Expectation B10 to be met in design.

2.85   In testing this Expectation the review team reviewed a range of documents, including assignment briefs, module handbooks and placement mentor handbooks. The team also discussed placements and assessment work-based learning in meetings with students, academic staff, and employers.

2.86   Tutors are responsible for ensuring that a placement is fit for purpose, liaison with employers and students on placement, and solving any issues that may arise during the placement. Students are briefed on the learning opportunities to be assessed, and have individual responsibility for securing their placement with support and guidance from academic tutors. The placement is arranged by the student on the Foundation Degree in Education and Care, and the Foundation Degree Counselling programmes, whereas a placement officer helps coordinate placements on the Foundation Degree Sports Coaching. Students and employers whom the team met reported good support from the College in establishing and managing placements, for example, through the partnership agreement in place with Siemens.

2.87   Employers are not involved in the formal graded assessment of student work, but they do provide informal feedback and value student projects and placements. On teacher training courses subject specialist mentors support the development of subject specialist knowledge and creative approaches to teaching and learning in the context of their vocational area.

2.88   The College provides placement opportunities to students undertaking full-time programmes, for example, those on sports programmes can access a voluntary placement in the North East Sports Academy (NESA) Academy Sports or in primary education through Access Coaching. Students on counselling programmes benefit from effective industry visits from local and national organisations, such as Place2Be, Derwentside Mind, Cruse

Bereavement and Norcare, promoted through the biannual Placement Fair. Students in Art and Design undertake live projects rather than placements, for example, with North Tyneside Customer First Centre and Voluntary Organisations Development Agency.

2.89 The College effectively integrates work experience into its programme design; this is evident from the customised selection of Higher National Certificate (HNC) units in Subsea Engineering, the HNC in Manufacturing Engineering for British Engineering, and the Health and Safety unit for Siemens. Employers are instrumental in identifying appropriate projects; both British Engineering and Nestlé have provided their employees with projects linked to improving productivity. Delivery teams at the College take responsibility for ensuring that projects are designed to meet the overall aims and unit outcomes of the awarding body and organisation. External examiner reports and annual review processes also confirm that work-based learning, including placements and live briefs, enables students to meet the unit and programme intended learning outcomes.

2.90 There are effective structures and processes in place at the College to ensure the quality of learning, including work-based and placement learning. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation B10 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.91   The College does not offer research degrees.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.92   In reaching its judgements about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Nine out of the 10 applicable Expectations in this area were met with low risk, and one was met with a moderate risk. The team has identified five features of good practice, two recommendations and one affirmation.

2.93   The team identified good practice in relation to the effective engagement with local and regional employers in the strategic design and development of programmes, along with the well developed use of live assignment briefs. The team also acknowledged the positive contributions made by the wide variety of staff development opportunities directly linked to employer needs. The College also makes extensive use and review of feedback mechanisms to identify and respond to student needs, and provides effective support to higher education students, particularly through the Higher Education Gateway.

2.94   In addition to recognising the good practice at the College, the review team also identified two recommendations in the quality of student learning opportunities and one affirmation. There is a lack of consistency from students in the awareness of external examiner reports and these reports are not always made available, for example, on the VLE. The review team therefore recommends that the College ensures that all students are aware of, and have access to, external examiner reports. There was also evidence of feedback from an external examiner report not being actioned within the required timescale. The College has put in place new arrangements for monitoring the completion of such actions; therefore, the review team affirms the steps being taken to improve the institutional oversight, tracking and completion of actions raised in external examiner reports. The review team considers Expectation B7 to be a moderate risk because there is currently insufficient evidence to, or priority given to, assuring standards or quality in the provider's planning process for communicating external examiner reports to students.

2.95   While the College has a sound teaching observation process, this is generic and does not specifically identify some of the different elements associated with effective higher education learning and teaching. Therefore, the review team recommends that the College ensures that teaching observations reflect the needs of higher education staff and students.

2.96   Overall, the review team found a number of features of good practice in the quality of student learning opportunities at the College, particularly in relation to student support and employer links. The recommendations relate to amendments that will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1   The College must seek approval to use its awarding body's logo or name, and must notify the University of any publicity relevant to its validated provision. Processes for gathering and signing-off published information are well-defined and appropriate. The final versions of published information are signed-off by the Marketing Department, having sought approval from programme teams or senior staff, whom confer with the awarding body where necessary. A designated member of marketing staff has responsibility for higher education website content, assisted by Heads of Department and the Head of Marketing. Procedures for gathering published information are designed to reduce opportunities for inaccuracy. Marketing staff members gather information from Heads of Department, such as entry requirements, assessment and module details, and progression opportunities, before producing a first draft of programme information pages. Following further revision and checking between marketing staff members, Heads of Department and programme leaders, the Head of Marketing sends information to the Deputy Principals for approval.

3.2   Periodic review, moderation of annual monitoring reports, the College annual self-evaluation report, and course approval boards monitor the accuracy and completeness of programme information. The Higher Education and Higher Level Skills Committee, of which the Head of Marketing has membership, is responsible for reviewing the prospectus and published information. A data protection policy deals with technical aspects of information management, such as photographic permissions.

3.3   The College publishes information via its website, higher education prospectus and course information sheets. The Gateway team provide information to prospective students, along with a series of news releases, to keep students informed. The College aims to make key programme materials, such as handbooks, available on the VLE and in hard copy. As discussed under Expectation A2.2, programme specifications are available for all programmes, although for Pearson programmes these are only partly contextualised in students' handbooks. Programme handbooks are approved by the University where necessary and are internally scrutinised against a programme handbook checklist.

3.4   More specific information on support services is also available via the website, in guides, at a placement fair, and from personal tutors. As discussed under Expectation B2, during induction, students receive support from library staff in locating and accessing resources and information about their programmes.

3.5   The VLE has been developed towards agreed standards across all higher education programmes; the curriculum model for 2013-14 sought to embed VLE use as part of learning beyond the classroom. To support these efforts, an innovation and improvement practitioner has specialised in VLE development. The Director of Learning Development undertakes termly audits of the VLE, disseminating feedback to programme leaders and curriculum heads, who also monitor content at programme-level and feed actions into continuing professional development activities and course reviews. One curriculum area, Sport and Leisure, adopts a self-assessment process, whereby programmes' VLE sites

receive bronze, silver or gold grades. Staff monitor VLE usage and also gather feedback on VLE use via focus groups and teaching observations.

3.6   The College uses electronic course files to manage programme information; staff members also use both their awarding body or awarding organisation quality handbooks and the College's own well defined quality processes and cycles. Robust procedures for the gathering, signoff, and monitoring of a wide range of information for stakeholders allows Expectation C to be met in design.

3.7   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's mechanisms for the production, signoff and review of published information, and evaluated the information made available in handbooks, online and in the prospectus. The team also assessed the trustworthiness and accessibility of information by holding meetings with staff, students and employers during the review visit.

3.8   The College has effective systems for the monitoring and review of published information and consults with its awarding body where necessary. A new programme approval process requires senior managers to sign off information produced and mandates the production of a course information sheet; the College scores highly on the NSS survey regarding support and guidance and programme management.

3.9   Specifically, the website contains a range of policies and procedures, including those mandated by the Wider Information Set, such as complaints procedures, annual reviews, strategic plans, equality and diversity reports, and policies. Programme webpages contain appropriate and up-to-date key information, such as entry requirements, FHEQ level, course duration, synopsis and assessment methods in an accessible format. Downloadable course information sheets offer similar information. Key information set data is also available for many programmes. The website features useful guidance on the types of higher education qualifications offered and the streams of financial support available, with the latter also being provided in handbook form. A 'partners' page clearly states the College's relationship with its awarding body and another informs students of the support services available. The College monitors the website, and a series of effective information-gathering processes allow the marketing team to produce trustworthy and accessible online information.

3.10   The higher education prospectus is available in print and online, providing a fit for purpose and trustworthy source of information for prospective students. Senior staff sign-off the higher education prospectus, following an information gathering process that effectively engages with programme-level staff to ensure accuracy and discussion at the Higher Education and Higher Level Skills Committee.

3.11   As discussed under Expectation B2, students receive effective guidance during induction, with the College operating a checklist system to ensure that all relevant information is delivered. As discussed under Expectation A2.2, students receive programme specifications as an effective form of definitive information. Programme handbooks are now a fit for purpose and trustworthy source of information for current students, containing introductions to the programme and staff, credit and unit structures, statements and contacts for student support, and policy summaries. A recent review of handbooks has improved consistency across the provision. While all handbooks are available electronically, not all are available in print and a minority of students were not aware of their programme handbook.

3.12   As discussed under Expectation B6, assessment plans and briefs are appropriate and published via the VLE. Departmental self-evaluations and external examiner reports consider the appropriateness of assignment briefs. Quick guides to mitigating circumstances afford students easy access to key information on grounds for appeal or extension.

3.13   A high-quality VLE is in place across the provision, enabling students to access programme handbooks, unit specifications, assignment briefs, assessment plans and extracts from academic regulations. The VLE also hosts a wide range of programme-specific learning resources, including videos, forums, presentations, academic writing guides, numeracy skills support and quizzes. Although the extensiveness of these resources varies, all programmes meet most of the College's minimum VLE requirements. Moreover, the innovation and improvement practitioner is working effectively with programme teams to improve the VLE sites across the College, particularly within the Engineering department. Despite the provision of good material, students have a mixed level of engagement with the VLE. The College effectively monitors use of the VLE through the internal monitoring processes described above, as well as through the awarding body periodic review process/partners' reports, external examiners reports, curriculum area reviews and course team reviews, which include sections prompting staff to check whether materials have been uploaded to the VLE. The results of the bronze, silver, and gold VLE site grading are integrated into programme staff members personal reviews.

3.14   The review team concludes that the broad range of fit for purpose and trustworthy information, and the operation of effective mechanisms for the control of this, enables Expectation C is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.15   In reaching its judgement relating to the quality of information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this area.

3.16   The College produces a wide range of information that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Systems for producing and monitoring this information are in place and implemented effectively. The College is continuing to improve the consistency of the information provided for students on the VLE and has mechanisms to evaluate the progress with this.

3.17   The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations

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 a deliberate strategy of engagement with the local economy. It recognises the vital importance of a formal qualification for access to employment, but aims to supplement this with the development of additional skills that are matched to employer requirements. Many students at the College are part-time, so there is a deliberate strategy of helping them to draw out from their employment settings the skills and practices that will enable them to progress in their careers. The College aims to make a seamless link between the students' academic studies and their workplace.

4.2 According to the College's Quality Improvement Strategy, the College recognises that quality improvement and enhancement is a continuous, ongoing process that takes account of the views of learners, employers, peers and other stakeholders. The processes at the College allow the Expectation to be met in design.

4.3 The review team tested this Expectation by examining a wide range of documentation, including strategy and policy documents, committee minutes, external examiner reports and programme approval documents. The team also held meetings with staff and students of the College, and employers.

4.4 The College gathers feedback from staff, students and other stakeholders, as part of its routine quality assurance processes. The information is considered systematically, and instances of good practice are identified and disseminated. The information is used to enhance the provision of learning opportunities and the student experience. The College identifies a strategic approach to this activity, driven by the needs of employers and the emerging local economy. This is made clear in the College's Higher Education Strategy and was articulated during the review visit. For example, the College is actively working with the destinations of students and using this to feed into the current student experience.

4.5 Robust information is systematically generated through consultation with students, external examiners and stakeholders. This information gathering is part of routine quality assurance procedures designed to enable useful feedback. As covered in Expectation B5, feedback is used effectively by the College to improve students' learning opportunities; the student voice is heard at all levels of College management, resulting in changes to programme content and resources. The extensive use and review of feedback mechanisms to identify student needs and respond to these has been identified as good practice under Expectation B5, paragraph 2.46. The information gathered is systematically considered at provider level as part of the oversight of higher education at the provider, in order to identify good practice and opportunities for further improvement.

4.6 The Higher Education and Higher Level Skills Committee has representatives from relevant curriculum departments and support services, and has responsibility for the quality, standards and enhancement of higher education. Its minutes record examples of sharing of good practice and consideration of student feedback. The Quality Improvement Strategy tasks the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee with continual monitoring to improve the effectiveness and impact of the teaching, learning and assessment practice. In addition to student feedback received through programme and course monitoring, the Quality Improvement Strategy includes the use of focus groups of learners to gauge student opinion on the College's provision and to seek feedback for enhancement. Minutes

for the higher education focus groups record that student feedback is being received and considered by the College.

4.7   Students report that they are largely aware of the opportunities provided to air their opinions and views, and that their voice is listened to by the College.

4.8   In keeping with general practice in the sector, external examiners on higher education programmes at the College are required to comment on areas of good practice and areas for possible enhancement. However, as identified under Expectations A3.4 and B1 of this report, the College also goes to great lengths to seek the opinions of local employers, as illustrated by the development of new programmes, such as the Foundation Degree in Power Engineering, the Foundation Degree in Graphic Communication and stages 1 and 2 of the BA in Graphic Design.

4.9   The enhancement initiatives of the College result in actions that positively impact on the quality of student learning opportunities. Students on the Counselling, Engineering and Graphic Design programmes gave examples of this engagement with employers; under Expectations B1 and B8 of this report it is noted that the engagement has a positive impact on the design of new programmes and the development of existing ones.

4.10   Engineering courses are structured around what employers require and are designed to help graduates secure employment or, in the case of students already in employment, to help career advancement. Employers told the team that the College is very employer-focused and will work with a company to develop a bespoke programme for its employees. As noted under Expectation B1 of this report, the development by the College of two new programmes, the Foundation Degree in Graphic Communication and stages 1 and 2 of the BA in Graphic Design, was done in direct response to employer feedback. A local company worked with the College to tailor the programme to the requirements of potential employers and informed the employability agenda. The College's engagement with local and regional employers in the strategic design and development of appropriate programmes is acknowledged as good practice under Expectation B1, paragraph 2.9.

4.11   An example of an activity arising from employer engagement, intended to increase the employability of students, is the annual Tony Mudd memorial lecture, delivered by a leading counselling expert, for current and previous students and industry professionals. A placement-supervisors fair is held twice a year to provide an opportunity for students on all programmes to meet leading professionals in counselling and supervision. The use of live assignment briefs and projects that develop students' employability skills and make positive contributions to local organisations is identified as good practice under Expectation B6, paragraph 2.54.

4.12   The College has demonstrated a strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The review team concludes, therefore, that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.13   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this area, but three features of good practice are linked to the quality of student learning opportunities section.

4.14   The College has a strategic commitment to enhancing student learning opportunities; a key feature of this links to local and regional employment needs, as recognised in Expectation B1, paragraph 2.9. This also links to the use of live assignment briefs and projects to enhance students' employability skills, as discussed in Expectation B6, paragraph 2.54. Quality assurance systems are used appropriately to highlight, action and evaluate improvements in the higher education provision at the College. These systems include the effective use of feedback mechanisms that involve key stakeholders, such as students, as recognised in Expectation B5, paragraph 2.46. Good practice is clearly shared across the staff members involved in delivering and supporting higher education.

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

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The College is committed to supporting the needs of the local population, which has traditionally low levels of participation in higher education. The strategic focus of the College is to support skills for growth in North Tyneside and throughout the region, adjusted in line with sector and regional priorities, such as the North East Local Enterprise Partnership Strategic Economic Plan.

5.2   The College effectively uses a range of sources supplying labour market information, which ensures that current and future learning needs and skills gaps are provided for; this is particularly effective in engineering. The College also works closely with the Local Enterprise Partnership to identify provision to meet skills shortages and has received a STEM Assured Kitemark in recognition of this. STEM accreditation provides a focus for employability and engagement with employers. For example, the College hosted an event for 100 local businesses in partnership with North Tyneside Business Forum to discuss opportunities for cooperation and facilitate networking opportunities.

5.3   The College has established a network of business ambassadors to act as role models to help build the confidence and self-belief among students of the benefits and opportunities that the world of industry and commerce presents to them. The business ambassadors are representatives from industry or education who will work closely with each department. Each of these ambassadors is aligned to a department and works with staff and students for a minimum period of two years. This was identified by Klynveld, Peat, Marwick, Goerdeler (KPMG), one of the largest professional services companies in the world, as an example of an innovative way to engage with various stakeholders throughout the region and encourages staff throughout the organisation to take an active role in stakeholder engagement.

5.4   All higher education programmes are vocational and include either a work-placement, work-based or related-learning element in the form of projects or real life briefs. The external examiner for art and design has recently acknowledged the added value of working on live commissions and engaging in active observations of other artists' work. Project work has included work with Balliol Youth and Community Centre to rebrand and update their corporate identity and Jam Jar Cinema to show work based on the cinema poster. Higher education Fine Art students displayed work at the Beacon Shopping Centre; the Four Seasons exhibition displayed paintings and digital images and several of the pieces were selected by an external panel to be displayed there on a longer term basis.

5.5   The curriculum reflects the needs of the local economy and has been specifically adapted to meet the requirements of employers, such as Nestlé, Siemens and British Engines. Students across the College benefit from guest speakers, placement fairs, a jobs fair in sport, and opportunities to undertake voluntary work and real life commissions. In the Counselling area the annual Tony Mudd memorial lecture includes professionals and past students, providing excellent networking opportunities.

5.6   The College has a partnership agreement with Siemens, who sponsor students on part-time higher education programmes in Engineering, as well as providing placements for Computing students in the summer vacation, and work with the College to enhance STEM opportunities in the region. Engineering programmes are accredited by the New Engineering Foundation (NEF), reflecting the delivery of high quality, industry accredited training in Engineering specialisms. The College has adopted the NEF model of a T-shaped curriculum, which develops a broader range of skills, including preparation for the world of work.

5.7   Stakeholders, including employers, are routinely consulted about many aspects of provision; this informs annual review processes. Consultation with employers prior to the development of the Foundation Degree in Power Engineering has ensured that learners develop specific skills and knowledge in line with the requirements of the employers, in power and renewable energies, precision engineering, oil and gas subsea, with whom the College works. Similarly, the new Foundation Degree in Graphic Design has been endorsed by Taylor MacKenzie Design, and the content has been shaped in response to identified employer needs, including skills in motion graphics. Funding from the NEF Industrial Fellowship Scheme has enabled a higher education Visual Arts teacher to attend a one-week training placement at Taylor McKenzie Design Consultants in London. The placement enabled the teacher to identify links between Creative Industries and STEM subjects, and to develop IT and e-learning packages to support course content for a new Foundation Degree. Feedback from both students and external examiners is positive in relation to the development of employability skills. There are regular discussions with employers across all sectors to ensure that College staff knowledge is updated and programmes reflect changes in their industry sector. Employers confirm the importance to them of being involved in a partnership with the College.

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* (FQHEIS).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

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

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

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