



Higher Education Review of Knowsley Community 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 Knowsley Community College. The review took place from 5 to 7 May 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Paul Brunt
- Dr Anya Perera
- Dr Axel Palmer (student reviewer)

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

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

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Knowsley Community College

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

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Knowsley Community College.

- The College's student-centred teaching and learning approaches that support the development of independent learners ready for employment or further study (Expectation B3).
- The effective support from practitioners, which enhances student employability (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

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

By September 2015:

- work with Pearson to ensure that there is a formal agreement in place in respect of the delivery of programmes at partner organisations (Expectations A2.1, B10)
- strengthen the monitoring and review of higher education provision in order to ensure effective oversight of academic standards (Expectations A3.3, B8)
- develop its strategy for higher education staff development, paying particular attention to opportunities for and reporting of scholarly activity (Expectation B3)
- ensure consistency of student access to an effective virtual learning environment (Expectation B4)
- formalise student participation in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5)
- establish a clear system of record-keeping and reporting within the College's committee structure (Expectation B8)
- ensure that certificates and transcripts for Higher National provision record the name and location of the partner responsible for delivering the programme (Expectation B10)
- articulate and fully implement the College's strategic approach to enhancement of higher education provision (Enhancement).

By January 2016:

- ensure that staff making admissions decisions based on auditions or interviews have sufficient training to carry out this role (Expectation B2).

Theme: Student Employability

The College's Strategic Plan and its Higher Education and Employer Engagement strategies have an explicit focus on employability and professionalism, and all of the College's higher education programmes are vocational. The foundation degrees reflect the appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements with regard to the integration of work-based and academic learning, and the development of vocational skills. The College assists students on foundation degrees in finding work placements and employers confirmed that they found students to be developing the appropriate skills for personal professional development.

There are numerous examples of aspects of employability being embedded in curriculum design and assessment. All students are engaged with employers throughout their course as practice forms an integral part of their studies. Moreover, the effective support from practitioners, which enhances student employability, was noted as a particular feature of good practice.

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

About Knowsley Community College

Knowsley Community College is a provider of post-16 education in the Borough of Knowsley in Merseyside. The College has a student body of about 4,500, and aspires to support individuals and businesses by ensuring that they are equipped with the skills, knowledge and attitudes to succeed in a global market for business and jobs.

The College operates on two main campuses situated in Roby. Its programmes of higher education, on which about 165 students are enrolled in 2014-15, lead to awards of Edge Hill University and of Pearson Education. The College's Higher National programmes are delivered on its behalf by the College's two partners, Liverpool Media Academy and the Elliott-Clarke School of Dance and Dramatic Art.

Since its previous QAA review in 2011, the College has seen considerable organisational change, including the closure of its Kirkby campus, major changes to its curricula and management restructuring. Under a Senior Leadership Team, established following the appointment of a Principal in 2014, the College now intends to increase student numbers in higher education. Its strategic plan for the period 2015-18 includes the goal of increasing higher education and higher apprenticeship provision by 20 per cent by 2016-17.

The key challenge facing the College is its continuing financial health, alongside the challenges of student recruitment and retention. Its Strategic Plan 2012-15 sets out its response to the main public policy influences on educational provision in the context of the priorities and strategies of the Liverpool City Region and of Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council.

The outcomes of the last QAA review in 2011 were positive and resulted in the review team identifying two features of good practice and four recommendations. The College has taken steps to address the recommendations although it has not systematically evaluated the effectiveness of its actions.

Explanation of the findings about Knowsley Community 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 the degree-awarding body and other awarding organisation

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 offers programmes leading to awards from Edge Hill University and from Pearson Education. Foundation degrees (FDs) awarded by Edge Hill University (the University) are delivered by the College, while the Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) awarded by Pearson Education are delivered at the College's teaching partner institutions, the Liverpool Media Academy and the Elliott-Clarke School of Dance and Dramatic Art.

1.2 Design, development and approval are carried out by the awarding body and awarding organisation, while the College contributes to the validation processes by participation in validation events and meetings with the awarding body. The awarding body and awarding organisation, through their approval and review procedures, are responsible for ensuring that programmes align with key reference points and for supplying the College with comprehensive information about these reference points. Programme specifications include references to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and to appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements. Programme approval processes confirm alignment with the FHEQ and with Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.3 The College's processes enable it to meet Expectation A1 in theory.

1.4 The review team considered the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining programme specifications, programme approval documentation, partnership agreements, review documentation, and external examiners' reports, and by holding meetings with staff and awarding body representatives.

1.5 The College's procedures are effective in practice. External examiners' reports show that the College appropriately acknowledges relevant reference points in its teaching, learning and assessment practices at both module and programme level. The College monitors standards through mark moderation and module evaluations, which feed into annual reviews at module and programme level and for the higher education provision across the College. Staff are involved in externally-organised programme approval events, and demonstrated their awareness of external reference points. Students confirmed their awareness of the existence of programme specifications in their handbooks and on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.6 While the awarding body and awarding organisation have ultimate responsibility through their own regulatory frameworks for ensuring that relevant external reference points are adhered to, the College effectively manages its own responsibilities in this respect within its partnership agreements. This is confirmed through a variety of mechanisms including reviews by the awarding body and the conclusions from external examiners' reports. Expectation A1 is met in both design and practice and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.7 The awarding body and awarding organisation are responsible for securing academic standards and establishing the academic frameworks that govern the award of credit and qualifications. Staff of the College are aware of their frameworks for awarding qualifications as detailed within regulatory documentation. The College works within these established academic frameworks and the regulations of its awarding body and awarding organisation as outlined in partnership agreements. The College demonstrates its awareness of, and engagement with, these frameworks and regulations through a variety of mechanisms including validation and revalidation processes, programme monitoring and review, and external examiners' reports.

1.8 The frameworks and regulations provided by the University enable the College to meet Expectation A2.1 in theory.

1.9 The review team scrutinised a range of documents outlining the academic frameworks and regulations applied by the awarding body, the awarding organisation and the College. The review team also spoke to staff during the review visit to ascertain their understanding of responsibilities within the context of the partnership agreements.

1.10 The academic frameworks and regulations are clearly outlined and are understood by staff. Evidence from annual monitoring and external examiners' reports and from validation events shows the College's awareness of and adherence to the frameworks and regulations of its awarding bodies. The College has close links with its awarding body as a consequence of the Partner Programme Board meetings and meetings with university-appointed liaison tutors; quality assurance procedures are coherent and complementary. Staff were clear about the respective allocations of responsibility between the College and the awarding body and awarding organisation. The structure of quality assurance committees and their reporting lines are effective in ensuring oversight of higher education provision and in ensuring adherence to the regulatory frameworks of its awarding body and awarding organisation. The College's Higher Education Committee (HEC) is chaired by the Principal and meets termly. It reports to the Curriculum and Quality Committee and via the Senior Leadership Team to the Quality Assurance Committee and the Governing Body. It effectively carries out its primary responsibility for oversight of standards of higher education. The meetings of the HEC Committee are supplemented by meetings at faculty and course level attended by senior managers and academic staff, with significant matters being taken forward to the next meeting of the HEC.

1.11 The team considered the sub-contracting arrangements the College had undertaken with the colleges that were responsible for the delivery of its higher national programmes. It was clear that Pearson, as awarding organisation, was aware of this arrangement, and, for example, had appointed external examiners to report on the provision delivered at the teaching partners. The team analysed the College's contractual and monitoring arrangements with the teaching partners, and it was clear from documentation provided and in meetings with the review team, that the College and the teaching partners clearly understood their respective roles and responsibilities. Moreover, students whom the review team met also clearly understood the nature of the arrangements between the

College and the teaching partners. However, the College and Pearson were unable to provide written evidence that Pearson had formally authorised the arrangement with the teaching partners. The review team determined that the lack of agreement between Pearson and the College posed a risk to the transparency of the frameworks for academic governance and therefore **recommends** that the College work with Pearson to ensure that there is a formal agreement in place in respect of the delivery of programmes at partner organisations.

1.12 The review team considers that the awarding body, awarding organisation and the College provide transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications. There were some shortcomings noted with the lack of a written agreement from Pearson and the College for the sub-contracting arrangements. Notwithstanding this, the engagement of the College with the requirements set by the awarding body and awarding organisation, combined with the documentary evidence provided, demonstrates that Expectation A2.1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.13 Both Edge Hill University and Pearson bear responsibility for demonstrating that the academic standards of their awards are appropriately set, and for establishing academic regulations and programme specifications.

1.14 The awarding body and the awarding organisation, together with the provider and its teaching institutions maintain a definitive record of each programme to enable the provider to meet Expectation A2.2 of the Quality Code in theory.

1.15 The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining: relevant awarding body and awarding organisation documentation; programme specifications; external examiners' reports and action plans; course handbooks; annual monitoring; the VLE, the website; and in meetings with Principal, staff and students, and awarding body and awarding organisation representatives.

1.16 The review team found that procedures are effective in practice. Evidence from annual monitoring and external examiners' reports, and participation at validation events shows the College's awareness and adherence to the requirement of programme delivery. Staff and students confirmed that there are close relationships between the College and Edge Hill University, Pearson and teaching partners. The College holds a termly review of delivery with each of its partners, which enables it to assure itself that the delivery of its Pearson programmes is taking place according to its contractual arrangements with them.

1.17 The College has transparent and comprehensive frameworks to ensure that the definitive record of each programme is used to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications. 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 The College's portfolio of courses is determined by local and regional skills priorities and employment opportunities aligned to its level 3 provision. The Higher Education Committee has internal responsibility for standards, development and it has oversight of its higher education provision.

1.19 The College is recognised by Edge Hill University as a partner for collaborative provision and was reapproved as a partner by the University in 2013 for a further five years. The College has held Pearson's centre and programme approval for three years. This has required a formal approval process and now entails continuing monitoring through the Standard Verifier's annual visits. The awarding body and the awarding organisation ensure that UK threshold standards are met and that academic frameworks and regulations are adhered to via the course approval process and monitoring.

1.20 Initial Planning Proposals (IPPs) for new HND and Foundation Degree programmes are received internally by the HEC for approval prior to discussions with relevant partners. Proposals for the development of FDs are submitted by the relevant faculty at the University, in consultation with the College, as well as being subject to scrutiny at the HEC. Validation events are chaired by a member of the Validation and Audit Standing Panel of the University, with documentation from the College submitted to the Academic Quality and Development unit at the University via the relevant faculty quality office.

1.21 The awarding organisation and awarding body ensure that academic frameworks and regulations are adhered to via the course approval process and annual monitoring, with responsibilities mapped against the Quality Code. The procedures, regulations and policies governing programme design ensure that courses are delivered at the appropriate level of the FHEQ and enable the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.22 The teams examined documents relating to the approval process including programme specifications, partnership agreements, templates and regulations and cross-referenced them to the responsibilities of the awarding body and awarding organisation. The review team examined reports from external verifiers and collaborative partners, annual monitoring reports, the College's own documentation as well as documentation from the awarding organisation and body, and met staff of the College and representatives of both the awarding organisation and awarding body to test their findings. The procedures, regulations and policies governing programme design ensure that courses are delivered at the appropriate level of the FHEQ and enable the Expectation to be met.

1.23 College staff have input into the design and approval process with discussion occurring between the programme leaders and staff at the University. Roles and responsibilities are clearly understood and documented with full appreciation of the role of verification and external scrutiny. The College operates an internal course approval procedure to align developments with its strategic objectives of addressing future employment and skills priorities to meet the needs of individuals, businesses and the local community.

1.24 Outline programme proposals are made via an Applications for Development Consent and are approved by the relevant faculty at the University with student discussions occurring at Programme Boards before they receive institutional scrutiny. The University's Learning and Teaching Committee and its subcommittee, the Validation and Audit Standing Panel, are responsible for programme approval and for supporting information on development and delivery which is written in consultation with staff at the College.

1.25 The review team scrutinised the Quality Manual for both the awarding organisation and body, examined documentation, and discussed the process for new programme approval in meetings with staff. New awards are developed and designed in accordance with the University's academic frameworks and regulations and those of Pearson. The procedures ensure that courses are delivered at the appropriate level of the FHEQ. Staff at the College are supported by the Liaison Tutor and by the Internal Verifier from Edge Hill University. Programme specifications make reference to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, national occupational standards and professional body recognition.

1.26 The College has mechanisms to ensure that it is fulfilling the requirements of its awarding organisation and awarding body in respect of the programme approval. The level and nature of regular liaison with Edge Hill University, the requirements of centre recognition with Pearson, and the externality in programme approval processes ensure that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.27 The College's Pearson awards have mandatory core and specialist units that have nationally devised curriculum units, learning outcomes, assessment criteria and descriptors for pass, merit and distinction grades. Responsibilities for programme leaders, module leaders and internal verifiers are articulated in the BTEC guidelines.

1.28 Definitive course documents are produced by Edge Hill University with contributions from College staff. Module specifications adopt the University template and provide the overall approach to learning, teaching and assessment with a view to ensuring that intended learning outcomes are met through both formative and summative assessment.

1.29 Roles and responsibilities for FD programmes are outlined in the Edge Hill University and Knowsley Community College Collaborative Delivery Plans. The College's Quality Assurance Policy outlines the responsibilities of the module and programme leaders, with module leaders being responsible for assessment and internal verification in accordance with the validated module specifications.

1.30 External examiners are appointed by the University and reports are submitted to the University. The College adopts and uses the University's academic regulations to govern assessment. Staff at the University act as liaison tutors, verifiers and coordinators for staff delivering their programmes at the College, while staff of the College act as programme leaders and module leaders. For the foundation degrees, cross-moderation days are held with the external examiners in attendance and recommendations and comments are reported to module boards held at the University.

1.31 In respect of HND programmes, assessment setting is the responsibility of the programme leaders at the College's partner institutions who set assessments with the guidance of the BTEC-trained Lead IV/Liaison Tutor. The effectiveness of the assessment instruments is reviewed in an online report by the external examiner. The College's Higher Education Manager is responsible for conducting assessment boards at partner institutions.

1.32 The team examined academic regulations, quality assurance policies, module/progression boards, assessment briefs and external reports, and held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

1.33 Assessments are conducted in accordance with guidelines published by the awarding body in the specification for each programme and in its academic regulations, as confirmed in external examiners' reports. The intended learning outcomes and assessment methods are documented, and students confirmed that they understood what was required in assessment tasks and that grading criteria were contextualised. Minor amendments to

existing validated modules must be agreed with the external examiner prior to submission to the Faculty Board.

1.34 There is clear understanding of roles and responsibilities of the awarding institutions, the awarding body and the College, with the roles of staff articulated through the Higher Education Quality Assurance Policy with relevant checks and procedures in place afforded through externality. The University oversees and administers Assessment and Progression/Award Boards for FDs; the College's Higher Education Manager is responsible for the conduct of assessment boards at partner institutions. External examiners confirm that boards are effective and run efficiently. The review team found that there is strength in the oversight of assessment and rigour in its external scrutiny. Expectation A3.2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.35 The College identifies annual monitoring in its Quality Strategy as being central to assuring academic standards and to the identification of opportunities for improvement in the quality of its provision. Ultimate responsibility for managing standards rests with Edge Hill University and Pearson, and the College follows their annual monitoring requirements.

1.36 The FD courses are monitored annually through collaborative partner monitoring reports (AMRs) which are received by the Learning and Teaching Committee Academic Quality Sub-Committee at the University (AQSC). This programme monitoring is designed to reflect on and evaluate student learning opportunities, academic standards and assessment strategies as a means of attaining the intended learning outcomes. It is co-authored by the University's verifier drawing on the external examiner's comments to ensure alignment with UK threshold academic standards. Academic support is provided by the liaison tutor who provides advice on the production of the AMR and on assessment and moderation. An institutional AMR is produced annually for the University and is considered alongside programme AMRs.

1.37 Annual monitoring by the Standards Verifier appointed by Pearson ensures that assessment decisions meet national standards and that the threshold academic standards are maintained through the assessment regulations and internal verification.

1.38 The commentary on standards in the AMRs for FDs relies on the review by external examiners to assure standards. Although these monitoring reports incorporate comments from the external examiners, the response to the external examiner's report is produced by the relevant University department.

1.39 The awarding body and the awarding organisation ensure that UK threshold standards are met and academic frameworks and regulations are adhered to via the course approval process and monitoring.

1.40 Monitoring is embedded in the culture of the College as a contribution to its pursuit of excellence. Self-assessment, reviews, audits, key performance indicators and action plans are designed to drive the quality cycle. Although the recent HE Quality Improvement Plan identifies actions to improve management of maintaining academic standards with partners, these actions have not yet been implemented.

1.41 The team examined the approval procedures, minutes of meetings, partnership agreements, external examiners' reports, annual monitoring reports and action plans and cross-referenced this to meetings with staff and representatives from the awarding organisation and body on the design, approval, assessment and monitoring processes. The processes and procedures of the awarding organisation and awarding body are adhered to with the appropriate external scrutiny.

1.42 Staff of the College confirmed that the responsibilities with respect to monitoring and review were well understood in the assurance of standards and are supported by

documentary frameworks and partnership agreements. Self-assessment reports are prepared for the whole College as well as at faculty and programme levels although they are weighted towards the College's priorities in respect of its further education provision. The College's review of its Higher Education Partnership Programme recognises its responsibilities for governing quality and standards, the importance of annual and periodic review and the role of self-assessment in this process.

1.43 Although processes for monitoring of programmes appear to be secure, the review team found some weaknesses in the manner in which the College implements them. Although the template for annual monitoring provides an opportunity to document good practice and enhancement opportunities at both programme and institutional level, it is not currently being used for this purpose. In its Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan, the College acknowledges the need to strengthen its processes for monitoring its higher education provision underpinned by systematic use of data. However, as described in respect of expectation B8, the review team found no references to or analyses of data in action plans. The review team **recommends** that the College strengthen the monitoring and review of higher education provision in order to ensure effective oversight of academic standards.

1.44 Through evaluation of the evidence and the combination of processes employed, the review team finds that Expectation A3.3 is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.45 The awarding body and awarding organisation design the programmes delivered by the College and therefore have ultimate responsibility for making use of external and independent expertise at this stage of programme development to set academic standards. Following approval, external examiners are appointed and trained by the awarding body or awarding organisation, and their reports comment on whether academic standards have successfully been achieved and maintained by the College. The College has good links with local employers, and the College makes use of this expertise in the initial stages of programme consideration. Externality is further enhanced by the experience of academic staff, many having current or recent experience in the sectors in which they teach.

1.46 These approaches allow the College's processes to meet Expectation A3.4 in theory.

1.47 The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining relevant awarding body and awarding organisation documentation, external examiners' reports, and through meetings with students, employers and academic staff.

1.48 The review team found the processes to work effectively in practice. External examiners' reports confirm that academic standards are maintained. The College maintains strong links with local employers and academic staff are well qualified and have experience and expertise in the relevant sectors. Many academic staff, notably at Elliott-Clarke School of Dance and Dramatic Art and Liverpool Media Academy, teach on a part-time basis while continuing to work as practitioners in the relevant sectors. Students confirmed that they valued this current industry expertise.

1.49 The evidence from documentation, meetings and external examiners' reports shows that the College is effectively managing its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards through the use of external expertise, through good relationships with local employers, and through the industry-relevant experience of academic staff. Expectation A3.4 is met both in design and operation, and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body and other awarding organisation: Summary of findings

1.50 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area have been met. The associated level of risk was judged to be low except for Expectation A3.3 for which the level of risk was judged to be moderate.

1.51 The College effectively manages its responsibilities for ensuring that relevant external reference points are adhered to in maintaining academic standards. Close liaison with its awarding body (Edge Hill University) and the awarding organisation (Pearson) ensures that the College fulfils its requirements in respect of programme approval.

1.52 The College has transparent and comprehensive frameworks to ensure that standards are set at appropriate levels within institutional frameworks and that the definitive record of each programme is used to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications.

1.53 There are no findings of good practice relating to this judgement area. The review team made two recommendations relating to this judgement area. The first relates to the absence of a formal agreement between the College and Pearson in respect of the delivery of Pearson programmes at partner organisations. The second relates to the need, acknowledged by the College, to strengthen the monitoring and review of its higher education provision to ensure effective oversight of academic standards.

1.54 On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff and students, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body and other organisation, at Knowsley Community College, **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design and Approval

Findings

2.1 The College's strategic aims encompass the support of regional and local objectives and it expresses its emphasis on having a strong sense of community in its core values. Its higher education strategy outlines the roles and responsibilities for course design approval and delivery and its HE quality improvement plan aligns growth in its higher education provision with the Local Enterprise Partnership priorities.

2.2 IPPs are subject to internal scrutiny and are required to detail market analysis and demand for skills with local employer input. The initial planning proposal is endorsed by the senior leadership team as being aligned to business planning processes, and progress thereafter is monitored by the HEC. Roles and responsibilities for course design and approval are clearly documented and understood, with specific consideration being given to new developments in the context of both national and regional demand.

2.3 Student demand is cited in IPPs but students' role in programme development, design and approval was not evident: the College recognises the need to engage students more fully in the design and approval of programmes. Although there is an opportunity in the IPP pro forma to demonstrate how external engagement has informed the curriculum, the College acknowledges that input from employers could be strengthened at this stage.

2.4 All Edge Hill University programmes at the College are franchised, the University being responsible for their design, development and approval. The Academic Planning Committee at the University formally approves applications for development consent for FDs, which may then proceed to validation.

2.5 The development of new HND programmes follows the Pearson approval process and the online application for each qualification is reviewed by a subject specialist appointed by Pearson. The programme leader takes overall responsibility for delivery and assessment and the nominated Lead Internal Verifier has overall responsibility for quality assurance.

2.6 The team examined the procedures for both proposal and approval and the effectiveness of internal approaches, by reading IPPs, HEC minutes, validation reports, and definitive course documents. The review team also consulted the College's Higher Education Quality Policy documents and those of the University and of Pearson, viewing existing templates and pro formas. During the visit, the review team met staff of the College involved with programme design and approval including staff representing all the partner institutions.

2.7 The processes for the design, development and approval of programmes are well-documented, systematic and robust, with well-defined roles and responsibilities. Staff at the College understand the procedures for course development and design, and externality occurs at both the design and approval stages. The College complies fully with the Pearson qualification and approval processes. Expectation B1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission

Findings

2.8 The College has its own recruitment, selection and admissions policy, expressed within its Higher Education Quality Assurance Policy. Entry requirements are clearly stated on the College's website and on those of Edge Hill University, Liverpool Media Academy and Elliott-Clarke School of Dance and Dramatic Art.

2.9 Applications for admission to FDs are made through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and are considered by the College itself. An offer of admission is made following an interview or an audition. Students progressing from other programmes at the College are interviewed and then, if appropriate, offered a place subject to completion of a UCAS application.

2.10 Applications for admission to HND programmes are made directly to the College. Liverpool Media Academy and Elliott-Clarke School of Dance and Dramatic Art are responsible for admissions decisions in respect of individual candidates. Admission to programmes delivered at these institutions is subject to a successful audition.

2.11 The team considered the policy documentation and minutes of meetings, and met staff and students, together with representatives of awarding body, awarding organisation and teaching institutions.

2.12 The team found that the recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures work effectively. In order to demonstrate transparency and reliability, the provider has in place procedures for appeals and complaints in respect of admissions processes. Although the review team was unable to verify the effectiveness of these procedures, both students and staff showed a good understanding of them.

2.13 Although the College places reliance on interviews and auditions in determining the suitability of candidates for admission, it does not provide guidance to staff who conduct them on how to undertake reliable and inclusive appraisals of candidates.

2.14 Overall, the team found that the College has effective procedures for recruitment, selection and admission in conjunction with the awarding body, awarding organisation and the two teaching institutions. The procedures for admission appeals and complaints appear to be well understood by staff and students. However, the College may benefit from more fully documenting the processes involved in recruitment and admission with a view to demonstrating transparency and reliability. While interviews and auditions of candidates for admission are the norm, the College does not offer training or guidance to staff who undertake interviews or auditions. The review team **recommends** that the College ensures that staff making admissions decisions based on auditions or interviews have sufficient training to carry out this role.

2.15 Expectation B2 is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.16 The College sets out clear aims to inform learning and teaching in its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Improvement Strategy. The strategy is underpinned by curriculum design and teaching initiatives to develop students' capacities to be engaged and learn, as well as a commitment to staff development and the observation of teaching to maintain and improve practice. The teaching and learning strategy for each course is set out in its programme specification. The College has systems to monitor and report on the quality of teaching and learning through the annual monitoring process, using progression and achievement data, information arising from the observation of teaching, and student feedback.

2.17 These approaches allow the College's processes to meet Expectation B3 in theory.

2.18 The review team met staff and students, looked at strategic documents as well as programme reviews, and minutes of meetings where learning opportunities and teaching practices were discussed.

2.19 There is a well-developed graded system of teaching observation. The implementation of a new process to ensure effective peer observation for higher education staff is noted in the College's quality priorities for 2014-2016. To date all staff have undergone teaching observations, at least annually, based on a graded five-stage process, with developmental outcomes identified. Observers are trained in their role, and need to satisfy certain requirements. Outcomes are recorded on documents designed to identify specific themes and issues that contribute to effective learning.

2.20 The management and delivery of staff development to support learning and teaching involves a combination of College, awarding body and staff-directed activities. The College has a staff development plan, and needs are identified through the observation of teaching, annual staff appraisal, and student feedback. Staff provided examples of development activities which have had a direct impact on their teaching, including studying for professional qualifications. The qualifications and experience of staff are scrutinised as part of the validation process with the awarding body, and the approval process with the awarding organisation. When the review team queried the cross-institutional approach to scholarly activity, the College acknowledged that there was a lack of consistency and reporting of it across the provision. Furthermore, in meetings it became apparent that there was a lack of clarity regarding the distinction between scholarly activity to support higher education and the broader opportunities for continuing professional development. The review team **recommends** that the College develop its strategy for higher education staff development, paying particular attention to the opportunities for and reporting of scholarly activity.

2.21 In developing curriculum structures, the College recognises the needs of diverse students, especially those from non-traditional backgrounds. For example, modules which include a focus on supporting students' development for employment have been incorporated on the foundation degree programmes. As noted in Expectation B1,

the College recognises the needs of employers in the development of programmes to ensure that the content and learning outcomes are current and that learning processes enable students to develop graduate attributes required for employment.

2.22 The College has worked with staff and students to identify the most effective teaching and learning approaches. The Teacher Innovation Programme aims to develop practice that recognises the diverse learning needs of students studying vocational higher education in a further education environment. In addition, the College has developed a policy to promote practice through teacher collaboration. The Joint Practice Development Policy aims to create self-improvement by enabling teachers to work together to build expertise and enhance practice. The review team heard evidence of this in connection with the effective mentoring of new staff by established staff. Students who met the review team commented very positively on the enthusiasm and approachability of staff and their ability to make learning interesting, intellectually stimulating and current. As a result of this, students stated that they felt more confident in achieving their employment aspirations. The team regards the student-centred teaching and learning approaches that support students as independent learners ready for employment or further study as **good practice**.

2.23 The College has a comprehensive approach to learning and teaching focused on student engagement, continuous improvement and employment readiness. Expectation B3 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.24 The College's senior leadership team is responsible for the strategic allocation of resources to enable students to develop their potential. Resources for higher education programmes are reviewed and determined through the annual business planning process linked to the College strategies. The allocation and monitoring of resources are also considered at regular managers' meetings and at programme validation and re-validation events. The College and its teaching partners have resource centres providing hard copy books and periodicals as well as online journals. Students also have borrowing rights with the libraries of the University. Programmes are structured to support and engage students and arrangements are in place to facilitate work-related learning. All students have personal tutors and access to the range of student support provided to all students at the College. The College is developing the estate to improve facilities for teaching.

2.25 These approaches allow the College's processes to meet Expectation B4 in theory.

2.26 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's approach to the provision and monitoring of resources in discussion with students, teaching and support staff, by scrutinising documents and looking at the use of the VLE.

2.27 Student guidance arrangements, including pre-entry guidance and induction, are effective. All students are interviewed or auditioned and receive an induction to their programme. Students confirmed that they found the pre-entry guidance helpful and comprehensive. Support for students while studying addresses a range of needs. Students praised the tutorial system and the accessibility and willingness of teaching staff to answer questions and provide support. There is effective liaison between the teaching teams and the learning resource centres to select and maintain resources within budgetary constraints.

2.28 The College's VLE provides a range of materials to support students' learning. Students reported varying degrees of access to and inconsistent use of the VLE at the College itself, and spoke also of the absence of a VLE at the College's teaching partners. The College has acknowledged deficiencies with the VLE and there are plans in the recent Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan to replace the existing provision. The review team **recommends** that the College takes steps to ensure consistency of student access to an effective virtual learning environment.

2.29 Students benefit from a variety of specialist facilities which are required by the vocational nature of programmes, and they are able to contribute their opinions on resources in a number of ways, including representation at programme board meetings, and feedback to staff through module evaluations and surveys. All foundation degree students are required to have suitable work placement, and, if necessary, the College assists students in finding it. All programmes have work-related activities within them, and students reported that such activities enhance their employment readiness. Subject staff remain current via engagement with industry and many continue to practise in the industries related to their subjects. Students reported very positively the enthusiasm and relevant experience of their tutors. Moreover, students felt that they directly benefited from tutors' up-to-date knowledge in relation to their awareness of employment opportunities. The effective support from practitioners which enhances student employability is a feature of **good practice**.

2.30 The College has a systematic and comprehensive approach to ensuring that students have access to the resources they require to develop their potential. 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

2.31 The College has a multi-faceted approach to ensuring the formal representation of students on deliberative bodies. Students are represented on the governing body of the provider. Students participate in module reviews and focus groups. The College elicits student views about its provision through its Student Voice Policy, from the National Student Survey (NSS), and through informal feedback from students to staff. The Student Voice Policy is contained within the College's Higher Education Quality Assurance Policy and comprises focus groups, programme boards, student representatives at programme level and on the Students' Council, module reviews and the NSS. These approaches enable the provider to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.32 In considering this Expectation, the review team examined policy documentation, outcomes of Student Voice and the NSS, and met the Principal, staff and students of the College and of the teaching partners.

2.33 The review team found that there was no lack of access to staff for students and that they knew how to raise issues including, if appropriate, with the senior leadership team and feel that their views are heard and valued. At Liverpool Media Academy, for instance, the Principal attends meetings with student representatives. There are student representatives in place for each course but they do not receive training for their roles. Although student views are expressed in focus groups and feed into the annual monitoring process, they do not have any involvement in new programme design.

2.34 Student views are captured in the Student Voice Policy and the NSS. Although the College prepares a useful summary of NSS outcomes, it does not systematically use NSS outcomes to inform planning. Students were unaware of NSS outcomes.

2.35 Overall, the team considered that the College has taken some deliberate steps to engage with students but that the scope of such engagement does not extend to all the areas where the students voice could be heard. In practice, the team noted that both staff and students enjoy good, informal communication: students appreciated the positive outcomes of this approach and indicated their willingness to support the College more formally. Noting that the College has already recognised the need to take steps to further engage all students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience, the review team **recommends** that the College should formalise student participation in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

2.36 The College ensures that student engagement is related to the participation of students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes. It is clear that students are engaged in the process, notwithstanding the lack of a formal structured approach to their engagement. The team therefore concludes that the provider meets Expectation B5 and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.37 The College aligns its assessment procedures and policies with the Academic Regulations of Edge Hill University and the BTEC guides to assessment. Its own Teaching, Learning and Assessment Improvement Strategy aims to foster a culture of outstanding provision which seeks to increase the achievements of learners. Programme specifications include requirements for formative assessment as well as grading criteria for Edexcel units and qualifications.

2.38 There are comprehensive processes to operate equitable, valid and authentic assessment which receive external scrutiny and ensure students can demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. Staff new to teaching in higher education are supported by College staff with more experience of assessment; internal moderation is supplemented by cross-moderation events which provide an opportunity to check parity and consistency. The College benefits from access to Pearson's design of assessment instruments and receives guidance and support from the Link Tutor at Edge Hill University. These processes enable the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.39 The review team looked at a range of documents and scrutinised assessment policy, external examiners' reports, academic regulations and processes, and explored the understanding of roles and responsibilities with senior staff, programme leaders and teaching staff.

2.40 The College's collaborative delivery plans for Pearson programmes set out roles and responsibilities in respect of assessment for the Lead Internal Verifier and for staff at the College and at the Liverpool Media Academy and the Elliott-Clarke School of Dance and Dramatic Art. External examiners' reports include comments on the effectiveness of assessment and on good practice in assessment, and the College's 'Post External Examiner Action Plans' identify actions arising from these reports.

2.41 Staff teaching on FD programmes are supported by the University's appointed liaison tutor and internal verifiers who evaluate the teaching, learning and assessment strategies and any associated action plans. External examiners attend cross-moderation events where they are able to sample a cross-section of work across the University's partnerships as a means of facilitating collaborative discussion and agreeing grades and standards. Responses to external examiners' reports are written by the relevant department at the University. The HND external examiner's report template identifies good practice on HND programmes and a post-visit action plan is constructed following the first and second sampling visit.

2.42 Module documentation provides information on the intended learning outcomes of both formative and summative assessments. Students confirmed that they understood what was expected of them in relation to assessment and reported a good understanding of the marking criteria.

2.43 The College's policy is that assessed work should be returned with feedback within three weeks of submission. Although in conflict with the 10 working days stipulated in the HE Quality Policy feedback, times are not formally monitored; the three-week policy is well understood by students. In respect of the recognition of prior learning for students entering Pearson programmes, the College uses the processes outlined in the Pearson's Recognition of Prior Learning Policy document which entails discussion with the student prior to enrolment to ensure internal standardisation and alignment with verification processes and Pearson's quality assurance procedures. Recognition of prior learning for entrants to foundation programmes follows the University's academic regulations.

2.44 External scrutiny of assessment is effective in ensuring standards, and external examiners express satisfaction with assessment practices. Staff were able to explain how teams responded to the external examiner's report on the need to contextualise grade criteria /descriptors and this was confirmed by students. Students expressed satisfaction with the quality of teaching and assessment and felt that assessment criteria were clear and that they received helpful feedback.

2.45 The review team found that there is a shared understanding of approaches to assessment among teaching staff, with clear guidance on the roles and responsibilities with regard to the design, conduct, marking and moderation of assessment tasks. The team concludes that the College's approach to assessment is robust and allows students to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. Expectation B6 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.46 The awarding body and awarding organisation determine the external examining arrangements within their programmes, including the appointment, training and support of examiners and their reporting requirements. External examiner reports are received by Edge Hill University and Pearson as well as by the College, and they are considered at both programme and senior levels within the College. Comments from the external examiners feed into the annual monitoring process.

2.47 The approach the College takes in relation to external examiner input would enable this Expectation to be met in theory.

2.48 The review team examined all recent examiner reports and associated responses to them from the College, and raised questions with staff, students and representatives from the awarding body and awarding organisation.

2.49 The findings of external examiners' reports are considered by programme teams and the Head of Quality. An appropriate response is returned to the examiner from the Chair of the relevant faculty committee of the University and action plans are developed to acknowledge and deal with any issues raised.

2.50 Through programme annual monitoring, programme teams comment on feedback from the external examiner and on actions taken in consequence. Programme annual monitoring reports are taken to the Foundation Degree Programme Board at the awarding body and to the College's Higher Education Committee. External examiners' reports are available to students on the VLE, although students appeared to be unaware of this opportunity.

2.51 The review team determined that the College makes appropriate use of external examiner input. While external examiners' reports vary in format and detail as required by the awarding body or awarding organisation, the College makes careful use of them to inform the quality of its provision. 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

2.52 Processes for annual monitoring and review are well documented. Edge Hill University's quality management procedures for collaborative provision set out its responsibilities and those delegated to the College, with collaborative delivery plans also detailing responsibilities at each institution. Revalidation and delivery approval of FDs by the University takes place every five years. Clear guidance in respect of Pearson provision is provided by the BTEC UK Quality Assurance Handbook. The roles of module and programme leaders in relation to the College's partners are detailed in the College's quality assurance policy.

2.53 The team examined the College's processes for monitoring and review as well as reports and action plans arising from external verifier and external examiner visits, student survey data, module review and student satisfaction data.

2.54 The HEC is central to the monitoring and review of higher education provision. The College's Quality Strategy sets out features of the monitoring process for higher education provision, but does not identify indicators, milestones and key performance indicators as explicitly as is the case for the College's further education provision.

2.55 Proposals for amendments to courses detailing the rationale and any resource implications are considered by the Senior Leadership Team and are signed off by the Principal. The review team noted that the definitive course document for the Foundation Degree in Information Technology identifies the Programme Board as having responsibility for approving minor amendments to programmes or modules prior to sign-off by the Principal.

2.56 Annual monitoring reports include information on student achievement, progression and retention and although information is received by HEC, the team could not find any reference to survey or module data or its analysis in accompanying action plans. This same data is also captured in the College self-assessment plans with attendance data and specified targets.

2.57 Internal College audits and annual course assessment processes are used to identify under-performance in faculties or areas within them using judgements based on the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework. The College requires self-assessment reports to be evidence-based; data on progression to higher education is included in curriculum area self-assessments. Although the HE Quality Improvement Plan has detailed actions to strengthen review processes, the College's AMR, produced to fulfil the collaborative partnership with Edge Hill University, is descriptive rather than data-driven in nature. The team could not find evidence of how module or student survey data including national benchmarks such as the National Student Survey and Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education are being used and analysed to inform programme monitoring, self-assessment or quality improvement plans. The finding that the College does not make full and systematic use of available data in its monitoring and review of its higher education provision led to the recommendation in Expectation A3.3 that it should strengthen the monitoring and review of HE provision in order to ensure effective oversight of academic standards.

2.58 The Student Voice Policy allows students on higher education programmes to draw attention to issues in relation to any aspect of their programmes through student focus groups and module satisfaction and review. Students also contribute to the review process through programme boards which take place each semester. The Board, chaired by the Liaison Tutor, considers the operation of the programme as a whole, evaluates modules and receives the annual monitoring report and external examiners' reports.

2.59 The review team found evidence that review and monitoring is conducted in line with the processes established by the awarding organisation and body, and that this takes place from programme level to College level. External expertise is used to confirm the maintenance of academic standards and learning opportunities via externally appointed internal verifiers and external examiners: this scrutiny feeds into reports and action plans. However, the review team found that the College was unclear as to how it monitors progress on the fulfilment of action plans and the achievement of milestones; the team formed the view that lack of clarity has been compounded by recent staff changes and that oversight of monitoring has been over-reliant on individuals rather than being embedded in systematic processes for reporting.

2.60 The team's conclusion, that procedures for monitoring and review could be further secured by formalising the gathering and use of evidence to inform programme monitoring and review processes, informed the recommendation in Expectation A3.3 in respect of the monitoring and review of higher education provision. Additionally, with a view to the development of processes that are pertinent to and encompass its higher education provision, the review team recommends that the College establish a clear system of record-keeping and reporting within the College's committee structure.

2.61 Noting the processes for monitoring and review of programmes and the effective liaison with its partners and awarding bodies, the review team found that Expectation B8 is met. In view of the lack of systematic use of data in monitoring and the lack of clarity in record-keeping and reporting, the review team found the associated level of risk to be moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.62 The College has in place procedures for academic appeals and complaints. It makes details of the procedures available in the course handbooks as well as on the VLE and its website. Academic appeals and complaints are governed by the academic regulations of the awarding body. Within this framework, the provider's policies are contained in the Higher Education Quality Assurance Policy. Arrangements for the teaching institutions are contained in the HE Quality Policy.

2.63 The frameworks and regulations enable the provider to meet the Expectation in theory.

2.64 The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining the log of academic appeals and complaints and at meetings with staff, students and awarding body and awarding organisation representatives.

2.65 Appeals and complaints at the College's teaching partners are dealt with at those institutions and, if not resolved, are then referred to the College, as detailed in the collaborative delivery plan. Any unresolved complaints would be referred to the senior leadership team. Edge Hill University adopts a similar procedure in its Collaborative Delivery Plan.

2.66 The review team found that the regulations and processes were well understood by students and staff, including those at the teaching partners. The College provides a written guide to enable students to raise issues or make formal complaints or academic appeals, which is available on the website, in student handbooks and from the VLE. Students and staff confirmed close informal communication which enables them to resolve any issues. The summary of complaints showed one complaint in 2013 which was closed satisfactorily according to both staff and students.

2.67 The College, with its awarding body and awarding organisation, has procedures in place which are fair, accessible, timely and well understood. The teaching institutions have their own arrangements for academic appeals and student complaints which allow unresolved issues to be referred to the College. The review team found this to be a satisfactory arrangement. The team concludes that Expectation B9 is met and that 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

2.68 The College has a range of responsibilities for the provision of learning opportunities delegated by its awarding body. This includes the provision of work-based learning opportunities on its two FDs. Students on these courses are required to identify a suitable placement in each stage of the programme. The College's Strategic Plan and Employer Engagement Strategy outline its approach with employers, and the College assists students to find suitable placements.

2.69 The College sub-contracts the delivery of its Higher National qualifications from Pearson to two partner organisations, the Liverpool Media Academy and the Elliott-Clarke School of Dance and Dramatic Art. These arrangements are covered by contractual agreements put in place following due diligence processes, and are monitored by termly contract meetings. The College's stated approach meets the Expectation B10 in theory.

2.70 The review team tested the College's arrangements for implementing and managing work-based learning opportunities, through the scrutiny of programme information and guidance to placement providers, the Strategic Plan and Employer Engagement Strategy, placement-related documentation, and through meetings with College staff, students, and employers. Contractual information relating to sub-contracting to the other teaching partners was also analysed and discussed in meetings.

2.71 The team found that the processes for managing higher education provision with others work effectively. Students reported a high degree of satisfaction with processes associated with their placements and confirmed that the College had approved appropriate settings for placements. The College's procedures to investigate and assess the risks of each arrangement are robust, and appropriate due diligence procedures are in place. Placement providers are briefed on their role by staff and the placement student. Employers reported that additional written information provided before the placement commenced would have assisted their understanding of the College's requirements.

2.72 In considering the sub-contracting arrangement between the College and its teaching partners, the team found that the College and Pearson were unable to provide written evidence that Pearson had authorised the arrangement. The lack of such an agreement between Pearson and the College led to the recommendation in Expectation A2.1.

2.73 Certificates and transcripts for students studying for Higher National awards at the Liverpool Media Academy and the Elliott-Clarke School of Dance and Dramatic Art do not fully meet the requirements of Expectation B10, in that the location of study was not recorded as being at the teaching partner location. The team **recommends** that the College ensure that certificates and transcripts for Higher National provision record the name and location of the partner responsible for delivering the programme.

2.74 Overall, the team found that the College has effective procedures to manage the work-related aspects of the provision in collaboration with employers, although the quality of written information provided to placement providers could be improved. Students

commented positively on the placement support they receive from the College. The arrangements with the College's sub-contracted partners are clear and well-managed, although the arrangements require formalisation with Pearson. Despite some minor shortcomings the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.75 This Expectation is not applicable because the College does not offer research degrees.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.76 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the relevant expectations for this judgement area have been met. The associated level of risk was judged to be low except for Expectations B2 and B8 for which the level of risk was judged to be moderate.

2.77 There are two features of good practice: the College's student-centred teaching and learning approaches that support the development of independent learners ready for employment or further study; and the effective support from practitioners which enhances student employability.

2.78 The review team made six recommendations relating to the quality of learning opportunities. The first relates to the strategy for staff development and in particular to scholarly activity in support of higher education. The second follows from the perceived lack of consistent student access to an effective VLE. The third concerns the formalisation of student participation in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The fourth relates to the need for a clear system of record-keeping and reporting within the college's committee structure. The fifth concerns the need to ensure that certificates and transcripts for Higher National provision record the name and location of the partner responsible for delivering the programme. The sixth and final recommendation is intended to ensure that staff making admissions decisions based on auditions or interviews have sufficient training to carry out this role. In addition, the recommendations in Part A relating to the absence of a formal agreement in respect of the delivery of programmes at partner organisations and to the need to strengthen the monitoring and review of higher education provision are also applicable to the quality of learning opportunities.

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

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The College makes available information to the public at large, to prospective students so that they may make informed decisions about studying, and to current students so that they may make the most of their higher education learning opportunities. In addition the College confirms achievements of students upon completion of their studies. The College places information on its external website and its internal VLE in addition to printed information.

3.2 The provision of information enables the provider to meet the Expectation in theory.

3.3 The team considered publicly available information which consisted of the website and prospectus, and tested understanding in meetings with students and staff. Information for current students came in the form of printed handbooks and information on the VLE. The team considered this in meetings with staff and students and received a demonstration of the functionality of the VLE. Other information was considered in meetings with representatives of the awarding body and awarding organisation, together with the teaching institutions. Academic transcripts were reviewed to verify that students are provided with a detailed record of study, as were programme specifications to ensure that both current and prospective students have information that properly reflects their programmes.

3.4 The website provides information about the provider and its programmes, including web links to the websites of teaching institutions. The awarding body and awarding organisation are identified and, in the case of the former, a web link is provided. The website promotes expectations of higher education quality, giving details of the previous QAA report and copies of the Quality Code, handbooks, complaints' procedure, outline of employability, links to UCAS and teaching institutions, fees and scholarships, together with vision statement and the provider's student charter. Although there is a copy of the College's general prospectus on the website, its higher education prospectus is in the course of preparation. Students confirmed that the information received before commencing their programme was accurate.

3.5 The VLE contains programme-related information and programme handbooks and also offers access to external examiners' reports. However, although students expressed awareness of the availability of programme-related information, they were generally unaware of the availability of external examiners' reports.

3.6 The College acknowledges the need for a consistent approach in relation to the contents of programme handbooks for its own programmes and those delivered at its teaching institutions, and intends this to be addressed through the implementation of its HE Quality Improvement Plan. The College's collaborative delivery plans identify responsibilities of teaching partners in relation to the provision of information. The responsibility for signing off public information lies with the Principal. The College recognises the lack of procedures for authorising and approving content of information for both internal

and external use, and anticipates that the appointment of a marketing manager would enable a proper process to be put in place.

3.7 The College effectively manages its responsibilities for the production of information for its various audiences, while formal procedures for authorising documents and website information will be established with the appointment of a new marketing manager. The review team concludes that Expectation C is met and 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

3.8 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The College effectively manages its responsibilities for the production of information for its various audiences. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk was low.

3.9 The College consistently provides accessible and clear information about its higher education provision, and has developed systems and procedures for designing and publishing information, leading to the availability of paper-based and electronic information for current and future students. The review team recognises this information as being clear and appropriate.

3.10 The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information produced about its 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 Approaches to enhancement are underpinned by the four themes of the College's Teaching and Learning and Assessment Improvement Strategy and its Quality Strategy. The recent HE Quality Improvement Plan, mapped against the Quality Code, identifies actions for fulfilment by the College and its partners to enhance quality of provision. The College believes that monitoring against defined indicators with oversight by the senior leadership team and the governing body will help to articulate its priorities for higher education and differentiate between its further education and higher education provision.

4.2 The College anticipates that its staff development plan, its approach to embedding employability skills combined with a commitment to improvements in the management of the quality of HE provision will help to consolidate a shared understanding of enhancement in the context of the College's strategic approach to enhancement of higher education provision.

4.3 In identifying opportunities for enhancement, the College places emphasis on grading of teaching observations and themed 'walkthroughs' linked to staff development. The Joint Practice Development policy, which promotes a collaborative approach to professional development of staff, incorporates graded observation of teaching by a team of three people and is seen as central to the College's approach to enhancement.

4.4 The team tested the understanding of enhancement with staff of the College and examined documentation relating to the quality assurance, learning and teaching.

4.5 The College has a number of ways in which it captures opportunities for improvements to its provision. The Student Voice Policy is a management-led initiative to ensure that student views are captured through focus groups, participation in programme boards, student surveys and module reviews. The institutional annual monitoring report and programme annual monitoring reports inform the HEC's oversight of provision. The template for annual monitoring provides an opportunity to document good practice and enhancement plans at both programme and institutional level but are not currently being systematically used.

4.6 Although there are a number of initiatives that show commitment to continual improvement at all levels of the organisation, the College has yet to define enhancement in the context of its provision for higher education, and was unable to demonstrate a shared understanding or demonstrate a strategic approach to enhancement of learning opportunities in its new strategic plan. As many of the policies and procedures are College-wide with staff teaching at both further and higher education levels, clearly differentiated priorities relating to quality assurance for higher education are beginning to be identified through the HE Quality Improvement Plan.

4.7 The review team noted the College's plans for its higher education provision as expressed in the Strategic Plan 2015-18 and the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan but concluded that the College has not yet conveyed through these plans its intentions for the enhancement of learning opportunities. Accordingly, the team **recommends** that the College should articulate and fully implement its strategic approach to enhancement of higher education provision.

4.8 The review team found that the College's Teaching and Learning and Assessment Improvement Strategy and its Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan together constitute a basis for a more fully developed approach to the enhancement of its provision, and accordingly concludes that the Expectation is met. The lack of implementation of the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan led to the finding that the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.9 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.10 The team found that while the College has formed policy and plans which constitute a basis for a well-defined strategic approach to the enhancement of its higher education provision, enhancement is not yet consistently understood by all staff and strategies for improvement are not yet fully developed or integrated. This led the team to the single recommendation that the College should articulate and fully implement its strategic approach to enhancement of higher education provision.

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

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The College is very aware of its role within the local community in contributing to economic prosperity as well as the transformative benefits that higher education can bring to individuals. The focus on student employability manifests itself at the programme design stage, where those designing programmes pay attention to employers' needs and to students' opportunities on programme completion. The College's Strategic Plan and its Higher Education and Employer Engagement strategies have an explicit focus on employability and professionalism.

5.2 All of the College's higher education programmes are vocational. The FDs reflect the qualification benchmark with regard to the integration of work-based and academic learning, and the development of vocational skills. The College assists students in finding appropriate work placements if required. Employers confirmed that they found students to be developing the appropriate skills for personal professional development and that students on work placements benefited their organisation directly.

5.3 The team heard of numerous examples of employer involvement in the development and delivery of programmes. Programmes require students to engage with work-related activities in a variety of different ways, and aspects of employability are embedded in curriculum design and assessment, including skills' development modules. Examples across different programmes include workplace visits, live briefs, volunteering, guest speakers, practitioner input and casting agencies. The review team concluded that all students are engaged with employers throughout their course as practice forms an integral part of their studies. Moreover, the effective support from practitioners, which enhances student employability, was noted as a feature of good practice in section B4.

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: <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: <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.

QAA1301 - R4097 - Jul 15

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786