Higher Education Review of Bath College

October 2015

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Bath College. The review took place from 6 to 8 October 2015 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Jonathan Doney
- Professor Jenny Anderson
- Mr Eric Macintyre
- Miss Lucy Bannister (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

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

The themes for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code.
[2] Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.
[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 Bath College

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

- 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 **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The employer engagement in Music Production courses, which gives students access to people working successfully in the industry and to cutting edge facilities, enabling them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

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

By March 2016:

- clarify the appeals process within the Admissions Policy (Expectation B2)
- adopt a consistent approach to making external examiner reports available to all students (Expectation B7)
- ensure that all policies relevant to prospective and current students are available and easily accessible on the website (Expectation C).

By April 2016:

- ensure that all student representatives are trained, supported and developed to perform their role effectively (Expectation B5)
- clarify the role of, and reporting structures for, the various student consultative bodies, and communicate this to students (Expectation B5).

By August 2016:

- consistently apply and monitor the minimum content guidelines for programme handbooks and course information across all learning platforms (Expectation C).

By July 2016:

- strengthen higher education-specific staff induction and development programmes (Expectation B3).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The introduction of audits for the use and effectiveness of the online learning portals (Expectation B4).
- The steps being taken to implement strategic oversight of enhancement (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

Bath College sees employability as being of strategic importance. Employer links are strong in most courses, providing opportunities for students to gain practical skills and increase their employment prospects. Local employers are engaged with, and supportive of, the College. The College has clear strategies and effective practices for developing and promoting employability skills and activities for its students.

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

About Bath College

Bath College (the College) is a general further education college located in Bath city centre. Following a merger, it now also has a campus in Westfield called Somer Valley Campus. Post-merger, Bath College has recently approved a new Strategic Intentions document called Open for Business, which defines its core purpose and mission as: talent development, career development and self-development for its students. Its strategic objectives are: enterprise, employability, economic impact and expertise.

The College has 280 higher education students on a range of programmes, which are vocational in nature and heavily focused on employability. The majority of programmes offered are Higher National Certificates/Diplomas (HNCs/HNDs) and foundation degrees, with one top-up in Applied Computing. Programmes are offered in the following areas: Fashion and Textiles, Music Production, Music, Applied Computing, Construction, Mechanical Engineering, Business, Sport and Exercise Science.

The major change since the March 2011 QAA review report has been the merger between City of Bath College and Norton Radstock College in April 2015 to form Bath College. This has led to the new college defining its strategic vision and purpose for the coming years. This work includes strategic objectives to increase the choice of higher education programmes and improve access for students wishing to study locally, and developing a curriculum that responds to local business needs.

Key challenges identified by the College include creating a balance between serving the needs of higher education students and further education students; providing sufficient opportunities for higher education students to develop their enterprise and employability skills; developing higher education programmes in new curriculum areas; increasing appropriate articulation routes for students to progress to top-up degrees or further study; and continuing to widen participation.

The College works with two local universities, Bath Spa University and the University of Bath. The arrangement with Bath Spa University relates mainly to the franchising relationship that is in place for two foundation degree programmes. The arrangement with

the University of Bath takes place on a number of levels, including licensing arrangements for the Applied Computing programme, through the partnership offering the International Foundation year and through widening participation initiatives. The College also runs Pearson programmes.

The College has made good progress since its last review, with all advisable and desirable recommendations having been met. These include developing a Higher Education Strategy Group; successfully operating examination boards for Higher National programmes, establishing clear policies and procedures for Higher National programmes; and reviewing the information made available to higher education students.

Explanation of the findings about Bath College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

Explanation of the findings about Bath College

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 operates under the aegis of Pearson for Higher National awards, and Bath Spa University and the University of Bath for foundation degrees and level 6 provision. With the validating bodies the provision is either franchised or licensed and no validated provision is offered by the College. Agreements are in place between the College and its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The College has made some minor amendments to awards validated by the two universities, and these are done by a clear process and liaison with the link staff at the universities.

1.2 Applications to offer Higher National awards are submitted to Pearson in a standard format following internal approval processes in the College.

1.3 The processes in place ensure that awards are correctly positioned at the relevant level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and aligned with Subject Benchmark Statements, which therefore allows the Expectation to be met.

1.4 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements and resources through the examination of the documentation presented, and in meetings and discussions with College staff and staff from the awarding bodies.

1.5   The process is clear and robust, from initial ideas and discussion, right through to final approval for an award to be offered. Link staff from the awarding bodies are involved at all stages of the process, and this effective communication is valued by staff from both the College and the awarding bodies. In summary, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.1): 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   For the delivery of its franchised and licensed provision the College is required to adhere to the academic framework and regulations of the University of Bath and Bath Spa University. For Pearson Higher National programmes, the College is required to adhere to the Pearson frameworks and regulations. The College has its own quality processes for the management and annual review of its provision, which includes annual monitoring processes that are applicable to all higher education programmes delivered. Academic regulations are made available to staff and students through course handbooks and the virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.7   The design of the academic regulations process allows the Expectation to be met.

1.8   The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements and resources through the examination of the documentation presented, a survey of the College VLE, and discussions with staff and students. The meetings involved staff from the awarding bodies.

1.9   Examination boards are convened for both the validated and licensed provision under the remit of the validating higher education institutions. The College operates a cycle of mid and end-of-year boards for its Pearson programmes, which allows actions to be taken in a timely manner. Students confirmed that they had been briefed on the academic regulations for all their awards and were clear on how these operated.

1.10   External examiners appointed by the awarding bodies and awarding organisation comment on all aspects under this Expectation, and any suggestions made are fully addressed and actioned, as required, through the Strand Team (the College's term for subject area teams) and whole College annual review and monitoring processes.

1.11   In summary, 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

1.12   The awarding bodies and organisation with established academic frameworks and regulations have responsibility for quality, standards, and enhancement policies and procedures. The responsibility for maintaining a definitive record of programme approval, motoring and review rests with the awarding bodies, Pearson and the College. The awarding bodies take the lead in setting standards and the College takes the lead in maintaining standards.

1.13   The Vice-Principal Quality and Students is responsible for monitoring the outcomes of the quality assurance process as outlined in the Higher Education Quality Framework. The College uses devolved or partially devolved responsibilities as identified in detailed responsibilities checklists.

1.14   Course tutors and their courses are subject to scrutiny through the College's Quality Assurance Cycle. Heads of Department are responsible for quality assurance in their subject area and ensure that staff understand the quality standards linked to their role.

1.15   The awarding bodies and organisation keep records of all programme qualifications that they approve, monitor and review. The Principal's Office, managed by the Principal's Executive Personal Assistant, has responsibility for maintaining records of all higher education programmes, and for liaison with each awarding body and organisation; because of these arrangements by the College, the Expectation is met.

1.16   The review team tested the Expectation by considering documentation produced by the College, including checklists produced by the awarding partners, validation documents, the College's Quality Assurance Cycle, the Higher Education Quality Framework, and guidance offered to staff. They also met awarding body representatives, and senior and academic College staff.

1.17   The Higher Education Manager, working under the direction of the Vice-Principal Curriculum, ensures that day-to-day course management is carried out effectively, in line with academic partners and organisations.

1.18   Appropriate allocation of the FHEQ is undertaken at validation and in subsequent course reviews. Subject Benchmark Statements and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) are considered at the same time.

1.19   The College makes programme specifications available to applicants through its website, and students confirmed that they were available to them through the portal and that they were useful. Therefore, the review team found that the College meets the Expectation through provision of programme specifications available to staff and students, as required by its awarding bodies and organisation. The management of programme specifications for its awards is appropriate. 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 (A3.1): 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

1.20   The College's degree-awarding bodies and organisation have procedures in place for the formal approval of taught programmes and are responsible for confirming that programmes meet the qualification descriptors and threshold standards in the Qualifications and Credit Framework, the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.21   In developing new provision, the detailed responsibilities of the University of Bath, Bath Spa University and Pearson are outlined in a series of checklists. The well-defined curriculum planning process, aligned with the embryonic Skills, Economy and Employment Plan, starts with identifying an appropriate awarding body or organisation for a new programme. Once this is done the new programme approval form is completed and assessed by the Senior Curriculum Group and Vice-Principal Curriculum, using specific criteria, and then passed to the Strategic Leadership Group for final approval. Courses accredited through awarding bodies subsequently move through their processes. Higher National courses proceed through Pearson/Edexcel processes.

1.22   New programmes are entered on the College's Curriculum Plan to generate a prospectus entry, timetable and engagement with the College's Quality Assurance Cycle.

1.23   There are awarding body, organisation and College-led processes in place that enable this Expectation to be met.

1.24   Documentary evidence, including relevant committee minutes and validation documents and programme specifications from degree-awarding bodies, Pearson and the College was examined to test the Expectation. The review team also met awarding body representatives, senior managers, senior teaching and support staff.

1.25   The review team found evidence of documentation and committee minutes for the approval of taught programmes showing that academic standards are set at appropriate levels.

1.26   Programme approval processes for partner organisations are clearly outlined and implemented: in the case of Bath Spa University in the Memorandum of Cooperation; and for the University of Bath in the Institutional Agreement and individual programme agreements. The approval process for Pearson courses is outlined in their handbooks. The Higher Education Manager, working under the direction of the Vice-Principal Curriculum, ensures that processes are followed. There are close relationships with the awarding bodies.

1.27   Appropriate allocation of the FHEQ is undertaken at validation and in subsequent course reviews. Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRBs are considered at the same time.

1.28   The Pearson programmes are subject to regular scrutiny via external verifier reporting, and programme delivery teams scrutinise the relevance of their programmes

annually. Consideration of Sector Skills Councils, Subject Benchmark Statements and national occupational standards takes place at validation.

1.29   Students are provided with appropriate assessment briefs that are linked to assessment objectives and intended learning outcomes. External examiner reports confirm that the College adheres to Pearson guidelines for maintaining standards.

1.30   Thorough internal and external scrutiny and quality assurance processes for the University of Bath, Bath Spa University and Pearson are followed to ensure that appropriate standards are set and maintained. Therefore, 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

1.31   The College delivers programmes developed and written by the awarding bodies and organisation, who maintain responsibility for securing academic standards. Consideration of Subject Benchmark Statements is also undertaken by the awarding bodies and organisation when defining academic standards and during programme approval, monitoring and review. External examiners appointed by the awarding bodies report on the appropriateness of the proposals of new courses in relation to all issues of quality and standards. Programme specifications and module descriptors detail learning outcomes and module credits. The awarding bodies and organisation keep definitive records of each programme specification. The College's Assessment and Verification Policy sets out clear expectations for assessment practices and processes.

1.32   The College adheres to well-established academic frameworks and regulations provided by both the University of Bath and Bath Spa University. Periodic programme reviews by these awarding bodies require programme teams and external reviewers to consider current Subject Benchmark Statements, together with the currency and validity of programmes. Internally, course leaders are responsible for coordinating the review of programmes, ensuring that any actions identified during this process are addressed with relevant teaching teams through Annual Programme Review reports. The course leader also informs the external examiner about the review and actions taken. The Higher Education Self-Assessment Report (SAR) summarises external examiner reports and informs the Higher Education Quality Improvement Action Plan.

1.33   These policies and processes allow the standards outlined in Expectation A.3.2 to be met.

1.34   The review team considered a range of documents relating specifically to quality and standards. These included minutes of meetings with awarding bodies, internal review documents, external examiner reports, module evaluation questionnaires, course and student handbooks, and policy documents. Meetings were held with senior staff, teaching staff, students and awarding body representatives.

1.35   The Strategic Intentions 2015-20 document outlines the College's approach to future growth of the curriculum. Currently, new courses are identified via the College's curriculum planning process, which will in future be governed by the emerging Skills, Economy and Employment Plan. This will provide the opportunity for external stakeholders to be canvassed and to directly relate the College's provision to local employer need. The Senior Curriculum Group scrutinises all higher education programme proposals before being approved by the Vice-Principal Curriculum Operations and finally by the Strategic Leadership Group. Appropriate allocation of the FHEQ is undertaken at validation and subsequent course reviews. Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRBs are considered

at the same time. Partnership arrangements for the two awarding bodies secure academic standards.

1.36   New course proposals are informally discussed with the awarding bodies before the more formal process of full application is made. This gives the College the opportunity to present its rationale and any supporting initial market research.

1.37   The 2011 QAA review report of the City of Bath College made a number of recommendations regarding the maintenance of academic standards, and the College's response to these is clearly detailed in the resulting action plan and subsequent progress report. The College confirms that all recommendations have been addressed. There are revised and appropriate terms of reference for the Higher Education Strategy Group in place. Examination boards for Higher National programmes are operating successfully under clear terms of reference, with constitution and membership clearly established. Policies and procedures for Higher National programmes now operate to ensure that all staff and students understand the academic assessment regulations.

1.38   The College has started to effectively embed the Quality Code into its practices. Implementation is through the Higher Education Strategy Group. Expectations of the Quality Code have been mapped against the College higher education provision, and staff have received appropriate training and development to assist them in this exercise. Department SARs now include the Quality Code's expectations, against which course teams evaluate their performance. This was confirmed by staff and documented evidence, but the review team found minimal evidence of this being recorded at Higher Education Strategy Group meetings as claimed.

1.39   Programme design, development and approval is subject to a clearly defined 10-stage process involving the Senior Curriculum Group and Vice-Principal Curriculum Operations before final approval is given by the Senior Leadership Group. All existing and new courses must be aligned to the imperatives of the Strategic Intentions 2015-20 document and, in future, the Skills, Economy and Employment Plan, which is currently in development.

1.40   The College's Assessment and Verification Policy provides an effective framework for adherence to awarding body requirements. Awarding organisation programmes adhere to regulations as detailed in the appropriate handbook and are subject to the College's own internal examination board procedure.

1.41   Students have access to assessment regulations and processes via induction, programme handbooks, the VLE and other media platforms. However, despite clear instructions regarding the inclusion of assessment information in the College's Guidelines for Higher Education Course Handbooks, scrutiny of these Handbooks found the guidelines to be inconsistently applied.

1.42   The review team confirms that the College adheres to and is compliant with all aspects of awarding body and organisation regulations for securing academic standards. These are supported and administered by strong and thorough internal mechanisms. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.3): 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

1.43   The College's provision is subject to the external monitoring and review procedures of its awarding bodies and organisation. Within the College, the Quality Assurance Cycle provides the framework for the processes of programme monitoring and review culminating in the publication of the College's Higher Education Self-Assessment Report. External examiners are appointed by the awarding bodies and organisation to monitor and maintain academic standards.

1.44   The College is subject to a number of different review processes as directed by its awarding bodies and organisation. The Bath Spa University periodic review process aligns with other quality management functions, including annual monitoring, external examining, course approval and student engagement. The University Quality Team meets College senior managers regularly to assist in monitoring the quality of programmes and their continued validity. All programmes are required to undergo an annual review culminating in the annual monitoring report. Additionally, the annual partner review considers the ongoing validity of programmes.

1.45   Programmes offered in collaboration with the University of Bath are subject to the degree review scheme. This periodic developmental review assures the University of a programme's quality and future development. Programme evaluation documents produced by the University provide an action plan of key findings of a review.

1.46   The procedures and systems referred to in documentation provided by the College allow the Expectation to be met in principle.

1.47   The review team scrutinised a range of annual and course review and monitoring documents from both the College and the awarding bodies and organisation. The review team held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, awarding body representatives, support staff and students.

1.48   Programmes approved by the awarding organisation are subject to a mid-year review process and regular scrutiny by external verifiers and examiners, who report on the validity and relevance of programmes. This effective process also confirms the College's compliance with their regulations.

1.49   Staff showed a good, knowledgeable understanding of the maintenance of academic standards, the Quality Code, and their roles and responsibilities to the awarding bodies and the awarding organisation in relation to the monitoring and review of programmes.

1.50   Led by the Vice-Principal Quality and Students, and the Participation Manager, the College's Learner Involvement Strategy outlines student involvement in operational and management processes. However, it is not clear from this document the extent to which students are involved in the monitoring and review processes. While staff were able to

clearly articulate student involvement in this process, the response from students did not indicate that all courses directly involved them.

1.51   The thorough nature by which the College engages with the awarding bodies and organisation's policies and processes clearly enables the achievement of UK threshold standards and the maintenance of standards required. In light of the thoroughness of programme monitoring and review, 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

1.52   With the recent merger of two institutions, the College is currently reviewing its strategic priorities and the subsequent implications for course development and its future portfolio of awards. The College alludes to the Skills, Economy and Employment Plan as being central to these plans and how the external viewpoint will be gathered in any future course proposals. The views of external examiners are seen as crucial in meeting this Expectation, and these are summarised in the Higher Education Self-Assessment Report and the resultant Higher Education Quality Improvement Action Plan.

1.53   The processes, mechanisms and future plans that the College has in place allow the Expectation to be met.

1.54   The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements for this Expectation through the examination of the documentation presented and meetings with staff, as well as employers and staff from the validating higher education institutions.

1.55   The College operates an internal approval process when new course proposals are being considered. The documentation does not clarify the role of external stakeholders in this process, but during the visit the review team was presented with sound evidence of how employers contribute to course developments in Engineering, Music and Hospitality. The Skills, Economy and Employment Plan had not yet been finally drafted during the review visit, but the strategic intentions of the College for the next five years make direct reference to the involvement of external stakeholders in course development.

1.56   When new course proposals are being considered or module amendments proposed, the awarding body staff become involved at an early stage and this ensures that all such proposals meet threshold academic standards.

1.57   The College effectively summarises the findings from external examiner reports as another means of gathering the external viewpoint, and ensuring the currency and quality of the awards being offered.

1.58   The College makes satisfactory use of relevant external experts at key stages of maintaining academic standards, although many of the current processes are largely informal. The review team therefore 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

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

1.60   All of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated levels of risk are low. In all sections under academic standards the College is also required to adhere to the procedures of its awarding bodies and organisation. There are no recommendations, affirmations or features of good practice in this section.

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

2   Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1   The College works with two awarding bodies and an awarding organisation, Pearson, to offer HNCs, HNDs, foundation degrees and a top-up degree.

2.2   The College identified higher education strategic objectives in the recently approved Open for Business Strategic Intentions 2015-20 document and the embryonic Skills, Economy and Employment Plan. The focus is on supporting the local economy through four priorities: employability, enterprise, economic impact and expertise. This builds on the employer-related focus of the previous strategic approach.

2.3   The awarding bodies, awarding organisation and the College have responsibility for ensuring courses are designed and developed in line with appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements and to the appropriate level of the FHEQ.

2.4   Curriculum development is overseen by the Vice-Principal Curriculum Operations. Oversight of the approval process is maintained through the provider checklists. New programmes are proposed as part of the 10-stage curriculum planning process. Following approval by the Senior Curriculum Group, Vice-Principal Curriculum Operations and Strategic Leadership Group, approval is sought from its partner. The process is recorded on an approval form, which includes a section on market research.

2.5   For the validation of Higher National programmes, the College uses standard module specifications and programme structures in an established process.

2.6   Internal College structures and processes enable the Expectation to be met.

2.7   In testing the Expectation, the review team scrutinised a variety of documents relating to the approval process and minutes of meetings. They also met teaching teams, senior academic staff, and professional and support staff and students.

2.8   College higher education programmes and programme specifications led by awarding bodies have been designed with appropriate reference to the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

2.9   The College discussed the rationale for the recent shift in provision of Sport courses from the University of Bath to Pearson, and the review team is satisfied with the reasoning behind this change. The College is exploring links with employers and the University of Gloucestershire to develop a new programme through a compact agreement. Working with Bath Spa University, the College has more recently set up a consortium of hospitality employers to develop future provision in that area, which the team found was working effectively.

2.10   The College works effectively with the awarding bodies and organisation to discharge the limited responsibilities it has for the design, development and approval of

programmes. The review team concludes 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

2.11   The College has a clear Admissions Policy and flowchart that includes details of information that students receive prior to interview and indicates that the identification of additional needs occurs prior to interview at the College; the Admissions Team then makes the appropriate arrangements with the Additional Learning Support Team.

2.12   There are opportunities at application, interview and enrolment for applicants to declare a specific learning difficulty in order to ensure support is in place as quickly as possible. Students can also be referred to the Additional Learning Support Team for assessment or to undergo a screening process.

2.13   The policies and processes in place adhere to the principles of fair admission and allow the Expectation to be met.

2.14   The review team tested the Expectation by analysing key documents in relation to recruitment, selection and admissions, and met students, senior staff, and teaching and support staff during the review visit.

2.15   The College states that all staff involved in the admissions process receive training. However, following a meeting with College staff, it was reported that staff involved in interviewing applicants are trained on a course-by-course basis, by shadowing experienced members of staff rather than general admissions training.

2.16   In order to ensure a smooth transition to UK higher education, the College provides a comprehensive pack of information with the offer letter for international applicants, despite the limited number of international students studying at the College.

2.17   Students reported no issues with the information provided prior to applying to the College; they reported that the website was helpful and some students had contacted the Head of Course for further information. Applications take place through UCAS and through direct application to the College. The College also publishes higher education bursary information on their website.

2.18   The College's Admissions Policy does not currently include appeals information for applicants and it is unclear how applicants would access the Admissions Policy as it is not available on the College website. The College also provided an example of a rejection letter, which did not include admissions appeals information. The review team **recommends** therefore that the College clarify the appeals process within the Admissions Policy.

2.19   The College has an evaluative approach to the admissions process. The Admissions Team receives feedback on the admissions process in the form of service quality questionnaires, which helps to ensure the process is efficient and effective. During the visit, the review team met staff who gave examples of changes that had been made as a result of the service quality questionnaires, which included improvements to the signage used for open events.

2.20   The College's recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission and are underpinned by appropriate structures and processes. Therefore, 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

2.21   The College has in place a number of policies and operational practices relating to the development of teaching and learning activities. The approach to effective learning and teaching in the College is outlined in the Teacher Development Process Policy and Procedure 2014-15 and this is linked to the Staff Development Policy. The Vice-Principal Quality and Standards has the responsibility for ensuring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

2.22   The policies, procedures and mechanisms in place provide a basis for effective learning and teaching, allowing the Expectation to be met.

2.23   The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements through the examination of the documentation presented and discussions with staff and students.

2.24   The College documentation states that all new staff will be supported and tracked through the 'Bath College Way' in their first six weeks of teaching. The process makes no specific reference to higher education teaching and the review team was not presented with evidence of the induction process having taken place for a new staff member teaching on these awards.

2.25   The Teaching and Learning Observation Policy outlines the approach, which is central to the College, and has the intention of improving standards of teaching, learning and assessment. Observations are ungraded and are based on collaborative reflection and action planning. In 2014-15, 16 members of staff were observed teaching on a higher education programme, and areas of good practice and challenges were identified. Teaching staff felt that this was a valuable process.

2.26   The National Student Survey scores for learning and teaching are excellent, and students reported favourably in their submission and in meetings on the quality of teaching which they received.

2.27   The College does not make any distinction between further and higher education provision in its policies and practices. This includes the Staff Development Policy, which has no specific references to higher education provision. While there is no inherent problem with this approach, the review team found aspects of staff development that could have more of a specific higher education focus. There is no College policy or support for staff undertaking higher awards to enhance their higher education teaching, and while the opportunity exists, no staff are undertaking the higher education specific teaching awards offered by Bath Spa University. The College has only recently become a member of the Higher Education Academy and at the time of the review visit this had not been publicised to teaching staff. There is a Higher Education Scholarly Activity Guidance and Application Process under which staff can bid for 36 hours remission from teaching, but few applications have been made and approved under the process. No examples of staff development provided by the awarding bodies were brought to the attention of the team.

2.28   While there are many examples of effective staff development, the review team **recommends** that the College strengthen higher education-specific staff induction and development programmes.

2.29   Due to the policies in place and the effective staff development activities undertaken by the College, 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

2.30   The College provides students with a variety of higher education-appropriate resources: learning spaces and services to support their learning, including the library; the Undergraduate Centre; and a range of online learning resources housed on several platforms. Students also have access to resources provided by the University of Bath and Bath Spa University. Within the library, the College has developed a specific space for higher education students.

2.31   Students are allocated a dedicated tutor who supports their academic and personal development. Information is given to students about the role at induction and in their student handbooks. Students have access to specialist equipment, either directly from the College or through relationships with local universities or industry. Resources and other student services are annually reviewed through the Strand Team and cross-College processes.

2.32   The availability of resources and support mechanisms for students enables the Expectation to be met.

2.33   The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements and resources through the examination of the documentation presented, the results of student surveys, a demonstration of the College VLE, and meetings with teaching and support staff, students and employers.

2.34   The review team found that students are generally satisfied with both the academic and tutorial support available to them and that they specifically value the support from their tutors with current and recent industrial and vocational experience. Students spoke favourably of the specialist facilities available, which, along with good teaching, industry contacts, live briefs and work placements and experience, enable them to develop their academic and professional skills. This was also the case for employed students and apprentices studying part-time at the College. Students were also satisfied with access to University resources. The College achieved excellent scores for resources in the National Student Survey; this includes IT, library and specialist equipment, with a three per cent improvement on the previous year to 89 per cent.

2.35   Strand Teams can bid for resources through a clear process, and teaching staff gave many examples of how bids had succeeded in such areas as Sport and Music Production, the results of which had enhanced provision for students. The review team heard good examples of an employer acting as a consultant and adviser to the Music Production Strand Team.

2.36   The review team considers the employer engagement in Music Production courses, which gives students access to people working successfully in the industry and to cutting-edge facilities, enabling them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, to be **good practice**.

2.37   The College uses a variety of online platforms and VLEs to which teaching and learning resources are uploaded. Students are satisfied with the availability, range and quality of the resources housed on these platforms and the online resources available through the awarding bodies.

2.38   The content of the various sites is the responsibility of Heads of Department, and no overall College minimum standards for content are set. This can result in variation and omissions in content and presentation on the platforms but the College has begun the process of auditing online materials to evaluate their effectiveness from the student perspective. The review team **affirms** the introduction of audits for the use and effectiveness of the online learning portals.

2.39   Overall, the College has in place, monitors and evaluates a wide range of resources, and support services and opportunities for students to develop their potential. Therefore, 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

2.40   The College has a Learner Involvement Strategy that encompasses a variety of engagement mechanisms across higher and further education provision. The mechanisms relevant to higher education include Staff Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs) and the Higher Education Parliament. Cross-College forums are also available in the form of course representative meetings and the Learner Expert Panel, as well as informal mechanisms that include You Said, We Did and the 'Question of the Month' online feature, coordinated by the Students' Union. These mechanisms are evaluated on an ongoing basis, which is documented in the Learner Involvement Action Plan.

2.41   The Higher Education Parliament occurs on a termly basis and its membership consists of student representatives across all higher education courses. The Chair of the Higher Education Parliament is the Students' Union Higher Education Officer and the remit is to identify themes across higher education provision. The Higher Education Officer presents a report on the outcomes of the Parliament to the Higher Education Strategy Group.

2.42   The Learner Expert Panel is a cross-College student engagement mechanism, which is held on a termly basis; its remit includes assisting in the recruitment of staff and supporting the teaching observation process. The Learner Expert Panel is made up of volunteers and currently includes three higher education students.

2.43   The student engagement mechanisms in place allow the Expectation to be met.

2.44   The review team analysed documentary evidence, including the Learner Involvement Strategy and action plan, minutes of the SSLC, terms of reference and meetings across all courses, the Higher Education Parliament report, and National Student Survey outcomes. The team also held meetings with staff and students.

2.45   SSLC meetings are held four times per year at course level, and there are clear terms of reference and standing agenda items. However, there are inconsistencies in the way SSLC meetings are minuted across higher education courses leading to a lack of clarity about attendance and the subject area being discussed. The SSLC structure has proven to be effective across the awarding bodies provision and therefore the College has plans to introduce it on Pearson courses.

2.46   The College provided evidence of course representative training material but it is unclear how many students attended the training sessions and most course representatives met by the review team were unaware of the training sessions. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure that all student representatives are trained, supported and developed to perform their role effectively.

2.47   Students contribute to the monitoring, review and continuous improvement of their course by representatives attending SSLC meetings, completing surveys and module evaluations. Outcomes of these are collated and reported within the higher education self-assessment process, which refers to chapters of the Quality Code within the template. Students felt that the College listened to them and the issues they raise are acted upon appropriately where possible.

2.48   During the visit it became clear that students were unaware of the differences between the various consultative committees within the College. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College clarify the role of, and reporting structures for, the various student consultative bodies, and communicate this to students.

2.49   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. The associated level of risk is moderate, however, as the lack of sufficient guidance, support and training - and the lack of clarity around the role of, and reporting structures for, student consultative bodies - mean that there are weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's academic governance structure.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.50   The responsibility for ensuring that assessment processes are equitable, valid and reliable rests with the awarding bodies and organisation. The College's Assessment and Verification Policy provides the framework to ensure that the entire process is fit for purpose and adheres to awarding body standards. Accreditation of Prior Learning is governed by awarding bodies' regulations and the College's own Recognition of Prior Learning Policy.

2.51   The College is compliant with the assessment regulations of its awarding bodies and organisation. The Vice-Principal Quality and Students maintains oversight of assessment for higher education programmes. The setting of assessments, their strategies and scheduling is undertaken by course leaders, who coordinate this with teaching staff, who in turn are responsible for writing module and assessment plans. Assessment procedures and learning outcomes are communicated to students through induction and programme handbooks, and at the presentation of an assignment.

2.52   Overall responsibility for internal verification lies with the Vice-Principal Quality and Students. Course leaders are responsible within their own subject areas and act as lead verifiers. All staff teaching on higher education programmes are expected to undertake internal verification of assignments, and appropriate training is provided in order for them to fulfil this role. External scrutiny is undertaken by external examiners and standards verifiers.

2.53   All higher education programmes are subject to internal quality assurance procedures as part of the College's Quality Assurance Cycle, and individual programme self-assessment reviews include a review of assessment practices.

2.54   The College's quality assurance processes meet in principle all of the relevant component elements within Expectation B6.

2.55   The review team examined a range of documents on assessment, including awarding body and organisation regulations, programme and student handbooks, external examiner reports, College policies and procedures, and minutes of relevant meetings. The team also met senior staff, teaching staff, awarding body representatives and students.

2.56   While the description of assessment procedures, criteria for assessment, grading criteria, information regarding plagiarism and the submission of assignments were contained in programme handbooks, the extent and depth to which these were included was inconsistent and did not follow the College's published guidelines.

2.57   The review team met three groups of students, including student representatives. Contrary to the student submission submitted for this review, they unanimously confirmed that their assessments are appropriate and clear, and that their feedback is helpful, constructive, developmental and received within the regulatory timeframe. They also recognised that their assignments would become increasingly challenging as their course progresses and were confident they would receive appropriate support from staff.

2.58   The College's assessment processes are thorough, carefully monitored, and rigorously applied, and this is confirmed by the awarding bodies, external examiners and standards verifiers, who endorse the effectiveness of these procedures. Students are positive about the nature of their assessment and the feedback they receive. 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 (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.59 External examiners and standards verifiers are appointed by the awarding bodies and awarding organisation, and provide standards advice and identify good practice. The College provides guidance for working with external examiners, which includes roles and responsibilities. External examiners approve draft assessments and examination papers, and this can also be done by Pearson standards verifiers.

2.60 Students have opportunities to meet external examiners. Awarding body external examiner reports are summarised annually and used to inform the Strand Team and College action plans.

2.61 The processes in place at the College allow the Expectation to be met.

2.62 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements and resources through the examination of the documentation, a survey of the College VLE, and discussions with staff from the College and validating higher education institutions, and with students.

2.63 The process for appointing external examiners and for using their reports to inform improvements in the quality of provision is robust and fit for purpose.

2.64 With regard to the students being informed of the findings of external examiner reports, the review team found some variation in approach and practice across the Strand Teams. In the minutes of the Higher Education Strategy Group it was proposed that all reports were put on the VLE portal, but this is not being done in all cases. Some reports are housed on the VLE and some are included in course handbooks, but some Strand Teams are still operating informal means of communicating the findings of external examiner reports to students and this results in inconsistencies in approach. The review team **recommends** that the College adopt a consistent approach to making external examiner reports available to all students.

2.65 Overall, the review team considers that the College has robust processes in place for receiving, considering and responding to external examiner reports, and makes scrupulous use of external examiners. 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

2.66   The College's programme review and monitoring procedures follow the processes of its awarding bodies and organisation. The self-assessment of all higher education programmes forms part of the College's Quality Assurance Cycle, which is coordinated by the Vice-Principal Quality and Students. The Higher Education Strategy Group maintains an overview of the operation of the quality assurance framework to ensure continuous improvement and to monitor the impact of this on its higher education provision. All courses are subject to mid-year reviews and are subsequently required to produce a Higher Education Self-Assessment Report (SAR), which is reviewed against the quality improvement action plan from the previous year. Heads of Department meet with the Vice-Principal Quality and Students to discuss progress against key performance indicators.

2.67   Programme SARs are reviewed against quality improvement plans. These are scrutinised by Heads of Department before being passed to the Vice-Principal Curriculum Operations for inclusion in the College-wide SAR. This report is received by the Strategic Leadership Group and the College's corporation. The resultant action plan is monitored by the Vice-Principal Curriculum Operations. At programme level, Heads of Department conduct a termly review of key performance indicators, which are measured against the College's key strategic targets. Heads of Department also attend standardisation meetings with the awarding bodies, where assessment practice and outcomes are considered and where parity of standards is confirmed throughout the partnership. Additionally, Strand Teams undertake a review of all the programmes in their subject area. These contribute to course self-evaluation reports and annual departmental reports prepared by Heads of Department. Module evaluation questionnaires are distributed to students at the end of each module, with the outcomes considered at boards of study.

2.68   The College's quality assurance processes for the monitoring and oversight of programmes allow Expectation B8 to be met.

2.69   The review team scrutinised documentation regarding the monitoring and review of the College's higher education provision documentation and held meetings with senior, teaching and support staff and students.

2.70   The 2011 QAA review report cited as good practice 'the detailed and analytical annual monitoring and review process at programme and college level which provides a sound vehicle for quality enhancement'. To reinforce this, the College's SAR process now uses a standardised form across all courses that reflects aspects of the Quality Code. The review team confirms that these processes continue to provide a robust system for the effective monitoring and review of programmes.

2.71   There is clear evidence that annual programme and periodic reviews monitor standards closely. 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

2.72   The College's Complaints Policy is clear and detailed and outlines examples of issues that the policy covers: the process; the timeframe for the College response, which is 10 working days following receipt; and appeals information. The College also has an Appeals Policy that is clear, outlines the process and provides links to awarding body appeals and complaints procedures.

2.73   The Complaints Policy is made available via the College website, the College handbook, the VLE and several social networking platforms, which vary across the courses. Appeals information is made available in course handbooks, and students are aware of how to find appeals information relevant to them. The policies and processes at the College allow the Expectation to be met.

2.74   The review team examined documents that included the College's policies and procedures for complaints and appeals, and explored how these are made available to students. They team also met staff and students.

2.75   The College has a comprehensive academic appeals procedure, which is predominantly used for further education students and those studying on Pearson courses. For courses that are awarded by Bath Spa University or the University of Bath, the College uses the awarding body appeals policies. These policies are included within the course handbooks or linked to the appropriate awarding body policy online. While handbooks across courses are inconsistent in terms of content, all of the handbooks included appeals information that is specific to the correct awarding body. Students are also informed of complaints and appeals information during their inductions.

2.76   Students stated that they were aware of where and how to access complaints and appeals information, and knew how to seek advice from their tutors in the first instance.

2.77   The review team is satisfied that the College makes its complaints and appeals procedure available. Numerous opportunities are provided to inform students of the process, and both staff and students were able to demonstrate and acknowledge awareness of this. 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

2.78   Work placements provided by the College include one-day to two-week work-based, work-related and field trip opportunities. The role work placements have in the development of students' enterprise and employability skills is outlined in the Higher Education Work Placement Policy.

2.79   Responsibilities of students and employers are outlined in the Agreement for Work-Based Learning Providers, and are checked by the College prior to students undertaking the placements; the process includes risk assessments and insurance.

2.80   Students are provided with work placement information at module level and course handbooks. The College supports students in selecting appropriate work placements and meeting its obligations regarding relevant risk assessment and insurance provision. Field work, work-based and placement learning opportunities are reviewed through Higher Education Curriculum Department Self-Assessments, and the Higher Education Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and action plan.

2.81   The policies and processes in place enable the Expectation to be met.

2.82   The Expectation was assessed through reviewing the Higher Education Work Placement Policy, sampling work placement units and programme SARs, and meeting College staff, students and employers.

2.83   Students reported that they valued their work placements. Fashion students commended their two-week placements. Music students and staff highly valued their work-related experiences with leading edge sector providers. At the time of the review, HND Sport students were taking part in productive one-to-one work experience planning meetings.

2.84   Staff confirmed that all students had been able to find placements. The Sport lecturers facilitating placements for the first time on the HND/C have prepared back-up placement opportunities. Students are given contact details of a member of College staff should there be issues while on work placement.

2.85   The College has effective policies and procedures that underpin the management of work placements and learning experiences facilitated by external parties. 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

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

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.88   All of the Expectations relating to the College's quality of student learning opportunities are met with low risk apart from Expectation B5, which is met with moderate risk. The review team makes five recommendations in this section that concern: clarifying the appeals process within the Admissions Policy; strengthening higher education-specific staff induction and development; ensuring that all student representatives are trained, supported and developed to perform their role effectively; clarifying the role of, and reporting structures for, the various student consultative bodies and communicating this to students; and adopting a consistent approach to making external examiner reports available to all students.

2.89   There is one feature of good practice identified in this section relating to the employer engagement in Music Production courses, which gives students access to people working successfully in the industry and to cutting edge facilities, enabling them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. There is one affirmation relating to the introduction of audits for the use and effectiveness of the online learning portals.

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

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The College provides information about its higher education provision through UCAS, prospectuses, the College website and printed publications, such as course information sheets. Following the recent merger, a new website has been developed.

3.2 The Director of Student Services and Marketing has oversight of the accuracy of promotional materials, which form part of the College's internal self-assessment quality assurance process.

3.3 There are established processes for checking information on the website and course information sheets. Where courses are validated by University partners the web and printed information forms part of their quality review. The website is monitored on a half-termly basis. For new courses the Head of Department checks information provided by course leaders before a course administrator submits it to the marketing team. There are appropriate procedures in place for amending course information published on the College website and for checking information included in the prospectus.

3.4 Programme handbooks are provided on all courses. A model of suggested content was developed as a response to the 2011 QAA review report to ensure greater consistency and accuracy. Course leaders submit their programme handbooks to the awarding bodies for regular checking. Pearson check their handbooks at the point of validation and there is an expectation that programme leaders, overseen by Heads of Department, maintain the standards of handbooks.

3.5 Programme specifications are made available to students through the College website and partner organisations.

3.6 The processes in place allow the Expectation to be met.

3.7 The review team tested the effectiveness of practices and procedures by reviewing the prospectus, website, programme handbooks and a range of other publications, and by meeting students, as well as teaching and support staff.

3.8 Students confirmed that the information on the website prior to joining the College was accurate and useful. The review team found minor inaccuracies on the website and in the prospectus. During the review visit the College acknowledged that finding College policies was not straightforward and that the Admissions Policy was not on the website. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure that all policies relevant to prospective and current students are available and easily accessible on the website.

3.9 External examiner reports are shared with students in a variety of ways. Mechanical and Electrical Engineering students receive a verbal briefing and are able to request the reports. HND/C Business students indicated they had yet to seek their external examiner report and the review team was unable to locate it on the portal or in the handbook. Business students confirmed they had met the standards verifier. In the light of

these issues the review team made a recommendation under Expectation B7 relating to the adoption of a consistent approach to making external examiner reports available to all students.

3.10   Teaching and learning is delivered online through a variety of platforms, with each subject area determining which platform is most appropriate for their students. To address recognised inconsistencies across platforms, the College's Quality Team has very recently put in place a plan to audit online resources, support and documentation.

3.11   Students confirmed programme handbooks provided at the start of the year are comprehensive and useful. The review team considered a sample of programme handbooks and noted the professional approach taken in the Applied Computing Foundation Degree, and the HNC/D Construction and Built Environment handbooks. However, there is a lack of consistency in some programme handbooks; some handbooks did not contain assessment information and guidance details.

3.12   During the review visit the College provided a handbook that the internal review process had identified as having insufficient detail and had subsequently been amended and approved. The College recognised that there had been insufficient scrutiny of programme handbooks.

3.13   The College recognised that a lack of consistency in the content of programme handbooks is an issue and confirmed that the newly appointed Higher Education Manager will audit all programme handbooks using a mandatory content checklist and share good practice. In the light of these issues, the review team **recommends** that the College consistently apply and monitor the minimum content guidelines for programme handbooks and course information across all learning platforms.

3.14   The review team concludes that the College makes available a wide range of information about its provision in both print and digital formats. Students have confidence in the usefulness and availability of information. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate, as processes are broadly adequate but there are some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

3.16   The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is moderate. There are two recommendations in this section concerning ensuring that all policies relevant to prospective and current students are available and easily accessible on the website; and consistently applying and monitoring the minimum content guidelines for programme handbooks and course information across all learning platforms.

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

4   Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1   The College takes deliberate steps at both strategic and operational level to enhance students' learning opportunities. The Higher Education Enhancement Policy clearly places the student at the centre of this process. Where the broader impact of enhancement is recognised, higher education students are consulted through established student representative systems.

4.2   The design of the College's quality assurance processes allow the Expectation to be met.

4.3   The review team examined a range of documentation relevant to the College's enhancement of its higher education provision, paying particular attention to the Higher Education Enhancement Policy and its links to the strategic direction of the College. Enhancement was also discussed at meetings with the Principal, representatives from awarding bodies, senior, teaching and support staff, students and employers.

4.4   The College's commitment to enhancement is strongly supported by the Higher Education Strategy Group, the Strategic Leadership Group and the College's corporation. The Vice-Principal Curriculum Operations, working with the Vice-Principal Students and Quality and the Higher Education Manager, all carry responsibility for overseeing enhancement for the whole College, including its higher education provision. Department Higher Education Self-Assessment Reports (SARs) and their action plans detail enhancements to course provision. These inform the College-wide SAR and action plan.

4.5   Heads of Department and programme leaders are empowered to identify, manage and implement enhancements at course level. Staff are able to present enhancement initiatives to Heads of Department, but were uncertain of the process to progress these beyond initial discussions or to make more formal presentations to senior management of how good practice in enhancement is disseminated effectively.

4.6   The College places considerable emphasis on the importance of students and learner voice feedback to inform enhancement, and employs a number of mechanisms to gather this information from them. These include student representative meetings, a Higher Education Parliament, module evaluations and on-course surveys. Employers have become increasingly involved in enhancement, and were able to cite a number of examples where they had contributed to the process. These included advising on changes to module content and recommending appropriate resources. Guest speakers and visiting professionals provide additional input, including 'live briefs', which the students greatly valued.

4.7   Staff were able to provide many examples where enhancement has taken place both in general support arrangements for students and also in the curriculum. These include capital investment in buildings and equipment; further development of student representation; development of higher education policies, procedures and protocols; and an enhanced continuing professional development process for higher education teaching staff. A revised teacher observation process has been initiated, as has the further development of online resources for staff and students. Well-established links with employers have also been extended.

4.8   The College is in a transitional phase after its recent merger, and a number of key strategic policies and initiatives are being revised to reflect this; it is clear that enhancement is one of these. A number of enhancements have already been made to higher education provision; in the light of this, the review team **affirms** the steps being taken to implement strategic oversight of enhancement.

4.9   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

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

4.11   The Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

4.12   There is one affirmation in this section relating to the steps being taken by the College to implement strategic oversight of enhancement.

4.13   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 sees employability as being of strategic importance in its curriculum planning. With the recent merger of the two colleges, and the production of a new Strategic Plan, the employability aspect will become even more important, as the College seeks to meet local economic needs and make a major contribution to growth. The College wishes to be a talent pipeline for all levels of provision, in line with Local Enterprise Partnership priorities and other initiatives.

5.2 Employer links are strong in most courses and these provide opportunities for students to gain practical skills and thus enhance their employability prospects. As new programmes are introduced, the good practice on existing awards will be shared. The review team met the human resources manager from Rotork, whose company operates a successful higher apprenticeship scheme with the College. The Royal Crescent Hotel and other employers are working with the College to set up a hotel and restaurant school.

5.3 Some units on courses are selected to develop employability skills, and students considered these to be valuable to them. Live briefs are used on all courses except Sport where these are in development. The review team saw good examples of these projects in the Applied Computing, Fashion and Textiles, and Business curriculum areas. Those students in employment and studying part-time at the College confirmed that employability was well covered on their courses. All courses except Business offer students some opportunity for work experience or work placements.

5.4 The College describes many examples of enhancements to student employability; these include opportunities for students to join professional institutes, student visits and an extensive range of visiting speakers. Internships are offered in some areas and employability advisers have recently been appointed to work in Strand Team areas. Careers advice is provided and students confirmed it is of value to them.

5.5 The student submission states that most students feel that employability is embedded in their programmes, with the exception of Sport where it is in development. This was confirmed during the review visit. The overall finding is that the College has clear strategies and effective practices for developing and promoting employability skills and activities for its students.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

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

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

Flexible and distributed learning
A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.
See also **distance learning**.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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