



# Higher Education Review of Burnley College

May 2015

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Burnley College. The review took place from 12 to 14 May 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Glenn Barr
- Dr Fiona Tolmie
- Mr James Perkins (student reviewer)

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Burnley 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)<sup>1</sup> 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 6.

In reviewing Burnley 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,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)<sup>4</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code)

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106)

<sup>3</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review)

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Burnley College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies **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 Burnley College.

- The personalised advice and guidance to prospective students which informs their admissions decisions (Expectation B2).
- The engagement of teaching and support staff in primary research projects as a means of developing the relationship between teaching and research (Expectation B3).
- The effective support for students' transition into higher education study (Expectation B4).
- The deliberate steps taken by the College to learn from best practice identified in other institutions (Enhancement).

### Recommendations

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

By January 2016:

- further develop higher education-specific approaches to staff induction and peer observation (Expectation B3).
- enable student participation in deliberative College committees (Expectations B5 and B8).

### Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps the College is taking to articulate its strategic approach to enhancement (Enhancement).

### Theme: Student Employability

The College engages with local employers to inform the design and curriculum of programmes. It provides opportunities for students to experience structured work placements in order to learn and practise new skills relevant to their programmes. The industry-relevant experience of staff enables them to convey the links between academic

theory and practical skills that benefits students' learning, and staff teaching is complemented by guest lectures and workshops from employers. Personal and professional development planning also focuses students on expanding their professional knowledge and skills.

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

## About Burnley College

Burnley College (the College) is a medium-sized further education College in Lancashire. A significant proportion of local communities experience deprivation and over half of the students enrolled at the College are from a widening participation area. The proportion of residents without qualifications is higher than the national average and the educational attainment of the town's school-leavers is lower than the national average. The College has been delivering higher education since 1994, and as of 2009, the College's higher education has been located in a new purpose-built campus shared with its awarding body, the University of Central Lancashire (the University). The size of its higher education provision increased significantly between 2006 and 2011 although student numbers have remained relatively static since.

The College's purpose statement is that it builds futures and changes lives, a statement supported by seven strategic objectives that cover expanding the opportunities for higher education study within the locality, making a contribution to the local and national economy through the employability and enterprise of students, maintaining an outstanding equality of opportunity, and promoting a culture of excellence with high aspirations for staff and means for them to develop, grow, and contribute to the College's success.

The College has been delivering higher education programmes on behalf of the University since it first introduced its higher education provision in 1994. It currently offers 44 courses, both full-time and part-time, covering subject areas including computing, engineering, education, creative art, construction, health and social care, and business. It offers a number of foundation degrees, bachelor degrees, bachelor top-up degrees and postgraduate certificates. Most programmes are franchised from the University but a small number have been designed by the College and validated by the University. Some programmes are accredited by professional bodies. Since the last QAA review, the College has experienced few major changes, and higher education remains the responsibility of the Assistant Principal for Sixth Form and University Studies, with operational support from a Higher Education and Professional Studies Manager. The allocation of subjects to divisions had been adjusted such that business programmes are delivered in a new Sport, Business and Services Division. The College now receives some direct funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for programmes, and accordingly participates in the National Student Survey (NSS), the Survey for Destination of Leavers in Higher Education, and it is responsible for compliance with student finance, student loan arrangements, and student number controls.

The College identifies a number of key challenges including its desire to continuously enhance the student experience, the need to differentiate the educational experience of students at the College from those studying at the University, and the management of facilities on a jointly-owned campus. It considers student recruitment against student number targets a challenge, alongside ensuring it can deliver good quality higher education that represents value for money.

The College has addressed all the recommendations from its last QAA review effectively. In September 2013, it revised its institutional agreement with the University to reflect the move to the new College campus. It has consolidated and further embedded its committee structure. It explored with the University means of extending access to the library and has provided additional quiet and alternative study space in computing laboratories. The College now has a process for reviewing course handbooks which is understood by staff and involves curriculum managers checking them on an annual basis, ensuring they reflect the awarding body's template. It has also worked towards improving course virtual learning environment (VLE) pages by articulating the minimum content for course and modules sites, checked and monitored by curriculum managers.

## Explanation of the findings about Burnley 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 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 a degree-awarding body and delivers programmes, some validated, some franchised, by the University, which holds the ultimate responsibility for ensuring compliance with the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics, relevant national credit frameworks and Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.2 The Memorandum of Co-operation with the University allows the College to propose the development of awards and/or modules to be validated by the University and to propose changes to approved programmes. Such proposals are subject to the University's approval processes and the University's ultimate responsibility for meeting these external reference points cannot be delegated. The College's quality assurance processes do not make explicit mention of the external reference points, but do so indirectly in that it is stated that processes are designed to comply with the University's Academic Quality Assurance regulations which refer to these external reference points.

1.3 Each programme has a generally available programme specification reflecting the requirements of the reference points which the College makes available to students via the virtual learning environment (VLE) and/or as an appendix to course handbooks. The

University's external examiner report template directs external examiners to consider whether the provision is meeting external reference points.

1.4 These arrangements enable the College to meet the expectation in theory. The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing relevant College and University documentation. This included quality assurance and curriculum approval documents, external examiner reports, programme specifications and staff development documentation. The team also met senior staff and teaching staff to explore the College's use and understanding of the reference points in the design and maintenance of programmes to meet academic standards.

1.5 The team found processes for working with the University to ensure that course developments meet the external reference points. The team also heard about the dissemination to staff of changes in Subject Benchmark Statements. The team found specific examples of how both the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements have been taken into account in developing new curriculums.

1.6 The review team concludes that the College works within the University regulations in the design of the programmes, that there is a shared understanding by programme staff of how and why programmes are approved, delivered and assessed at different levels and that there is appropriate oversight by external examiners and the University of the maintenance of standards. The review team therefore concludes that the College meets Expectation A1 and that 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**

1.7 Its agreement with the University requires the College to work within the frameworks provided by the University Academic Regulations. College higher education curriculum managers disseminate any changes in regulations to staff. Chairs of assessment boards provide a briefing to attendees at the start of each board and where boards are chaired by the College, the Chair attends an annual training and update session with the University. The regulations are made available to students during induction and in course handbooks.

1.8 Responsibility for oversight of the higher education provision within the College rests with the Assistant Principal for Sixth Form and University Education, a member of the senior management team within the College. The senior management team takes the lead in developing higher education strategy for the College in consultation with the College Academic Board. Operational management of the higher education provision is the responsibility of the Higher Education and Professional Studies Manager. Each teaching division within the College has a curriculum manager responsible for its higher education provision.

1.9 The College has further developed its committee structures for the oversight of the quality and standards of its higher education provision in response to its last QAA review in 2011, introducing a University Management Group (UMG), chaired by the Assistant Principal for Sixth Form and University Education. Members of the committee include the Higher Education Manager, the Higher Education Curriculum Managers, the College Quality Manager, the Student Services Leader, the Marketing Manager and a representative from the University with responsibility for the joint campus. Once a term, the agenda has a more strategic focus, while the regular monthly meetings are more operational in character. This committee enables a flow of information regarding higher education to and from the College senior management team.

1.10 Further oversight of the quality and standards of provision within the College is provided by the process of divisional quality review meetings, discussed in section B8.

1.11 These arrangements allow the College to meet the expectation in theory. The review team tested the Expectation in discussion with senior staff, teaching staff and students, and by evaluating academic regulations, policies and procedures of the College and the University. The relationship with the University is transparent and clearly understood by staff and students and the review team concluded that the College has an effective structure in place for the management and oversight of higher education. The College, working with the University, uses academic regulations effectively to govern how credit and qualifications are awarded.

1.12 The review team concludes that the College, in partnership with the University, works within a comprehensive and transparent framework and regulations for the award of

credit and qualifications such that it meets Expectation A2.1 and that 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**

1.13 The College uses programme specifications as the main reference point for delivery and assessment of these programmes. These programme specifications follow a standard template, and are approved by the awarding body. Programme specifications are shared with students through programme handbooks and the VLE. As all programmes delivered by the College are either franchised or validated, the approval and review of these programmes are subject to the awarding body's approval. Quality assurance processes at the College are designed to complement those of the University, and are used internally to monitor and review programmes against their specifications. These arrangements allow for the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.14 To test the Expectation, the team considered the College's self-evaluation documents, programme specifications, course approval documents, and student handbooks as evidence and met senior and academic staff from the College.

1.15 Programme specifications clearly identify the level of delivery for the programme through reference to the FHEQ, they reference relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, list the intended learning outcomes, and identify the methods of delivery and assessment for programmes. Formally, programmes are reviewed at the end of each academic year. In the case of validated provision, annual and periodic review processes for these programmes act as an overarching quality check of the ongoing suitability of definitive records of programmes.

1.16 Senior and programme-level staff confirmed that programme specifications are used as the main reference point for each programme at the College and used heavily in the design and conduct of assessment. A close relationship with the awarding body facilitates ongoing discussions about the structure of programmes, and particularly in the case of franchised provision, changes can be suggested by the College either on its own, or alongside other Colleges which deliver the same programmes.

1.17 The review team determined that the College understands its responsibilities for delivering programmes against the definitive programme records and meets these responsibilities securely. Through meetings with staff and students, programme specifications were found to demarcate programmes of study, and were identified and understood as definitive records for delivery and assessment of programmes. Changes to programme specifications can only be ratified by the awarding body, limiting the extent to which the operationalisation of the programme specification can vary. As such, 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**

1.18 As the awarding body, the University's procedures govern the deliberation, scrutiny and involvement of external expertise in programme validation. Programmes at the College are either franchises of existing University programmes or validated programmes, comprising existing University modules and a small number of modules for validation by the awarding body. College quality assurance documents set out the process for approving new programmes. The College submits outline proposal and academic case documents to the University for approval, identifying any resource implications. The College's arrangements for programme design include setting assessment activities at the appropriate level for the qualification, with reference to subject and qualification benchmark statements and the FHEQ. It uses external expertise to inform programme development and validation.

1.19 The process of programme approval and development follows clear stages, articulated in College and University quality documents. Validation procedures use external expertise and ensure that standards are set at the appropriate level. The awarding body is responsible for maintaining the definitive documents for franchised provision. These procedures enable the expectation to be met in theory.

1.20 The team examined documents submitted by the College to the University proposing a programme and justifying its academic case and the sufficiency of resourcing. The team also considered validation records and programme specifications for evidence of externality, reference to subject and qualification benchmarks and the FHEQ. Meetings with staff provided confirmation of the process and knowledge of the relevant frameworks.

1.21 The team found that the College conformed to awarding body procedures for the validation of programmes to secure academic standards. The College submits outline proposal and academic case documents to the awarding body for approval prior to the submission of the final validation documentation. Developing programmes involves extensive external consultation to ensure that the qualifications meet the needs of students, employers, professional bodies and skills councils as well as meeting threshold and the University's academic standards. Internal College pre-validation processes ensure that the documentation is complete and appropriate and that the programme is at the appropriate level prior to submission to the awarding body. The awarding body's Course Planning Committee monitors the progress of new programme approvals. Processes for minor modification of programmes through annual review allows module content and assessment to remain current. External examiners confirm that the standards of validated awards are appropriate. The 2014 awarding body periodic review confirmed the academic standards of programmes remained appropriate and compliant with their regulations, reapproving the programmes under review.

1.22 The College has effective processes for validation, review and externality with a clear awareness of the procedures across the College. The review team concludes that processes for designing programmes which meet threshold standards are thorough.

Therefore, Expectation A3.1 is met in both design and operation 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**

1.23 The University retains ultimate responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards of the College's programmes. The College delivers programmes in accordance with its institutional agreement and following the awarding body's regulations. The College's quality assurance document sets out processes for assurance of academic standards in assessment to align with the University processes. The College adheres to the principles of assessment established by the University and provides its own guidance on features of good assessment practice. The awarding body maintains responsibility for ensuring that credit and qualifications are only awarded for the achievement of learning outcomes aligned to threshold and institutional standards by designing the assessments or moderating those proposed by the College. External examiners provide confirmation that assessments conform to national threshold and awarding body standards. Boards of examiners confirm the award of credit for the achievement of learning outcomes.

1.24 Awarding body procedures for assessment design, moderation and external examining maintain national and awarding body standards. The awarding body ensures that student achievement of learning outcomes receives academic credit through moderation, external examination and confirmation at boards of examiners. The College supports these arrangements by also moderating assessed work, by making such work available to university moderators and external examiners, and by attending assessment boards. The design of these arrangements enables the College to meet the expectation in theory.

1.25 The review team examined the University's regulations, the College's quality assurance documents and procedures, including external examiner reports and minutes of examination boards, and met staff responsible for assessment.

1.26 The team found that assessment design, marking and moderation processes ensure that the College and awarding bodies award qualifications only as a result of the achievement of relevant learning outcomes. Internal verification and moderation of assessment activities prior to issue ensures that students have the opportunity to achieve outcomes at the appropriate levels. External examiners confirm the maintenance of academic standards national and awarding body standards. In accordance with the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*, the College assesses work-based and work-related learning for its foundation degree programmes. Assessment briefs examined by the team exhibit constructive alignment with the module learning outcomes, confirmed by students and external examiners.

1.27 External examiner reports, minutes of boards of examiners, and the 2014 periodic review provided evidence of the effective operation of the assessment processes and confirm that credit and qualifications are awarded to the achievement of learning outcomes aligned to threshold and institutional academic standards.

1.28 Overall, the College applies the assessment regulations and procedures of the awarding body effectively. The constructive alignment of learning outcomes and assessment activities at design stage ensures that students are assessed against learning outcomes through their academic work, and that quality assurance arrangements take account of threshold and institutional academic standards. As such, the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation A3.2 in both design and theory and that 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**

1.29 The College's Memorandum of Co-operation with the University expects that staff delivering each programme link with the appropriate University school to liaise in relation to the quality assurance of the programmes. The College has its own quality processes that reflect the requirements of the University, for example the pre-validation events, annual monitoring quality reviews, divisional quality reviews and meetings of the UMG. The close relationship between the College and the University facilitates thorough design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes to secure academic standards. The College follows the processes for monitoring and review established by the University. The College completes module reviews, and an annual institutional report that take into account external examiner reports, which in turn address whether academic standards have been achieved and maintained.

1.30 The College's arrangements for internal processes of monitoring and review and external monitoring by its awarding body and external examiners, enable the College to monitor and review whether academic standards have been achieved and maintained, such that the expectation is met in theory.

1.31 The review team examined completed internal and external monitoring documents to check conformity with the processes set out in the Memorandum of Co-operation, the quality process documents of the College, and those of the awarding body. Meetings with senior staff and teaching staff provided further evidence of the application of these procedures.

1.32 The template for external examiner reports explicitly requires confirmation that academic standards are comparable to other institutions in the UK and are appropriate for the programmes. External examiner reports confirm that programmes meet both threshold and institutional academic standards. Periodic review by the awarding body confirmed that the College maintains academic standards and adheres to procedures, providing assurance that academic standards are being maintained. AMR templates require the programme team to consider external examiner reports, and the annual institutional report considers external examiner views and confirms that academic standards are met. The College's own processes, analysing achievement data, provide a further level of monitoring and review. Further oversight is provided by the Governors' Standards Committee.

1.33 Comprehensive College and awarding body processes of review and monitoring at module, programme and institutional level check and test whether academic standards are being maintained by the College. Therefore, the College meets Expectation A3.3 in both design and operation 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**

1.34 The College is required by its agreement with the University to work within the frameworks provided by the University academic regulations. Academic standards are set during the approval process by the University, whose course approval process requires the involvement of independent external academic and industry expertise. The College provides nominations of external advisers for the course approval process to the University.

1.35 External examiners, appointed for each programme by the University, confirm the ongoing maintenance of standards through the assessment process. The arrangements for using external and independent expertise in the setting and maintenance of academic standards enable the Expectation to be met in design.

1.36 To test this Expectation, the team reviewed examples of course approval documentation, documentary evidence of the involvement of industry expertise in the design of course proposals as well as a considerable range of external examiner reports. The team also discussed the involvement of external academic and industry expertise in the development of new programme proposals and in the setting and maintenance of standards with managers and members of the programme teams.

1.37 The team found evidence of the involvement of external and independent academic and industry expertise during course development and approval. This expertise is also evident in relation to the award of credit through the external examiner process.

1.38 The College's use of external experts in the design of programmes is evident, in, for example, the involvement of a Sector Skills Council and the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers in the development of the HND Furniture: Design & Make.

1.39 The review team concludes that the College, working with the University, uses external and independent expertise in the setting and maintenance of academic standards and accordingly meets Expectation A3.4 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 or other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.40 In reaching its judgement on the College's maintenance of academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.41 The College's awarding body maintains responsibility for setting academic standards of programmes and it articulates the College's responsibilities for maintaining both the awarding body's and threshold academic standards. The College uses its own procedures and those of the awarding body to manage these responsibilities and the College participates and supports the awarding body's processes, by, for example, moderating assessment, participating in exam boards, and working with external examiners to confirm academic standards. The College takes account of appropriate subject and qualification benchmark statements when designing programmes for approval by the awarding body.

1.42 The review team found that all Expectations are met and the risk for each area is low. The team makes no recommendations or affirmations.

1.43 The review team concludes that the College's maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of its awarding body **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 and Approval*

#### Findings

2.1 The College runs franchised programmes from the awarding body and a small number of validated programmes that it has developed. It works with a number of other colleges in the area to deliver some of its franchised provision. The process of programme approval and development follows clear stages, articulated in College quality documentation. Divisional HE Review Meetings propose new programme developments for approval by the College Academic Management Committee. An annual planning meeting of senior staff from the College and the University considers the proposals and the range higher education programmes offered at the Burnley Campus. The College submits outline proposal and academic case documents to the University for approval. Once the University agrees initial support for new programmes, the College's programme team and the relevant school of the University jointly develop a formal course proposal to be presented to a University approval event. This involves course teams working with employers and relevant professional bodies or sector skills councils, to complete documentation required by the awarding body. The College identifies resource requirements for new programmes using the University's Course Resource Audit Forms. A pre-validation event held by the College ensures that the documentation is complete and appropriate and that the programme is likely to be successful. The internal process mirrors the University's in making recommendation or setting conditions before the College approves the proposal for submission to the awarding body. Internal validation panel members include senior staff, an experienced member of higher education staff from another programme area, and a relevant member of awarding body staff. The College and University Course Planning Committee monitors the progress of new programme approvals. Students contribute to the process of identifying, developing and amending programmes through module reviews, staff-student liaison meetings, forums and questionnaires.

2.2 These arrangements enable the Expectation to be met in theory by providing effective processes for design, development and approval of programmes. The College and awarding body processes provide opportunities for staff, students and employers to contribute to programme proposal, approval and modification. Clear documentation and formal processes support the approval and modification of programmes.

2.3 The review team's meetings of particular relevance for testing this Expectation were those with senior staff, teaching staff and employers. The latter provided an opportunity to confirm their role in programme development and modification. A wide range of awarding body and College documents allowed the team to consider the robustness of programme development and validation procedures and the College's adherence to those procedures.

2.4 The team found that documents supporting programme approval were comprehensive and confirmed adherence to the College's and awarding body's procedures. Outline proposal and academic case documents for a BA (Hons) Criminology and Criminal Justice, a BA (Hons) Business Management top-up and BA (Hons) Theatre top-up and new pathways on the Postgraduate Certificate in Education were clear and well constructed.

Outline proposal documents include consideration of potential student numbers and rationale, while the academic case documents consider staff qualifications, experience and staff development. Resource planning processes of the awarding body and the College ensure adequate staffing, library, and physical resources for each programme.

2.5 Validation processes and documentation ensure alignment with subject and qualification benchmarks, the FHEQ and the requirements of relevant professional and external bodies. Validation also ensures the coherence of learning outcomes, the range of knowledge and skills developed and the approaches to teaching and learning and assessment employed. External expert opinion of the programme further informs the validation process. When planning the viability of programmes, the College considers running programmes on low numbers in the light of local market needs, existing local provision and likely future demand, keeping data and trends under regular review.

2.6 Proposals for new programmes or modifications to existing programmes may come about as part of the process of programme review through suggestions from students, employers or teaching staff. For example, the BA (Hons) Business Management top-up arose from student suggestion, and changes to the HNC Furniture Design & Make modules were made in response to employer requests. Employer advisory boards provide an opportunity for employers to articulate their views within the formal College structures. Although not all of the College's academic divisions have an employer advisory board, generic advisory boards provide relevant and useful employer expertise across subject areas.

2.7 The College meets Expectation B1 with low risk as procedures are clear and applied consistently and systematically. Detailed documentation confirms adherence to processes for design, development and approval, involving employers, students and external views.

**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***

**Findings**

2.8 Expectations of the College regarding recruitment, admission and enrolment, are specified within a Memorandum of Co-operation with the awarding body. Specific entry criteria are agreed when programmes are approved, and the admissions policy of the awarding body applies to all applicants. The College is committed to maintaining an 'outstanding equality of opportunity', widening participation, and enabling the local community to access to higher education. Information regarding programmes of study is available from student services, or more detailed enquiries are handled by programme staff. Information about programmes of study and entry requirements are published in the undergraduate prospectus and online. Students apply to the College through UCAS, a process which is managed by the awarding body. The College manages applications made directly to the College by prospective students for part-time courses, or for those applying outside the normal UCAS timeframe. The applications for such students is paper based.

2.9 Upon application, students are informed that they are applying to programmes which run under the academic governance of the College's awarding body. The College shortlists prospective students to determine those suitable for entry to a programme, and invites them for one-to-one interviews, which follow a standard format. At interview, if students meet the entry requirements, they may be offered a place of study. Publicity materials encourage students to disclose disabilities and learning needs, a message further reiterated during the application process. Students are required inform the College upon application if they have a criminal record, and from this point they are risk-assessed to consider their suitability to study at the College.

2.10 Selection decisions are communicated to students by letter, and differentiated for unconditional and conditional offers as well as rejections, in which case the College offers applicants the opportunity for further contact and feedback. The College has arrangements to admit students, following consideration of prior experiential learning, in consultation with the awarding body. If any applicants are unsuccessful, they may appeal within 10 working days on the basis of administrative error or the internal admissions policies not being followed. Before students are formally admitted and enrolled at the College, students are invited to applicant days. Upon confirmation of admission, the College invites students to enrol, which is currently a manual paper-based process. Students can be admitted to the provider, following consideration of other qualification or experience and consultation with the awarding body. If unsuccessful, applicants may appeal within ten working days on the basis of administrative error or internal admissions policies not being followed.

2.11 The process, as described, allows for this Expectation to be met in theory.

2.12 To test the effectiveness of this process, the team met the College Principal, senior and support staff, and students. It also considered the College's student submission, retention and success data, application forms, publicity such as prospectuses and interview information, written communication to applicants and policies relating to admissions.

2.13 The review team was informed that the awarding body is committed to the programmes available from the College and the long-term future of this its partnership with

the University. It heard that higher education provision is an ongoing focus for the College's governors who oversee both further and higher education. While admissions are managed by support staff, admissions decisions are made by academic staff on academic grounds. The application process for those that apply directly to the College is paper-based but the College intends to develop a paperless enrolment system within a central management information system in the future. Through discussions with senior, programme and support staff, the team found a desire exists not to simply reject applicants but to refer them most commonly to the National Careers Service, as based on their experience, the College finds applicants to the College can be unsure of what they really want to achieve. Students echoed this, praising the information they received which helped inform their decision to study at the College.

2.14 In attempting to create a personalised experience for students in admissions, the College is seen by students as being easy to understand and navigate, perception shared across students on franchised and validated courses, and both those starting courses in September or January. Students met by the team reflected positively on their experience of the recruitment process, and felt they had been able to talk to staff and current students during applicant days which were found to provide useful for information about the process, and broader information about finance or study skills. Students were positive about the timeliness of communication, which in cases exceeded expectation. The review team found the College positively supports applicants and considered the personalised advice and guidance to prospective students which informs their admissions decisions to be **good practice**.

2.15 The College's retention and student achievement data demonstrates a high student retention and success rates, which might be related to effective selection and admission processes. Student enrolment and retention is particularly high when students have undertaken an optional 'Introduction to University Study' programme which is informally promoted to students. Data on students' destinations upon graduation, whether into employment or further study, further suggests that recruitment, selection and admission identifies students able to complete and succeed on their programmes.

2.16 Oversight of applications, admission and retention is provided through AMRs for programmes and academic divisions, as well as through an institutional report to the awarding body and on an ongoing basis by the UMG. UMG has championed the theme of recruitment, alongside retention and rigour, as a priority for enhancement, based on qualitative measures from the academic year 2011-12. It has considered recruitment in the national higher education context, as well as at a provider and divisional level. As one of the three main themes for UMG, it has been a focus of best practice visits to other higher education providers and the subject of internal dissemination of good practice. UMG evaluates current recruitment practice, its effectiveness, what potentially could be done in this area and what should be altered or implemented. A detailed review of recruitment at institutional level is paralleled at the divisional level whereupon divisional Curriculum Managers are subsequently tasked with running pilots of projects to sustain and enhance practice within specific divisions.

2.17 There is a robust process for considering the suitability of applicants with a criminal record, where decisions take account of previous offences and any conditions. Such applicants are assessed on an individual basis by a safeguarding team, including those with expertise in convictions and their implications, and a judgement on their risk level must be unanimous. These applicants are informed whether they are allowed to enrol with or without conditions, or whether they are rejected.

2.18 The review team found there to be a clear basis for effective recruitment, selection and admission of students, based on oversight at a senior and programme level,

appropriately supported by accessible information and a widely understood and navigable process and stages within this. As such, Expectation B2 is met. Sufficient internal oversight and widespread awareness of recruitment and selection processes exists to indicate a low level of risk for this Expectation.

**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 has a strategic objective of maintaining teaching and learning at an excellent standard. The College considers that small class sizes are a key factor in the high levels of retention, achievement and success that generally exist across the curriculum. The outcomes for 2013-14, which were similar to those in recent years, were full-time success (based on retention and achievement rates) at 83 per cent and part-time success at 87 per cent.

2.20 It is College policy that all permanent full-time teaching staff and significant part-time staff have a full teaching qualification, or achieve one within a reasonable time frame, usually within two years of appointment. The College aims to recruit staff with specialist vocational expertise who can apply academic knowledge to workplace scenarios, thus enhancing the relevance of vocational programmes, in particular foundation degrees and Higher National programmes.

2.21 The College has a teaching and learning model based on an active learning philosophy, developed in 2007-08 for both further and higher education programmes. The College describes the model as supporting the transition of students to becoming independent learners and enhancing their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking. New staff are introduced to this teaching and learning model by a two-day Classroom Essentials programme which forms part of the College-wide induction process for all staff.

2.22 The College manages the proficiency of its teaching staff through its teaching observation process Changing Lives and the analysis of the associated data. It is College policy that all permanent staff (full-time or fractional) and hourly paid staff with a contract for regular teaching will be observed in the classroom by a relevant member of the academic management team and will receive developmental feedback, which will inform their annual appraisal process. The observation process grades all permanent staff and those who do not achieve a satisfactory grade must undertake the Classroom Extensions programme, involving weekly training sessions over 13 weeks. The Classroom Extensions group also includes staff who achieved good observation grades to facilitate the dissemination of best practice.

2.23 While the observation process, including the records used, is common to all teaching staff, the College seeks to ensure that observations for staff teaching on higher education courses are carried out by managers with an understanding of teaching in higher education who can then apply the process appropriately to the higher education context.

2.24 The annual appraisal process includes a consideration of Staff Development needs. Requests for support to undertake additional qualifications are considered annually by the College's Long Courses Panel, which includes the Staff Development Manager, and the Higher Education and Professional Studies Manager. The College has supported staff to undertake higher level qualifications, leading to a significant proportion of staff working on higher education programmes having postgraduate qualifications. The College holds a



two-week Summer Feast programme of staff development activity which includes some sessions aimed at higher education staff. Staff also attend sessions provided by the University both in Burnley and at Preston. Teaching and support staff are also encouraged and supported to attend external development events and conferences. All staff are encouraged to undertake a minimum of two best practice visits per year to other high performing providers. The College keeps thorough records of staff continuing professional development activity.

2.25 The College recognises that, while higher education observations have identified good practice in research-informed teaching, much of this is drawing on secondary research. The College has begun to implement plans to raise the profile of and involvement in scholarly activity, particularly amongst staff involved in higher education programmes. In 2013-14 members of the UMG, including all HE Curriculum Managers and a number of Support Area Managers were tasked with undertaking a research project related to the enhancement of the College's higher education provision. Findings were presented at an internal HE Symposium to a wider set of staff involved in higher education as part of the Summer Feast fortnight in June 2014. The engagement of teaching and support staff in primary research projects as a means of developing the relationship between teaching and research is **good practice** on which the College will be able to build future development of research and scholarly activity among both staff and students.

2.26 The physical learning environment of the College is based on a new build from 2009, with the bulk of higher education provision delivered in a designated wing of the University-owned building, jointly branded by the College and the University. The Facilities Service Level Agreement between the College and the University includes the rental of teaching space and the provision of resources such as IT facilities the University Library, the Student Union Resource Centre and the Student Help Desk. Some specialist teaching takes place within College facilities elsewhere on Campus, for example, Engineering and Sport and the College have invested in the provision of industry standard facilities in these areas.

2.27 All higher education students studying at the College also have the right to access facilities at the University's main Campus at Preston, including the library, Student Union, arts centre and sports centre.

2.28 The College has recently been moving to use the University's VLE as a response to a reduced level of satisfaction among higher education students with the main College VLE. Students expressed increased satisfaction with the VLE both in the student submission and in the student meetings with the review team. As a means of further improving the VLE, the College is developing a checklist to identify its minimum VLE requirements for each discipline area to enable Curriculum Managers to monitor compliance with this quality threshold.

2.29 The strategic approach to learning and teaching, the learning and teaching model, and arrangements for peer observation and scholarly activity enable the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.30 The team tested this Expectation by reviewing a range of documentation relating to College policies and processes, including evidence of appropriate staff qualifications and experience and records of continuing professional development. The team also considered the documentation used in teaching observations, annual monitoring documentation relating to learning and teaching, evidence of staff engagement with pedagogic and other professionally-related research and the results from the NSS. The team reviewed material on the VLE and those provided to students, and met a range of senior and programme staff, learning support staff, students and alumni. The team discussed with senior staff the extent to which learning and teaching is differentiated for higher education, the experience of

running programmes with small class sizes and the College's ability to adjust the learning environment for its higher education students.

2.31 The review team heard about the benefits which both staff and students experienced in the small class sizes and, while noting that small class sizes presented potential risks to the student experience, the team concluded on the basis of discussion with senior staff that this was a risk that was adequately managed.

2.32 The review team noted that the wing of the building which the College use is owned by the University which limits the College's ability to respond to any student dissatisfaction with the facilities. For example, while the College has recognised some student dissatisfaction with the physical space in the main higher education library, the library is owned and managed by the University rather than the College and the College is unable to increase the physical space available within the library without the University's agreement. The College has, however, worked with the University to propose changes to improve space, including more workspace in the Student Union Resource Centre, the installation of study pods, and the identification and promotion of the availability IT labs or classrooms in which students could work as an alternative to working in the Library. Students welcomed the changes and expressed their satisfaction with the facilities. The review team also concluded that, while arrangements with the University relating to both physical and virtual resources reduce the ability of the College to control the learning environment, the College works effectively within the constraints to provide appropriate facilities for its higher education students.

2.33 Neither the College's learning and teaching model nor the Classroom Essentials programme focus specifically on teaching and learning in higher education. The review team was told that higher education-specific induction takes place for new teaching staff within the relevant subject Division. Students confirmed to the review team that they felt a progression in level of difficulty from their previous experience and through the levels in higher education.

2.34 The review team saw records of higher education teaching observations which referenced teaching at the higher education level. The observation process involves the use of external consultants to standardise the observations and the review team was told that some of the consultants have higher education experience. The review team was also told that managers are considering a differentiated approach to the observation of teaching in higher education and the standardisation process, but there was no evidence of steps being taken in pursuit of this. The lack of specifically articulated criteria for teaching at higher education level either within the induction process or the briefing for the observation process means, however, that there is a risk of students being taught at an inappropriate level during the period before a member of staff first has his/her teaching of higher education students observed and the team **recommends** that the College further develop higher education-specific approaches to staff induction and peer observation by January 2016.

2.35 The review team concludes that the College works effectively with staff, students and other stakeholders to develop and review its provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices and that students are enabled to develop as independent learners and encouraged to develop their intellectual capacities. However, the need for articulated criteria for teaching at higher education level gives rise to a recommendation and there is a risk of students being taught at an inappropriate level albeit briefly before staff have their teaching observed. Such risks indicate that insufficient emphasis or priority is given to assuring quality in the College's planning process with regard to these specific aspects of teaching and learning.

2.36 The review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B3 and that the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

2.37 The higher education strategy regards student transitions and the enabling of students to reach their potential as being a key focus of its work. There is a strategic focus on enabling local students' progression which is reflected in new curriculum developments, including the introduction of level 6 top-up provision and the introduction of a level 3 foundation entry year programme. The strategic theme of Recruitment, Retention and Rigour, which the UMG has adopted as the framework for its activities in recent years, has led to much of the work in supporting the development of students enrolled on College programmes.

2.38 The College has various initiatives to assist students with the transition into higher education, including a pre-induction activity in which students are set a task over the summer period prior to commencing their studies, which is designed to introduce students to the skills that would be required to complete formal assessments, as well as providing an initial diagnostic tool for staff. A pre-induction Applicant Day was held in June 2014 where students could meet current students, the programme team and gain information on topics such as student finance and preparing to study.

2.39 The Introduction to University Study programme was developed by the College in 2013 as a University-validated short course (30 hours class time) at level 3 designed to aid the transition into higher education.

2.40 The student induction process ensures that students are aware of all key processes and regulations at the commencement of their studies and are introduced to academic skills and relevant technology. The College provides students with comprehensive information about their programmes through programme and module handbooks, the student support handbook and information on the VLE. The College evaluates the induction process through student focus groups.

2.41 The College provides guidance on academic practice both within programmes and through academic support sessions, which take place on a daily basis within the library, designed to enable students to develop their skills in academic writing and conventions, and to promote increased independence.

2.42 Once enrolled on a programme, students are encouraged to monitor their progress and development and take increasing responsibility for their personal and academic development through the Personal, Professional and Development Planning process (PPDP). This is built into specific modules on a number of foundation degree programmes but, where it is not, the College has developed a generic PPDP record that students complete. This includes prompt sheets to aid personal reflection, with links, where appropriate, to current work-based learning experiences and future employment.

2.43 The College gives students with disabilities advice at interview about applications for the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and the Disability Team holds weekly timetabled drop-in sessions where current or prospective students can gain advice and support with their DSA applications.

2.44 Teaching that develops employability skills is embedded in all programmes, and students have the opportunity to do structured work experience. The College assists

students in accessing such opportunities through support from programme tutors and events such as the volunteering fair at the start of each academic year. All students also have access to independent advisers from the National Careers Service, who work to enhance students' professional development and employability, including one-to-one appointments and group workshops on employability skills. These careers advisers also support students' progression to further study, or in making job applications upon completion of their programmes. Students can also access the University's careers service.

2.45 The College's arrangements for student induction, transition and support allow it to meet the expectation in theory. The review team tested this Expectation by examining a range of College documents including strategies, presentations, minutes of the UMG, induction documents, student handbooks, material relating to personal and professional development, careers advice and structured work experience. The team also reviewed annual monitoring documents related to support for student development. The team met senior staff, teaching staff, professional support staff, students, alumni and employers.

2.46 The review team heard about the steps taken to address retention rates among students on construction programmes, an example of the deliberate approach to improve recruitment, retention and rigour. The retention issues had been identified through monitoring processes and the College then both talked to the students and also sought to understand the practice of programmes elsewhere with better retention. It then changed the programme delivery pattern and incorporated work-related visits early in the course which had a positive impact on retention rates.

2.47 The review team met students who confirmed that the induction process had worked well for them and that they had ready access to the information they needed to guide them through their courses. Students, including mature students, informed the review team that they had access to support from the Library which had facilitated their transition into higher education. The team finds that the effective support for students' transition into higher education study is **good practice**.

2.48 Students completing the introduction to University Study course and moving on to level 4 programmes have provided feedback as to the benefit of the course in preparing them for their studies. The review team was also told by students about the benefits of this course although some students had been unaware of its existence and others were told about the course as part of informal advice and guidance rather than a part of the formal interview checklist.

2.49 The review team spoke to students who articulated clearly how PPDP had assisted their development, although not all the students recognised the place of PPDP in their programmes to the same extent. All the students whom the team met had felt well supported by the College.

2.50 The team heard that the College makes considerable efforts to track students' destinations; it has introduced a graduate internship scheme and is currently strengthening arrangements for keeping in touch with alumni.

2.51 The review team concludes that the College has effective arrangements in place to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, which it keeps under review through student feedback and annual monitoring processes. Therefore, 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**

2.52 Student engagement within the College comprises collective student representation, with course-specific student representatives sharing views in official forums such as Student-Staff Liaison Meetings (SSLMs) and higher education student meetings. SSLMs occur at least once per semester at programme level, and the institution-wide higher education student meetings take place four times per year. Individual student feedback is formally collected through surveys such as module evaluation questionnaires and the NSS.

2.53 Formal mechanisms are supplemented with informal student engagement, because of small group sizes and the close interaction between students and staff, for instance, during tutorials. Student representatives are able to access training, and are informed about the importance and value placed on student feedback, and the various mechanisms to collect feedback. The College aims to embrace the principles laid out within the awarding body's student charter, which describes the relationship between students, the University, and the Students' Union.

2.54 These structures and mechanisms for student engagement enable the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.55 The review team explored these arrangements in meetings with the College senior, academic and support staff, current students and alumni. It considered evidence including a student submission, minutes from SSLMs, minutes from periodic course reviews, module evaluation questionnaires and responses, and resources available to student representatives such as training presentations, handbooks and handouts.

2.56 Students appoint representatives early in the academic year during induction by a range of methods including elections, and typically have two student representatives per course. Where this is less practical due to small class sizes, students were aware that they could all attend SSLMs and directly contact academic or support staff. A clear role description, information and advice are available for student representatives, supplied by the awarding body's Students' Union, who also invite the College's students to attend training. This opportunity is not widely taken up by students and training is also provided by the College.

2.57 Students were aware of their ability to provide feedback on their experiences through representatives, and considered there were adequate opportunities to raise concerns both formally and informally. Outside of committees, students are confident and encouraged to contact a range of staff on an informal basis. Students and staff identified SSLMs as effective in conveying the student voice and enabling changes to a wide range of issues relating to programmes. The informal engagement between students and staff on issues is also actively encouraged and valued, particularly the speed with which informal engagement enables issues to be addressed.

2.58 Students and alumni were happy that completion of module evaluation questionnaires allowed them to raise issues about their study. Student feedback is identifiably incorporated into programme and institutional AMRs. Action plans arising from module evaluation outcomes are monitored by curriculum managers. While students were aware that their feedback was taken into account and used to improve things for future

cohorts, students expressed regret that they may not see the benefit of these outcomes themselves.

2.59 Student feedback is highly valued and is seen as vital in developing a distinct student experience as a higher education student, and distinct from the awarding body's direct provision. Student feedback is keenly sought through module evaluations, SSLMs and higher education student forums. While records are kept of SSLM meetings, the College's awarding body noted during a periodic course review that student issues are often resolved informally, and it can be difficult to identify where actions have been agreed, taken, and closed. This is also acknowledged by the College and it is working with students to address this.

2.60 Though the College actively seeks to engage students and is responsive to student feedback, the review team spent some time considering how students are engaged as partners in decision-making about the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. Students had recently met with the College's governors for the first time, and there are discussions taking place as to how to enable higher education students to engage with this body. Steps are being taken to enable students to take part in other activities, such as approval panels for new programmes, but the College acknowledged that students' views are collected and then incorporated into plans by managers, rather than through direct student input into these planning processes. Students confirmed this, recalling that they feed into programme review processes, but are not involved in programme review events. The student submission further reflected a desire to become more involved in the design and creation of new programmes. Though there is clearly a demonstrable impact from students engaging at a programme-level, the College has not yet developed student participation above programme level. Students are not members of the UMG, and, while some students have attended course meetings, they are not constituent members of these meetings. The review team **recommends** that the College enable student participation in deliberative College committees by January 2016.

2.61 The College is beginning to reflect how to strengthen its Students' Union and is recruiting a member of staff to support it. While students are not universally aware of the student charter, those who were felt it could be more integrated into the College and in documentation higher education students receive, and that it relates to the awarding body's ethos.

2.62 The College clearly values and is eager for students to share their views. The College actively engages students on a formal basis through student representatives, who have access to training and ongoing support, and is keen to respond to their feedback. Informally, through ongoing dialogue between staff and students within their small teaching groups, an open environment is conducive to students being considered partners in their learning experience. As such, Expectation B5 is met. The review team identifies that insufficient emphasis is given to assuring quality with the involvement of students as partners in deliberative processes, and as such that associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

2.63 The awarding body establishes assessment regulations, principles and practice requiring the College to adhere to these as part of the Memorandum of Co-operation. Programme specifications establish learning outcomes and assessment strategies, communicated to students through programme handbooks and the VLE.

2.64 The awarding body writes assessments for most modules delivered at the College whether for franchised or validated programmes. For modules which are only delivered at the College, tutors set assessments that are moderated and approved by the University with further scrutiny by the external examiner. College staff first mark assessments, with sampling of work for second-marking by college staff, by the University, and in some cases by consortium partners. Claims for the accreditation of prior learning are rare and considered by the awarding body. The University chairs boards of examiners although the College is empowered to chair module boards for subjects unique to the College's partnership, such as engineering.

2.65 Programme validation and periodic review procedures ensure that effective assessment design allows students to demonstrate the extent to which they meet the learning outcomes of their programme of study. The College operates under agreements and regulations which establish a clear framework for robust, valid and reliable assessments confirmed by external examiners. College procedures for supporting good academic practice and avoidance of academic misconduct are thorough. Therefore, the College meets the Expectation in theory.

2.66 The review team met the Principal, senior, teaching and support staff, employers and groups of franchised and validated students to discuss the nature of assessments and the operation of assessment processes. The team examined documentation relating to the operation of assessments including programme handbooks, assignment briefs, moderation and external examiner reports. Other documents used to test the Expectation were the 2014 periodic review by the awarding body, College guidance on the use of electronic originality-checking software and College teaching and learning documentation.

2.67 Programme validation procedures ensure that affective assessment design allows students to meet the learning outcomes of their programme of study. Assessment briefs examined by the team exhibit constructive alignment with the module learning outcomes, confirmed by students and external examiners.

2.68 The College and University assessment regulations and processes establish a clear framework for valid and reliable assessments confirmed by external examiners. The University moderates the design of all assessments prior to issue for franchised programmes and for most validated modules; the College moderates assignments for modules that it delivers uniquely. Moderation of marked assessments follows the same process, with the addition of shared moderation for assessments delivered as part of a consortium, and external examiner sampling.



2.69 The College prepares students well for assessments, and students recognise the change in level and complexity of assessments as they progress through their studies. Assessment briefs and assessment regulations are in programme handbooks and on the VLE.

2.70 The College and the University aim to provide feedback on assessed work within 15 working days. Increasing use of electronic submission and marking of assessments facilitates monitoring of the target which currently takes place at programme rather than institutional level. External examiners praise the standard of student work and the quality of feedback from staff. NSS scores for assessment are high.

2.71 College guidance for staff on assessment is part of its approach to supporting and improving teaching and learning. The document *Changing People's Lives* contains a useful range of assessment methods, emphasising the role of assessment in the process of learning and teaching. The Annual Institutional Report for 2013-14 and the 2014 periodic review by the University identify timely, clear and comprehensive assessment feedback as a strength.

2.72 Steps to encourage good academic practice are thorough. The College supports academic writing and referencing in the pre-enrolment module, at induction and during the year. Handbooks and the VLE contain guidance on assessment regulations and academic writing. Assignment documents contain originality declarations. The College uses originality-checking software as a learning tool with clear guidance on its application.

2.73 Employers are aware of the assessments their students undertake and that they are relevant to their workplace. Work-related assessments are central to the College's approach to assessment. Foundation degree programmes have work-based or work-related assessments in line with the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*. External examiners and the University's periodic review confirm the range and variety of work-based assessments on foundation degrees. Students comment favourably on how work experience and employer projects provide them with the opportunity to identify a link between their course and the skills required to be effective in the workplace.

2.74 Overall, the College's management of assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for their programme of study. Processes for conducting assessments are valid and reliable. The team concludes that Expectation B6 is met in both design and practice. There are no identified omissions or amendments required, 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**

2.75 The role of the external examiner is defined and set out by the University, which also manages the nomination and appointment process. External examiners report on a template provided by the University. The Higher Education and Professional Studies Manager and the Quality Manager receive all reports, review them and disseminate them to relevant heads of division, curriculum managers and programme leaders for discussion with programme teams and to formulate appropriate responses. The College requires all programme teams to review external examiner reports as part of the annual monitoring process and an overview of external examiners' comments is also provided within the institutional-level AMR.

2.76 It is University and College policy that external examiner reports are shared with students. This is done by a variety of methods including discussion at SSLMs and/or making a copy of the report available on the VLE. The review team found that this approach allowed the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.77 The review team tested this Expectation by examining relevant College policies and procedures, external examiner reports, responses to external examiner reports, minutes of SSLMs and annual monitoring documentation. The team also discussed the involvement of external examiners with both staff and students and assessed the use of the VLE for engaging students with external examiner reports. The review team found that the College manages the external examiner processes in accordance with the relevant policies and procedures, that reflective use is made of external examiner reports in the annual monitoring process at both course and institution level, and that external examiners are responded to appropriately. The students whom the review team met were all clear about the role of the external examiner and the review team saw evidence of external examiner reports being shared with students.

2.78 The review team noted that it was not always clear, in relation to courses delivered at a number of the University's partner colleges, whether comments by external examiners related to the College. The team heard that the College is working with the University to address this and that progress had been made in this regard with more effective induction of external examiners.

2.79 The review team concludes that the College has appropriate arrangements in place to make use of external examiners' reports and to respond to feedback from them so that there is appropriate and scrupulous use of external examiners. As such, Expectation B7 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**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**

2.80 Higher education programmes are subject to extensive monitoring and review through the University's processes and those of the College. Students complete module evaluation questionnaires, which are summarised by teaching staff and inform an action plan. The summaries are fed back to students at SSLMs or group tutorials. Curriculum managers approve the programme summaries and action plans and produce their own subject area summary. The action plans are sent to the University and form part of the programme team AMR. AMRs are compiled using retention and achievement data, external examiner reports, teaching team's views, and external input. AMRs inform the College's overall institutional level report to the University. The University conducts periodic reviews of programmes, making recommendations and identifying good practice.

2.81 College monitoring processes take place throughout the year, supplementing the annual process. Senior staff monitor recruitment and retention rates on a weekly basis. Fortnightly meetings of the Academic Management Committee, comprising senior staff and heads of division, consider the performance of programmes at all levels based on recruitment, retention and achievement data. The UMG meets every three weeks and is remitted to consider and respond to College quality indicators. An annual divisional review by senior management examines the quality and outcomes of the courses offered by each division. Higher education data and actions are considered at the highest level by governors, and in particular by the Governors' Standards Committee.

2.82 The College's quality assurance, through programme monitoring and review and other College and University processes, is comprehensive. Through these processes, the College assures itself that programmes are effective in securing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The monitoring and review processes are clear, regular and systematic, such that this Expectation is met in theory.

2.83 In testing the College's processes, the review team met senior staff, academic and support staff, students and employers. The team examined a range of structure diagrams and clarified the College's reporting structure and processes. The team reviewed minutes, in particular those of the UMG, Academic Board, Quality Committee and committees of governors. AMRs and their associated quality reviews were central to the testing process.

2.84 The team found that the processes of monitoring and review at the College are extensive, thorough and effective. Monitoring of data is regular and frequent. As an example of the effectiveness of the process, the identification of poor performance in retention and success rates for Construction and Education programmes led to actions, subsequent improvement and sharing of good practice. Programme teams produce comprehensive AMRs, taking into account student, staff and external examiner's views and a range of performance data. Reports examined by the team included identification of good practice from periodic review and external examiner reports. Standard awarding body templates ensure a consistent approach to matters reported and considered. The AMRs are themselves monitored for consistency by senior managers.

2.85 The College structure for academic management is organic, relying more on the relationship of interlocking groups of managers and staff rather than formal hierarchical

committee structure. Divisional heads and curriculum managers check AMRs to ensure that they are sufficiently detailed and with measurable targets; these are monitored in-year through divisional review panels. Frequent meetings between the Higher Education Manager, the Assistant Principal for Sixth Form and University Studies, and divisional heads underpin the processes of monitoring and review to share key messages and practice.

2.86 The UMG complements the organic structure of programme monitoring and the monitoring of subsequent action plans. The Group is central to the formal management and monitoring of higher education programmes with clear terms of reference and membership. UMG does not report to any higher committee and so there is no formal consideration of its minutes within the College's committee system, nor specified in its terms of reference. The Academic Board does not receive minutes from UMG but has discussed, for example, the Higher Education Strategy to provide feedback to UMG. Governors consider higher education data and trends but do not receive UMG minutes. UMG links to the College's committee structure through the participation of the senior management team on the Group, and others. The UMG does not benefit from student involvement in decision-making, relying instead on monitored student opinion from module reviews, surveys and staff-student liaison committees. This finding supports the recommendation in paragraph 2.58.

2.87 The review team concludes that the College's monitoring and review processes are effective, regular and systematic, and result in actions to secure improvements. Therefore, Expectation B8 is met in both design and practice and that 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**

2.88 Academic appeals from students are handled by the College's awarding body and programmes delivered at Burnley College are subject to the University's academic regulations. Students are informed of their right to appeal throughout their studies, and that appeals cannot be made against academic judgements, but on the grounds of extenuating circumstances not properly considered or as yet undisclosed, material error, or assessments not conducted according to academic regulations. Appeals against final results must be made within two weeks of receiving them, and students are directed to use the Students' Union Advice Centre for guidance and support. The appeals procedure is available in student handbooks, and refers to the University's regulations.

2.89 A detailed internal complaints procedure exists, designed to be accessible, fair and straightforward and to enable effective, prompt and appropriate responses. According to the procedure, the College acknowledges formal student complaints by letter before forwarding the complaint form and supporting evidence to a senior member of staff for investigation. This investigation outcome comprises a written response including any proposed corrective actions. The College retains and stores supporting information internally. It informs students that internal complaints' procedures must be exhausted prior to escalating their complaint to the awarding body, and, if a complaint cannot be resolved at this level, students are directed to seek resolution through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

2.90 The College provides both the complaints and appeals procedure to students online through the VLE, and within student handbooks. It informs students that their complaints must exhaust internal procedures before referral to the University. The College's procedures allow for this Expectation to be met in theory, as they detail an iterative and clearly defined process, with information about appeals and complaints proactively communicated to students.

2.91 The review team considered the College's documentation pertaining to academic appeals and complaints policy and procedure, such as audit trails of resolved student complaints, and student handbooks. The team met the College Principal, senior staff, and students from courses both franchised from and validated by the University.

2.92 Formal academic appeals are rare. However, when they are received, the College is committed to cooperating fully, and providing necessary evidence to support the awarding body in resolving the issue. The limited grounds for appeal are believed to limit the number received.

2.93 The College welcomes student complaints in order to help improve students' learning, and monitors the level of complaints received within a central log, maintained by a specific member of staff for both formal and informal complaints. Only three complaints have been received over the last three years. In each case, these were escalated to the awarding body who upheld the College's decision, and one of these was unsuccessfully referred to the OIA. The senior management team monitors complaints to identify weaknesses and areas for enhancement within the College. If errors or weaknesses are identified, this would be fed back to the relevant divisional team and students would be consulted to determine actions to

be taken. The review team was told that annual reports of student complaints are provided to the board of governors, and, on an interim basis, all appeals and complaints are seen and logged by the senior team to monitor them.

2.94 Students were found to be aware of the grounds for and process of academic appeals and submitting formal complaints, and where to find relevant information. Furthermore, students perceive the information regarding grounds and processes for academic appeals and complaints to be accessible and accurate.

2.95 The College senior management team attributes the low number of formal complaints to its proactive approach to resolving students' concerns informally. Students often seek to resolve issues with their tutors in the first instance, and identify the small class sizes and high levels of tutor support as limiting the number of complaints and appeals. The team considered evidence from recent formal student complaints and found that the College's responses demonstrated a positive, fair and transparent approach to communicating and working with students in response. Where complaints progress to the awarding body, the team found additional evidence and information was compiled by the College to support the complainant's case. The review team noted that in future the College will become an OIA subscriber, enabling students to progress their cases to the OIA more quickly and seek faster resolution.

2.96 The review team concluded that the College's procedures for handling academic appeals or formal complaints, its positive approach to supporting students, its aim to seek resolution, as well as transparency of information available to students on these procedures mean that Expectation B9 is met. The College's low number of appeals and complaints, and evidence of early resolution suggests that procedures work effectively 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**

2.97 The College does not franchise out or subcontract its higher education provision to any other body or organisation. The College strategy is that every student has an entitlement to structured work experience. This is monitored by the UMG which also has oversight of the guidelines for working with employers in setting up placements. Course teams liaise with employers in setting up placements and in briefing work-place mentors. Where appropriate, health and safety assessments, including insurance cover, for these workplaces are coordinated via the College's employer liaison arm, Themis, in accordance with the College health and safety policy. Course teams provide support for students on placement and students have the opportunity to provide feedback on their placement experiences. All placement-related assessment is carried out by members of College staff.

2.98 In theory, College procedures meet the Expectation in relation to delivering learning opportunities with other organisations. In order to assess the effectiveness of the College's procedures the team reviewed a range of information and resources regarding placements and discussed these processes in meetings with students, staff, and employers.

2.99 The review team heard that students were expected to find their own placement but found evidence of the College's ability to support this. The College has a range of template letters to prospective placement providers and it provides briefings for workplace mentors, placement handbooks and three-way agreements between the College, the employer and the students. The employers and students whom the review team met understood what they should do in the event that a placement proved problematic. Employers who were workplace mentors felt that they were well-briefed and the review team found evidence of monitoring of student experience on placement. Currently, employers are not involved in the formal assessment of students' written work, although they may observe students' project presentations and will usually be consulted on students' progress.

2.100 The team found that the College fulfils its responsibilities for managing students' work experience and placements effectively through course-level support for students in finding placements, provision of appropriate documentation and support while on placement. The team concluded that the College has effective procedures in place to manage work placements delivered through employers. Students and employers commented positively on the support they receive from the College and the team saw evidence that the College's procedures for managing placements are working effectively. As such, the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B10 and that 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**

2.101 As the College does not offer research degrees, this Expectation does not apply.



## The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.102 In reaching its judgement on the College's quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.103 The College has clear procedures for the development and approval of new programmes that it applies consistently and systematically. It has a clear basis for effective recruitment and admission of students based on appropriate oversight at programme and senior level. Learning and teaching approaches enable students to develop as independent learners, and the College has mechanisms to enhance staff teaching practices. The College also supports students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Student representation structures, and opportunities, coupled with the close dialogue between staff and students means that students are engaged in the management and enhancement of their education. The College's processes for conducting assessments are valid and reliable, and allow students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes. In addition, the College has appropriate arrangements to make scrupulous use of external examiners. Programme monitoring and review processes are effective, regular and systematic, and result in actions to secure improvements. The College has clear procedures for handling student complaints and appeals, which it manages positively with the aim to seek resolution in a transparent manner. Finally, the College has effective procedures in place to manage work placements delivered through employers.

2.104 The review team found that eight of 10 applicable expectations in this area had been met with low associated risk, and two had been met with moderate risk. In relation to Expectation B3: Learning and Teaching, the team found that the need for articulated criteria for teaching at higher education level gives rise to a recommendation and there is a risk of students being taught at an inappropriate level, albeit briefly, before staff have their teaching observed. It makes one recommendation in relation to this: that the College further develop higher education-specific approaches to staff induction and peer observation. In relation to Expectation B5: Student Engagement, the review team identifies that insufficient emphasis is given to assuring quality with the involvement of students as partners, and it makes a recommendation in relation to student engagement; that students are enabled to participate in deliberative College committees.

2.105 The review team identifies three features of good practice in relation to the quality of learning opportunities. These related to the advice and guidance give to prospective students, the engagement of teaching and support staff in primary research projects, and the effective support for students' transition into higher education.

2.106 The review team found that the College is fully aware of its responsibilities for assuring quality, and previous responses to external review activities provides confidence that areas of weakness will be address promptly and professionally. The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities **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 Information about the College's higher education provision is available through a publicly available prospectus published by the awarding body. Prospective students can find out about programmes of study, preparing for higher education and student finance during interviews, applicant days and open evenings. Standard format programme specifications, approved by the awarding body, are available to students providing definitive information about their programmes. Current students are able to access information about their studies through the student handbook, which follows a template set by the awarding body.

3.2 All publicity material that includes the names of the College and the University requires approval from both bodies before publication. Programmes can only be advertised with the University's permission, and those under development must be advertised as 'subject to approval'. The College Principal is responsible for signing off Key Information Sets, compiled internally by the higher education manager, and publically available on the College's website.

3.3 The College intends that information about learning opportunities is published on the basis that it is accessible, accurate and fit for purpose for all intended audiences. The College is aware of the differentiated responsibilities for the production of information under the terms of its institutional agreement and memorandum of understanding with the University. Staff have access to the awarding body's regulations, and changes to regulations are relayed from the University to the higher education manager and to support and academic staff in turn. Employers responsible for students on placement are supported by a link tutor.

3.4 Upon completion of their studies, students are provided with a certificate and transcript of their studies, which are the ultimate responsibility of the awarding body. Certificates confirm the name and level of award achieved, with transcripts indicating the level, number of modules and amount of credit awarded.

3.5 The range of information made available for the College's stakeholders and the clear designation of responsibilities for different types of information about higher education allow for the Expectation to be met in theory.

3.6 The review team tested the expectation by meeting the College senior team, academic and support staff, students and employers involved in work-based learning opportunities. It considered a range of publicity and programme-related material in addition to policy and the College's self-evaluation and student submission. It also looked at the prospectus jointly published by the College and University, interview information, student handbooks, module handbooks, learning agreements, and publishing sign-off forms.

3.7 A joint marketing meeting takes place between the College and University to ensure consistency in understanding of policy and procedure, including any changes in protocol and marketing plans, and regular liaison is maintained by the College marketing manager. These meetings enable a shared approach to information between the College

and the University, for instance in the use of social media. The College also engages with other institutions that have partnerships with the University to ensure consistency in their approach. The College has a designated member of staff to communicate national changes in higher education policy.

3.8 The College has a process for internal sign-off of higher education publicity material at a senior level, and this is effectively operationalised and understood by staff such that sign-off occurs when there are no further amendments to be made to draft documents. Amendments to information regarding provision are centrally monitored and actioned to specific members of staff by the higher education manager. Changes to publicity materials are submitted by programme teams within annual programme reports to the University. Higher education handbooks are checked annually by curriculum managers to ensure suitability of presentation, coverage of academic information, minor changes needed, good practice and areas for improvement.

3.9 As a result of the shared branding and the requirement to use standard templates from the University for key student-facing documents, such as handbooks and promotional material, the College has been considering ways to contextualise information in order to further communicate the College-specific student experience. One such development is to produce a College-specific alternative prospectus in order to better reflect the differentiated experience of studying on the Burnley College campus as against the University's campus. The creation of this alternative prospectus has included students from the outset and they were invited to help design information through focus groups or through student representatives. Also, students are confident that their feedback within or outside of these mechanisms is taken into account.

3.10 When students apply to the College, programme specifications are provided to students giving more detailed information about programmes than online programme descriptions. Students confirmed that information given either verbally or physically reflected the experience of studying at the College. Students confirmed they were happy to contact tutors if they need information not provided in printed materials. Students agreed that programme specifications are available within programme handbooks and on the VLE. Module handbooks include module specification or descriptor information such as module aims, learning objectives, marking criteria and indicative reading, with some students identifying the correlation between programme outcomes and the modules they study.

3.11 The handbook is the main source of information for students about their studies, and is supplemented through module handbooks and information packs. Programme staff are familiar with the template provided by the University and the monitoring process and, when teaching, refer students to the handbook as necessary. While working to avoid in-year changes to programme handbooks, changes are communicated to students and reflected through revised online versions. Students use their programme and module handbooks throughout the year to identify deadlines and organise their workloads.

3.12 Students find the combination of the VLE, social media and the College's website helpful for communicating relevant information, the latter also providing a breadth of information about student life and study opportunities. The College's website, alongside the joint prospectus, was highlighted as good practice by the 2011 QAA review, and the value and trust students place in the information suggests this has been sustained. Students describe the VLE as containing all required course information.

3.13 Employers involved in placements consider that they are appropriately supported to understand what is expected of students by the College, and invited for updating sessions if programmes are changed. While there is a range of types of relationships between workplaces and the College, employers are able to access programme handbooks and

specifications and are often contacted by students using a pro forma letter provided by the College. Where relevant, trilateral agreements between the College, students and the prospective placement are provided to clarify the responsibilities and expectations of these parties. For prospective employers of graduates, enquiries about programmes are handled by direct contact with staff.

3.14 All internal audiences are able to access the University's regulations through the VLE, and students are informed at interview that these govern all higher education programmes taught at the College.

3.15 The College's clear processes for publication, centralised monitoring and ongoing annual maintenance of information enable internal and external stakeholders access to reliable, trustworthy and fit-for-purpose information through a range of media. This was confirmed during the visit through meetings with a range of stakeholders, and the team concluded that Expectation C is met. The systematic internal oversight and review of information regarding the quality of student learning opportunities, supported by a strong relationship and a shared understanding of responsibilities with the University mean that the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

3.16 In reaching its judgement on the College's quality of information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.17 Information for students, industry partners, prospective students and the general public is available on its website and other media, such as in hardcopy and the VLE, some of it produced jointly with its awarding body. The College has arrangements to review and assure the information it produces, with clearly allocated responsibilities for approving and signing off published documents and student handbooks. It has involved students in the production of student-facing materials such as the alternative College prospectus. It uses the VLE to communicate quality assurance procedures to staff and students through handbooks. Information about the College's higher education is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy and students confirm the usefulness of information they receive.

3.18 The review team found that the Expectation is met and the risk is low. It makes no recommendations or affirmations, and found no features of good practice. As such, the review team concludes that the quality of information about learning opportunities **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's Higher Education Strategy links directly to the strategic objectives underpinning the College's mission. The objective of expanding local opportunities for higher education study while maintaining high quality provision in turn informs a draft enhancement strategy. The draft strategy, designed to articulate a strategic approach to enhancement, commits the College to the continuous enhancement of the student learning and experience for higher education students. The College's current enhancement initiatives are identified by the UMG as the '3Rs' of Recruitment, Retention and Rigour.

4.2 College processes for monitoring and review provide extensive opportunities to reflect on programmes, identify and share good practice and take actions that enhance student learning opportunities. Module, programme and institutional review, coupled with other processes of monitoring and student feedback, ensures that information is systematically generated to inform enhancement initiatives at an institutional level. College staff at all levels, including support staff, visit other institutions and bodies to bring back and share examples of good practice.

4.3 There are processes for sharing good practice, collating and sharing feedback, and current enhancement initiatives which are strategically led. There are evident deliberate steps to enhance student learning opportunities at an institutional level and, as such, this Expectation is met in theory.

4.4 In testing the College's strategic and operational approach to improving the quality of students' learning, the review team met the Principal, senior staff, teaching and support staff. The team checked the impact of enhancement activities in meetings with validated and franchised students and in examining the student submission. The College mission, higher education strategy and draft enhancement strategy were examined along with minutes of committees and review documentation to examine the coherence at institutional and operational levels.

4.5 The College has taken steps to make explicit the processes of enhancement by appointing an enhancement manager and drafting an enhancement strategy. The team affirms the steps the College is taking to articulate its strategic approach to enhancement.

4.6 Senior staff and teaching staff provided examples of steps taken to implement the enhancement theme of Recruitment, Retention and Rigour. Further examples of enhancement initiatives identified by students include the introduction of a new VLE, improved induction, and improved access to performance space. Examples identified in the University's review of the College include working with the University to increase library space and book stock, strengthening student progress monitoring, support and tutorials, and providing timely, clear and comprehensive assignment feedback.

4.7 Programme review processes systematically generate information and data facilitating the sharing of good practice. Annual monitoring processes use performance data, external examiner reports and student module reviews to identify actions for improvement. The annual institutional report provides an effective mechanism for analysing the performance of programmes and identifying themes and areas of good practice. The current enhancement theme arose from this process with the College identifying some programmes

requiring improved retention and identifying the need to improve processes to recruit students to fulfil their potential.

4.8 Information informing enhancement also arises from engagement with employers through employer advisory boards and in gathering student opinion through surveys, forums and staff-student liaison and student representative meetings. However, as noted in B5 and B8, this is not through formal engagement with students in deliberative committees.

4.9 The College has a particularly thorough process of identifying and sharing good practice. Divisional review templates include sections asking staff to reflect on things to be proud of and best practice from other institutions. The College provided examples of visits to other external bodies and the awarding body in order to maintain current practice. College processes also enable best practice to be identified and shared between programmes teams through symposia for sharing practice, for example, in study skills or employability. The 2014 periodic review by the University confirmed significant sharing of good practice. The deliberate steps taken by the College to learn from best practice identified in other institutions is **good practice**.

4.10 The College has a clear commitment to encouraging improvements to the quality of learning opportunities that is strategically led and understood by programme staff. The College both internally and externally identifies and shares good practice. The team affirms the steps taken to articulate a strategic approach to enhancement, and enhancement themes and initiatives confirmed this. Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation (Enhancement) is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11 In reaching its judgement on the College's enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.12 The higher education strategy provides a strategic approach to enhancement that places value on providing excellent educational opportunities for the local community. This is complemented by clear direction to programme teams on enhancement initiatives and processes for monitoring and review that identify and share good practice. The impact of enhancement initiatives, such as Recruitment, Retention and Rigour is evident across the College including at programme level.

4.13 The review team found the Expectation is met and the risk is low. It found one feature of good practice in this area, and affirmed the College's plans to enhance this area further through the enhancement strategy. The team noted that students are not engaged in deliberative committees that consider enhancement, and as such, it was unable to reach a commendable judgement.

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



## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The College provides various opportunities for students to enhance their employability skills and prospects through curriculum design, delivery, support for personal and professional development, structured work experience and general careers advice.

5.2 The College works to develop and maintain links with employers so that they can be involved in curriculum design and delivery. Some of the divisions maintain employer forums or employer advisory boards. The development of Higher Apprenticeship in Furniture Manufacturing Technology and the recent revalidation and refocusing of the engineering provision are examples of employers working closely with the College to develop programmes and curricula for new and existing members of the regional workforce. There is also a skills advisory board, whose members are drawn from senior human resources staff across a range of employers, which advises on employability skills' development for all students. The review team heard about the work of the recent curriculum and employability development working group and the recommendations that it has made in relation to the further development within College processes of the work with employers to embed employability into the curriculum.

5.3 A number of staff have current or recent close links with industry practice which enhances the links between theory and practice on programmes. Tutors invite guest speakers from industry and/or leading researchers to deliver guest sessions on their courses. The College creates centralised programmes of guest events to enhance the learning of students on a number of different courses.

5.4 Many students are enrolled on work-based learning programmes and all students have the opportunity of structured work experience either through placements, which form part of the curriculum, or through extracurricular volunteering. The College holds annual volunteering fairs to help students find relevant voluntary experience.

5.5 Professional and personal development planning is embedded in many of the programmes and supported through personal tutorials for students and, on some courses, workplace mentors. Employability skills are included within the curriculum through reflection on work experience within assessments.

5.6 The College provides extracurricular support for developing employability skills through one-to-one advice sessions and workshops provided by National Careers Service and the University Careers Service. The College runs a graduate internship scheme which provides an opportunity for graduates to gain new skills and experience.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27-29 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#)

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality](http://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](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx)

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

### **Framework for higher education qualifications**

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

### **Programme (of study)**

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

### **Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)**

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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