Higher Education Review of North Shropshire College

November 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 North Shropshire College. The review took place from 10 to 11 November 2015 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Colin Stanfield
- Mr Matthew Kitching (student reviewer)

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

In reviewing North Shropshire 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 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 North Shropshire College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **does not meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **does not meet** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The involvement of employers in the delivery of programmes and their use in programme developments (Expectations B4, A3.4 and B1).

Recommendations

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

By March 2016:

- take deliberate steps to engage students in College-level assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5 and Enhancement)
- ensure staff are developed and supported to give feedback that enables students to demonstrate that they have achieved the intended learning outcomes (Expectations B6 and A3.2)
- consistently implement monitoring processes that are effective, regular and systematic (Expectations B8 and A3.3)
- clarify and communicate to all stakeholders the policies and procedures for complaints and appeals (Expectations B9, B2 and C)
- develop and implement policies and procedures that are appropriate to the management and oversight of work-based learning (Expectations B10, C and A2.1)
- ensure that all information produced is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (Expectations C, B2, B3, B5, B9 and B10).

By September 2016:

- systematically review and enhance the VLE to enable every student to develop their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking (Expectations B3 and C)
- adhere to the College's own regulations on the selection of student representatives (Expectation B5)
- ensure that quality assurance procedures are used to identify opportunities for enhancement and that this is done in a systematic and planned manner at College level (Enhancement).

By October 2016:

- ensure student representatives receive training and support for their role (Expectation B5).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The introduction of a more formalised process for the identification of possible new areas of provision (Expectation B1)
- The introduction of a bespoke programme of staff development for higher education (Expectations B3 and B6, and Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

The College is committed to encouraging students to progress from lower levels of education into higher education, and ultimately into employment. It has an employer engagement strategy and aims to ensure that employer views are embedded in the curriculum development and delivery process. The College has effective relationships with a range of employers who contribute to the delivery and enhancement of learning opportunities in a variety of ways, which includes involvement in programme design, validation and periodic review, the provision of work-placements, guest lectures, practical demonstrations, and the observation of teaching trainees.

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

About North Shropshire College

North Shropshire College was created in 2001 following the merger of Walford College, a specialist land-based College near Baschurch, and The North Shropshire College, a tertiary college with its main campus in Oswestry. The main College campuses are situated in north Shropshire. The College aims to provide 'outstanding education and training opportunities in order to add value to the lives of all our learners and to advance the economic and social well-being of the communities we serve'.

The College offers a broad curriculum at different levels. Subjects include sport, travel and tourism, hair and beauty, childcare, hospitality and catering, plumbing, construction, engineering, motor vehicle maintenance, agriculture, animal management, equine studies, and engineering.

Higher education is a relatively small part of the College's provision and is delivered at the Baschurch and Oswestry campuses. The College has taken the strategic decision to develop its higher education programmes to reflect its land-based character, with a focus on employment and further professional development. The higher education provision comprises Higher National qualifications and degrees in wildlife and countryside studies, animal science, sports coaching, interactive media, and business. The College also offers professional qualifications to prepare teachers for work in the post-compulsory education and training sector. At the time of the review, 48 students were enrolled on higher education programmes funded through the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

The College works with Staffordshire University for the delivery of foundation degrees, honours degrees and teacher training qualifications and with Pearson Education for the delivery of Higher National qualifications.

Since the last QAA review in 2010, the College's partnership with Harper Adams University College has ended. There have been changes in the management structure of the College. A new Principal is in post and two new directorates have been created to oversee higher education. A core element of the management of higher education is the implementation of the Higher Education Delivery Group, which monitors the quality process and considers growth strategies and the development of new provision. The College has further developed its resources to support further and higher education provision. This includes a new scientific laboratory, refurbishment of the Walford Learning Resources Centre and investment in sports facilities.

The College's documentation identifies establishing large and viable higher education programmes of study in the context of social deprivation and low levels of higher education participation as the key challenges for the future. Full and part-time student numbers have declined since the last review in 2011. The College is responding to this challenge by developing flexible entry points for students and widening its geographic recruitment range for part-time students. Future developments will include exploring opportunities to develop its higher education provision to meet community and employer needs and to provide progression routes into and through higher education for local people.

All of the recommendations from the previous review have been addressed and the College has shared the good practice. Slow progress has been made with the desirable recommendation to ensure the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) is more comprehensive across all subject areas. In their submission to the review, students commented that the VLE was often not updated and was under-used. The College has recently made new staff appointments to develop the VLE further.

Explanation of the findings about North Shropshire College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1   Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies 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 its awarding body, Staffordshire University (the University), and the awarding organisation, Pearson Education, in the development and delivery of higher education. The roles, responsibilities and obligations of the College and the University are set out in partnership agreements. The awarding body and Pearson hold ultimate responsibility for the setting and verification of the standard of all the College's higher education awards. The allocation of programmes and modules to the appropriate level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), as well as the definition of learning outcomes and the appropriate use of Subject Benchmark Statements, are also the responsibility of the University and Pearson.

1.2   The review team tested this Expectation through careful consideration of relevant College, University and Pearson documentation, including the College's quality assurance, validation and approval documents, partnerships agreements and programme specifications. The review team also met senior College staff and representatives from the University to explore their use and understanding of the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements as a reference point in the maintenance of academic standards.

1.3   Programme specifications, curriculum documents and minutes from approval and validation events demonstrate an appropriate awareness of Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ and that programme outcomes are suitably matched to the FHEQ

qualification descriptors. The Initial Teacher Training programme (ITT) effectively reflects the national requirements for teaching in the post-16 sector.

1.4   Qualifications are named in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the FHEQ. External examiner reports confirm that students are undertaking an appropriate volume of study to demonstrate their achievement of the required learning outcomes. College arrangements for marking students' assessed work, combined with moderation of assessed student work by the University and the role of external examiners in reviewing provision and processes for assessment, also help to ensure that the College maintains academic standards.

1.5   The College recognises and manages the maintenance of standards by means of its own policies and procedures, as well as complying with the requirements of the awarding body and organisation. Building on its experience of operating University processes, the College is further developing structures and procedures to strengthen its maintenance of academic standards on its Pearson provision.

1.6   The analysis of documentary evidence, supported by staff responses in meetings, shows that the ultimate responsibility for allocating each qualification to the appropriate level of the FHEQ rests with the University and Pearson. The review team concludes that the College is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities for the maintenance of academic standards through close adherence to the policies and programme specifications of its awarding partners. The close integration of the College with its University partner and the implementation of actions to increase strengthening of the maintenance of standards on Pearson programmes leads to the conclusion that Expectation A1 is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.7 Programmes are operated in accordance with the academic frameworks and regulations developed and approved by the University and Pearson. Partnership agreements define mutual roles and responsibilities and the specific arrangements for the delivery of the programme and functions delegated to the College. The College's systems and procedures to implement its responsibilities within the terms of its agreements are tested during approval and validation activities and in ongoing review conducted in accordance with the requirements of the University and Pearson. These robust processes allow Expectation A1 to be met.

1.8 The College's approach to implementing its responsibilities was explored through discussion with staff at the College and representatives from the University, as well as scrutiny of partnership agreements, the minutes of partnership meetings, documents relating to the management and recording of assessment, and external examiner reports. Attention was paid to arrangements for assessment and award boards and the terms of reference for the Higher Education Quality Group, which is pivotal to the implementation of academic governance and frameworks for Higher National programmes**.**

1.9 Link tutors from the awarding body work effectively with the College to support and oversee the implementation of academic frameworks and regulations. The College conforms to awarding body regulations on the use of admission with advanced standing or recognition of prior learning. Students are advised of this at interview and through course handbooks. Applications for assessment of prior learning (APL) are approved by the University.

1.10 Appropriate assessment processes, approved by the University and Pearson, are in place to enable students to demonstrate learning outcomes. The documented assessment regulations of the degree-awarding body and Pearson are systematically and consistently applied.

1.11 Assessment boards at module and programme level operate in accordance with awarding body regulations and are attended by the external examiner. Boards operate both at the University and at the College and are chaired by awarding body staff. The College undertakes in-year review of its provision to ensure that awarding body and organisation procedures are being followed and, where necessary, adjustments can be made.

1.12 Through its close collaboration with Staffordshire University, the College has effective processes in place to ensure that it meets this Expectation. It has developed effective policies for key processes such as assessment. The College is in the process of drawing on its experience of operating Staffordshire University frameworks and regulations and applying this to secure academic standards more effectively on its Higher National provision, which it is seeking to expand. The College already has effective structures and processes in place to support these programmes, but acknowledges that further progress is needed to fully embed these processes.

1.13 The review team concludes that the academic frameworks and regulations, as well as comprehensive monitoring and review arrangements operated by the College and its

partners, effectively contribute to securing academic standards. Expectation A2.1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.14   The definitive record of the programme is held by the degree-awarding body and organisation, who inform the College of any changes or amendments to these records. The College also maintains records of each programme and is responsible for ensuring dissemination of this information to staff and students. Programme specifications for University courses are accessible to the College via the University website.

1.15   The College's approach would meet the Expectation set out in A2.2, as there are clear processes for the recording and updating of programme information and dissemination to students, and for recording student achievement.

1.16   The review team held meetings with staff from the College and the University. The team also discussed programme information and its availability with students, and explored the VLE to ascertain to what extent information is made available to staff and students. Finally, the team reviewed documentation, including examples of programme specifications and student programme handbooks.

1.17   The awarding body and organisation retain responsibility for the maintenance of definitive records of each programme and inform the College of any changes or amendments to these records. The College also maintains a record of such documents. Any proposed changes to validated programmes are required to go through a formal change process, approved and overseen by the awarding body and organisation.

1.18   The College provides useful information in student programme handbooks on course contents, modules and units, which identifies the structure of the course and the assessment schemes. This allows prospective applicants and students to make an informed choice about the areas they will study.

1.19   The College is effective in managing its responsibilities with regard to maintaining and disseminating programme information and using this as a reference point for the delivery and assessment of programmes. However, the team found that information in programme specifications was not consistently included in all programme handbooks. The College is also undertaking further development to improve the level of information contained in programme specifications on its Pearson awards.

1.20   The review team found that Expectation A2.2 is met and the risk level 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

1.21   The College follows well-documented approval processes operated by the awarding body and organisation. For its Pearson provision, the College is responsible for determining which modules it will select to form the programmes, which it does following consultation with employers and after giving consideration to the expertise of its teaching staff. The Higher Education Delivery Group plays a significant role in determining future developments in academic provision by considering proposals from College departments. These discussions are informed by staff from across the College, including those with responsibility for admissions and marketing. The College has recently implemented a new Curriculum and Quality Steering Group, which will assume responsibility for considering and approving new curriculum proposals.

1.22   In combination, the processes operated by the awarding body and organisation and the College would allow Expectation A3.1 to be met.

1.23   The team tested the Expectation by meeting staff, including link staff from the University, students and employers. The team also viewed approval documentation, the College's Curriculum Development Strategy and the minutes of the Higher Education Delivery Group and Curriculum and Quality Steering Group.

1.24   The University and Pearson operate robust processes for the approval of their awards and for ensuring that the academic standards of qualifications are set at an appropriate level. All programmes are subject to rigorous approval and validation processes managed by the awarding bodies, with College representatives to approve the delivery of their programmes by the College. All of the programmes delivered by the College have been initially designed by the University and Pearson and approved using internal procedures. While the College is responsible for selecting units from the overall Pearson modular suite, Pearson is responsible for approving units and programmes in line with their own regulations.

1.25   The College conducts internal consultation and scrutiny of new and amended course proposals to ensure the validity and relevance of programmes, and considers resource requirements to support programmes, prior to seeking formal approval from the awarding body and organisation. The College has a Curriculum Development Strategy and has recently developed a new template that provides a consistent structure to any new programme proposals developed by staff, although as yet this has not been used for new higher education programme proposals. The review team's affirmation of the College's action to formalise the process of identifying new course provision is in Expectation B1, paragraph 2.7.

1.26   The College incorporates significant industry feedback into its curriculum development processes. This is evident, for example, through the use of targeted surveys in the development of the Foundation Degree in Animal Science with Health Management. Employers speak positively about the concerted effort the College undertakes to gather their feedback and to use it in informing the development of new programmes, and in particular

the selection of units and construction of assessment. Employer involvement in the delivery of programmes is identified as good practice in Expectation B4, paragraph 2.39 and is also referred to in Expectation B1, paragraph 2.6 and Expectation A3.4, paragraph 1.41.

1.27 The review team concludes that, due to the high involvement of the awarding partners, oversight by the College through higher education committees, and increasing formalisation of College systems for identifying and developing new course proposals, Expectation A3.1 is met and the level of associated 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

1.28   The College's responsibilities for the assessment of students are defined in partnership agreements and during the formal programme approval process. Assessment processes are governed by the regulatory frameworks of the University and Pearson.

1.29   The College contributes to the development of assessment methods, which are approved by the awarding partners and also by the external examiner prior to use. Marking of student work is done internally and the University also undertakes moderation of assessment on its programmes. In relation to both awarding partners assessment is verified by external examiners. College staff participate in Staffordshire University's award and assessment boards and are developing their own equivalents in preparation for the new Pearson provision. Learning outcomes, together with grading criteria, are made available to students through their course handbooks and online.

1.30   In combination, the appointment and oversight of external examiners, the operation of award and assessment boards, robust marking arrangements, and emerging College processes to support its Higher National programmes would enable Expectation A3.2 to be met.

1.31   The team tested the Expectation by meeting students and staff, including staff from the awarding partners. The team also scrutinised external examiner reports and the minutes of assessment boards, and viewed course handbooks and the awarding partners' regulations.

1.32   The awarding partners retain responsibility for the development of learning outcomes for the College's programmes. Nevertheless, the College plays a central role in the assessment process and has its own Higher Education Assessment Policy. Staff are aware of their responsibilities in developing assessment and the external examiner approves assessment prior to its use. Although external examiners have commented on not receiving proposed assessment in a timely fashion, and that some assessment requires amending and that feedback could be improved, there is evidence that the College is acting on this feedback. The College is developing a professional development programme for staff teaching higher education, and responsibilities around assessment will feature as part of that programme. The review team's recommendation relating to staff development is in Expectation B6, paragraph 2.61. External examiners comment on the extent to which learning outcomes have been demonstrated and UK threshold standards have been met. Responses provided to the team indicate satisfaction among examiners that this is the case.

1.33   The College participates in University assessment and award boards and is using its experience at these meetings as the foundation upon which to construct its own assessment and award boards for Pearson programmes. These arrangements have been documented in the College's Handbook for Higher Education Staff and appear to be sound.

1.34   The review team concludes that owing to the significant responsibility retained by the College's awarding body, clear external examining arrangements and the College Higher Education Assessment Policy, Expectation A3.2 is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.35   Arrangements for the monitoring and review of programmes are led by the awarding partners. Staffordshire University requires the College to adhere to an annual monitoring process using a structured report template. External examiners are also in place and produce annual reports that explicitly comment on whether standards are aligned with the FHEQ and are comparable to standards at other institutions, and that assessment methods are appropriate. Programmes being delivered in partnership with Pearson are in their first year and as such have not yet been subject to monitoring and review processes. The College is currently developing an internal monitoring process to support its Higher National provision and Pearson will retain responsibility for appointing external examiners.

1.36   The structured reporting requirements for annual monitoring and external examiners, together with the awarding body's periodic review process, would enable Expectation A3.3 to be met.

1.37   The team tested the Expectation by meeting with students and staff, including University staff. The team also viewed annual monitoring reports, external examiner reports and the minutes of college committees, including the Higher Education Delivery Group. The team also scrutinised the College's Handbook for Higher Education Staff and the Higher Education Provision Quality Cycle and Annual Monitoring Report Cycle.

1.38   The team found that a standard template is used for annual monitoring reports produced for Staffordshire University provision. The University's programme adviser works with programme teams to produce the report, which draws on feedback from employers, external examiners and students and considers a range of data.

1.39   At the time of the review the College was in the process of developing a new internal cycle for annual monitoring. Previously, annual monitoring reports had not been considered prior to being sent to Staffordshire University. The College has recently decided to validate these reports internally before submission to the awarding body as part of its Higher Education Provision Quality Cycle.

1.40   The review team concludes that the College employs robustly applied annual monitoring and review of higher education provision with external verification to assure both itself and its awarding partners that academic standards are being maintained. Expectation A3.3 is met and the associated 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

1.41   The College works with Staffordshire University and Pearson to ensure the use of external expertise in the setting and maintaining of standards. Staffordshire University and Pearson ensure that external stakeholders are consulted in programme design and are also involved in programme approval. The College is active in consulting with employer representatives with regard to the choice of new provision, and employer feedback informs the selection of particular units and the content of assessment. The review team identifies employer involvement in the delivery and development of programmes as good practice (see Expectation B4, paragraph 2.39). External examiners are appointed by the awarding partners and their role is seen as central to maintaining academic standards. External examiners are required to approve assessment prior to use, to attend assessment boards and to produce an annual report. The College uses these reports to inform its own annual monitoring process.

1.42   The role of the University and Pearson in partnership with the College, as well as use of externality in programme approval, feedback from external examiners and College relationships with a wide range of employers, would enable Expectation A3.4 to be met.

1.43   The team tested this Expectation by meeting staff, including representatives from the University and employers. The team also viewed external examiner reports and scrutinised annual monitoring reports. In addition the team examined College responses to external examiner feedback in annual monitoring reports, validation documents and College templates for new programme proposals.

1.44   The team found some inconsistency in the use of external examiners to approve and contribute to the design of assessment methods prior to being made available to students. For example, the external examiner feedback on the FdSc Wildlife and Countryside programme notes the need to ensure that the examiner has the opportunity to approve assessment questions prior to issue.

1.45   The review team concludes that robust externality informs programme development and approval. External examiners are in place. Although one examiner had commented about the need to view assessment prior to its use, this issue had been identified by the College and is being addressed through action plans attached to annual monitoring reports. The team concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.46   In reaching its judgements about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Of the seven Expectations in this area, all are met with a low level of risk.

1.47   Overall, the College is effective in managing its responsibilities, in conjunction with the degree-awarding body and organisation, and maintaining academic standards. Effective use is made of relevant subject and qualification benchmarks and external expertise in the development of programmes and their subsequent approval and monitoring. Effective use is made of input from external examiners and link tutors from the degree-awarding body.

1.48   The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body and awarding organisation **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 has an internal process for identifying new provision and approving the development and introduction of programmes. In most cases the College is responsible for delivering programmes that have been designed, developed and approved by the University and Pearson. The College has some involvement in selecting units for inclusion in Higher National programmes. In all cases, programme design and validation processes, and approval for the College to deliver awards, are managed by its awarding partners according to their procedures and regulations.

2.2 The College takes an active role in the process of programme approval through participation in awarding partners' processes and in implementing its own internal procedures. New programme proposals are considered at the College's Senior Leadership Team meetings, the Higher Education Delivery Group and the Curriculum and Quality Steering Group, and decisions are informed by the College's Curriculum Development Strategy. Marketing analysis also informs the process and particular consideration is given to resource requirements and skills needs in the local economy, in line with the College's Strategic Plan.

2.3 In combination, the significant control of design and approval processes exercised by the awarding partners, the College's strategic approach to identifying new areas of provision as set out in the Curriculum Development Strategy, and consideration of proposals at key College committees would enable Expectation B1 to be met.

2.4 The review team tested this Expectation by meeting students, staff and employers. The team also viewed the minutes of College meetings, such as the Higher Education Delivery Group and Curriculum and Quality Steering Group. In addition, the team examined the College's Curriculum Development Strategy, documentation supplied to the awarding partners and College forms used to compile programme proposals.

2.5 The College's Curriculum Development Strategy makes explicit reference to higher education in the context of its growth strategy. The College identifies a number of key strategies, which includes the development of a 'curriculum for progression' that meets local, regional and national priorities with a focus on vocational higher education. The team was able to identify strategic decisions that emanated from this approach.

2.6 Although the College has limited involvement in programme design, it is involved in discussions regarding programme development with its awarding partners. For example, College staff contributed to the design of the FdSc Wildlife and Countryside programme. Employers also confirmed significant involvement in programme development. They informed the team that they are consulted on unit selection and about the content of assessment in order to make it as industry relevant as possible, thereby supporting graduate employability. The review team identifies employer involvement in the delivery and development of programmes as good practice (see Expectation B4, paragraph 2.39).

Students are involved in curriculum development through their membership of committees such as the Curriculum and Quality Steering Group but are not present at the Higher Education Delivery Group.

2.7   The College is developing and implementing new course proposal templates to strengthen the consistency and scrutiny of proposed new provision. The review team **affirms** the introduction of a more formalised process for the identification of possible new areas of provision.

2.8   The review team concludes that the College fully understands its role and responsibilities in the design, development and approval of programmes and that it complies with the requirements of its awarding partners. Measures are being introduced to formalise and strengthen internal College processes for course approval. New developments are influenced by student demand and employer feedback. Expectation B1 is met and the level of associated 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

2.9   Recruitment, selection and admission procedures are guided by the principles of fair admission and are outlined in the College's Student Admissions Policy. The College undertakes the admissions process in collaboration with the University, in accordance with University procedures. Full-time students apply for courses through UCAS and the University manages the UCAS application and admissions process. Programmes are listed on the Staffordshire University website and are advertised in the College prospectus and on the College website.

2.10   Staffordshire University admissions criteria and requirements are contained in programme specifications and are followed by the College. Initial applications are dealt with by the University, which then works with the College in the subsequent selection and admission process. Applications are handled within the context of the University and the College's equality policies.

2.11   The College Admissions and Marketing Manager and the admissions team work in partnership with the University during the recruitment and selection process and have access to the University portal system. Internally, the College admissions team work closely with higher education course leaders to arrange applicant interviews and the administration of offers via the University portal system.

2.12   The College's current processes would allow Expectation B2 to be met, as it has a policy setting out the principles and procedures for recruitment and there is clarity regarding the role of the College and its awarding body and organisation within the recruitment, selection and admissions process.

2.13   The review team tested the College's approach to admissions through meetings with staff responsible for admissions and representatives from the awarding bodies, and scrutinised a range of documents relating to admissions. The team also met the College's senior staff and students.

2.14   Training in interview techniques and processes is provided for teaching staff and tutors are supported by members of the admissions team. Some tutors have undertaken training to enable them to consider accreditation of prior learning/experience (APL/E) applicants effectively. College tutors, when interviewing students, assess applicant suitability and also provide advice and guidance. Where necessary, alternative course options are suggested.

2.15   The College Admissions Policy does not include reference to appeals on admissions decisions, and in their meetings with the review team College staff were not clear on how a complaint or appeal relating to admissions would be lodged and processed.

2.16   Students are made aware of the organisation responsible for the award of their qualification at the admissions and application stage, and in subsequent communications

from the College admissions team prior to enrolment. Students whom the review team met were positive about their experience of the application and admissions process.

2.17   The review team found that Expectation B2 relating to recruitment, selection and admissions is met, as the College, in partnership with its awarding body and organisation, has clear policies, which are consistently implemented with the exception of policies on complaints and appeals relating to the admissions process. 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

2.18   The College Teaching and Learning Policy addresses both its higher and further education provision and sets out the principles on which teaching and learning at the College are based. The policy makes reference to the Higher Education Academy and to the UK Professional Standards Framework as external points of reference to inform its approach to teaching and learning for its higher education programmes.

2.19   The observation of taught sessions is central to monitoring the quality teaching and learning on higher education programmes. Observations are based on the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework and are internally validated to assure their quality and rigour. Observations are used developmentally, as well as to inform performance and development reviews for all teaching staff. Reviews are governed by a formal policy and help to inform College professional development needs.

2.20   Termly course review meetings are held to monitor the quality of learning opportunities. Reviews comprise teaching teams and students, and student feedback is used to evaluate student perceptions of the quality of learning opportunities. Minutes from these reviews inform the annual monitoring review for each course.

2.21   Teaching and learning resource requirements, including those of the library, are first identified at the course planning and approval stage and at subsequent course review, which informs annual business planning.

2.22   Online resources are available through the College's VLE. Students on University awards have access to the University VLE and online library resources, and are provided with an induction to access these.

2.23   Higher education provision is delivered in both general and specialist classrooms at the College's campuses. There has been extensive resource investment in the Walford Campus with bespoke teaching rooms, a dedicated science laboratory and a newly created Learning Resources Centre. The Wildlife and Countryside students have the opportunity to benefit from using the Preston Montford Field Centre resources by prior appointment. The College's strategies and policies would allow Expectation B3 to be met.

2.24   The review team tested the application of the College's strategies and policies through review of committee minutes at strategic, cross-College, campus and course level. The team also held meetings with senior, teaching and academic support staff and students, and explored elements of the VLE.

2.25   Processes are in place to review and enhance the provision of learning. These include the College quality cycle, the reviews held by the University and the College, external examiner reports, and the operation of higher education assessment and award boards. Teaching observations are undertaken systematically using the cross-College framework, although this does not differentiate between higher and further education.

2.26   A variety of College manuals and strategies convey operational guidelines for staff to support teaching and learning. For example, the College Handbook for Higher Education Staff sets out an overview of those procedures necessary for the successful operation of higher education programmes, such as the quality and academic cycle and assessment. Key higher education policies are also included for staff reference.

2.27   Staff are well qualified. Many have recent or current experience of their sector and undertake a range of professional development activities to ensure that their subject and teaching expertise is current. Students benefit from a range of employer engagement opportunities and, where applicable, are able to use their own work experience to inform teaching and learning sessions. The College is planning to introduce a series of internal staff development sessions specific to higher education, though at the time of the review these had not been implemented. The review team **affirms** the introduction of a bespoke programme of staff development for higher education.

2.28   Limited progress has been made in implementing the desirable recommendation from the last review to 'ensure the use of the VLE is more comprehensive across all subject areas'. In their submission to the current review, students commented that the VLE was often not updated and was underused. A recent Jisc report commissioned to evaluate the College's VLE noted that the understanding of the VLE at strategic level was not being consistently implemented in practice. While the College VLE is used to support teaching and learning the College does not currently set any minimum requirements for content, nor is there any internal audit of the quality of the VLE. Consequently, the College is not best placed to ascertain the quality and consistency of the use of the VLE to support teaching and learning. The College is now responding with the appointment of information and learning technology champions (see discussion relating to the VLE in Expectation C paragraph 3.8). The review team **recommends** that by September 2016, the College systematically reviews and enhances the VLE to enable every student to develop their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

2.29   Student feedback on learning is gathered through close contact with tutors, afforded by small group sizes. The College recognises that there is potential for students to be further involved in the enhancement of teaching and learning. Students who met the team spoke highly of their learning experience and value the work-related knowledge that tutors employ in their teaching.

2.30   The College is continuing to develop its structures and approaches to review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices systematically, and recognises the specific needs of its higher education provision. The development of the College's VLE to support teaching and learning has been slow. The review team concludes that Expectation B3 is met and that the associated 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

2.31   The College has recently created a new organisational structure to provide an enhanced focus on higher education within the College's curriculum offer. The Higher Education Delivery Group is responsible for the implementation of policies and procedures to support the delivery of higher education programmes. The Group also receives and reviews annual monitoring reports.

2.32   Arrangements and resources are monitored and evaluated through the College's quality cycle. Teaching and support areas produce annual self-assessment reports, which result in quality improvement plans to enhance provision. Degree-awarding partners also monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources within their partnerships.

2.33   Students are supported in their development by course teams and support staff, and have access to staff and resources at Staffordshire University. Students may disclose the need for additional learning support at any point in their enrolment with the College and course teams use early formative assessments as a means to identify learning difficulties. Support is provided for students applying for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).

2.34   Students are provided with a wide range of information, advice and guidance at application, admission, induction and on programme. The College Student Services team holds the external matrix Standard accreditation in recognition of the quality of its information, advice and guidance services. Student Services are able to provide additional support over and above that which is available from the course team. Programme specifications and programme handbooks contain information about the specific academic, personal and professional skills developed on courses.

2.35   The College's policies and arrangements would allow Expectation B4 to be met.

2.36   The review team tested this Expectation through the examination of internal College documents, including its strategies and policies, programme and careers information, relevant meeting minutes and the student submission. The review team also met staff from the College and the University, employers and students.

2.37   The College is effective in identifying student need for additional learning support and where reasonable adjustments can be made for students who have specific learning difficulties. Students who met the team spoke positively about how the College has supported them where specific needs have been identified. The newly created Learning Resources Centre acts as an effective focal point for support services for students.

2.38   Entry criteria for the higher education programmes require both GCSE English and mathematics qualifications, and the College recognises the importance of these subjects at all levels of study and at all ages. As a consequence, the College has developed and updated its English and Maths strategy, a key element of which is to support students on higher education programmes to acquire skills and qualifications in these key subjects, to promote their personal and professional development.

2.39   All programmes provide opportunities for students to link their career and personal development opportunities. For example, Higher National and foundation degree programmes include 'people and skills' modules, which develop leadership skills. Many

programmes embed a diverse range of employer engagement activities, which help students to gain a deeper appreciation of the sector in which they are involved or to which they aspire. Students already employed in a related sector have opportunities to use this experience in their learning and to relate practice to theory. The team considers that the involvement of employers in the delivery of programmes and their use in programme developments is **good practice**.

2.40   Students enjoy access to College-based specialist resources and are facilitated to undertake industry-specific additional qualifications, which promote their career development. The College also affords students opportunities to develop their wider skill set through a range of enrichment activities beyond their immediate academic subject.

2.41   Students whom the team met spoke highly of the extent to which they have made academic, personal and professional development as a result of their studies. Students already employed in the sector are positive about how their studies allow them to relate theory to practice, and all students commented that they have gained a fuller appreciation of the sector in which they work or to which they aspire. Employers who met the team also noted how the students with whom they work develop as a consequence of their studies. Furthermore, employers who had previously studied on College higher education programmes commented positively on how their career progression had been enhanced by their studies at the College.

2.42   The review team concludes that the College has in place a variety of effective mechanisms to support student development and to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources. The review team concludes that Expectation B4 has been 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

2.43   The College's approach to student engagement is governed by its Learner Involvement Strategy and the Guidance for Student Representatives contained in the Handbook for Higher Education Staff. This guidance states that student representatives are to be democratically elected and information about the College's student engagement arrangements is detailed in course handbooks.

2.44   Student representatives are invited to attend termly course committee meetings, assessment boards and the Curriculum and Quality Steering Group. At present, students are not members of the Higher Education Delivery Group or the Board of Governors. There is a generic student representative training programme in place, designed to be applicable to students across the College's provision.

2.45   The team considers that although the lack of student membership at the College's senior higher education committee limits students' opportunity to be involved in institutional-level quality assurance and enhancement, the College does possess a strategy for student engagement. The College's formal system of student representation, set out in the Learner Involvement Strategy and Guidance for Student Representatives, is supplemented by surveys and module feedback and would be sufficient to enable Expectation B5 to be met.

2.46   The team tested this Expectation by meeting staff, students and student representatives. The team also viewed programme handbooks and committee minutes. In addition, the team considered the Learner Involvement Strategy and documentation relating to module feedback and annual monitoring.

2.47   The College's Guidance for Student Representatives is codified in the Handbook for Higher Education Staff and states that course handbooks provide students with information about the student representation system. However, the team was unable to find consistent evidence to support this. Handbooks for University programmes direct students to key individuals and departments for support if they identify problems, whereas handbooks for the College's Higher National provision, available to students through the VLE, do not. The Guidance for Student Representatives also contains explicit instruction for student representatives to be democratically elected. Staff and students reported that this requirement is not always adhered to, and students who met the team were not clear about why they had been selected. The team **recommends** that the College adheres to its own regulations on the selection of student representatives.

2.48   At the time of the review, the College was not providing specific training for higher education student representatives. Although the College has run sessions for further education representatives there was no evidence that higher education students had participated in this, and students confirmed that they had received no formal training. The College informed the team that there had been a delay in the current academic year and that it intends to provide training and support at a later point. The team **recommends** that by October 2016 the College ensures that student representatives receive training and support for their role.

2.49   The College recognises the need to ensure that it generates more meaningful student feedback and is looking for this to feature more prominently as an objective.

The small size of cohorts reduces the usefulness of survey data collected internally, and in the context of the National Student Survey, for identifying trends. The team found that effective arrangements exist for involving students in quality assurance at programme level through course review meetings and assessment boards. Although there is student membership of the Curriculum and Quality Steering Group, students are not members of the Higher Education Delivery Group and there is no higher education representative on the governing body. The College acknowledges that student membership of the Higher Education Delivery Group would be helpful. The team **recommends** that by March 2016 the College takes deliberate steps to engage students in College-level assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

2.50   The team concludes that the College is failing to adhere to its agreed process for the appointment of student representatives, that student representative training had not been implemented at the time of the Review, that there are limited opportunities for student involvement in College-level quality assurance and enhancement activity, and that there is a lack of comprehensive information for students about the College's student engagement arrangements. The recommendations in this area relate to strengthening the College's application of its policies for the selection and training of student representatives and to taking action to develop students' contribution to College-level quality assurance and enhancement. Although this Expectation does not present any serious risk, failure to take action may over time limit the College's capacity to ensure the quality of student learning opportunities. Therefore Expectation B5 is not met and the level of associated risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not 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

2.51   Assessment is conducted according to the documented academic frameworks and assessment regulations of the awarding body and organisation. College responsibilities for assessment are defined in partnership agreements and approval documents. External examiners appointed by the awarding partners maintain oversight of assessment processes and provide reports to the College and its awarding partners. In addition to the frameworks of its partners, the College operates a number of policies and processes to assure assessment, including the Higher Education Assessment Policy. College policies are intended to supplement the guidance of awarding bodies, and have been developed to complement any external requirements.

2.52   Assessment methods for University awards are agreed at approval, and may subsequently be updated in liaison with University link tutors through the application of the University's academic framework. Arrangements are also in place for setting and amending assessments on Higher National programmes using Pearson guidelines. With the introduction of Higher National programmes in September 2015, the College adheres to the BTEC Centre Guide for Managing Quality and is further developing existing internal assessment frameworks to facilitate this.

2.53   The College complies with the University's policy for APL/E. Claims for APL/E are individually addressed at the application and admission stage with support from Student Services. The outcomes of such claims are submitted to the University to be approved by its APL panel.

2.54   The strong alignment of the College's assessment processes for its provision with those of the University, and the development of new structures and processes to support the newly introduced Higher National provision, would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.55   The review team considered the College's approach to assessment processes by talking to students, College staff and awarding body representatives. The review team also examined a range of staff guidance, assessment board minutes, policy documents, awarding partner regulations, programme handbooks and external examiners' reports and their resulting action plans.

2.56   Assessments are subject to internal verification and submitted to the external examiner before being issued to students. Marked assessed work is subject to moderation in partnership with the awarding body, and a sample is considered by the external examiner.

2.57   Assessment is regularly reviewed by course teams in association with awarding body link tutors, and any changes tracked through annual monitoring reports. A wide range of assessment types is employed. The College has formal procedures in place to ensure the integrity of any examinations.

2.58   The College develops student understanding of assessment through a structured initial induction, where the process of assessment is fully explained. Key principles of

assessment continue to be emphasised to students throughout each programme. Draft assignment submission is encouraged and supported by the teaching staff for one draft of each assignment. The team found some inconsistency in the understanding of this between staff and students.

2.59   Assessments are designed to be appropriate for the learning outcomes that are being assessed. Wherever possible, practical assessments are designed to be industry-relevant in order to contextualise the modules and programme learning outcomes. Examination and assessment practices are developed around industrial scenarios, both for relevance and to proactively encourage the transference of skills from theory to practice.

2.60   Higher education assessment and award boards monitor compliance with the agreed assessment strategies, scrutinise external examiner reports, and review course-related operational matters and key data for quality assurance and improvement. Approval of student grades, progression and awards for programmes are conducted through assessment, and award boards are operated according to the academic and assessment regulations of the awarding body and organisation.

2.61   External examiner reports comment positively on assessment types and on feedback. Students whom the team met were generally positive about assessment. However, some commented that the clarity, timeliness and quality of feedback was variable, and in some instances did not enhance their capacity to improve assessment practice. The team **recommends** that by March 2016, the College ensures that staff are developed and supported to give feedback that enables students to demonstrate that they have achieved the intended learning outcomes.

2.62   The review team concludes that the College operates equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment. Further action to improve the provision of student feedback is recommended to support students and enable them to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate. The College's quality assurance procedures are broadly adequate in this area. However, there is scope for greater vigour in the application of procedures relating to the provision of student feedback on assessment.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.63   The University and Pearson determine the external examining arrangements within programmes, including the appointment, training, support and reporting requirements of examiners.

2.64   External examiners play a crucial role in the approval of assessment methods and in the monitoring of the quality of student learning opportunities. Examiners' annual reports are considered by the awarding body and organisation as well as by programme teams. Actions arising from external examiner feedback are incorporated into annual monitoring reports and their associated action plans. External examiners are also required to approve assessment prior to its use.

2.65   The awarding partners' responsibility for the appointment of external examiners and control over the reporting requirements, together with the College's structured approach to considering feedback from external examiners, would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.66   The team tested this expectation by meeting College staff and staff from the awarding partners. The team also met students, viewed external examiner reports and read annual monitoring reports.

2.67   External examiner reports vary in length and substance. Where several Colleges are delivering the same provision awarded by the University it is sometimes difficult to identify comments specifically relating to the delivery of the programme at North Shropshire College.

2.68   Consideration of external examiner reports is more scrupulous at programme level than at College level. Programme teams reflect on the external examiner reports and where issues arise, actions are captured as part of the annual monitoring process. The Higher Education Delivery Group terms of reference state that the Group will consider external examiner reports to identify issues and good practice. The minutes for the Group do not indicate that this is taking place despite several references to the need for external examiner reports to be considered. Students are able to view external examiner reports on the VLE. While students are not members of the Higher Education Delivery Group they do attend meetings at programme level, where external examiner reports are discussed.

2.69   At programme level, external examiner arrangements are effective and there is evidence that the College responds to external examiner reports in a structured way, including through the action plans produced as part of the annual monitoring process. Timely implementation of actions resulting from external reports is variable. For example, within the annual monitoring report for the Wildlife and Countryside programmes a number of actions emanating from external examiner feedback had been carried forward from one year to the next.

2.70   The review team concludes that Expectation B7 is met. Procedures and oversight could be applied with more rigour and consistency to assure standards and quality, and consequently the level of associated risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.71   The Higher Education Delivery Group plays a central role in the monitoring of higher education provision within the College. The awarding body and organisation also monitor and review programmes in partnership with the College, and over the longer term through periodic review.

2.72   The College has a range of monitoring systems in place, central to which are annual monitoring reports. The annual monitoring form, devised by Staffordshire University, incorporates space to comment on engagement with employers and work placement arrangements, statistical data across a number of key areas such as achievement and retention, and a dedicated action plan. The annual monitoring report also incorporates module and survey feedback from students, issues arising from the external examiner report and feedback from the University programme adviser. Termly course review meetings are used to track changes throughout the year and as a vehicle to monitor the action plan arising from the annual monitoring report.

2.73   The College's Pearson provision is in the first year of delivery and has not yet been subject to annual monitoring processes or, at the time of this review, course review meetings. The College has codified monitoring systems for this provision, which mirror those of the University provision, in its Higher Education Provision Quality Cycle.

2.74   The team found that while monitoring and review systems were yet to be implemented on the College's Higher National provision, the College's newly documented processes, strict awarding body requirements and established College committees would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.75   The team tested this Expectation by meeting College staff and students and a University programme adviser. The team also viewed annual monitoring reports, the minutes of College committees and external examiner reports. In addition, the team examined programme adviser reports, self-assessment reports for central College services, the Higher Education Provision Quality Cycle and the Handbook for Higher Education Staff.

2.76   Monitoring and review activity at programme level is robust, detailed and comprehensive. Annual monitoring reports are compiled on the basis of feedback from the external examiner and students, together with data. This is further supplemented in the case of University programmes by a programme adviser report, which requires programme teams to submit a separate action plan. Programme teams also meet student representatives at course review meetings and use assessment boards as a further opportunity to gather feedback upon which they can act.

2.77   The College maintains a variety of documents describing its approach to the review and monitoring of provision. This includes the Higher Education Quality Process, the Higher Education Provision Quality Cycle, and separate written guidance entitled the Annual Monitoring Report Cycle. The contents of these documents do not align and reflect current practice in all instances. For example, the Higher Education Delivery Group agreed to produce a dedicated higher education self-assessment report. This decision is referred to in the minutes of several meetings and is described in the Higher Education Quality Process

document. At the time of the review the higher education self-assessment report had not been produced, and senior staff informed the review team that this decision has been reversed. No record of this decision is recorded in the minutes of the Higher Education Delivery Group and the change is not reflected in policy documents.

2.78   While the College operates effective monitoring and review systems at programme level, College-level oversight is less apparent The minutes of the College's Higher Education Delivery Group indicate that it is not consistently operating within its terms of reference. For example, the terms of reference include the review of external examiners' reports but there is no evidence in the minutes to support this taking place. Minutes also state that external examiner actions will be monitored at each meeting of the Group. The evidence does not confirm that this is happening. The Higher Education Delivery Group is also tasked with overseeing all operational quality assurance procedures and systems within higher education provision, yet the programme advisers' reports are not considered by the Group. Central services such as IT, the library and Student Services all complete an annual self-assessment report. These reports do not make explicit reference to higher education provision or requirements.

2.79   Although students are represented at course review meetings and assessment boards they are not members of the Higher Education Delivery Group. This limits the involvement of students in monitoring, review and the identification of enhancement priorities.

2.80   The College's Higher Education Provision Quality Cycle has been developed recently, in part due to the College's recent introduction of Pearson HNC provision. The new process will require annual monitoring reports to be signed off at Higher Education Delivery Group. In the case of Staffordshire University programmes this will now be done before they are sent to the awarding body. Although written policies have been produced they are yet to be fully implemented. The team **recommends** that the College consistently implements monitoring processes that are effective, regular and systematic.

2.81   The team concludes that, although the College adheres to the requirements of its awarding body, evidence suggests that greater rigour could be applied to the monitoring of reports and action plans at College level, and in particular at the Higher Education Delivery Group. The Group would also benefit from the involvement of students and while its terms of reference are broadly adequate there is scope to apply these more rigorously. Expectation B8 is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints*

Findings

2.82   The College provided limited and incomplete information about its approach to handling academic appeals and student complaints. It did, however, explain that the procedure for handling appeals is set out in course handbooks and that, for provision delivered with Staffordshire University, students have recourse to the awarding body, if they are unhappy with the outcome once the College procedure has been exhausted. The College did not refer to the procedures for handling complaints or academic appeals in relation to its Pearson provision.

2.83   The mutual responsibilities of the College and the University for complaints and appeals are set out in the partnerships agreements. The College has a Complaints Policy, which it applies to all students. This does not refer to the role of the awarding body or organisation. The College's Higher Education Assessment Policy makes reference to academic appeals. The policy states that students can only appeal assessment decisions where marks have been calculated incorrectly. This does not fully align with awarding body regulations.

2.84   Expectation B9 is not met. Inconsistencies surrounding academic appeals are present in the Higher Education Assessment Policy, but the College Complaints Policy makes no reference to the role of the awarding partners or the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), and no clear College arrangements are in existence to support students wishing to make a complaint or academic appeal on the College's Pearson provision.

2.85   The team tested the Expectation by considering the College Complaints Policy, programme handbooks, communications exchanged between the College and their awarding partners, and monitoring reports relating to complaints. The team also met students and staff, including University staff. In addition, the team viewed the College's Handbook for Higher Education Staff, Higher Education Assessment Policy and Staffordshire University award regulations.

2.86   Confusion exists within the College over the meaning of complaints and academic appeals, as well as the policies and procedures that govern the management of complaints and appeals. This prevented staff whom the review team met from providing a consistent and coherent explanation of how processes in this area operate and relate to College policy. College staff were unable to articulate clearly their internal process for handling complaints and the interrelationship between their own complaints policy and that of Pearson, including the relevance and role of the OIA.

2.87   The team found that the College was unaware as to the extent of its responsibilities for managing academic appeals relating to Pearson provision. There was uncertainty regarding the grounds on which Pearson would permit an academic appeal, and also as to whether Pearson expected the College to handle the issue in its entirety or whether Pearson would intervene if the student remained unhappy. This was only resolved following a dialogue between the College and a Pearson representative during the review visit.

2.88   The College's Higher Education Assessment Policy states that appeals will only be accepted where staff members have added up marks incorrectly. However, staff reported a

wider interpretation centred on procedural irregularity, which the team found to align with the regulations of the awarding partners.

2.89   The College has a single complaints policy, which is applicable to all students. There is no reference to the awarding partners or to the OIA. Staff whom the team met were unsure whether or not students on Pearson awards were entitled to take complaints to the OIA. The review team was told that students studying for Pearson awards are not permitted to take complaints to the OIA. During the course of the review visit, staff revised their initial response and confirmed that where the complainant remains unsatisfied with the College's response they do have a right to take their complaint firstly to Pearson and ultimately to the OIA.

2.90   Information given to students is limited and inconsistent. Although students whom the team met reported that information about complaints and appeals was contained in their programme handbooks, the team could find evidence of this only for students studying University awards. Handbooks developed for the College's Higher National provision, available to students on the VLE, do not contain information about complaints and appeals processes. In their meeting with the team, senior staff acknowledged that the introduction of a template would enable them to standardise the structure of handbooks and the information that they provide to students, but such an approach had not resulted in consistency at the time of the review. The College also confirmed that information about support for students who submit a complaint is not detailed in the complaints policy. The team **recommends** that the College clarifies and communicates to all stakeholders the policies and procedures for complaints and appeals (see also the discussion relating to information provided to students regarding academic appeals and student complaints in Expectation C).

2.91   The College monitors complaints across the institution but does not explicitly distinguish between those arising from higher or further education provision. Higher education complaints are also monitored in annual monitoring reports and higher education course committee meetings, although the review team did not find evidence of this happening in practice.

2.92   The review team concludes that the College is unclear about the internal processes and policies governing complaints and academic appeals. Understanding among staff surrounding the grounds for an academic appeal and the role of Pearson and the OIA is not consistently understood or in line with written policies and the expectations of the awarding organisation. Information for students is not present in all handbooks, including where they can access support. While processes exist for the oversight of complaints, the team found that significant gaps exist in policies, structures and procedures relating to complaints and appeals and that Expectation B9 is therefore not met and the level of associated risk is serious.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

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

2.93   The College has a range of responsibilities for the provision of learning opportunities delegated by its awarding bodies and organisation. This includes the provision of work-based learning opportunities on some foundation degree and teacher training programmes. The College's Higher Education Strategy requires close association with employers in the delivery of programmes.

2.94   The College's Work Experience Policy and Procedures apply to further and higher education. The procedures are detailed and comprehensive and address the need to conduct due diligence and risk assessments, ensure that an induction takes place, conduct site visits and gather feedback. They also require the College to maintain a database of approved employers and produce work-based learning handbooks for students.

2.95   Students on the FdSc Wildlife and Countryside programme undertake workplace learning as a component of their programme and are provided with a handbook to support this. The handbook is detailed, with information for students and employers, and contains a form for recording placement visits. The College's stated approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.96   The team tested this Expectation by meeting staff, students and employers. The team also scrutinised the College's Work Experience Policy and Procedures, FdSc Wildlife and Countryside Workplace Learning Handbook, the College's employer database, and completed risk assessments.

2.97   The College has effective relationships with a range of employers, who contribute to the delivery and enhancement of learning opportunities in a variety of ways. This includes involvement in programme design, validation and periodic review, the provision of work-placements, guest lectures, practical demonstrations and the observation of teaching trainees.

2.98   Employers speak positively about the contribution of the College's students while they are taking part in work-based learning. The FdSc Wildlife and Countryside Workplace Learning Handbook contains information about employer and mentor responsibilities. Employers whom the review team met were unable to confirm having received the handbook. However, employers were positive about the open communication maintained by the College and the information received to assist them in undertaking their roles. The College did provide an example of a completed placement visit report for the FdSc Wildlife and Countryside. Employers also confirmed that risk assessments are conducted.

2.99   Arrangements for College-level oversight of work-based learning are not evident in the committee structure. In their meetings with the team, staff provided contradictory and inconsistent views regarding the application of the Colleges Work Experience Policy and Procedures to the management of work-based learning on higher education provision. Differing views were expressed about whether the procedures should be, and were being, applied. Initially, senior staff informed the team that the College's Work Experience Policy and Procedures governed higher education provision and were to be applied in their entirety.

The College subsequently revised their earlier suggestion that the Work Experience Policy and Procedures were pertinent to higher education provision. However, in the final clarification meeting with the review team, staff confirmed that the policy and procedures did apply to higher education.

2.100   There are inconsistencies in the implementation of the College's Work Experience Policy and Procedures in the management of work-based learning. For example, work experience reports and work experience assessment as described in the Work Experience Policy and Procedures are not being used, nor is the induction form. Although the policy allows for documentation to be tailored and this has occurred for the FdSc Wildlife and Countryside, the alternative documentation does not align with the College's policy in all areas. The review team **recommends** that the College develops and implements policies and procedures that are appropriate to the management and oversight of work-based learning.

2.101   The review team concludes that the College maintains productive relationships and good communication with employers who contribute effectively to the development and delivery of programmes. The status and application of College policy regarding work experience is not clear or fully understood by staff and the policy is not consistently implemented in relation to its higher education provision. Arrangements for oversight of work-based learning at College-level through the committee structure are absent. Expectation B10 is met and the level of associated risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk   Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.102   The College does not offer research degrees, and therefore Expectation B11 is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.103   In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.104   Of the 10 applicable expectations for this judgement area, four are met with a low level of risk (Expectations B1, B2, B3 and B4) and three are met with a moderate level of risk (Expectations B6, B7 and B8). Expectations B5, B9 and B10 are not met. B5 is not met, with a moderate level of risk, B9 with a serious level of risk, and B10 with a moderate level of risk.

2.105   The review team makes two affirmations in this area. One affirmation is in B1, relating to the actions taken by the College to introduce more formalised processes for the identification of new areas of provision. A second affirmation is in B3, which refers to the introduction of a bespoke programme of staff development for higher education.

2.106   There is one area of good practice in this area, located in B4: the involvement of employers in the delivery of programmes and their use in programme development.

2.107   There are eight recommendations associated with this judgement area.

2.108   The review team makes one recommendation under Expectation B3, which is met with an associated level of low risk. This relates to reviewing and enhancing the VLE across all subject areas. Recommendations are made in Expectations B6 and B8 where the level of risk is moderate. In Expectation B6 the recommendation relates to the provision of staff development to improve assessment feedback to students. The recommendation in Expectation B8 relates to the implementation of consistent monitoring processes.

2.109   The review team concludes that Expectation B5 is not met and that the associated level of risk is moderate. The failure of the College to adhere to its agreed processes for the appointment and training of student representatives, and limited opportunities for students to participate in College-level quality assurance and enhancement, limits the College's capacity to ensure the quality of student learning opportunities and contributes to the moderate level of risk. There is also some evidence to suggest that gaps in student feedback mean that the College may not always be aware of issues affecting the quality of student learning opportunities. Without action more serious problems may develop over time.

2.110   There are three recommendation under Expectation B5. These relate to engaging students in College-level processes of quality assurance and enhancement, implementing College policies with regard to the selection of student representatives, and ensuring that they receive support and training for their role.

2.111   Expectation B9 is not met, with an associated serious level of risk. The review team found a lack of understanding among staff about internal College processes and policies governing student complaints and academic appeals, and the interrelationship of these processes with those of the awarding body and organisation. There is a lack of awareness of the role of the OIA. Information for students regarding complaints, the meaning of an academic appeal and how to make an appeal, was not present in all programme handbooks. There are significant gaps in the College's understanding of its responsibilities in relation to the management of academic appeals and student complaints in the context of the regulations of its awarding bodies. Consequences of inaction in this area may be severe.

2.112   There is one recommendation under Expectation B9, which relates to clarification and communication of procedures for student complaints and academic appeals to all stakeholders.

2.113   Expectation B10 is met and the associated level of risk is moderate. The reasons for this are that the status and application of College policy regarding work experience to its higher education provision is not clear or fully understood by staff, and the policy is not consistently implemented. Arrangements for oversight of work-based learning at College-level through the committee structure are absent.

2.114   The review team did not find any evidence to suggest that arrangements for work-based learning were not operating effectively. However, lack of clarity regarding the application of College policy to higher education provision, and lack of oversight, could lead to problems with the management of this area over time. The one recommendation in this area relates to the development and implementation of policies and procedures to support the management and oversight of work-based learning that are appropriate for higher education provision.

2.115   Having concluded that Expectation B9 is not met, and with a serious level of risk, the review team, taking into account the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook, concludes that this area **does not meet** 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 recognises the importance of providing accurate and detailed information about its courses for prospective and current students as well as for its key partners and stakeholders in the community. Information about the College, its courses, facilities, policies and procedures is made available to applicants, students, staff, and external stakeholders through the College website, the VLE and printed materials, including a prospectus. Partnership agreements with the University set out in detail the mutual responsibilities for the development, approval and publication of information. The College has recently produced its own Published Information Policy to provide explanation and guidance to staff on expectations regarding public information.

3.2 The review team tested the Expectation through examining the College website, VLE, course handbooks and College prospectus. The review team also met teaching staff and students.

3.3 The College provides information about its higher education programmes to prospective students, including its own Level 3 students, on its website, through an annual prospectus, via social media and at a higher education open college event. Progression opportunities available to students following completion of their studies at higher education level are also included.

3.4 The College has recently relaunched its website, which promotes the higher education provision. Usefully, the website signposts potential students to named individuals at the College who can then provide bespoke one-to-one advice.

3.5 The College collates its higher education offer annually in a prospectus for the following year. Additionally, press releases and social media are used to target a wider demographic audience.

3.6 Once enrolled, students are provided with programme information through programme and module handbooks and on the VLE. Programme handbooks for awarding body programmes are produced by the University, with local amendments by the College if required, and contain information derived from programme specifications. Course handbooks for the College's Higher National programmes are not required to follow a standard template or other means to ensure consistency and accuracy of information.

3.7 The review team found that information to students regarding academic appeals and complaints was incomplete in programme handbooks. Handbooks provided to students on the College's Higher National provision do not contain information about complaints and academic appeals. Students are made aware of the possibility of raising a concern or complaint in handbooks on University awards, and signposted to further information at the University. However, students are not directed to the College's formal complaints process and no details are provided in the handbooks on what constitutes an academic appeal. Information for staff regarding what constitutes an academic appeal, contained in the College's Higher Education Assessment Policy, does not align with awarding body or

organisation regulations. The College Complaints Policy makes no reference to the role of the awarding partners or the OIA.

3.8   The VLE is used to provide programme information for students. The College acknowledges that the VLE is inconsistent in its provision of information. For example, not all programme specifications are available to students online. Students whom the team met, and who made a submission to the review, commented that the VLE is often not updated and is underused. The College has made slow progress in responding to an advisable recommendation from the last review to ensure the use of the VLE is more comprehensive across all subject areas (see Expectation B3).

3.9   The review team concludes that the College's stated approach to the provision of information is not effective in providing consistent and complete information to current students, staff or stakeholders. Information regarding complaints and academic appeals is not complete or brought to the attention of all students in their handbooks. Information for staff regarding academic appeals contained in the College's higher education assessment policy does not align with awarding body or organisation regulations (see Expectation B9). The VLE is inconsistent in the provision of programme information across subject areas (see Expectation B3). There is a lack of comprehensive information to students in handbooks about the College's student engagement arrangements, and information in programme specifications was not consistently included in all programme handbooks (see Expectations A2.2 and B5). The review team **recommends** that the College ensures all information produced is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.10   Expectation (C) is not met and the level of risk is serious. There are significant gaps in the College's approach to the quality assurance of information which, if not addressed, may have severe consequences.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

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

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

3.12   There is one recommendation specifically associated with this area, and this relates to ensuring that all information produced is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.13   The College's policies and procedures for producing and monitoring information are not effective in providing information for current students and staff that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. There has been slow progress in addressing the recommendation from the previous review to improve the availability of programme information across subject areas through the College's VLE. Consequences of inaction in relation to, for example, the provision of full and accurate information regarding processes for academic appeals and student complaints, may be severe. The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **does not meet** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College has recently approved a Higher Education Enhancement Strategy. The Higher Education Delivery Group is central to managing the College's stated strategic approach to enhancement. Where activities or initiatives worthy of dissemination are identified the Higher Education Delivery Group assumes responsibility for ensuring that all staff are aware of the good practice, and there are plans to link enhancement to staff performance reviews. Annual monitoring reports are seen as another key vehicle in identifying and sharing good practice. Outcomes from these reports are discussed at the Curriculum and Quality Steering Group and Higher Education Delivery Group.

4.2 The Strategy contains key themes, which include student experience and engagement, excellence in academic and professional practice, equality and inclusion, employability and employer engagement, helping students to develop a wider understanding of their chosen field of study, and developing knowledge and research. Each theme is underpinned by a wider series of objectives.

4.3 The College's policy, arrangements for oversight, and the use of staff development sessions to disseminate good practice would enable the Expectation to be met.

4.4 The team tested this Expectation by scrutinising the College's Higher Education Enhancement Strategy, Strategic Plan, minutes of College committees, annual monitoring reports and survey outcomes. The team also met students, staff and employers and viewed planned staff development activities.

4.5 The College has recently developed a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities, which it has detailed in its Higher Education Enhancement Strategy. The strategy was considered in draft form at the Higher Education Delivery Group in May 2015 and was provided to the review team during the visit. Enhancement has been discussed at the Higher Education Delivery Group, but the focus has been on understanding the term rather than on activities designed to enhance student learning opportunities. The team was not able to find any evidence that the College has reflected on its strategic approach to enhancement as driven by the Higher Education Delivery Group, or its effectiveness, prior to the development of the recent strategy.

4.6 Prior to the development of the Higher Education Enhancement Strategy, enhancement was driven by annual monitoring reports and efforts to increase recruitment, with good practice being disseminated through professional development events. Staff mentoring arrangements and the development of the FdSc Animal Science programme were provided as examples of enhancement initiatives generated by this approach. While the team found that staff mentoring in particular was valued by staff, it did not clearly derive from deliberate steps at provider level. Discussions regarding annual monitoring reports at the Higher Education Delivery Group centre on the process of completing the documents and reporting them to the College rather than on identifying good practice worthy of dissemination.

4.7 The College places a strong emphasis in its Higher Education Enhancement Strategy on using higher education professional development sessions to disseminate good practice. However, the College's plans to develop a bespoke programme of staff

development for higher education have not yet been implemented (see discussion in Expectation B3). Staff members were able to provide examples of positive developments at programme level but were unable to articulate the College's strategy for enhancement, or how any examples at programme level related to the strategy.

4.8   Students are involved in quality assurance at programme level and their feedback informs College decision making. However, students have limited opportunities for formal participation in senior College committees such as the Board of Governors and meetings of the Higher Education Delivery Group, thus limiting their involvement in College-level enhancement (see discussion in Expectation B5).

4.9   The College intends to deliver its Higher Education Enhancement Strategy by having it as a standing item at the Higher Education Delivery Group. The College also intends to integrate enhancement into performance agendas, with outcomes informing the College's higher education continuing professional development programme. At the time of the visit this was not in operation. The review team **recommends** that the College ensures that quality assurance procedures are used to identify opportunities for enhancement and that this is done in a systematic and planned manner at College level.

4.10   The team concludes that new formalised arrangements for enhancement are broadly adequate and sufficient to enable the Expectation to be met. However, the College has not yet implemented these processes and cannot therefore demonstrate that its intended approach is improving the quality of learning opportunities at provider level. Consequently, the Expectation is not met and the level of associated risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.12   There is one recommendation in this area, which relates to ensuring that quality assurance procedures are used systematically to identify opportunities for enhancement across the College.

4.13   The College has a strong commitment to improving the quality of student learning, and has recently developed a formal strategy and senior management arrangements to support enhancement on its higher education provision. The review team saw evidence of a number of enhancement initiatives at programme and College level. The College was unable, however, to demonstrate that these initiatives are linked into a coherent strategic whole. The new arrangements for a more strategic approach to enhancement are not yet fully embedded.

4.14   The enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement** to meet UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The College's Strategic Plan notes the role of the College in working with employers to meet the skills and training requirement of local businesses. This is further developed in the College's Higher Education Strategy, which seeks to ensure that the higher education curriculum offer is enhanced with opportunities that enrich both the life and the employability skills of students for later progression.

5.2 University programmes embed the notion of the 'Staffordshire Graduate' to ensure that students gain the life and work skills that employers respect and to assist graduates in obtaining employment.

5.3 The College has a wide range of productive links with local and national employers. Such links enable employers to engage with staff and students to enhance employability within the curriculum and to align with the College's Employer Engagement Strategy. Examples of links with employers include work-based learning and placement, volunteering, employers as guest speakers and sector-related visits and tours. Students on the FdSc Sports Development and Coaching programme recently took part in a study tour to Barcelona, where they organised and ran a competition with a number of international teams.

5.4 The College seeks to add value to students' qualifications by offering a range of sector-specific additional qualifications, such as technical certificates, that students can undertake. Some of these have a synergy with studies for their main qualification while others are more stand-alone.

5.5 The enhancement of students' employability skills is recognised by students, and employers and external examiners confirm the appropriateness of the curriculum and assessment in developing and preparing students for work.

5.6 Staff are well qualified, and many have recent or current experience of their sector and undertake a range of professional development activities to ensure that their subject and teaching expertise is current. Staff speak enthusiastically about the extent to which their current engagement with the sector enables them to bring this to bear on the teaching and learning of their students.

5.7 College resources further the employability of students with access to a range of specialist resources. For example, students on the Wildlife and Countryside, and Animal Science and Health programmes enjoy access to a 600-acre farm and (by appointment) to the Preston Montford Field Centre resources. Students whom the review team met described how their use of these resources allows them to relate theory to practice, provides them with volunteering opportunities, and develops their wider employability skills.

5.8 Students on the Foundation Degree in Sports Development and Coaching programme have the support and input from the College Sports Maker, who works across the College and who serves to develop and enrich the employability of these students.

5.9 To further its engagement with employers across the entirety of its provision, the College is in the process of developing employer focus groups in each curriculum area. The extent to which each course promotes employability is reviewed in Course annual monitoring reports, in which progression to employment or to further study is considered.

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.