



# Higher Education Review of New College Stamford

September 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 New College Stamford. The review took place from 29 to 30 September 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Associate Professor Alan Howard
- Mr Mike Slawin
- Mr Matthew Kitching (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are followed by numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

In reviewing New College Stamford 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 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code).

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859).

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

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

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about New College Stamford

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

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

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following feature of **good practice** at New College Stamford.

- The effective academic and pastoral support arrangements, which enable student progress and achievement (Expectation B4).

### Recommendations

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

By January 2016:

- ensure consistent and transparent implementation of the Admissions Policy for all higher education students (Expectation B2)
- consistently provide information in the higher education and programme handbooks that aligns with the College's Higher Education Manual (Expectation C).

### Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The implementation of a more strategic oversight to annual monitoring (Expectation A3.3).
- The steps taken to formalise the process for work placement arrangements, including the introduction of a handbook (Expectation B10).

### Theme: Student Employability

The College considers that its central reason for delivering higher education is to offer vocationally relevant programmes, which improve students' employability prospects. Employability itself is a core theme in the College's higher education strategy and all programmes are required to have a vocational and professional emphasis. The College is able to demonstrate a wide range of examples of how student employability is embedded into its higher education provision.

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

## About New College Stamford

New College Stamford (the College) is a further education college in Lincolnshire, recruiting students from both Lincolnshire, and Peterborough, Rutland, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. The College notes that residents in its recruitment area have comparatively low numbers of higher education equivalent qualifications, with just over 20 per cent of individuals educated to level 4 and above. The College identifies this as a key driver to develop and expand its higher education provision.

More generally, the College has a higher education strategy with the aims of growth, developing employability and enhancing the learner experience. The College aims to achieve this through developing a distinctive higher education ethos, providing the necessary resourcing, and widening participation. The College has joined the Lincolnshire Collaborative Outreach Network, working in collaboration with other Lincolnshire colleges and universities to develop a more coordinated approach to the delivery of education in the region and support the aim to widen the participation.

The College's higher education provision operates primarily from a single campus in Stamford. The College has a partnership with one dance school in Leicester and one performing arts school in Stamford. The College currently works with four partners to offer higher education qualifications: the University of Northampton, the University of Bedfordshire, Bishop Grosseteste University and Pearson Edexcel. The partnership with the University of Northampton will end in 2016.

There have been a number of recent leadership changes at the College, including a new Principal starting in September 2015, and a Higher Education Learning Standards Manager who took up post in January 2015. In addition, a new higher education committee structure was established in May 2015. There have been a number of other significant developments since the 2011 QAA review report, which have had an impact on the provision of higher education. These include introducing a new Higher Education Observation of Teaching and Learning Strategy, implementing a new Enhancement Procedure, and setting up a dedicated higher education space within the College.

A number of these measures were introduced following recommendations made in the 2011 review undertaken by QAA. Most of the progress made to address these recommendations has taken place in 2015, so it remains too early to determine the impact of these changes. However, the changes made suggest the College has taken the necessary measures to address the recommendations. Similarly, there is evidence to suggest the College has built on the good practice identified, for example the quality of feedback to students.

## Explanation of the findings about New College Stamford

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.1 The College works with four awarding partners: Bishop Grosseteste University, the University of Bedfordshire, the University of Northampton, and Pearson. The partnership with the University of Northampton consists of one programme, and is due to cease in September 2016. The College has a mix of directly funded and franchised programmes.

1.2 The College delivers programmes that go through the validation and approval processes of the awarding partners. In engaging with these processes, the awarding partners ensure that for programmes offered by the College the level, learning outcomes and programme title reflect the qualification, as well as articulate to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

1.3 The validation and approval processes as specified by the awarding partners, and as engaged with by the College, conform to the Expectation.

1.4 The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing validation and approval documentation, considering programme handbooks, and meeting with College staff and the representative of an awarding partner. Staff demonstrate necessary understanding of the

relevant reference points, and the team identified that they were appropriately applied to higher education provision across the College.

1.5 The review team concludes that, as the College engagement with approval and validation processes is successful, 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**

1.6 The academic frameworks and regulations of each awarding partner determine academic standards for each programme. The College adheres to these frameworks and keeps records through moderation documents. Internally, the Academic Board, and Academic Quality and Standards Committee provide oversight to the engagement with, and adherence to, these frameworks. Link tutors and external examiners maintain oversight of the process on behalf of awarding partners.

1.7 Tutors use the appropriate benchmarks when developing assignments and carrying out assessment. The College has clear governance arrangements and regulations in the form of its Higher Education Manual and a newly revised committee structure.

1.8 The approach demonstrated by the College is consistent with the Expectation, with a clear understanding of responsibilities as they are apportioned to the College by the awarding partners.

1.9 The review team reviewed the effectiveness of the College's engagement with these frameworks by considering external examiners' reports, moderation records, validation and approval documents, academic regulations, and by talking to staff.

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

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



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

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

**Findings**

1.11 Programme specifications are in place for all courses delivered in partnership with awarding partners. Arrangements for the production of programme specifications differ between the College's awarding partners. Where the College is working with awarding bodies the partners themselves will construct the programme specifications. In relation to provision delivered under arrangements with its awarding organisation, the College produces programme specifications and uses guidance from QAA in the process. These programme specifications are constructed on a College template and are subject to approval by the Higher Education Learning Standards Manager. Responsibility for approval will transfer to the Academic Board from September 2015. Programme specifications are made available to students through the College's virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.12 The review team found that the involvement of the College's awarding bodies, templates for provision delivered with the awarding organisation, and a clear process for approval, together with arrangements for making definitive documentation available to students, are sufficient to enable this Expectation to be met.

1.13 The review team tested this Expectation by viewing programme specifications, templates and the minutes of relevant College committees. The team also met staff and students, and viewed the College's VLE.

1.14 Programme specifications used and produced by the College are detailed and comprehensive. They include programme aims, details about the College's learning, teaching and assessment strategies, and a detailed programme structure. In addition, they incorporate an assessment map, grade descriptors and admission criteria. Programme specifications produced by the College also contain unit-level information including assessment weighting. The template produced by the College to support the construction of programme specifications for Pearson awards helps to ensure consistency in the information provided to students. Students themselves reported that information provided to them was clear, accurate and helped to equip them for study.

1.15 The review team concludes that due to the comprehensive coverage and content of programme specifications; the templates produced by the College, which help to ensure consistency; and the satisfaction of students with the information provided, the Expectation is met and the level of associated 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**

1.16 The College delivers a number of franchised foundation degree programmes where responsibility for programme development and approval, and for programme modifications, remains with the validating universities. The College has also developed new programmes including foundation degrees for Music Practitioners and Drama Practitioners, validated by Bishop Grosseteste University, and five new Higher National Diploma programmes validated by Pearson.

1.17 When the College wishes to deliver a new programme, the Curriculum Learning Standards Manager completes a programme approval form, which outlines reasons for delivery of the programme, market analysis, planned delivery and resource implications. Until September 2015 these were submitted to the Higher Education Learning Support Manager for approval prior to delivery to the awarding body for validation. The College has reviewed its processes, and internal programme approval is now the responsibility of the Academic Board.

1.18 The review team tested the approach taken to meeting Expectation A3.1 by reading programme approval forms and validation reports, and by talking to senior staff and programme leaders.

1.19 Continuing professional development training provided for staff involved in programme development enables them to have knowledge of key external reference points, including Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ. The process is supported by university link tutors, and validation reports confirm appropriate consultation with students and relevant industrial contacts. Validation or approval panels operated by the awarding bodies include external subject specialist expertise.

1.20 The review team notes the steps taken to establish stronger strategic oversight of processes for the internal development and approval of programmes, including new responsibilities for the Academic Board in terms of internal approval prior to seeking validation from an awarding body. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A3.2): 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**

1.21 Respective responsibilities allocated to the College and its partners for setting, marking and moderating assessments are set out in operating agreements with the awarding universities and Pearson. Assignments set by the College for Pearson programmes undergo an internal verification process prior to delivery to students. Similarly, assessment documents are sent to the University of Bedfordshire and Bishop Grosseteste University for approval prior to delivery, and link tutors provide support to ensure alignment with threshold academic standards. The College Assessment Policy sets out expectations in terms of the setting and moderation of assessments, and provision of feedback to students.

1.22 The review team considered a range of documentary evidence, and met College staff and a university link tutor. The partnership agreements between the College and its awarding bodies are supported by effective structures and processes. The Board of Examiners (for Pearson programmes) and Exam Boards operate in accordance with the relevant regulations and confirm that students have achieved the standards set for the award of credit and qualifications; this allows the Expectation to be met.

1.23 Programme specifications describe the assessment by which students will demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes at programme and module levels. This information is reproduced in handbooks that are made available to students on the VLE. Staff met by the review team explained the process for making reasonable adjustments for students with additional learning needs or extenuating circumstances, and confirmed that assessments subject to adjustment must still enable learning outcomes to be appropriately tested.

1.24 External examiners provide annual reports to the College and the awarding partners, which confirm that UK threshold academic standards are being met. Standards set at validation are being maintained and are comparable with those of similar programmes of other providers. Reports are considered and responded to within the College's annual monitoring process and now feed into quality improvement and enhancement plans.

1.25 The College has systems to ensure that its processes are aligned with the academic regulations of its awarding bodies and the review team found that these are working effectively. 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**

1.26 The College's Higher Education Manual sets out the process and requirements for annual review of programmes. Annual monitoring reports (AMRs) are completed by respective programme leaders, using intelligence including data on student progression and attainment, student feedback and the latest external examiners' report. From September 2015, AMRs are submitted to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) for monitoring and approval before submission, where required, to the awarding body. Programme committee meetings involving programme leaders, teaching staff and other stakeholders, including the relevant link tutor and student representatives, take place termly.

1.27 This approach to programme review enables Expectation A3.3 to be met. The review team tested the approach by reading documentary evidence, including AMRs, and by talking to a range of staff, including programme leaders and a university link tutor.

1.28 Programme committees consider external examiner reports in their first meeting of the academic year, and feed issues arising into annual monitoring, and quality improvement and enhancement plans. External examiner reports confirm that UK threshold standards are achieved on all higher education programmes delivered by the College; however, explicit reference to these reports is not always evident in AMRs. Employer attendance at programme committees is intended to provide greater externality, particularly on foundation degree programmes; however, such representation has so far been limited to one programme meeting.

1.29 Prior to 2015, completed AMRs were submitted for approval to the Higher Education Learning Support Manager before submission to awarding bodies. However, not all partners require submission of AMRs, and the College recognises the need for stronger internal oversight of annual monitoring processes. From September 2015, the new AQSC, reporting to the Academic Board, receives monitoring reports, external examiner reports and programme committee minutes; the review team **affirms** the implementation of a more strategic oversight to annual monitoring.

1.30 Overall, the review team found that the approaches to programme review are fit for purpose and will be strengthened by the new oversight provided by the AQSC. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk level 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**

1.31 As part of programme development, there is a requirement to involve external expertise to provide academic and industrial insight to programmes. External experts are also appointed by awarding partners to validation panels for all new programme approvals. This will include independent academics as well as industry experts related to the subject discipline; as such, externality is secured by engaging with the awarding partners' processes at the point of validation.

1.32 External examiners are appointed to the College's programmes by the awarding partners. They provide annual reports that comment on whether academic standards have successfully been achieved and maintained by the College. In order to do this they review assignments, verify grades and confirm threshold standards. External examiners visit the College or have work sent to them.

1.33 External examiner reports are sent to the Higher Education Learning Standards Manager to be distributed to programme leaders. Programme leaders liaise with link tutors to discuss the reports and annual monitoring. On one programme, the external examiner visited the College to take part in joint observations. External examiner reports are considered by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, which assures oversight of external examiner reports, and confirms that academic standards have been maintained appropriately.

1.34 The review team tested the processes by considering a range of documents, including validation and approval documents, and external examiner reports, as well as talking to staff.

1.35 The review team concludes 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/or other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

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

1.37 All Expectations in this area are met with low risk identified. The College has suitable processes in place to meet the Expectations in relation to the maintenance of academic standards. The review team affirms the implementation of a more strategic oversight to annual monitoring. More generally, the team acknowledged the introduction of a new higher education committee structure, which, among other measures, will improve further the College's work to maintain academic standards. At this stage it is too early to say how much of a positive impact these changes will have.

1.38 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 Where the College wishes to deliver a new programme, the relevant Curriculum Learning Standards Manager completes a programme approval form outlining the rationale, including market analysis, planned delivery and resource implications. Until this academic year, the proposal was internally approved by the Higher Education Learning Support Manager and validated by Pearson, for Higher National Certificates/Diplomas (HNC/Ds), or by a university awarding body.

2.2 Pearson Higher National programmes are 'off-the-shelf' programmes, with units chosen by the prospective programme team based on local needs, resources, and student and employer consultation. Where programmes are being developed in partnership with a validating university, an internal programme team writes the programme specification followed by the rationale and module specifications. Student and industry practitioner opinion is sought and a validation event, including external representation, is organised by the awarding body.

2.3 The approach taken to the design, development and approval of new programmes is sufficient to enable the Expectation to be met. The review team tested the approach by talking to senior staff and students, and by reviewing documentation including programme approval forms and validation event reports.

2.4 The review team found that the idea for new programme development often emerges at curriculum level. Individual staff identify potential programme areas or use market intelligence to identify where the College could meet local demand. Many students on Pearson-validated Higher National programmes previously studied as further education students at the College, and these programmes are devised as a progression from the modules they took on BTEC courses at the College. Consultation and ongoing engagement with local industry is evident and the involvement of students in the design of the FdA Music Practitioners was praised in its validation report.

2.5 From September 2015, the Academic Board has assumed responsibility for internal approval of programme proposals prior to validation, thus strengthening College oversight of the processes and strategic direction of new programme development. Senior staff confidently articulate strategic ambitions towards future programme growth and development, although this has yet to be translated into a formal strategy document.

2.6 Overall, the review team found that the College operates effective processes for the 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**

2.7 The College has an Admissions Policy, which is available on the website. The policy details responsibility for setting the College's standard entry requirements, which falls to the Higher Education Quality and Development Group. Learner Services staff are responsible for administering the College's admissions process; however, programme leaders are responsible for interviewing students, making offers and detailing reasons should an application be refused. Where an applicant is refused entry they are entitled to appeal, and this will be heard by the Admissions Review Panel. The College also has a procedure in place for handling applications, which involve accreditation of prior learning, including experiential learning.

2.8 The College produces a prospectus in online and hard-copy format and hosts dedicated higher education open days. Internal applicants also benefit from career days, meetings with higher education tutors and taster sessions. Parents of level 3 students are invited to an information evening to help prepare students for higher education study irrespective of the institution they intend to apply to. The College also invites guest speakers to present on topics including student finance and the UCAS application process.

2.9 All full-time applicants are required to attend an interview that is usually conducted by a member of the programme team but on occasion can be conducted by a manager. Templates are in place to structure the interview process and include prompts to inform the applicants about the distinctiveness of higher education and assessment on the programme. The College also collects feedback from interviewees about their experience.

2.10 Students are provided with a College-wide induction focused on student support, finance and resources. This is supplemented by a course induction, which is delivered by the relevant programme leader.

2.11 The review team found that the College's Admissions Policy, structured approach to interviews, and appeals process, together with a dedicated higher education induction, supplemented by a programme induction and detailed guidance for prospective students, are sufficient to enable this Expectation to be met.

2.12 The review team tested this Expectation by scrutinising the College's Admissions Policy, higher education application form, and forms and feedback pertaining to the interview process. The team also met students and staff, including admissions tutors. In addition, the team viewed the College prospectus and other information and guidance produced for applicants.

2.13 The review team was able to confirm that the College's Admissions Policy is comprehensive, that admissions criteria are accessible on the institution's website, and that students were largely positive about their experience in relation to admissions. Students spoke positively about the supportive nature of the admissions process and the fact that it supports induction by explaining the expectations of students studying for higher education awards.



2.14 Despite the fact that all students are required to attend interviews, the review team was informed by students that this process is not consistently and rigorously applied for students progressing internally from level 3 programmes. Staff gave students the impression that the interview stage, where it occurred, was communicated as a formality rather than an integral part of the application process, on the basis that staff had prior knowledge of internal applicants' competencies. College staff acknowledged that rigour could be strengthened for internal applicants and that enhanced training was being developed, with a member of staff also now dedicated to higher education admissions. The review team found no evidence to suggest that admissions decisions had been compromised by this practice, but nevertheless **recommends** that the College ensure consistent and transparent implementation of the Admissions Policy for all higher education students.

2.15 The review team concludes that, as a result of the College's explicit entry criteria, detailed information for prospective students, and high levels of student satisfaction with their admissions experience, the Expectation is met. The associated level of risk is moderate, however, due to the need to strengthen admissions practice for internal applicants, which amounts to shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which the College's otherwise clear and consistently applied Admissions Policy is implemented.

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

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

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching***

#### **Findings**

2.16 The College has a Teaching and Learning Strategy, which has been introduced recently and articulates a commitment to the College's strategic direction. The Strategy has core themes that include a focus on the learner experience, innovative teaching and learning, and a supportive environment. The College has identified performance indicators on which to base the impact of the Strategy, which include retention, progression, student achievement, student satisfaction, and student destinations.

2.17 The review team tested the Expectation by looking at the College's Teaching and Learning Strategy, considering minutes of meetings, student feedback data, reviewing the content of the VLE, and talking to staff and students.

2.18 The College has recently introduced a process for peer observation of teaching and learning, which is bespoke to its higher education provision. This has replaced a College-wide observation process, and also includes the involvement of trained student observers. In addition, the College has created a Higher Education Teaching and Learning Coach position, whose role is to support and develop higher education teaching staff.

2.19 The College uses collaborative briefs between programmes where possible to enhance the student learning experience. Staff also strive to create 'live briefs' in order to provide real-life experience through assessment activity.

2.20 The College gathers student feedback to judge the effectiveness of learning and teaching. An internal student survey notes that 93 per cent of students are satisfied with the teaching on their programmes, and 98 per cent feel that staff are enthusiastic about their teaching. Results from the National Student Survey (NSS) are positive and formally reported at the Academic Board level.

2.21 There is a recently established higher education Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee, which includes student membership, and has identified future development activities to enhance teaching and learning. These include more higher education-specific continuing professional development, greater partnerships with other colleges and industry, and joint staff/student research activities.

2.22 There is a commitment to staff continuing professional development related to higher education teaching, such as training on the use of Subject Benchmark Statements. The College also supports staff to become Fellows of the Higher Education Academy. Staff new to teaching higher education are supported through an approach referred to as the Staff Toolkit, which is designed to equip them with the necessary support, mentoring and advice to help them develop effectively as teachers. While initial feedback is positive, it is too early to say this is a success.

2.23 There is a VLE for all higher education programmes, which includes access to online resources, lecture notes, support for careers and job opportunities, links to key websites and external examiner reports. Students confirm that the VLE is very helpful,

and that for students who have jobs as well as study it is an effective method of maintaining links with their courses and keeping up to date.

2.24 Data from the NSS identifies that student satisfaction for teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support, are well above the mean for similar colleges. Staff demonstrate a clear understanding of what is expected of them in terms of teaching at higher education level.

2.25 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**

2.26 The College has a structured approach to enabling students to develop their academic and personal achievement. The College operates a flexible tutoring policy to enable its students, many of whom are mature, to receive the support required to realise their potential. Programme handbooks detail the entitlement to support, including pastoral support, and this is understood by students.

2.27 The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising key documents, including tutorial records, validation and approval documentation, considering the VLE content, and meeting with teaching and support staff, and students.

2.28 The College organises 'taster days' to help provide awareness of what is expected in terms of study at higher education level. This is confirmed at the start of the programme through induction, which is designed to reassure and inform new students, as well as support them in the transition to higher education study.

2.29 Students have one-to-one tutorial meetings with their programme leader. Where there are academic and support needs identified, they are referred to a bespoke higher education Academic Study Support Coach. This support is recognised and appreciated by students across all programmes and teaching venues. In particular, the ready accessibility to the Academic Study Support Coach, and the range of study skills offered by this role, were praised by students. The support helps students to develop an understanding of what is expected of them in terms of commitment to study, how to approach and organise their studies, and what help can be accessed in terms of study support. The review team considers the effective academic and pastoral support arrangements, which enable student progress and achievement, to be **good practice**.

2.30 The College further demonstrates this through the support for the professional development of students by encouraging the undertaking of 'live' projects relating to their chosen career. Students receive employability and careers guidance as part of their programmes, as well as benefiting from industry-related input from guest speakers. In addition to this, alumni are invited back to the College to talk to student groups about the transition from study to employment. Presentations have also been delivered by the National Careers Service on CV development, self-promotion and interview techniques.

2.31 Resources to support programmes are identified at the programme development stage. A programme proposal form is completed that provides detail on human and physical resources needed to run the programme effectively. The College has a dedicated higher education budget and there is dialogue between the Learning Resources Centre and the curriculum staff to ensure that resources are updated on a regular basis in order to remain current and sufficient. Students feel that their programmes are well resourced.

2.32 The College maintains a VLE that allows access to online resources for all programmes. This provides access to relevant websites; lecture notes; external examiner reports; career information; and, in some cases, job opportunities. The VLE is well regarded by students, who consider it an essential resource in supporting and enabling them to complete their courses.

2.33 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**

2.34 The mechanisms for student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement processes are detailed in the College's Enhancement Procedure. These mechanisms include a formal system of student representation, a termly Higher Education Student Forum and membership of programme committees. It also incorporates opportunities for students to respond to College surveys and the NSS. In addition, the College appoints a Lead Course Representative and requires programme staff to collate feedback from students and include it in their quality improvement and enhancement plans (QIEPs).

2.35 The Higher Education Student Forum is used to consult students over College-wide developments, including new policies and procedures, such as the Higher Education Observation of Teaching and Learning Strategy, and the construction of dedicated higher education space on campus.

2.36 The College has operated a varied approach to module feedback in line with the requirements of its awarding partners. While formal feedback has been collected for some provision, other programmes have assumed a more informal approach, including the use of suggestion boxes. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) has agreed that from September 2015 all programmes will operate an online modular feedback system to enable more effective institutional oversight.

2.37 Students are informed about the different ways they can provide their feedback through information contained on the VLE and in their student handbooks. Similarly, the outcomes of student engagement and representation are posted on the VLE, including QIEPs and annual monitoring reports (AMRs), for students to access.

2.38 The review team found that the wide range of mechanisms for engaging students, including a formal system of student representation, together with an integrated approach to ensuring actions are captured within QIEPs, which are subsequently overseen by the Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee, enable Expectation B5 to be met.

2.39 The review team tested this Expectation by meeting students, staff and student representatives. The team also viewed training materials for student representatives, survey results and QIEPs. In addition, the team scrutinised the minutes of programme committees, the Higher Education Student Forum and AQSC, together with AMRs.

2.40 The AQSC plays an integral role in the oversight of student engagement and its outcomes. Informal student feedback, together with issues identified through the Higher Education Student Forum, NSS and programme committees, all inform QIEPs, which are overseen by the AQSC. Even more prominent is the use of student feedback in the construction of AMRs.

2.41 Students reported that they feel able to contribute to College committees and that their feedback is listened to and acted upon. The timing of committees for 2015-16 has been adjusted to enable maximum participation among student representatives. The College has determined that the appointment of a Lead Student Representative, initially for the purposes of external review, will now become standard practice. The review team found that the Lead Student Representative, together with the College's other student representatives, had a

well-developed understanding of their role and remit partly emanating from effective training sessions run by the College.

2.42 As a result of the College's clearly documented systems for student engagement; the effective training arrangements for representatives; the well-established practice of integrating feedback within College action plans; and the active role played by the Lead Student Representative, 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**

2.43 The College adopts the regulations, policies and practices of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation in assessing students, including allocation of responsibilities for setting, marking and moderating assessments. External examiners confirm that the processes for maintaining and auditing assessment records are robust. A code of practice sets out the regulations and processes governing applications for recognition of prior learning, which is aligned with the requirements of the College's awarding partners. An internal Assessment Policy provides teaching staff with guidance in terms of setting and moderation of assessments, and provision of feedback to students. All work is either moderated or internally verified, and standardisation meetings take place for all programmes. Exam Boards or Board of Examiners (for Pearson programmes) operate for all programmes.

2.44 These policies and practices enable Expectation B6 to be met. The review team tested this by scrutinising documentary evidence, including programme committee minutes, NSS data and external examiner reports, and by talking to staff and students.

2.45 NSS data indicates good overall student satisfaction with assessment and feedback provided by the College. Students are enthusiastic about the varied nature of assessments set and by guiding and constructive feedback. Staff indicate that small class sizes enable detailed personalised feedback; in general, external examiners praise the quality of feedback. One external examiner in particular praised assessments for being varied, challenging and appropriate to each level, but suggested that some markers could add more annotations and comments to further help students. Exam Board minutes confirm that students have achieved the standards set for the award of credit and qualifications.

2.46 The College has processes for dealing with plagiarism and other academic misconduct, which are articulated in a higher education student disciplinary and academic misconduct policy. Tutorials help students develop good academic practice in written work, and students are appreciative of the additional support provided by the Academic Study Support Coach.

2.47 A process exists for supporting students with additional learning needs, and staff confirmed that any reasonable adjustments recommended for assignments must still enable learning outcomes to be appropriately tested. Internal processes for considering extenuating circumstances are aligned to the requirements of awarding partners. Students indicate some confusion over responsibilities for granting adjustments to assignment deadlines but staff confirm programme leaders are responsible. More substantive circumstances are given consideration at the internal Board of Examiners (for Pearson programmes) or by Exam Boards for university-franchised or validated programmes.

2.48 The review team is satisfied that the College is operating valid and reliable processes for assessment, which enable students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the expected learning outcomes. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is therefore 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**

2.49 The awarding partners take responsibility for the selection and appointment of external examiners. External examiners provide annual reports to the College. The external examiner reports follow formats specified by awarding partners and are used in reviewing and enhancing programmes.

2.50 In the first instance, all external examiner reports are received centrally by the Higher Education Learning Standards Manager. These are then distributed to the programme teams, who discuss them at their team meetings. Programme team meetings include student representation. External examiner report findings contribute to annual monitoring reports (AMRs) and programme quality improvement and enhancement plans (QIEPs). These are then scrutinised by the Higher Education Learning Standards Manager, who uses them to inform the overall College QIEP. Reports are also considered by the Academic Board, and Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC).

2.51 Students are aware of external examiner reports; the College shares the reports with students by posting them on the VLE at the same time as annual monitoring. Student representatives are made aware that they are available and encouraged to communicate their accessibility to other students.

2.52 The review team tested the application of the approach by scrutinising a range of documentation, including external examiners' reports, AMRs, QIEPs, and minutes of the Academic Board and AQSC. The team also held meetings with staff and students, and looked at the content of the VLE.

2.53 The review team concludes 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**

2.54 All programmes produce annual monitoring reports (AMRs), and quality improvement and enhancement plans (QIEPs) to address areas for improvement and to share good practice. Requirements for annual monitoring are set out in the Higher Education Manual; the Higher Education Calendar includes a timeline for completion of AMRs and QIEPs; consideration by programme committee meetings; and submission, where required, to awarding bodies.

2.55 Intelligence, including data on student progression and attainment, student feedback and the latest external examiner report inform annual monitoring, and draft reports are discussed in the first programme committee meeting of the academic year to which employer representatives are invited. From September 2015, AMRs are submitted to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) for monitoring and approval before submission to the awarding body.

2.56 This approach to programme review enables Expectation B8 to be met. The review team tested the approach by reading documentary evidence, including AMRs and QIEPs, and by talking to a range of staff and students, including programme leaders, student representatives and a university link tutor.

2.57 The review team found that consideration of AMRs and QIEPs by the AQSC provides a mechanism whereby enhancement initiatives may be identified and reported in an overarching College QIEP. This more strategic approach to annual monitoring is affirmed under Expectation A3.3. However, some foundation degree programme AMRs lack external or employer comment. Inclusion of employer representatives at a programme committee meeting is a new initiative and has not fed through fully into annual monitoring. The review team heard that one AMR had been returned to the Programme Leader for further work and this confirms the strengthened oversight provided by consideration at AQSC.

2.58 Programme committee meetings are scheduled to occur four times a year and focus on issues relating to the quality of the learning experience, thereby providing ongoing monitoring of programme delivery. External examiner reports are discussed with student representatives at the first programme committee meeting and now form an integral part of annual review. In one case, an external examiner noted that merit and distinction descriptors should be available at the time work is set; this was highlighted through the AMR process and shared as standard practice across programmes.

2.59 Overall, the review team found that the College has in place regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review 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 (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**

2.60 The College has a documented Procedure for Dealing with Complaints by Higher Education Students. The procedure defines a complaint in the context of the College and clarifies the scope of the policy, together with principles the College will look to uphold in applying its procedure. It also defines students' right to representation at meetings and hearings; their entitlement to a review of any decision; and, ultimately, their right to take their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. Students are informed about the procedure at induction and through their programme handbooks. In addition, the relevant information is maintained on the VLE.

2.61 A report is maintained that summarises all College complaints for monitoring purposes, including higher education complaints. These are considered by the College's Senior Leadership Team. The Higher Education Learning Standards Manager is responsible for checking annual monitoring plans, and quality improvement and enhancement plans (QIEPs) in order to ensure that any actions taken to address issues identified through complaints are addressed.

2.62 In relation to academic appeals, the College has a documented process, which is outlined in its Procedure for Academic Appeals (Higher Education). Students wishing to review a Board of Examiners' decision must write to the Higher Education Learning Standards Manager, who will then ask the relevant Director of Learning to investigate. The Student Administration Manager is responsible for informing appellants of the agreed outcome. A further internal stage exists for students who remain unsatisfied, where they can write to the Vice-Principal. Following this stage, students are issued with a completion of proceedings letter and may take the matter to the awarding partner or Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.63 The review team found that the College's written policies for complaints and appeals, monitoring arrangements, and information provided to students in handbooks and through the VLE, were sufficient to allow Expectation B9 to be met.

2.64 The review team tested this Expectation by scrutinising the College's Procedure for Dealing with Complaints by Higher Education Students, together with its Procedure for Academic Appeals (Higher Education). The team also viewed QIEPs, student handbooks and information housed on the VLE. In addition, the team met students and staff.

2.65 The review team found that the College's policies for managing and monitoring complaints and appeals are detailed and comprehensive. Students reported that information is readily accessible in handbooks and online, and that they felt able to approach programme staff for advice, guidance and to resolve issues locally. The team was also able to confirm that complaints relating to higher education are clearly identifiable in the monitoring report compiled for the Senior Leadership Team. QIEPs also demonstrated to the team that the College is seeking to improve the information it provides to students surrounding complaints and appeals.

2.66 As a result of the College's robust policy framework; staff familiarity with processes; documented monitoring of complaints; and student satisfaction with information in this area, 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**

2.67 The College does not have degree awarding powers, and works with other organisations to deliver programmes. Also, for most programmes, students undertake work-based learning that involves engaging with a range of employers. There are a number of differing approaches within the College to work-based learning and work placements. There is a recently introduced Work-Based Learning Policy and Staff Guide handbook, and the College recognises that a more structured approach to work placements and work experience is required.

2.68 The review team tested the Expectation by looking at partnership agreements, due diligence documentation, work experience and work-based learning documentation, and by talking to staff and students. In addition to this, the team also met a group of employers who had provided work experience and placements to students.

2.69 The College has appointed a new Work Placement Officer and has recently developed a work placement handbook, which contains guidance and information to formalise work placement arrangements, and placement provider awareness. This handbook and associated documentation was agreed at the September 2015 meeting of the Academic Board, and is now in place. At the time of review, employers who offered work placements were unaware of the new documentation. The review team **affirms** the steps taken to formalise the process for work placement arrangements, including the introduction of a handbook.

2.70 The College delivers its HND Performing Arts (Dance) programme in partnership with two dance schools. The College has an arrangement for the programme to be delivered by a provider based in Leicester, and a more recent partnership developed locally in Stamford. Prior to entering into these partnerships, the College requires extensive due diligence to take place. This includes checking on a range of aspects, including staff expertise, safeguarding, resources, registration and policy checks. Once agreed, contracts are renewed on an annual basis to ensure that these standards are maintained.

2.71 Partners of the College who deliver HND programmes are required to operate the same quality assurance processes and procedures as the College itself. In addition, staff from partners are invited to College continuing professional development activities and students have access to all the College's resources. Students from partner dance schools confirmed that they receive effective study support from the Academic Study Support Coach at their own location. External examiner reports are positive about this partnership delivery.

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

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

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees***

**Findings**

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

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

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

2.75 All Expectations in this area are met. The College has suitable processes in place to meet the Expectations in relation to the quality of student learning opportunities. Low risk was identified for all Expectations, with the exception of recruitment, selection and admissions. This reflected some of the issues identified in this area by the review team, which recommends that the College works to ensure there is a consistent and transparent implementation of the Admissions Policy for higher education students.

2.76 The review team affirms the steps being taken to formalise the process for work placement arrangements, including the introduction of a handbook. This followed identification from the College that a more formalised process was required. More generally, the team acknowledged a number of recent developments that aim to improve further the College's student learning opportunities. At this stage it is too early to say how much of a positive impact these changes will have. The team did note the College's effective academic and pastoral support arrangements, which enable student progress, highlighting this as an area of good practice.

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

### **3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities**

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

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

##### **Findings**

3.1 Information is provided to students and interested parties in a range of formats. The VLE and programme handbooks are seen as the primary source of information for students, whereas public information is primarily made available through the College website, which includes links to the key information set. As discussed under Expectation B2, prospective students are able to access information about the programmes through the admissions team, online or in a hard-copy prospectus, from the programme leader, or at an open day.

3.2 A Public Information Procedure has recently been put in place that codifies responsibility for the management and monitoring of public information, including handbooks. This is supplemented by a Public Information Calendar 2015-16, which stipulates responsibility for the construction and approval of information, together with associated deadlines. The Higher Education Learning Standards Manager is responsible for auditing programme handbooks on an annual basis, as well as auditing the VLE to ensure consistency between it and any hard-copy material produced. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee and programme committees play a significant role in the management of information, which remains a standing item on the agenda of those committees.

3.3 Staff are able to access a range of information relating to the management of academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities. This includes regulations and handbooks produced by the awarding partners, together with policies and procedures created by the College itself. The Head of Quality has recently conducted a mapping exercise of policies and procedures to ensure that they align with the Quality Code.

3.4 The review team found that the significant role played by the Higher Education Learning Standards Manager; explicit committee oversight; and comprehensive policies and procedures issued by the awarding partners were robust in theory. The team also determined that the College's Public Information Procedure contained little documented emphasis on monitoring arrangements and that the Higher Education Public Information Schedule only identified committee, rather than staff, responsibility for monitoring, but that the evidence provided was still sufficient to allow the Expectation to be met.

3.5 The review team tested this Expectation by examining the College's website, VLE and prospectus. The team also viewed programme handbooks and specifications, the College's Public Information Procedure and Public Information Calendar 2015-16. In addition, the team examined committee minutes and met students and staff.

3.6 Audits for the VLE and programme handbooks have been conducted for 2015-16. The College operates a graded audit system to identify areas in need of action or improvement. Students reported to the review team that the VLE had become clearer and easier to use, and similarly that handbooks were now more tailored to individual programmes. This demonstrated to the team that despite the lack of explicit monitoring



information in the College's Public Information Procedure, responsibility for this is clear, documented and having a positive impact.

3.7 In addition to programme handbooks, a new Higher Education Programme Handbook, covering all higher education provision, has been produced in an attempt to reduce repetition and inconsistency between different handbooks. The Higher Education Programme Handbook is comprehensive and valued by students. Despite this, the review team found that inconsistencies still exist between handbooks at programme level, for instance in relation to the information provided on complaints, appeals and student support, as well as the amount of unit information provided. The College's Higher Education Manual also indicates that programme and module handbooks will be maintained; at present, however, modular handbooks are not being created. The Higher Education Manual also makes no reference to the College's new Higher Education Programme Handbook. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College consistently provides information in the higher education and programme handbooks that aligns with the College's Higher Education Manual.

3.8 The College website contains accurate and accessible information about higher education programmes, including entry requirements, unit descriptions and assessment information. The VLE is easy to navigate and a dedicated higher education section houses important information for students.

3.9 The review team found that despite the need to strengthen the management of handbooks, prospective and current students are provided with the information they require. Although not documented in its Public Information Procedure, the College possesses arrangements for the monitoring of information that are effective. Improvements have also been made to the VLE. 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 quality of the information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

3.11 The Expectation in this area has been met with low risk. The quality of information is demonstrated to be fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. While the review team recommends that the College ensure it consistently provides information in the higher education and programme handbooks that aligns with the College's Higher Education Manual, it is clear that prospective and current students are provided with the information they require.

3.12 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 Enhancement of opportunities is a core theme of the College's higher education strategic plan, which underpins all higher education policies and processes, implementation of which is supported and overseen by a new higher education committee structure.

The College uses programme reviews, student surveys and external examiner reports to continually improve the quality of its provision. Student representatives attend programme committee meetings, and university link tutors share good practice and discuss areas for improvement. Deliberate processes have been put in place to formalise the tracking of actions necessary to enhance provision and share good practice. These are set out in the College Enhancement Procedure and associated quality improvement and enhancement plans (QIEPs), which are produced at both programme and College level.

4.2 These approaches to enhancement enable the Expectation to be met. The review team examined key documents, including annual monitoring reports (AMRs) and QIEPs, and held meetings with students and staff at all levels within the College.

4.3 Consideration of AMRs and QIEPs at the Academic Quality and Standards Committee provides a mechanism whereby enhancement initiatives may be identified and reported in an overarching College QIEP. However, QIEPs have only recently been introduced and it is too early to confirm their effectiveness in establishing College-wide initiatives to enhance students' learning opportunities.

4.4 Enhancement activity prior to the establishment of QIEPs is evident, and the review team found clear steps taken to enhance higher education provision and delivery at the College. For example, the College has made significant investment in resources for teaching and learning, including the establishment of dedicated higher education areas. The review team was impressed by the commitment to developing a higher education learning environment, which students feel is distinct from further education provision at the College. Staff development has been supported through a new higher education joint observation process involving students, and teaching staff may receive funding to apply to gain recognition as Fellows of the Higher Education Academy. Seven experienced lecturers and the Higher Education Learning Support Manager are working towards Fellowship in 2015-16. Students feel well supported and benefit from access to the Academic Study Support Coach; they feel their voice is heard and is responded to positively where possible.

4.5 The College takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities, and has recognised the need to formalise structures and processes to identify and support College-wide enhancement initiatives. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

4.7 The Expectation in this area is met with low risk. The College has a deliberate, strategic approach to enhancement, with structures and processes in place that encourage and identify learning opportunities that enhance the experience of higher education students. There are examples of enhancement activities that indicate that the strategic approach the College has taken is effective in meeting the Expectation.

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

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The College considers its central reason for delivering higher education to be the offering of vocationally relevant programmes that improve students' employability prospects. Employability itself is a core theme in the College's higher education strategy and all programmes are required to have a vocational and professional emphasis.

5.2 The College provided the review team with a wide range of examples where employability is integrated into the curriculum. This includes the use of employers and alumni as guest speakers and also as providers of live briefs; internships; and work-related projects. Guest lectures have included sessions on the transition from study to employment. The College also uses staff members from the National Careers Service to deliver talks to students about CV preparation, self-promotion using social media, and interview techniques. Students consider the use of industry employers in particular to be a strength of their programmes, although some students reported that they would like a greater amount of this in the curriculum.

5.3 The College has a considered and effective approach to collaborative projects on its higher education programmes. This collaboration is in evidence both with industry and between higher education programmes themselves. For instance, innovations on the FdA Music Practitioners programme have seen the College partner with LOV Festival, where students then work as sound engineers. In addition, the College has its own record label and radio station, which allow students to gain practical experience. This also enables collaboration between programmes, with students on the FdA Graphic Design programme providing design support and promotional materials. Collaboration also takes place on programmes that could be deemed less cognate. For example, the HND Animal Management students work with FdA Graphic Design and Photography students on shared briefs.

5.4 The College operates an expansive programme of trips designed to support employability and raise aspiration. These have ranged from gallery visits for students on the FdA Graphic Design programme, to agency visits for FdA Photography students, and trips to nature reserves, zoos and animal centres for HND Animal Management students.

5.5 Students also benefit from specialist facilities such as those in place for the HND Animal Management programme, which allow students to study in environments that simulate those they will experience in their chosen sector upon graduation. This programme also requires students to complete 450 hours of work experience in a professional setting. The review team heard from students that they would like to be taught the necessary skills and techniques to be able to support a broader spectrum of animals post-graduation. At the time of the review, the team heard a specific request from students relating to the purchase of a crocodile. The College was in the process of considering the feasibility of this acquisition.

5.6 The College is working to secure representation from employers on all committees that deal with higher education. This is proving difficult to realise but the College hopes to have secured participation by January 2016, and the review team found evidence of a strong commitment to achieving this from senior staff and staff at programme level.

## 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 30-33 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

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

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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