



Higher Education Review of St Mary's College, Blackburn

June 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 St Mary's College, Blackburn. The review took place from 9 to 11 June 2015 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Martin Stimson
- Mrs Jacqueline Scott (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by St Mary's College, Blackburn 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 St Mary's College, Blackburn 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 Review⁴ 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/assuring-standards-and-quality/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 St Mary's College, Blackburn

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at St Mary's College, Blackburn.

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at St Mary's College, Blackburn.

- The high levels of support provided to students by the Higher Education Advisors (Expectation B4).
- The breadth of the College's engagement with its awarding body and other colleges in the collaborative network (Expectation B1).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to St Mary's College, Blackburn.

By October 2015:

- ensure the Observation of Teaching and Learning Policy for higher education provision is implemented (Expectation B3)
- implement evaluations for all modules to ensure systematic feedback from students to inform enhancement (Expectations B8 and Enhancement)
- further develop effective management procedures for the arrangement and routine monitoring of all student work placements (Expectation B10)
- further develop the current policy for higher education work placements to take account of all types of student placements (Expectation B10)
- ensure consistency of information on the virtual learning environment and in module handbooks (Expectation C)
- ensure all programme specifications are made available to students (Expectation C).

By January 2016:

- take deliberate steps to systematically and strategically apply its policies, structures and processes to improve the quality of learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The decision to appoint a 0.2 Foundation Degree Work Placement Coordinator from September 2015 to strengthen the arrangements for student work placements. (Expectation B10).

Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The mission and culture of St Mary's College, Blackburn encourages student involvement in open and frequent dialogue with the staff. This is supported by a range of policies that identify student engagement, along with student representation and training. In particular, Staff Student Liaison meetings provide students with a forum to feed back to the College about the quality of their programmes. This feedback is included in the College's annual monitoring report (AMR).

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

About St Mary's College, Blackburn

St Mary's College, Blackburn (the College) is a Roman Catholic sixth-form College that serves the community of East Lancashire. It was founded by the Marist Fathers in 1925. Since its foundation as a Catholic grammar school for boys it has developed into an inclusive college. Blackburn, with Darwen, has a high level of socially deprived wards. Consequently, the College has a strong commitment to widening participation. The College welcomes students and staff of all religious beliefs, and those with no faith, as fully participating members of the Marist community.

The College has links with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) and Liverpool Hope University to offer degree-level study programmes, as well as access to learning programmes. The higher education provision with UCLan is reviewed in this report.

The UCLan partnership has existed since 2006. The College was granted Institutional Approval by UCLan in February 2006 for the delivery of the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care (Rehabilitation pathway). In March 2012, the College was successful in gaining approval to offer the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care (Social Care pathway). As a result of a successful bid to the Margin and Core Fund, the College has had its own directly funded numbers since 2013. At the time of the review visit there were 45 students on the course.

In January 2013, the College was reviewed as part of QAA's Initial Review process. The review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the College:

- the policies and procedures at the College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in maintaining the threshold academic standards set by its awarding body
- the policies and procedures at the College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in the quality of the student learning opportunities

- the policies and procedures at the College **are likely to meet UK expectations** in the quality of information produced for students and applicants.

In addition, the Initial Review report identified three features of good practice at the College and also affirmed three actions.

The review team made the following recommendations to St Mary's College:

- that by June 2013, the higher education team develops ways of reporting the annual review process back to the Staff Student Liaison Meeting to close the feedback loop and enhance the students' involvement in the quality assurance procedures
- that by March 2014, the College clarifies and develops the roles of its committees to promote its responsibilities for the management of higher education and the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities
- that by June 2013, information relating to induction and the Degree Study Success Course is timely, clear and accessible
- that by the next occasion at which students are enrolled, the College makes available complete student handbooks in hard copy and electronically to all higher education students from the start of the course.

With regard to these recommendations the Higher Education Review team noted that:

- feedback from the annual review process has become a standard agenda item on the Staff Student Liaison meetings and that the annual report findings are shared with student representatives and the student body
- since the Initial Review, the College has changed the responsibilities for higher education and there is now an Assistant Principal Higher Education and Assistant Principal Quality Assurance. Staff and senior managers are clear where responsibility lies for higher education within the committee structure, and reports on higher education are produced for the senior management team and governing body
- students confirmed receipt of timely accurate information relating to the Degree Study Success programme
- programme handbooks are available to all students at the start of the programme in both electronic and paper form.

Explanation of the findings about St Mary's College, Blackburn

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College offers a Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care, with two approved pathways of Social Care and Rehabilitation. UCLan is responsible for ensuring that key reference points are adhered to. Programme development and approval processes are undertaken by UCLan, and the College contributes fully to these processes, including periodic reviews.

1.2 UCLan positions its qualification at the appropriate level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and aligns programme learning outcomes with the relevant qualification descriptor level. UCLan names qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education. In addition, it awards qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes at programme assessment boards.

1.3 The programme specifications take account of the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* and are aligned accurately within the national credit framework. Arrangements for the maintenance of academic standards are secure and aligned with Expectation A1 of the Quality Code, and this Expectation is met in theory.

1.4 The review team tested the College's arrangements in relation to the Expectation through scrutiny of validation documents and programme specifications. It also tested

familiarity with the arrangements in meetings with staff, students and representatives from UCLan.

1.5 The College adheres to the awarding body processes for ensuring the alignment of programmes with the FHEQ and programme title conventions. Tutors at the College work closely with UCLan's link tutors in the development of the curriculum and maintain productive partner relationships. UCLan commented favourably on the engagement of the College within the collaborative partnership, and in particular the process for the revalidation of modules. In meetings with the review team, both staff and students demonstrated a clear and comprehensive understanding of the arrangements regarding the setting and maintenance of threshold academic standards. Students confirmed an understanding of programme levels and the increasing level of challenge of study from Levels 4 to 5.

1.6 Overall, the review team found that each pathway awarded through the College's arrangements with UCLan is allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.7 The College works within the established academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding body as outlined in the Institutional Agreement, and in particular annex 7. The College demonstrates awareness of, and engagement with, the frameworks and regulations, through mechanisms including validation and revalidation processes, programme monitoring and review, and external examiner reports.

1.8 UCLan is responsible for establishing academic frameworks and regulations to govern the award of academic credit. The evidence submitted by the College indicated that it is maintaining the arrangements, frameworks and regulations of UCLan, and that this Expectation is met in theory.

1.9 The review team considered the Institutional Agreement, and evaluated the extent to which this was applied through consideration of external examiner and annual monitoring reports (AMRs). In addition, the transparency of these frameworks and key aspects of the regulations were tested, through the student submission and in a meeting the review team held with students. The team also explored the College's alignment with the Expectation in meetings with College staff and UCLan representatives.

1.10 The College participates fully in UCLan's partnership and moderation meetings, and undertakes annual monitoring of the programme. Academic standards and outcomes from AMRs are centrally monitored by UCLan's Academic Standards and Quality Committee. The evidence from external examiners, periodic review and AMRs indicates that this Expectation is being met.

1.11 The student submission reports that students find academic frameworks to be transparent. Programme handbooks make reference to key awarding body regulations and students understand the role of academic frameworks in the awarding of credit. The College follows a higher education quality cycle, which integrates College and UCLan arrangements. In addition, the College has recently amended its higher education structures to include an Assistant Principal Higher Education and Assistant Principal Quality Assurance in response to the recommendations of the QAA Initial Review published in March 2013.

1.12 The review team concludes that the Expectation 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 It is the responsibility of the awarding body to maintain definitive records and programme specifications for each approved programme and qualification. The programme specifications include references to relevant external reference points, including the FHEQ and appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements. Programme specifications provide information regarding learning outcomes and the award of credit. In addition, assessment regulations are clearly outlined.

1.14 UCLan provides templates for programme specifications, which include aims, intended learning outcomes and assessment methods. They take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and other external influences, including the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*, published by QAA in 2010, and *Skills for Care and Development* (2010). Programme specifications are used as a reference point by the College for the delivery and assessment of programmes and their monitoring and review. The Expectation is met in theory.

1.15 In testing this Expectation, the review team reviewed the self-evaluation document (SED), the student submission, programme specifications, Institutional Agreements and programme handbooks. The team also examined documents available on the virtual learning environment (VLE) and the College website. In addition, the team met senior managers, teaching and support staff, and students.

1.16 UCLan representatives and the College's Assistant Principal Higher Education confirmed that changes to programme specifications are managed by the collaborative partnership within UCLan's academic regulations. UCLan and the College maintain copies of programme specifications; however, the review team noted that students were unfamiliar with the term 'programme specification', and the team was unable to locate them on the website or VLE. Students have access to the module learning outcomes, as well as teaching, learning and assessment methods on the VLE and in module handbooks. The availability of programme specifications to students is considered further under Expectation C of this report.

1.17 The review team concludes that the Expectation 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 responsibilities of UCLan and the College are identified in the appendices of the Institutional Agreement, which includes a Memorandum of Cooperation. UCLan and the College work collaboratively to ensure through joint processes that the programmes delivered at the College meet the threshold standards. The outcome of those processes is a report from a UCLan validation event. The Academic Standards and Quality Committee at UCLan is responsible for programme approval and ensuring that the qualifications are established at the right level. It is also responsible for ensuring that qualifications are in accordance with the appropriate academic frameworks and regulations. The College applies to UCLan seeking support for the validation of new programmes.

1.19 Collaborative partners are required to use UCLan processes, which, for validation, identify definitive programme aims, intended learning outcomes, and expected learner achievements of programmes, through a programme specification, module guides and programme handbook. This includes a template for outlining a business case for approving new awards. Validated programmes are governed by UCLan academic regulations that provide structure and procedures in relation to programme design and assessment, which are implemented by the College. The review team found that this Expectation is met in theory.

1.20 The College's higher education provision is small and relatively static, but modest growth is envisaged in the future. This is reflected in the College's Strategic Plan 2013-2015 and in the succeeding draft. The responsibilities of the College and UCLan are clearly articulated through shared documents; the College's responsibilities for delivery are understood by staff and senior managers.

1.21 The review team considered evidence to confirm the College's involvement in the validation event for the Foundation Degree, which included the establishment of threshold standards and alignment to the FHEQ. The associated programme specification identifies the module levels in relation to the FHEQ, although the overall level of the award is not explicit. In addition, the team confirmed the final approval by UCLan for the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care and the relevant formal letters.

1.22 In meetings with staff and representatives from UCLan, the review team explored the effectiveness of the relationship and understanding between UCLan and the College, including processes for developing and changing the programme. The evidence from the meetings confirmed the documentary evidence and demonstrated a clear understanding of a close and effective relationship with the awarding body.

1.23 The College carefully adheres to the processes of UCLan. The review team concludes therefore 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

1.24 Design and approval of modules and programmes follows UCLan systems and processes, and results in an approved programme specification and module descriptors. These identify the credit awarded where the achievement of the learning outcomes meets UCLan guidance on programme development.

1.25 The validation events confirm that assessment takes into account the required threshold standards. The programme specification and the module descriptor approved at validation are implemented by the College. The College makes full use of the UCLan Academic Regulations 2014-15, which provide the structure and procedures for programme design, approval, monitoring and assessment. The development of programmes is overseen by UCLan, and programme learning outcomes are mapped to module outcomes and assessment activity in the validation documents. The Expectation is met in theory.

1.26 The review team confirmed external participation in validation and periodic review assessment activity. External examiners are asked to comment on the appropriateness of assessment within programmes. Marking criteria and internal moderation is in line with UCLan policies, and shared practice occurs at partnership and team meetings.

1.27 Learning outcomes are evident in student handbooks for both foundation degree programmes, and programme handbooks signpost students to UCLan assessment regulations. Handbooks outline the requirements to students of how to achieve module and programme credit via the module descriptors. These are available on the VLE. The VLE also provides links to the awarding bodies' academic regulations to enable students to understand the relationship between assessment and credit.

1.28 Staff and students understand the link between programme learning outcomes, module learning outcomes, assessment and credit, and both have access to sufficient information through the validated programme documents in hard copy and on the VLE.

1.29 Initially, students' work is marked and moderated by College tutors. Subsequently, there is a partnership moderation event at UCLan, which includes other collaborative partners. Student work is then sent to the external moderator. At set intervals during the academic year UCLan convenes course assessment boards and module assessment boards. Grades are confirmed at this point by the partners and any resubmissions agreed. External examiners contribute to validation events, and through their ongoing monitoring of the College's provision, confirm that assessment practices implemented by the College are in accordance with the awarding body.

1.30 The review team tested this Expectation through a review of documents relating to the validation and monitoring of programmes, and in meetings with senior managers, staff,

students, alumni and representatives from the awarding body. The review team explored the approach to assessment and the students' experience of the assessment process.

1.31 Students demonstrated an understanding of the nature of the assessment criteria and recognised the distinctiveness of the assessment at Levels 4 and 5. Those who had progressed to the top-up degree at UCLan identified the appropriateness of the study they had undertaken at the College as preparation for Level 6 study.

1.32 External examiner reports and the annual monitoring arrangement confirmed that the award of credit was considered carefully by the College, in partnership with UCLan, and was at the appropriate level for the achievement of the learning outcomes.

1.33 The application of UCLan's systems and processes, and an operational focus on the programme aims and learning outcomes of the modules, ensure that achievement of the learning outcomes is demonstrated through assessment. The close working relationship with the awarding body provides a high level of understanding among College staff. External examiners consider the use of assessment practices to be sound and confirm that UK threshold standards, and the academic standards of UCLan, have been satisfied. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation 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

1.34 UCLan is responsible for periodic programme review and the annual monitoring of programmes. The College cooperates fully with these requirements and submits annual programme reports to UCLan.

1.35 Academic standards are centrally monitored, and good practice is disseminated to partners by the UCLan Academic Quality and Awards Report: Summary of institutional issues raised within External Examiners' annual reports 2013-14. External examiners are asked to comment on the appropriateness of assessment within programmes and on threshold standards.

1.36 The College is expected to regularly monitor the maintenance of academic standards through processes that include module evaluations, participation in the National Student Survey (NSS), regular Staff Student Liaison meetings and responses to external examiner reports.

1.37 Staff Student Liaison meetings, which are chaired by the College's Head of Quality, provide an opportunity for the College to feed back to its students comments from moderators and external examiners in relation to academic standards. The student submission indicated that there is confidence among the student body that the programme is regularly reviewed and their opinions taken into account. The review team found that this Expectation is met in theory.

1.38 The review team tested the Expectation through its meetings with staff, senior managers and students. Link tutors from UCLan spoke positively about the College's engagement in review and monitoring activity. The review team read documents referring to monitoring and review, including the recent external examiner reports. AMRs produced by the College for 2013-14 were also considered. These demonstrated consideration of a wide range of issues, including programme aims, programme statistics, student feedback, higher education team feedback and external examiner comments. Evidence considered by the review team also included Programme and Module Board minutes, a review of the notes from the higher education team meetings, and UCLan higher education team meetings.

1.39 The College is an active participant in UCLan's collaborative partnership, and its contribution to the monitoring and periodic review ensures that the process at the College is effective. The Collaborative Provision Report 2012-13 indicates that while there were issues with 'attrition' at the College these were managed effectively. The AMR is considered at UCLan, as well as by the College's senior management team. The outcomes are then disseminated through higher education team meetings.

1.40 The review team's meeting with senior staff confirmed that recent restructuring ensured that issues related to programme monitoring and review processes were readily brought to the attention of the senior management team.

1.41 The College is making effective use of UCLan's systems and policies for the monitoring and review of programmes and ensuring that academic standards are maintained. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.42 UCLan appoints link tutors to support and visit staff at the College involved in their collaborative partnership. Higher education staff from the College engage in collaborative partnership meetings, including those in which external examiner reports are considered. External examiners complete reports in accordance with the UCLan programme approvals processes. They also report more widely for the collaborative partnership. College staff who attend meetings report back to the higher education team and to the College's senior management team.

1.43 Module assessment is mapped to programme learning outcomes, and external examiners ensure that assessment of the learning outcomes meets UK threshold standards. External examiners attend final programme boards and their reports are made available to the College. The Expectation is met in theory.

1.44 External examiner reports for 2012-13 indicate satisfaction with the programme and confirm that academic standards are appropriate for the award and level of study.

1.45 Quality monitoring visit reports also confirm the College's compliance with UCLan policies and procedures.

1.46 The small scale nature of the provision and the close working relationship of the staff at the College enables information to be shared readily and quickly both within the team and with senior managers. In the meeting with students it was confirmed they had access to external examiner reports.

1.47 Through the evidence reviewed and from meetings held, the review team confirmed that the College fully engaged with the processes and requirements of its awarding body. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.49 There are seven Expectations in this area and all are met with a low level of risk.

1.50 The review team found that each pathway for the College's programme with UCLan is allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ and that academic standards and outcomes from AMRs are centrally monitored by UCLan's Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

1.51 There is an effective relationship and close understanding between UCLan and the College for managing the processes for developing and changing the programme. The application of the awarding body's systems and processes ensure that learning outcomes are demonstrated through assessment; external examiners consider the use of assessment practices to be sound and confirm that UK threshold standards and academic standards are satisfied.

1.52 The College is effective in applying the systems and policies of its awarding body for monitoring and reviewing the programme and this is confirmed by the external examiners' reports.

1.53 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the awarding body at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The responsibility for the design, development and approval of higher education programmes delivered at the College is with UCLan, which provides advice, guidance and policy documents. The key responsibilities of the awarding body and the College are outlined in the Memorandum of Cooperation. Proposals for new programmes or pathways are submitted to UCLan through templates that ensure consistency. The higher education provision at the College was developed in keeping with its Strategic Plan, which aims to meet the higher educational needs of the local community.

2.2 UCLan's approval of the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care pathways considered in detail the programme specifications provided by the College. Details of the programme specifications are included in the programme handbook. Following UCLan's approval processes, an approval letter is issued confirming authority to deliver the programme.

2.3 The College submitted a business case to UCLan with the rationale for providing the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care (Social Care pathway) in addition to the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care (Rehabilitation pathway). The rationale was carefully considered with reference to national and local contexts and skills demand. The close working relationship between the College's higher education staff and UCLan link tutors enables the awarding body's policies and process for programme design, approval and development to be effectively implemented. The review team found the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.4 The review team read documents relating to the development and approval of the higher education programmes and reviewed evidence relating to an annual planning cycle. In meetings with College staff and UCLan link tutors, the team discussed the development of the programme; the future strategy for higher education development was discussed in the meeting with the Principal and senior staff.

2.5 The College refers to staff making significant contributions to changes in the Foundation Degree as part of the revalidation event in April 2012. In meetings with the review team, staff at the College demonstrated a thorough understanding of the processes for securing approval for developmental changes from UCLan, and consequently changes for module and programme learning outcomes.

2.6 The College and the University's close working relationship ensures that the design, development and approval of modules and programmes, and any changes, are managed effectively. Evidence from both the documents and meetings with staff confirms full engagement by the College with the awarding body's programme approval process. The review team considered the breadth of the College's engagement with its awarding body and other colleges in the collaborative network to be **good practice**.

2.7 The engagement of the College with UCLan's systems and processes ensures effective design, development and approval of programmes. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.8 The College has devolved responsibility for the admission and selection of students to higher education programmes overseen by the awarding body. Recruitment, selection and admission are founded on clearly articulated awarding body admissions and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning policies with which the College complies. The Admissions Policy includes appeals and complaints procedures. Entry requirements are determined at programme validation and revalidation events.

2.9 Admissions are administered by the College in collaboration with UCLan. Higher Education Advisors at the College conduct informal interviews to assess prospective students, provide them with essential information and determine the offer for admission. Relevant information is supplied to students through the College website, during interview and through tailored higher education open events. The College offers a Degree Study Success programme each summer. This consists of four weekly sessions, delivered by Higher Education Advisors, to prepare students for higher education study. The admissions procedures outlined meet Expectation B2 and reflect the Indicators of sound practice.

2.10 The review team tested the operation and effectiveness of the admission, recruitment and selection procedures in meetings with students, academic staff and support staff; it also examined the information produced for students and the website.

2.11 The College processes are clear and carefully administered and followed. The Higher Education Advisors work closely with the awarding body. Students and staff confirm the value of the individual interviews. Students concur they have an accurate understanding of their programme prior to commencement, including timetabled and independent study hours.

2.12 Widening participation is a key feature of the College's higher education strategy. In support of the College's core values, applications are welcomed from students with both standard and non-standard qualifications. An alternative assessment method is in place to support the strong organisational commitment to diversity and widening participation. The College undertakes an annual review of admissions informed by learner feedback; this has led to alternative assessments being standardised.

2.13 Students confirmed that access to the alternative assessment method is effective and that they value the help of the Higher Education Advisors during the pre-enrolment processes. In addition, they confirm receipt of timely accurate information relating to the Degree Study Success programme, which addresses the recommendation from the QAA Initial Review, published in March 2013. In addition, effective procedures are in place for identifying and supporting additional needs before admission, at interview, during enrolment, and throughout the programme.

2.14 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.15 The College is responsible for the delivery of programmes, as stated in the Institutional Agreement with UCLan. The College's Strategic Plan 2013-15 and draft Strategic Plan 2015-18 outline the College's commitment to encouraging widening participation and providing local opportunities for students. The College further articulates its core values and approach to teaching and learning through its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and its Equal Opportunity Statement.

2.16 The College has a policy to promote high quality teaching through an Observation of Teaching and Learning Policy, Time Off for Training Policy and Peer Observation scheme. The College's approach to teaching and learning provides opportunities for staff to share best practice and engage in continuing professional development. Staff also participate in regular cross-College inset training days. Higher education staff access staff development opportunities at UCLan and within its collaborative partnerships. These systems, policies and procedures allow the Expectation to be met.

2.17 The review team examined the effectiveness of the College's procedures and policies in meetings with employers, students, teachers and support staff. It also considered a range of documents, including the Observation of Teaching and Learning Policy, the Peer Observation Scheme and the VLE.

2.18 The programme at the College is delivered by a complement of three tutors who are approved by the awarding body. These tutors are qualified to a minimum of Level 6 and have a range of complementary academic qualifications and vocational experience.

2.19 The effectiveness of teaching and learning is discussed in UCLan team meetings held at the College, and in Staff Student Liaison meetings with the Assistant Principal Quality Assurance and students. The evidence from the AMRs indicates improvements in teaching and learning resources to support learner development, including the provision of laptop computers.

2.20 In the meeting with the review team, students commented favourably about the resources available to them and access to UCLan's electronic and library resources. The College provides a library loan scheme between itself and UCLan, which students consider effective and beneficial. In addition, students value the VLE, as teaching notes are uploaded shortly after sessions and they are also able to access additional supporting information for their studies. Students and staff were positive about the recent addition of dedicated higher education accommodation, which has contributed to a higher education ethos at the College.

2.21 The programme handbooks are a key source of information for students and are available in hard copy and electronically. The VLE is widely used by students to access programme and module-based information. However, the review team noted a lack of consistency in module handbook information and students' awareness of programme specifications, and makes recommendations in relation to this under Expectation C.

2.22 Both current students and alumni, in meetings with the review team, commented positively about the opportunities to develop as independent students and the support of the Higher Education Advisors and academic staff. The Degree Study Success programme has a pivotal role in raising learner awareness of the expectations of higher education study. The increasing challenges of higher education study are managed well at the College and students are aware of the importance of independent learning. In addition, work placement opportunities contribute to professional development, improving confidence and an awareness of individual career and progression routes.

2.23 In meetings with staff, students and employers, the review team noted inconsistencies of approach to the management of work placements, with evidence of policies not reflecting practice, and makes two recommendations relating to this under Expectation B10. However, the team was informed of the College's plans to deploy additional staffing resources to work placements, and an affirmation is also made under Expectation B10.

2.24 Students commented positively in their meeting with the review team about the quality of teaching and learning, and the informal mechanisms to feed back their views. However, the review team noted an inconsistency in the gathering of modular feedback, and makes a further recommendation under Expectation B8.

2.25 In addition, the review team found that, although tutors had undertaken peer observations at Level 3, the most recent higher education peer observations took place three years ago. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College ensure the Observation of Teaching and Learning Policy for higher education provision is implemented by October 2015.

2.26 Overall, the College is responsive to the needs of its students and their development as independent, analytical and critical students.

2.27 The review team concludes that the Expectation 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

2.28 The College's arrangements to resource and support students are delivered through its agreement with UCLan. The arrangements are articulated in the College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the Equal Opportunity Statement.

2.29 The College evaluates these arrangements through annual monitoring reviews. The support to students from Higher Education Advisors has been designed to meet the needs of the College's student body, which is mainly composed of mature adult returners. All prospective higher education students are interviewed by a Higher Education Adviser, and through this process any particular additional learning needs can be assessed and, where necessary, appropriate additional sources of support identified. Higher Education Advisors provide a wide range of support from application to graduation.

2.30 The arrangements for supporting students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential at the College allow this Expectation to be met.

2.31 The review team evaluated the extent to which this Expectation was met through meetings with students, academic and support staff, and local employers. A range of documentary sources was also consulted, including the student submission, the College's self-evaluation document and Staff Student Liaison meetings.

2.32 The review team explored the use of the College's VLE with staff and students, and found that students were familiar with its content. The student submission commented favourably on the availability of electronic resources and considered the VLE to be a particularly supportive teaching and learning resource. Students also value the library loans scheme provided by the College, which secures a next day delivery of books from the awarding body's library. Staff from the College's library, information technology section, and higher education administrative support meet with academic staff to review the resources available to students; this has resulted in improvements, including larger dedicated classrooms, laptops for students and 'breakout' rooms.

2.33 Students were positive about both the resources and processes in place to support their learning. In particular, they commented enthusiastically about the tailored support they received from Higher Education Advisors. The Higher Education Advisors provide consistency and continuity of support from application to graduation, and for some students this support had enabled them to remain on the programme. Students value the feedback on draft assignments from Higher Education Advisors and the effectiveness and timeliness of their responses. The review team considers the high levels of support provided to students by the Higher Education Advisors to be **good practice**.

2.34 The College recognises the challenges of students' transition and takes deliberate steps to facilitate transition, including the support from Higher Education Advisors, the Degree Study Success programme and promoting independent learning. Alumni of the College who met the review team stated that they were well prepared for the transition to Level 6 study. Both staff and students value the informal communication mechanisms that the smaller scale provision can afford.

2.35 The review team concludes that the Expectation 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

2.36 The College's Learner Involvement Strategy identifies ways in which the College engages with students and the higher education community. The small scale of the College's provision enables a close relationship to develop between the staff and the students, where students can raise issues with staff as they arise.

2.37 There is a student representation system that includes nominated students from each year group with some training and support provided by the Higher Education Advisors. In addition, there is a Higher Education Student Governor, who is a formal member of the Governors' quality assurance meetings. The Higher Education Advisors track student attendance to assess engagement with learning. Both a College and UCLan charter are available to students.

2.38 The programme handbook has a section on the 'student voice' and includes information on student representation, Students' Union meetings and regular Staff Student Liaison meetings. The minutes of these meetings are disseminated to students and the higher education staff at the College. The UCLan Students' Union offers support and access to students at the College.

2.39 Student feedback is included in the AMRs, with brief notes of any actions taken. There is an opportunity to evaluate modules at the end of each delivery period. The College participates in the NSS, which is promoted to students and its participation rates monitored. Support departments at the College, including the library, undertake surveys of student opinion to enable their service to be developed.

2.40 The College Strategic Plan and draft Strategic Plan 2015-18 do not directly refer to the engagement of higher education students, although there is an inclusive approach evident through the College's mission. The Learner Involvement Strategy is a cross-College generic document, which indicates how learner involvement activity is monitored including higher education students.

2.41 The scale of the College's provision enables staff and students to work closely. This close, and at times informal, relationship is recognised as valuable by both staff and students. It provides regular opportunities for students to engage with staff in discussion about their learning experience.

2.42 The College conducts regular Staff Student Liaison meetings with foundation degree students to gather feedback, and there are separate meetings held for each year group. This information is included in AMRs. The Higher Education Charter produced by UCLan is available to students at the College through the programme handbook. A student representative structure provides opportunities for formal feedback and monitoring. There is a process for modules to be evaluated but it is inconsistently applied.

2.43 The review team considered documents relating to student engagement, including programme handbooks, AMRs, the College's Strategic Plan and draft Strategic Plan, and minutes of the Staff Student Liaison meetings. The team also met the Principal, senior staff, tutors, UCLan link tutors, support staff and students. Students were invited to comment on the extent to which they were involved in the quality assurance aspects of their provision and the opportunities to provide feedback to the College.

2.44 The programme handbooks include a section on the 'student voice'. This articulates the ethos of student engagement from the awarding body to the College.

2.45 The College states that students have access to module evaluation questionnaires at the end of each module. These are then analysed by the teaching team, and feedback is used to improve teaching, planning and assessment. The review team noted that the College is currently considering using an electronic version, as completion rates are inconsistent particularly among second year students.

2.46 The students welcomed the closeness and friendliness of the academic community and the responsiveness of staff, who were regarded as helpful and caring. This had led to a view among the College staff, expressed to the review team, that the use of formal systems for student engagement at modular level is not always appropriate. The documentary evidence considered by the team indicated that there had been difficulty in securing student opinion through the use of module evaluations and reviews. The student submission confirms that end-of-module feedback forms are issued to students but are not always completed.

2.47 The review team's meetings with College staff revealed inconsistencies in the value given to the formal systematic review of the modules. The team heard that the development of online surveys had been delayed by management restructuring but that UCLan's planned development of the VLE would include a facility to undertake online surveys of modules.

2.48 The review team found that the close working relationship between staff and students, along with informal and formal methods, ensures that the College takes deliberate steps to engage students.

2.49 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.50 The College has a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. For the higher education provision it also conforms to the awarding body's Assessment Policy. The Memorandum of Cooperation appendix clarifies responsibilities in regard to assessment arrangements, representation at module and exam boards, responses to external examiner reports, and information to students about external examiner reports. The assessment strategy for each programme is approved as part of the validation process and is included in the programme specification. Advice for College staff on the development of assessment strategies is provided by UCLan in a programme development guide; guides are also available for the accreditation of prior learning and the accreditation of prior experiential learning. In addition, there is a UCLan policy relating to late work and mitigating circumstances. Appeals against assessment decisions are covered in the programme handbook.

2.51 Assessment practice is comprehensively detailed in the UCLan assessment handbook, which links to assessment information in programme handbooks. These are available on the VLE, and students are signposted from them to the UCLan assessment regulations. In addition, a calendar for assessments is produced for students by the College. Subsequent to marking and internal moderation, external moderation results in an external moderator's report, which is disseminated by UCLan. UCLan hosts and chairs the exam boards and assessment panels, which College staff attend.

2.52 There is a comprehensive range of policy documents and guidance from UCLan available for staff and students at the College. Assessment activity is approved at validation; the College then implements the approved programme specification.

2.53 The review team read the documents associated with assessment, including the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, the programme approval documents and the programme specification. The review team confirmed that the details of assessment are included in the programme handbooks for students and made available on the VLE. The team also confirmed that the College's student assessment results were considered at the relevant module and examination boards, and that external examiners reported on assessment.

2.54 The review team discussed assessment in a meeting with students. Students were typically complimentary about the range and quality of assessments and demonstrated an understanding of how assessment was moderated with UCLan. In addition, the review team met College staff and UCLan link tutors who confirmed a good understanding of the assessment strategy and its implementation at the College.

2.55 External examiners confirm that the College applies UCLan's policy through valid, equitable and reliable assessment. They also confirmed that the assessment methods were appropriate and 'enable the students to develop a range of knowledge and skills relevant to the workplace', as well as noting that the assessment helped support the achievement of the

foundation degree benchmarks. In addition, external examiner reports raised no issues with marking and identified audio feedback as good practice.

2.56 The careful and deliberate application of the assessment policies provided by UCLan ensures the College operates equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including the recognition of prior learning.

2.57 The review team concludes that the Expectation 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

2.58 UCLan is responsible for the appointment of external examiners. Information about external examiners is provided for students at the College in the programme handbooks. The external examiner reports confirm that the academic standards set by UCLan are appropriate to the award and the FHEQ. External examiners contribute to the UCLan programme approval process, and their reports for the College's provision were submitted in accordance with UCLan programme approval processes.

2.59 The UCLan Academic Quality and Awards Committee provides a summary of institutional issues raised by external examiner reports for partners to disseminate. At the College it is referred to the senior management team. In addition, external examiner reports are discussed at Staff Student Liaison meetings and inform the AMRs. These reflect on the comments of the external examiners, summarise key points and identify any planned action.

2.60 External examiners visit the College annually as part of reporting on the provision. These reports are completed to a standard UCLan template to ensure consistency.

2.61 The review team tested this Expectation by reference to the external examiner reports for the College and the AMRs. In addition, the team explored in meetings with senior staff and tutors how the external examiner reports are used to maintain standards and develop the College's higher education provision. In a meeting with the team, students confirmed they were able to access external examiner reports on the VLE. The review team also considered evidence to affirm that any concerns raised by external examiners were addressed; this was confirmed in subsequent external examiner reports.

2.62 The College recognises the responsibilities of UCLan with regard to the role of the external examiners and cooperates fully and actively in ensuring they work effectively. Meetings with College and UCLan link tutors confirmed the close working relationship with the awarding body. This ensures that issues raised by external examiners are communicated to the higher education team and students, and appropriate action taken when necessary. The external examiner reports confirm the validity, reliability and integrity of the external examination processes and that external examiners are provided with appropriate access and responses by the College.

2.63 The College makes appropriate and careful use of external examiners to maintain the standards of awards as part of the quality assurance processes. The College's procedures are consistent with the requirements of the Quality Code. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation 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

2.64 The College is responsible for enacting UCLan's policy for Annual Monitoring and Review. The responsibilities are clearly articulated in the Memorandum of Cooperation. As part of its responsibility, the College reports annually to UCLan using a standard AMR template. This is used by the College's programme and senior management teams to monitor higher education provision and guide future action in accordance with the College's planning and quality cycle.

2.65 College governors receive a Higher Education and Adult Quality Assurance Report and a Higher Education Quality Report, and the senior management team receive regular monitoring reports. In addition, periodic review follows an agreed cycle with UCLan and is conducted within its quality processes.

2.66 Staff Student Liaison meetings enable the College to monitor student views about the programme and to feed back to students on items from the annual monitoring and external examiner reports. Students also have the opportunity to evaluate modules via module evaluation forms. In addition, regular College team meetings relay information about annual monitoring.

2.67 The College produces an AMR, which complies with UCLan's policy for annual monitoring and review and is monitored by UCLan's Academic Quality and Standards Committee. This enables the programme to be monitored regularly and subsequent actions developed. Management oversight at the College is through reporting structures to the senior management team and the governing body.

2.68 The review team tested the Expectation through a review of documents, including external examiner reports, AMRs, the Student and Academic Support Report, and minutes of Staff Student Liaison meetings and higher education team meetings. Reports to senior managers and governors were also considered.

2.69 In meetings with the Principal and senior staff, the review team explored how governors and senior staff maintain oversight of higher education provision. In meetings with staff, support staff and students, particular emphasis was given to understanding how programme modules were reviewed.

2.70 The College fully engages with the requirements of UCLan for monitoring and review. The range of reports considered by the review team focused on management information to a greater extent than quality assurance and enhancement. In addition, the team's meetings with senior staff confirmed that the scale of the College's provision often enables immediate and informal responses to quality issues.

2.71 The informal culture of the College has many advantages, which are recognised especially by students. This has led to students providing immediate feedback to staff about the delivery of modules, which in turn has led to improvements in the learning environment and the provision of dedicated space for students.

2.72 The introduction of online surveys had been planned for some time but was delayed as the VLE used for its implementation was in development. Evidence from a team meeting

suggested that module evaluation was no longer required by UCLan, and in meetings with the review team some College staff expressed the view that formal systematic feedback was not appropriate for the scale of the College's provision. An example of audio feedback was provided, which was commended by the external examiner as good practice but was not systematically reviewed.

2.73 The College implements the policies and procedures of the awarding body. It also participates fully in partnership meetings to share good practice. The senior management team at the College is kept informed of issues that arise from monitoring and review. The review team noted the value placed on the informal arrangements for student feedback. However, it was reported in meetings with staff and students that some modules are not formally and systematically evaluated. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College implement evaluations for all modules to ensure systematic feedback from students to inform enhancement by October 2015.

2.74 Overall, the review team found that the College discharges its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards, and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, through its own policies and procedures, and those of the awarding body for the monitoring and review of programmes.

2.75 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.76 Formal policies and procedures for the management of complaints and appeals are provided by the awarding body. UCLan's complaints procedure is signposted to students in the programme handbook. In addition, the College has its own policy for managing complaints, and logs all complaints.

2.77 The College operates informal processes in the first instance to manage complaints. The Higher Education Advisors and student representatives play an important role in supporting students who might make a complaint, as does the UCLan Students' Union. Exceptionally, students are referred to the UCLan complaints procedure. The relevant documents are clear and responsibilities are identified. Students are informed of the process during induction and through the programme handbooks on the VLE.

2.78 The review team tested the Expectation through a review of documents, including student handbooks and written policies. In addition, the team met teaching staff, students and Higher Education Advisors.

2.79 In its meetings with students, staff and Higher Education Advisors, the review team was informed that complaints are managed positively through close and immediate dialogue with students. Thus, the great majority of issues are resolved as they arise, which means the formal complaints system is rarely used by students. Students who met the review team indicated that they knew where to go for information if they wished to make a formal complaint. Likewise, the team found no evidence of the published appeals process being used by students at the College.

2.80 Given the effective arrangements and understanding by students of the College's and awarding body's policies, the review team found that there are appropriate procedures in place for managing academic appeals and student complaints. The procedures are fair, accessible and timely.

2.81 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.82 The College is responsible for managing its relationships with employers in respect of student work placements provided on the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care (Social Care and Rehabilitation pathways). It has arrangements to resource and support students through their work placements. The College operates health and safety policies and procedures for higher education work placements. Higher Education Advisors initially discuss the work placement in interviews with prospective students.

2.83 On enrolment, students receive information from their module tutor, with support from Higher Education Advisors, and are encouraged to make arrangements for their work placements. The College takes this approach as it considers that it contributes to a more purposeful and valuable placement experience. There is a dedicated Work Placement Officer at the College, who is trained to conduct risk assessments in the establishment of work placements. The College maintains an approved employers database for all work placements it arranges.

2.84 The College's arrangements for managing higher education with provision with employers enables this Expectation to be met in theory.

2.85 The review team considered the relationship between the College, students and employers to ascertain how study on the programme was formally connected with work placements through meetings with staff, students and employers. In addition, the team explored a range of documents, including module handbooks and risk assessments, employer agreements, monitoring documents, and the approved employers database.

2.86 On testing the arrangements, the review team found that work placements vary in nature. They include self-placed/volunteer placements, which students arrange independently; work placements that the College arranges; and those involving existing student employment. Analysis of College information indicated that, at the time of the review visit, from a cohort of 43 students, 13 students were self-placed, nine were using existing employments, and the remainder were placed by the College.

2.87 The review team found evidence of risk assessments and employer agreements, with those placements arranged by the College and recorded in the approved employer database. However, inconsistencies were found in the management of self-placed and existing employment-based placements. For some placements there was an assumption of up-to-date risk assessments, and students are asked to sign a Self-Placement Volunteer Form as a disclaimer. Higher Education Advisors track progress for all placements of personal tutees, which includes consideration of risk assessments. In addition, Higher Education Advisors also make initial and follow-up contact with employers. The review team found an inconsistent supervision of work placements and noted the recent discussion within senior management about work placements.

2.88 In meetings with the Principal and senior staff, the review team was informed of the College's plans to deploy additional staffing resources to work placements. The review team **affirms** the decision to appoint a 0.2 Foundation Degree Work Placement Coordinator from

September 2015 to strengthen the arrangements for student work placements. However, as all work placements contribute to the award of credit, the review team **recommends** that the College further develop effective management procedures for the arrangement and routine monitoring of all student work placements by October 2015.

2.89 In addition, the review team found that the College's published health and safety policies and procedures for higher education work placements do not fully reflect its current practice, and **recommends** that the College further develop the current policy for higher education work placements to take account of all types of student placements by October 2015.

2.90 In meetings with the review team, students, alumni and employers commented positively on work experience as a means of professional development and improving employability and progression opportunities. One employer confirmed the value of self-placed students as a means of meeting the needs of a small not-for-profit organisation. Students, alumni and employers were familiar with all the documents in the module handbooks and in particular the learning agreement.

2.91 The review team noted that UCLan's Foundations for Practice and Supporting Professional Practice handbooks refer to placement visits from academic staff. This information was found to be inconsistent and the review team makes a further recommendation under Expectation C.

2.92 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met with moderate risk, due to inconsistencies of approach and existing policies not reflecting operational practice.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.93 The College does not offer research degrees therefore this Expectation does not apply.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.94 In reaching its judgements about the quality of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.95 Of the 10 applicable Expectations in this area all are met, with one moderate risk under the Expectation for the Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*.

2.96 There are four recommendations in this area, which relate to the Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*; *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*; and two in *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*. In addition, there is an affirmation under Expectation B10, and two features of good practice in *Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval* and *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement* of the Quality Code respectively.

2.97 The review team noted in particular the close working relationship between the College and UCLan, which ensures that the design, development and approval of modules and programmes, and any changes to them, are managed effectively. The review team considered the breadth of engagement with its awarding body and other colleges in the collaborative network to be good practice (see Expectation B1).

2.98 In addition, students highly valued the work of the College's Higher Education Advisors, who provide consistency and continuity of support and feedback that had enabled some students to remain on the programme. The review team considered the high levels of support provided to students by the Higher Education Advisors to be good practice (see Expectation B4).

2.99 The first of the four recommendations in this judgement is for learning and teaching (see Expectation B3). The review team found that there were lapses in the peer observations of higher education at the College and made the recommendation for the College to implement its Observation of Teaching and Learning Policy by October 2015.

2.100 A further recommendation is made by the review team in relation to Expectation B8, which is cross-referenced with Enhancement. In meetings with staff and students, the review team was informed that some modules are not formally and systematically evaluated. The review team recommends that the College implement evaluations for all modules to ensure systematic feedback from students to inform enhancement by October 2015.

2.101 Two recommendations and one affirmation are made by the review team in relation to Expectation B10. These relate to the College's policy and management of the Expectation. The review team found that the policies published by the College do not fully reflect its current practice and made the recommendation that the College further develop the current policy for higher education work placements to take account of all types of student placements by October 2015. In addition, inconsistencies were found in the management of self-placed and existing employment-based placements; as all work placements contribute to the award of credit, the review team made the recommendation that the College further develop effective management procedures for the arrangement and routine monitoring of all student work placements by October 2015.

2.102 In meetings with the Principal and senior staff, the review team was informed of plans to deploy additional staffing resources to work placements; the team affirmed the decision to appoint a 0.2 Foundation Degree Work Placement Coordinator from September 2015 to strengthen the arrangements for student work placements.

2.103 The review team concludes that the quality of 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 Institutional Agreement and Memorandum of Cooperation between the College and UCLan outline the responsibilities regarding the quality of information provided for students. The College produces information for prospective and current students via its website, leaflets and open days. In accordance with the requirements of its awarding body, the College submits data so that Key Information Sets are displayed on its website.

3.2 A Collaborative Marketing Agreement 2014-15 outlines responsibilities for the approval of publicity materials. The awarding body's requirements are further outlined in the Partner Institution Collaborative Marketing Guidance Notes 2014-15. The production of programme specifications is the responsibility of the awarding body and are approved at validation events. UCLan makes use of specification templates and is supported by a Programme Developer's Guide 2014, produced by the Academic Quality and Awards Committee. The production of student handbooks is the responsibility of the College. Module handbooks are produced in collaboration with UCLan. A Higher Education Adviser at the College has responsibility for the oversight of information on the website and the use of awarding body logos.

3.3 The arrangements for the production of information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy and the Expectation is met in theory.

3.4 The review team examined this Expectation through scrutiny of publicity and marketing information, including the College's website, programme leaflets, student handbooks, module handbooks, and meetings with staff and students.

3.5 The College has a clear understanding of its responsibilities for the provision of information required by UCLan, including publicity guidelines, protocols for the use of branding and communications materials, and activity. The College fully engages with the awarding body's processes to ensure accuracy of marketing information.

3.6 Information regarding the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care (Social Care and Rehabilitation pathways) is readily accessible on the College's website. The awarding body information is clearly visible and prospective students can access information about the programme.

3.7 In their meeting with the review team, students confirmed that the information available to them included sufficient details about the admissions procedures, programme content and progression opportunities. They were satisfied with the accuracy and completeness of the information and the support of the Higher Education Advisors during the admissions process. In addition, students were positive about the value of the Degree Study Success programme.

3.8 Students considered the VLE to be a particularly supportive teaching and learning resource. It includes a range of information to support teaching and learning for modules, including class notes and further reading sources. Students are aware that external

examiner reports are available on the VLE. In addition, students confirmed they are familiar with student handbook and module handbook information. Students are aware of the UCLan charter, which is referenced in the student handbook; they confirmed that they understood the purpose of the charter and that details could be found on classroom noticeboards.

3.9 The review team examined a range of module handbooks available on the VLE for 2014-15 and found them to be inconsistent in content, with some containing inaccurate programme title details, inaccurate tutor details and programme delivery dates. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College ensure consistency of information on the VLE and in module handbooks by October 2015.

3.10 In addition, the review team was unable to locate programme specifications on the VLE and found that students were unfamiliar with the purpose of programme specifications. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College ensure all programme specifications are made available to students by October 2015.

3.11 Overall, the review team found that the College's arrangements for providing information for its intended audience about the higher education it offers are fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.12 In reaching its judgements on the quality of the information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.13 The review team made two recommendations; there are no applicable affirmations or features of good practice. However, the team found that the College's arrangements for providing information for its intended audience about the higher education it offers are fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.14 The first recommendation arises from inconsistent content and inaccurate programme title details in module handbooks available on the VLE for 2014-15, including inaccurate tutor details and programme delivery dates. The review team makes the recommendation that the College ensure consistency of information on the VLE and in module handbooks by October 2015.

3.15 In addition, the review team was unable to locate programme specifications on the VLE and found that students were unfamiliar with the purpose of programme specifications. The team therefore makes the recommendation that the College ensure all programme specifications are made available to students by October 2015.

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

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

- 4.1 The College has an ethos and culture that encourages a close relationship with students and welcomes their feedback. Senior managers with responsibility for higher education and quality are represented on the senior management team, and there are regular meetings with the awarding body.
- 4.2 The College has a Strategic Plan and a successor is in draft. Other College processes and procedures that provide a means to secure improvements in the quality of students' learning opportunities include the College quality assurance cycle and reporting schedule, and reports produced for the governing body on higher education matters and for the senior management team. In addition, there are regular Staff Student Liaison meetings, and processes for module evaluation and teaching observation.
- 4.3 While the College's higher education provision is modest in scale, it has an approach, and policies, procedures and structures that enable the Expectation to be met.
- 4.4 The review team tested the Expectation in meetings with the Principal, senior staff, tutors, support staff and students. The team also read a range of documents, including higher education reports prepared for the senior management team and governing body, the minutes of the Staff Student Liaison meetings and a sample of module evaluations.
- 4.5 The review team noted a number of practical steps taken by the College to improve the quality of its students' learning opportunities and to create a more mature learning environment. In particular, the provision of laptops for use by students was noted, the development of dedicated higher education teaching and learning spaces, and changes to the timetabling of the day and the refectory arrangements. The team also heard from staff and students of minor modifications made to modules in response to student feedback.
- 4.6 The review team noted the value of the College's close working relationship with students and its commitment to improving their experience. However, the approach was often informal and mechanisms were not deployed consistently, in particular module evaluations and peer observation of teaching. This limited the scope of the College to gather and assess students' views and engage with them systematically to enhance student learning opportunities. The review team makes reference to this in Expectation B8, where it made the recommendation that by October 2015 the College should implement evaluations for all modules to ensure systematic feedback from students to inform enhancement, and further recommends in Expectation B3 that the College implement its Observation of Teaching and Learning Policy by October 2015.
- 4.7 This inconsistent approach has implications in limiting the College's systematic evidence base and consideration of how to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities in a planned and integrated way through the current formal structures and processes at senior level. The evidence examined by the review team indicated a disjointed incremental approach to improvement, rather than a deliberative approach to enhancement. Examples of good practice exist but are not always fully recognised, and remain under-developed and consequently not disseminated. For example, the team heard that an initiative to provide audio feedback on assessment had not been evaluated through systematic feedback and therefore had not been developed further.

4.8 Consequently, the review team **recommends** that the College take deliberate steps to systematically and strategically apply its policies, structures and processes to improve the quality of learning opportunities by January 2016.

4.9 The review team found that the College's approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities was insufficiently informed by the planned, systematic and consistent application of quality procedures and the current management structures.

4.10 The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11 In reaching its judgements about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.12 The Expectation is not met with a moderate level of associated risk. There are two applicable recommendations and no affirmations or features of good practice.

4.13 The review team was informed of a number of practical steps taken by the College to improve the quality of its students' learning opportunities. In particular, the provision of laptops, the development of dedicated higher education teaching and learning spaces, and changes to the timetabling of the day and the refectory arrangements. The team also heard of minor modifications in the programme informed by student feedback.

4.14 In addition, the review team noted the College's close working relationship with students and its commitment to improving their experience. However, the approach was often informal and mechanisms were not deployed consistently.

4.15 The review team found that module evaluations were not deployed consistently and limited the College's capacity to assess students' views and engage with them systematically to enhance their learning opportunities. Therefore, the review team makes the recommendation that the College should implement evaluations for all modules to ensure systematic feedback from students to inform enhancement by October 2015. This recommendation is cross-referenced with Expectation B8.

4.16 This inconsistent approach was also evident in peer observations and presented implications for the College's consideration of how to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities in a planned and integrated way through the current formal structures and processes at senior level.

4.17 The evidence examined by the review team indicates a disjointed incremental approach to enhancement. The review team makes the recommendation that the College take deliberate steps to systematically and strategically apply its policies, structures and processes to improve the quality of learning opportunities by January 2016.

4.18 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

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

Findings

5.1 The College has an inclusive mission, and there is a culture that encourages students to engage in open and frequent dialogue with the staff. Consequently, students' feedback to staff is often immediate on issues relating to the quality of their provision.

5.2 The College's policies include a Learner Involvement Strategy, which is applicable to all students, including those on higher education awards. It identifies how the College engages with its students. There is a higher education student representation system, which includes nominated students from each year group. Higher Education Advisors provide support and training for student representatives through tutorials and multimedia presentations. In addition, there is a higher education student governor.

5.3 The College produces a charter and there is also a UCLan higher education charter. The Students' Union at UCLan offers support to College students on increasing student representation.

5.4 The programme handbook includes a section on the student voice and information about student representation, Students' Union meetings and Staff Student Liaison meetings. These assist students in providing feedback about the quality and enhancement of their programmes. Student feedback on the quality of learning opportunities is included in the AMR, with brief notes of actions taken. There is an opportunity to evaluate modules at the end of each delivery period. The College also participates in the NSS, and participation rates are monitored by senior managers.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 29-32 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

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

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

Academic standards

The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their programmes (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 programme of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'. See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

An approved programme 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 programme handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation

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

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