Higher Education Review of Richmond Adult Community College

January 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Richmond Adult Community College. The review took place from 12 to 14 January 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Tessa Counsell
- Dr James Freeman (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

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

The themes for the academic year 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/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 Richmond Adult Community College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards **does not meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The integrated student support systems that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4).
- The Higher Education Pass system which enhances students' ability to develop as confident and independent learners (Expectation B4).
- The effective use of live briefs in the enhancement of assessment processes (Expectation B6).

Recommendations

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

By May 2016:

- establish assessment boards in accordance with Pearson Education's requirements (Expectations A2.1 and B6)
- produce a definitive record for each programme and qualification as required by the awarding organisation (Expectations A2.2 and C)
- formally define the College's position on the recognition of prior learning for higher education students (Expectation B6)
- ensure that the information for current and prospective students is fit for purpose and trustworthy (Expectations C and A2.2).

By June 2016:

- fully align the Appeals Policy with Pearson Education's requirements (Expectation B9).

By September 2016:

- strengthen the process for the design, development and approval of programmes to include formal consideration of the academic content and delivery (Expectation B1)

- ensure higher education student membership of appropriate deliberative committees (Expectation B5)
- ensure all recommendations from external verifier reports are completed in a timely manner (Expectation B7).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps taken to develop and implement a mitigating circumstances policy (Expectation B6).

Theme: Student Employability

The College's 2012-15 Strategic Plan sets out employability as a key aspect of the College mission and vision. The College supports students' transition into employment by embedding vocational aspirations and skills into its programmes and offers a range of employment-related opportunities.

The College has selected a Level 5 professional practice unit for delivery across the second year of all Higher National (HN) programmes. Staff have educational and practitioner experience, which is appreciated by students as providing an immediate bridge to the external environment. Students achieve incremental career progression as they acquire new skills, enabling those who have previously faced barriers to learning to make progress and gain new qualifications.

A programme of visiting lecturers gives students an insight into working as a practitioner. In addition, students are given a range of exhibition, competition and live brief opportunities to support the development of their work in a professional context. They are also encouraged to sell their work and volunteer in the onsite gallery to further develop their curricula vitae and develop employability skills.

An annual Artist in Residency programme will be launched in 2016. This will offer former students the use of studio facilities together with support to develop new work in their first years of practice.

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

About Richmond Adult Community College

Richmond Adult and Community College (the College) was established in 1838 to provide education and skills to working and disadvantaged adults. The College incorporated as a General Further Education College in 1994. It maintained its adult education mission by offering vocational skills programmes which complement a broad range of community learning programmes. The College is located in southwest London within the London Borough of Richmond-Upon-Thames. The College operates from one site in Parkshot.

The College's mission is to create a sustainable model for adult learning, from which it can continue to 'enable adults to unlock their talent and release their potential through learning, skills and enterprise'.

The academic provision of the College focuses on the needs of adults who lack the basic skills of literacy, English language and numeracy; adults who have disabilities and severe learning difficulties; adults who seek vocational skills, training and career progression; and adults of all abilities who seek personal development and well-being. The College enables adult learners, who are frequently returners to education, to progress from entry level to Level 5.

The College's higher education provision is small and comprises programmes from Pearson, Trinity College London, Cambridge English Language Assessment and the Association of Accounting Technicians. Five HN programmes from Pearson are in scope for this review. Student numbers are small, with 22 students enrolled across programmes in Crafts, Photography and Digital Media, and in Fine Art, at the time of the review.

In 2011 the College underwent a Summative Review by QAA under Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER). Since then the College's higher education provision has changed both in terms of subjects and number of programmes offered. All qualifications offered at the time of the last review have been discontinued. In response to student feedback the College developed a progression route to higher education from its Level 3 programmes in Art and Design and has been offering HN Certificates and Diplomas in this subject area since 2013.

Richmond Adult and Community College previously operated from two sites, the Clifden Centre in Twickenham and the Parkshot site in central Richmond. Following the withdrawal of public funding for adult learning, the College sold the Clifden Centre and used the proceeds to finance the development of an adult learning campus at Parkshot. The new facilities at Parkshot include state-of-the-art creative and performing arts spaces. In line with national trends in terms of creative art and design subjects having higher levels of support needs, including mental health difficulties, support systems for students with learning difficulties and disabilities have also been enhanced.

The IQER report of 2011 identified two areas of good practice, which have been maintained. The College addressed the advisable recommendation made in the report. To strengthen its oversight of higher education the Higher Education Committee, which had been set up as a subcommittee of Academic Board to develop higher education provision, was disbanded. Monitoring of the quality, management and resources of higher education provision was taken over by Academic Board, with discussions also taking place at the Teaching Quality Group and the Curriculum Senior Management Team meetings.

The 2011 IQER report also identified two desirable recommendations. The mapping of College quality policies and procedures against the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* has been superseded by mapping against the Quality Code, which the College has completed for selected Expectations. The review and formalisation of procedures for the quality assurance and monitoring of public information has not been completed. The College still does not have a formal policy for the production and quality assurance of print and web information (see Expectation C).

Explanation of the findings about Richmond Adult Community College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of 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* (FHEQ) 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 higher education provision at Richmond Adult Community College is small, limited in 2015-16 to 22 students on three Level 4 and two Level 5 Pearson HN programmes in the School of Creative and Performing Arts. While Pearson is responsible for setting the academic standards of the awards, and has overall responsibility for the maintenance of those standards, the College is responsible for delivering and assessing the programmes of study, and for maintaining the academic standards of the degree-awarding organisation, as set out in the responsibilities checklist for Level 4 and Level 5 BTEC programmes contained in the draft Higher Education Staff Handbook. The approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.2   In considering this Expectation, the review team examined College and awarding organisation procedures for programme approval and programme specifications. The team tested its findings through discussions with members of senior staff.

1.3   While the programmes delivered are aligned to the FHEQ, via the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), by the awarding organisation, it is not immediately clear how the College differentiates between the different award titles and levels, due to the cross-level and programme delivery methodology. For example, there are four core units across all programmes, three at Level 4 and one at Level 5, together with a range of specialist units,

the majority crossing disciplines and qualifications. The College uses different programme titles from Pearson when referring to the programmes in its documentation. In meetings with senior staff the team found that there is awareness of the discrepancy between the official programme titles used by the awarding organisation in its specifications and the programme titles on the College website. Staff admitted that in internal documentation, such as the 2015-16 Course Guide (prospectus), the programme specification in the Course Handbook, the virtual learning environment (VLE) and assessment briefs, the correct title is not always used, with, for example, pathway titles used as shorthand for the overall qualification. These aspects are further discussed in Expectations A2.1, A2.2 and C: Information. The team also found an overall lack of staff awareness of external reference points, for example the Quality Code and the FHEQ.

1.4   The unit aims sheets and assignment briefs clearly indicate the QCF level. Teaching staff and students demonstrate a solid understanding of the requirements of teaching and assessment at Levels 4 and 5. Students undertaking Level 5 units are aware of the increased demand in study at that level. The College's teaching observation process considers whether teaching is level appropriate, and the external examiner reports seen by the team confirm that the programmes are assessed at the correct levels.

1.5   The team concludes that the College has in place adequate processes to ensure that threshold academic standards are met. Therefore the Expectation 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

1.6   The College is responsible for maintaining academic standards through its academic frameworks. It has a range of policies which cover both the further and higher education programmes, including the Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and Procedures, an Assessment Policy and Procedure, and Complaints Policy and Procedure, together with a higher education Curriculum Quality Procedures Manual, but does not have its own academic regulations. There are also no arrangements for a higher education assessment board regarding decisions on progression or achievement. The lack of a process for formally making decisions on student progression and achievement leads to the Expectation not being met.

1.7   In considering this Expectation, the review team examined College and Pearson procedures and guidance for teaching, learning and assessment and met senior staff, academic staff and students.

1.8   The College's Academic Board holds overall responsibility for the academic work of the College, including the monitoring and maintenance of academic standards, and formulating regulations. The Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) is responsible for the overall curriculum, including the monitoring and review of quality assurance processes to ensure the overall delivery standards, while the Teaching Quality Group's overall purpose is to develop and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The Curriculum Senior Management Team (CSMT) has oversight of operations at School level, while the draft Higher Education Staff Handbook sets out the responsibilities of Heads of School and Programme Leaders for recruiting with integrity and oversight of planning, delivery and assessment.

1.9   The cross-College Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and Procedures set out the approach to, and key elements of, teaching, learning and assessment of quality assurance. Assessment of learning is specified in the College Assessment Policy and Procedures. The policy also details the role of observations of assessment practice in ensuring quality. None of the policies, procedures and key documents for staff and students contain arrangements for an assessment board or equivalent, at which student achievement and progression can be formally discussed and recorded, which is a requirement of the awarding organisation.

1.10   The draft Higher Education Staff Handbook is useful. It is higher education-specific and contains an overview of BTEC procedures, details on assessment design, marking and verification, and the Pearson responsibilities checklist for delivery centres. The HNC/D Course Handbook for students explains plagiarism and misconduct in examinations but does not refer to or signpost academic regulations or the College Assessment Policy and Procedures. It also does not contain information on appeals or mitigating circumstances (also see Expectation C).

1.11   The BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment, referenced in the College's draft Higher Education Staff Handbook, emphasises the requirement for assessment boards in order to make recommendations on achievement and progression. It states that 'each centre is

expected by Pearson to hold Assessment Boards for all of its BTEC Higher National programmes…to make recommendations on: the grades achieved by students on the individual modules or units; extenuating circumstances; cases of cheating and plagiarism; progression of students onto the next stage of the programme; the awards to be made to students; referrals and withdrawals'. The document stresses the 'requirement for Assessment Boards by both Pearson and QAA'. The guidance goes on to state that 'each centre should have a published set of regulations for its assessment boards. These should cover matters such as the scheduling of boards, membership, terms of reference, operation and administration, appeals, assessment of students with disabilities and anonymity of students in assessment. Regulations may include a standard agenda for all assessment boards. All members of the programme team should attend the board, and the Chair and Secretary of the assessment board should be independent of the programme under consideration, with programme leaders prohibited from chairing such meetings.'

1.12   The College confirmed that there is no higher education assessment board in place. In meetings with senior staff, the review team was informed that the issue of an assessment board had been discussed at a meeting of the Teaching Quality Group in 2013 when the programmes commenced, and the decision had been taken not to establish one. Staff reported that end-of-year consideration of students' unit and programme achievement and progression was informal, and that the external verifier had not raised the issue of not having an assessment board.

1.13   The review team heard that the College considers that it carries out the functions of a higher education assessment board as an informal process. Senior staff stated that there is a robust process of internal moderation, and that the external verifier makes the final decision on whether grading is robust and each student has met the unit outcomes. The review team also heard that CSMT and Academic Board will look at matters arising regarding assessment on higher education programmes. While the HNC assessment procedure document states that Academic Board will consider appeals decisions and mitigating circumstances, its terms of reference and minutes do not suggest that it carries out the duties of an assessment board as defined by the awarding organisation. Although achievement data is reported to Academic Board in summary form, there is also no formal consideration of student grades or progression. Moreover, programme staff are not members of Academic Board and the terms of reference do not explicitly empower the board to make the decisions required of an assessment board. The College also pointed the review team to its data census and monitoring procedures, but these are aimed at gathering summary data on progression and achievement rather than acting as a forum for the consideration of individual students.

1.14   In addition, in their 2015 report the external examiner repeated their 2014 recommendation that the College put in place a mitigating circumstances policy. At the time of the visit, this was only available in draft form, so could not be used by students. In the absence of a formal policy, senior staff reported that students at risk have been discussed at the Teaching Quality Group meetings, and at Academic Board. In practice, the review team found that, although the terms of reference of the Teaching Quality Group include monitoring performance and outcomes of different learner groups, there is very little reference to higher education students (see also Expectation B6). Moreover, student appeals to the awarding organisation relating to external or internally awarded assessment outcomes can only take place following the decision of an assessment board.

1.15   The review team concludes that the lack of adherence to the requirement of the awarding organisation to hold an assessment board at which student achievement and progression can be formally discussed and recorded is a serious omission and a breach of Pearson's procedures. The team **recommends** that the College establishes assessment boards in accordance with the awarding organisation's requirements. In conclusion, the

review team finds that the Expectation is not met, and that the level of risk is serious, due to a significant gap in policy, structure and procedures relating to the College's maintenance of academic standards.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

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

1.16   The College's higher education Curriculum Quality Procedures Manual states that programme specifications are the definitive record of each programme, detailing the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected achievements of programmes of study. The awarding organisation has clear requirements for the production of contextualised programme specifications and their contents. Its guidance states that 'a separate programme specification is required for each and every higher education programme on offer. If the offer comprises HNCs in more than one area, with common core units, then a separate programme specification is required for each'. The responsibilities checklist for Levels 4 and 5 BTEC programmes also states that it is the College's responsibility for 'providing definitive programme information relating to the HNs as delivered at their institution, including a tailored programme specification'.

1.17   The programme specifications the College uses are Pearson documents, and not contextualised for the College's unit selection and delivery. The only contextualised programme specification available is for an overall award title of Art and Design, with learning outcomes undifferentiated for the two levels of HNC and HND, contrary to Pearson's requirement. It contains programme learning outcomes, but not those at unit level. There are also no references to the FHEQ. As the College does not maintain a definitive record for each Higher National award offered, the Expectation is not met.

1.18   In considering the Expectation, the review team scrutinised documentation provided by the College, including programme documentation and external examiner reports, and met senior, academic and support staff and students.

1.19   The review team found that there is variability in the way in which the College states the titles of the Higher National programmes that it delivers (see also Expectations A2.1 and C). In meetings with staff, the team found a similar variability in their understanding of the qualification titles on offer and the requirements for separate, contextualised programme specifications. From senior staff the team heard that only the national specifications are used, with the units that make up the programme, as per the rules of combination, stated in the annually updated HNC/D Course Handbook.

1.20   Academic staff indicated that the separate titles were pathways on the overall title of Art and Design, and that each pathway would be included in the title stated on certification of the final award to students. However, students met at the visit considered that the titles on the website and in the programme documentation referred to the certification they would receive on completion of their awards. The example certificate seen by the team contains the wording 'Pearson Level 4 HNC Diploma in 3D Design (QCF)', in contrast to the titles used by the College of HNC and HND 3D Crafts Ceramics or HNC 3D Crafts. With regard to the discrepancies between programme titles and students' expectations, senior staff agreed that the correct titles were not always used; however, the transcript would clearly indicate pathway units.

1.21 The review team found that there is a lack of understanding at the College of Pearson's requirements regarding the compilation and maintenance of a definitive record for each programme and qualification delivered (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. The team therefore **recommends** that the College produces a definitive record for each programme and qualification as required by Pearson. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is not met and the level of risk is serious.

Expectation: **Not met**
Level of risk: **Serious**

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

1.22   The College's responsibilities for setting academic standards during programme design are limited to selecting an appropriate combination of units and devising effective assessments. The College operates a Curriculum Review and Approval Process and selects units from Pearson's national programme specifications according to rules of combination. The approval process details how deliberative committees contribute to the approval of new programmes. The clear process of selecting units would allow the Expectation to be met in design.

1.23   In considering this Expectation, the team scrutinised the Curriculum Review and Approval Process, programme feasibility studies and external examiner reports to test the effectiveness of the procedures for approving programmes, and met senior staff and academic staff and students.

1.24   Academic Board, QSC and CSMT share responsibility for managing and overseeing the approval of new programmes. To begin the development of a new programme, Heads of Schools or Programme Leaders submit a 'feasibility study' for approval by the Vice Principal Curriculum and Learner Services at CSMT and eventually by the Principal at Academic Board. Following this approval, programme teams then select units and formulate an overall plan of delivery for the provision. The College's processes for programme approval do not formally include external input.

1.25   The review team found that the current processes for the approval of new programmes do not record sufficient scrutiny of the academic case. The 'feasibility studies' do not discuss the structure of the programme's units, or its assessment strategy, in detail. Nor do Academic Board, CSMT, Teaching Quality Group or QSC consider individual programme proposals in depth or evaluate supporting documentation, such as contextualised programme specifications or assessment schedules (see recommendation in Expectation B1). However, after a programme has been approved in principle, programme teams effectively plan unit combinations and design high-quality assessments.

1.26   The College adheres to Pearson's rules of combinations and effectively selects programme units. The limited responsibilities the College has in this area leads the review team to conclude that the Expectation is met, with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.27　　The College has an Assessment Policy governing assessment design and processes. It ensures that credit is awarded only through the achievement of intended learning outcomes by selecting units from Pearson's national programme specifications according to the rules of combination, and by designing assessments that fulfil the intended learning outcomes of each unit. Academic Board, QSC and Teaching Quality Group each have duties to ensure that academic standards are maintained and that the Assessment Policy is consistently applied. The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.28　　To test the effectiveness of the College's assessment procedures and its use of definitive information relating to programme learning outcomes, the team scrutinised external examiner reports, programme documentation, and examples of internally verified assessments and assignment briefs. The team also held meetings with senior staff, academic staff and students.

1.29　　Each programme's assessment strategy is considered during the Curriculum Review and Approval Process. Templates promote consistent lesson planning, schemes of work, and assessment planning. Assignments are internally verified before they are distributed to students, and internal verification of grading is used to ensure the quality and consistency of assessment by verifying that assessment decisions have been reached fairly and accurately. College policy outlines who can act as an internal verifier, with certain stipulations such as subject knowledge. Where more than one internal verifier is required on a programme, the curriculum area leader will act as a lead internal verifier responsible for scheduling. The Quality Team audits the internal verification processes.

1.30　　External examiners confirm the validity of assessment decisions and that assignments are set at the appropriate level to meet the UK threshold standards for the qualification. Their reports confirm that the level of assessment, marking and internal verification procedures are effective, and that no awards have been withheld due to assessment issues. As discussed under Expectation A2.1 and Expectation B6, the College does not currently hold assessment boards.

1.31　　Assignment briefs state unit-level intended learning outcomes and academic staff and students understand that assessments will test different learning outcomes depending on the unit and level. The College does not map unit-level intended learning outcomes onto programme-level intended learning outcomes, but instead relies upon the selection of units according to the rules of combination to achieve this. A single contextualised programme specification covers all of its HN provision. Although the status of this document as a source of definitive information is unclear, it details programme-level learning outcomes but does not differentiate between levels or programme.

1.32   The College has rigorous assessment design and internal verification procedures and external examiners confirm that UK threshold standards are met. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met, with low risk.

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

1.33   Pearson bears ultimate responsibility for the monitoring and review of its programmes' academic standards, but the College must ensure that procedures are in place for routine monitoring and periodic review. The Principal has overall responsibility for standards and quality at the College, but the Vice Principal Curriculum and Learner Services and the Director of Quality work with Heads of Schools to operate and oversee the quality system. A College-wide quality cycle integrates quality processes and the Curriculum Quality Procedures Manual provides specific guidance for higher education programme teams.

1.34   The College monitors the standards of its own provision through a combination of data analysis, observation of teaching and learning, external examiner reports, surveys and student focus groups. Staff evaluate this information during annual programme reviews, the results of which feed into Schools' self-assessment reports (SARs) and, where necessary, into the College-wide Self-Assessment Report. Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) result from both School-level SARs and the cross-College SAR. Programme reviews also include action planning. Teaching Quality Group and CSMT meetings monitor these action plans and report to Academic Board.

1.35   Pearson periodically reviews the standards of the College's provision through a Quality Review and Development Report, which supplements the annual programme-specific external scrutiny conducted by external examiners.

1.36   The combination of an internal system of annual monitoring and reporting, annual external examiner reports and periodic reviews carried out by the awarding organisation would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.37   To test the effectiveness of the above systems for monitoring academic standards, the team considered external examiner reports, the College's most recent Quality Review and Development Report, and documentation resulting from its annual monitoring procedures. The team also scrutinised minutes of deliberative committees, such as Teaching Quality Group, and met with academic staff and senior staff.

1.38   The College's quality assurance procedures are well understood by both senior and academic staff. The Quality Cycle is supported by a series of data census dates, and programme reviews effectively log and reflect upon external examiner actions and key performance indicators. School-level SARs plan actions against strengths and weaknesses emerging from programme reviews and effectively summarise external examiners' reports. College-wide SARs do not explicitly report on the performance of higher education provision, but reports to Quality and Standards Working Group ensure that College governors are made aware of how this provision is performing. Routine monitoring is carried out between annual programme reviews via a series of 'position statements', where staff with different levels of responsibility reflect during meetings on the performance of their provision. Staff and deliberative committees generally scrutinise quality assurance reports and management information effectively.

1.39   The College makes effective use of its internal annual monitoring procedures. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met, with low risk.

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

1.40   The Colleges' main source of external and independent expertise in maintaining academic standards are the external examiners appointed by Pearson. The Curriculum Quality Procedures Manual outlines the role of external examiners and the use of their reports as a source of evidence for other quality assurance activities. The College's clear procedures for the use of external examiners would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.41   To evaluate the College's use of externality to set and maintain academic standards, the team met academic and senior staff. The team also scrutinised external examiner reports and the outputs of quality assurance processes, such as programme review.

1.42   The College logs external examiners' reports and the Quality Team monitors external examiner reports using moderation action sheets, which are signed off by the Heads of School and Quality Director. Heads of School are responsible for liaising with external examiners. Essential actions, recommendations or good practice highlighted in external examiner reports feed into programme reviews, and then into School-level SARs. External examiner reports have not raised any issues with the programmes' standards. Staff also make extensive use of their external examiner as a source of expert advice.

1.43   There is little evidence of formalised external input into the design of higher national programmes, other than from Pearson itself. The College's processes for programme approval do not formally include a requirement for external scrutiny of the proposed programme. The list of external contacts provided by the College also did not evidence any formal input into the design of HN programmes. For example, neither the 'feasibility study' for HNC/D Photography nor the one for HNC/D Visual Arts contained evidence of external scrutiny of the proposed programme's academic content, but the team appreciated that Pearson was ultimately responsible for setting the standards of its programmes and that the College had to operate within the rules of combination.

1.44   Similarly, apart from Pearson's Quality Review and Development Report and external examiner reports, the College's annual review processes contain little externality. However, the College highlighted the small scale of its higher education provision, and that its staff and governors had wide experience both as practitioners and in the broader higher education sector.

1.45   The College makes appropriate use of external expertise in the maintenance of academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met, with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.47   Two of the seven Expectations for this judgement area are not met and the associated level of risk is serious in each case due to a significant gap in policy, structure and procedures relating to the College's maintenance of academic standards. There are two recommendations located in Expectation A 2.1 and A2.2, both of which relate to the lack of adherence by the College to Pearson requirements for the maintenance of academic standards, and also relate to the necessity to establish assessment boards and produce and maintain definitive programme records. The recommendations on strengthening of the programme approval process (located in Expectation B1) and timely response to external examiner reports (located in Expectation B7) are also relevant to this judgement area. There are no affirmations in this judgement area.

1.48   The College currently does not have rigorous procedures for maintaining academic standards in all areas; the review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at Richmond Adult Community College on behalf of the degree-awarding organisation **does not meet** 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

1.49   A College Curriculum Strategy and Position Statement sets the provision within the context of local and national needs, and outlines the range of provision on offer for different groups of adult students. The College operates a Curriculum Review and Approval Process, which details how deliberative committees contribute to approving a new programme. Academic Board is responsible for overseeing procedures for the consideration and approval of programmes and courses of study. QSC is charged with monitoring procedures for the continuous review and evaluation of curricula to provide outstanding teaching and learning quality. CSMT will ensure that Schools work to the agreed timelines in determining their curriculum offer. Heads of School and Programme Leaders are responsible for ensuring that programmes have been approved using clearly defined processes, and that the subsequent planning of units and materials is appropriate. The design of the process for approving new programmes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.50   In considering this Expectation, the review team examined the College's Curriculum Review and Approval Process and consulted committee minutes and feasibility studies to judge the effectiveness of the College's programme design, development and approval processes. The team also held meetings with academic and senior staff.

1.51   At the July meeting of the Teaching Quality Group, the Director of Quality gives Heads of School a 'Qualifications of Concern' list, which highlights under-recruiting and retaining programmes. At the next Academic Board, Heads of School outline the rationale for continuing programmes along with plans for recruitment and quality improvement. In August, the Director of Quality meets Heads of School to review enrolments. Those without sufficient recruits will be closed and any registered learners given assistance to find new programmes. At a subsequent meeting of CSMT, labour market information, demographic data and partnership agreements will be used to review the curriculum offer and consider initial plans for the next academic year. In November, Heads of School present their curriculum plans to QSC before presenting a review of new provision at Academic Board. Proposals are discussed at CSMT before being sent to Academic Board for approval by the Principal or Vice Principal Curriculum and Learner Services. An overview of new provision is then presented to the QSC. Some of these activities are incorporated into the College's Quality Cycle.

1.52   The draft Higher Education Staff Handbook helpfully outlines key features of a HN programmes for new staff, along with Programme Leaders' and teams' responsibilities during the planning process. After programmes have been approved, academic staff devise assessment briefs, schedules and unit plans effectively. Higher Education planning meetings are focused on current provision, rather than planning future higher education programmes, and there is discussion of recruitment and unit selection for existing programmes. A useful demand analysis tracks changes in recruitment across the College and staff produce an overall plan of units covering all HN programmes.

1.53   It is not clear that the academic rationale for a programme is effectively scrutinised and formally discussed during the Curriculum Review and Approval Process. The feasibility studies that Heads of School (or Programme Leaders) produce are variable in quality. Some focus almost exclusively on the business case for new programmes, whereas others offer suggested units, but without detailed plans or documentation, such as contextualised programme specifications. For example, the feasibility for photography programmes based its rationale on available resources and the business case. Indeed, the study was primarily concerned with possibilities rather than firm plans resulting from detailed research into potential partners. Nor is not clear from the study how many programmes will be developed and where these will sit within the College's existing provision. The HNC/D currently running was discussed in a single paragraph among other proposals. The more recent feasibility study for a HNC/D in Visual Communication is focused on this particular programme. However, while the study does identify potential links with businesses and 'live brief' assessments, discussion of the unit's academic content does not go beyond listing unit titles. For example, there is no indication of how these units will build upon each other intellectually or the unit's level.

1.54   Similarly, although the College's deliberative committees carry out many of the processes listed in the Curriculum Review and Approval Process, there is little evidence that the academic case for new programmes is considered in detail. Academic Board considers underperforming programmes, recruitment data and progression data, but has not recently recorded the detailed consideration of a new higher education programme, nor did the available minutes of QSC show detailed discussion of higher education programmes. Teaching Quality Group minutes mention some consideration of proposals, but do not explicitly consider underperforming courses. Committee minutes demonstrate that Heads of School meet with the Principal to discuss their plans for new programmes. CSMT minutes confirm that the Curriculum Review and Approval Process is in operation, but do not show detailed consideration of the academic rationale for any specific higher education programme. However, senior staff are given updates on the broader curriculum strategy and technical details of how to log new programmes on College systems. Minutes from CSMT suggest that Heads of Schools hold meetings with the Vice Principal Curriculum and Learner Services to gain formal approval for their programme offers, but the details of these discussions are not recorded.

1.55   While the current Curriculum Review and Approval Process allows senior staff to approve the business case for a particular higher education programme, the process does not allow for detailed scrutiny of the proposed programme's academic case or supporting documentation, such as contextualised programme specifications or handbooks, prior to approval. The team therefore **recommends** that the College strengthens the process for the design, development and approval of programmes to include formal consideration of the academic content and delivery.

1.56   The review team concludes that despite the need to strengthen scrutiny of a proposed programme's academic case, the College has in place appropriate structures for programme approval and effective programme planning takes place after approval. Therefore, the Expectation is met, with low risk.

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

1.57   The College is responsible for recruitment, selection and admission to its higher education programmes. The College Admissions Policy, currently in draft form, and its Equality and Diversity Policy define the admissions system and aim to ensure that all potential applicants are considered for courses equitably and consistently, and have access to full information. The Equality and Diversity Policy is available on the College website, and details the responsibilities of staff. The application process is described both on the website and in prospectuses. The College aims to offer impartial information and advice so that prospective students can understand the potential progression routes from programmes that fit their previous experience and career aspirations. The information, processes and procedures in place at the College regarding recruitment, selection and admission would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.58   In considering this Expectation the review team scrutinised information provided by the College, including the Curriculum and Learner Recruitment Strategy, the Admissions Policy, the enrolment process flowchart, records of interviews and example post-interview action plans, and met admissions staff as well as students currently on higher education programmes at the College.

1.59   The College targets its recruitment, according to a pre-defined strategy, to adult learners mainly from the local area, who may not otherwise benefit from higher education. Potential applicants viewing the website are made aware of the programme entry requirements and sources of further information, advice and guidance, and are able to complete an online application form leading to interview. Full details regarding the higher education programmes are not available to prospective applicants on the College website. The Key Information Set for each programme is absent, programme information lacks detail on available units and assessment, and incorrect titles are used for some programmes (see also Expectation C). However, there is information on the fees payable and a link is provided to information on sources of higher education funding.

1.60   Interviews are carried out by the Head of School, Programme Leader or lead tutor, with interviews designed to assess candidates' suitability and also any risk factors which may lead to non-achievement. Should any factors be present in students who are accepted onto programmes, the College states that an action plan is drawn up following interview, which includes suitable learning support or extra tutorial support from the teaching team. Interview record forms record any disability or learning difficulty, and any potential effect on attendance. Students who declare a disability during the admissions process or while studying on the programme receive guidance and support to which they are entitled, with the Learning Support Team playing a key role.

1.61   The interview form also contains a final section where a learner who is initially unsuccessful in gaining a place is required to undertake some additional preparatory work, where a post-interview project can be required in order to assist the student in reaching the required level prior to further consideration. The summer mini-project example given by the College is completed by students prior to their first class, and then presented to their peers.

Students consider that this aided them in forming a strong peer group at the start of their study. The welcome letter from the Head of School, sent to successful applicants following interview, gives detail on the fee payable, the date, time and venue for the induction day, and a reminder for students to bring the summer project work with them.

1.62   Staff met during the review visit confirmed the admissions process, with applications made online to the School of Art and Design followed by interview, at which the applicants also submit a portfolio of their work together with the outcomes of their pre-interview project, if relevant, for consideration by the programme lead. Records of interviews and interview decisions, together with post-interview action plans, are dealt with and kept within the School. Should an application not be successful, the Admissions Policy states that the applicant may appeal to the Learning Services Manager in writing, within five days of receipt of their decision following interview. Students found the application process straightforward, although a small number reported that they had experienced problems with the online application and enrolment processes, with a disconnect between the two processes leading to loss of their initial application information. The College has now reverted to hard copy applications following previous technical problems with the online system.

1.63   The review team also viewed retention and success data in order to assess further the effectiveness of the College's selection and admission policies. The team found that student success rates are good, with 85.7 per cent achieving their qualification in 2014-15. Student progress data, including attendance and retention, are regularly monitored by the School, Academic Board and CSMT.

1.64   The review team concludes that the College has appropriate processes in place for the recruitment, selection and admission of students onto its higher education programmes and that these processes are followed. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is deemed 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

1.65   The College has mapped its processes against *Chapter B3* of the Quality Code. This mapping provides a detailed description of the College's policies and processes underpinning its approach to effective learning and teaching, including the Equality and Diversity and Staff Development policies, together with the approach to learning support and resources. The Curriculum Quality Manual sets out the College's strategy for the systematic approach to learning and teaching. The manual details the structural underpinning of the teaching on the higher education programmes, including documentary requirements for programme quality files, which contain completed schemes of work, learning plans, assessment planning and internal verification tracking and schedule as part of the course review aspect of the 'Meeting our Targets' process.

1.66   The Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and Procedures outline the process of observation of teaching, learning and assessment (OTLA), which aims to evaluate teaching standards and sets expectations while identifying opportunities for tutor development and the sharing of good practice. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Position Statement reports on strengths and areas for improvement following learning walks and observations. The College has policies and procedures in place that would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.67   In considering this Expectation, the review team examined relevant documentation provided by the College, including the Curriculum Quality Manual, the Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and Procedures, staff development and learning walks policies, and staff profiles, and met staff and students.

1.68   Overall responsibility for teaching observations lies with the Vice Principal Curriculum and Learner Services, and the OTLA process is managed by the Director of Quality through the Teaching Quality Group. The observation team consists of academic managers who have been trained and who attend an extended meeting of Teaching Quality Group to standardise their approach. The Head of School is a full member of the teaching team and carries out observations, with a full knowledge of the requirements of the qualifications and levels. Lessons may be visited unannounced as part of learning walks, and a number of lessons are also observed during quality review and audit days set in advance.

1.69   Teaching observations are reported in the generic annual School Position Statement, together with student data and a commentary on overall strengths and weaknesses. Tutors are formally graded annually and those new to a subject area are regraded, so may have more than one observation per year, as will those who receive an unsatisfactory grade, who have an action plan and a follow-up observation, generally within four weeks. The Quality Department produces termly reports on training needs identified from teaching observations and these are provided to the Teaching Quality Group and Academic Board. As well as feeding into staff appraisal, individual grades are held by the Quality Team and provided to Heads of School for monitoring and inclusion in SARs, which, although generic, demonstrate the effective monitoring and review of learning opportunities.

In addition, observation data is fed into the regularly reviewed generic College Quality Improvement Plan. This process enables the ongoing enhancement of teaching practice, through the sharing of good practice and the development of continuing professional development (CPD) plans for staff, and their review at appraisal, which are fit for purpose.

1.70   Learning walks are themed around student progress, support, or developing independent learning. 2014-15 learning walks focused on peer-to-peer learning in multi-qualification aim taught sessions, joint delivery and shared good practice, and level-appropriate assessment driving distinction attainment. The collated themes from learning walks provide clear opportunities for the sharing of good practice and enhancement of learning and teaching.

1.71   The team found that the College's policies for learning and teaching work effectively. Staff delivering the higher education programmes are well qualified academically, the majority to master's level, and also hold teaching qualifications. They are also practitioners, with extensive experience of exhibiting their work, and this enables the development of staff-student communities of practice. Key members of the teaching team are profiled in the HNC/D Art and Design Course Handbook, ensuring student awareness of the experience of their tutors as artists. The students too are encouraged to think of themselves as artists from the commencement of their engagement with the College, with this ethos being encouraged by means of the effective delivery of shared units across the programmes.

1.72   The learning environment overall is fit for practice, with staff and students using the various areas of the studio space effectively for teaching, assessment and exhibitions, including outside timetabled class time. The College undertook intensive stakeholder consultations about spaces and projects that would enhance working spaces and working practices prior to the development of the current studio space, which has resulted in students having an access pass to studio space, for which they can book extra time if required. Specialist technician support is available where required for certain techniques. The planning of resources is effective, with requests made to the Head of School for sign off. For larger items of resource the College holds a separate capital expenditure fund which accepts bids, with the TQC/CSMT considering requests as part of the course planning process.

1.73   The College VLE is also effectively used to provide course information to students and to host the eTrackr system, which monitors student attendance and enables staff to give feedback to students on their progress. Students appreciate the opportunity afforded by the VLE to obtain course information and feedback at a time of their choosing, aiding their development as independent learners.

1.74   Students met by the team were complimentary regarding the teaching they receive, together with the support from staff and technicians in their development as practitioners. They appreciate the opportunities the College gives them in the structure of the timetables, which allows them to undertake modules outside their specific specialisation. They also reported positively on the learning experience, including the learning resources, attention to their goals, the well qualified teaching staff and the teaching methods used. They appreciate the recent development of the Art School as a spacious, modern environment in which to study.

1.75   The College's Staff Development Policy sets out priority areas, which include mandatory training in aspects such as attainment of teaching qualifications alongside equality and diversity and health and safety. The policy also refers to continuing staff CPD commensurate to the job role, and links to the teaching observation and appraisal systems. The staff training plans for 2014-15 and 2015-16 confirm the generic training opportunities

for staff, together with higher education-specific sessions on assessment and internal moderation.

1.76   The team discussed with teaching staff how learning and teaching practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice and subject-specific and educational scholarship. Although the generic staff development policy contains no higher education-specific references to scholarship, academic staff reported that they were given support as practitioners and for their own exhibitions, together with reductions for attendance at College courses and support for pursuing external qualifications. Staff qualifications and experience enable them to support students effectively, both academically and in their development as autonomous learners. The performance of individual staff is evaluated during annual appraisals, linking to appropriate training plans, with Heads of School and Programme Leaders given specific targets for increasing student success rates.

1.77   The College has effective systems in place for assuring, reviewing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, including processes for reviewing the learning environment and for supporting staff development. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*

Findings

1.78   The College has a number of processes in place to enable higher education students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Its approach to enabling student development is incorporated in its Strategic Plan and supported by investment in learning resources and student support services. Supporting the Strategic Plan is a range of policies and processes designed to enable the College to fulfil its commitment to student development. The College's Academic Board has overall responsibility for the academic work of the College and for procedures which monitor the effectiveness of programmes of study and the quality of the students' learning experience, supported by the Teaching Quality Group which also monitors the overall quality of the learner experience. The process for annual self-assessment at course, School and College level, articulated in the Quality Cycle, enables the effectiveness of the policies to be evaluated. The College provides an induction for all its students. Student support arrangements are described in the Learner Handbook, with tutors, technicians and the Additional Learning Support Service providing extensive academic and pastoral support. The College's processes and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.79   In considering this Expectation the review team examined relevant documentation, including the Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and Procedures, the Admissions Policy and Curriculum and Learner Recruitment Strategy, and the generic assessment policy and associated procedures. The team also viewed course and learner handbooks and tested its findings in meetings with staff and students.

1.80   The aim of the College is for students to think of themselves as artists from the commencement of their engagement with the College, and to enable them to experience other artistic disciplines outside their immediate specialism. This commences with an effective induction at the start of the programme and when progressing from the HNC stage to the HND, and continues with the teaching and assessment methodology, by which cross-programme and unit delivery enables students to work with peers from other disciplines to broaden their experience. Students greatly appreciate these opportunities.

1.81   The College has recently opened new facilities in which the higher education students are taught and undertake practical activities. This is appreciated by the students and praised by the external examiner. Library resources are available at the College, and students also make use of two other libraries within the vicinity. The resource in place is seen as adequate by students, with books resourced by request and students made aware of new resources in place. Students receive a Higher Education Pass, which enhances their learning by allowing them access to studio spaces outside their timetabled classes and enables them to work independently on their projects in their own time. This access is supported by technicians and students receive inductions into the use of equipment. The Higher Education Pass system enhances students' ability to develop as confident and independent learners and is **good practice.**

1.82   The College VLE provides online course information, including timetables, course material and assessment information, as well as online goal tracking and diagnostic testing, together with course forums that post opportunities for engagement such as exhibitions and commissions. There is also a cross-programme forum for communicating exhibition highlights, articles, signpostings to artist websites and other relevant news. Students report positively regarding the College's support for the individual student journey, through encouraging development of personal learning styles and ongoing guidance and support.

1.83   Regular programme and School planning meetings, and detailed assessment schedules, ensure that students and staff have clarity regarding the potentially complex design of delivery and assessment across programmes and units. The use of live briefs, where appropriate, further introduces students to the link between their academic work and its use in the external environment. This is appreciated by students, and noted as effective practice by the external examiner.

1.84   All students also undertake a Level 5 Professional Practice unit, delivered across all three terms in the second year of study. Students view this as important in further linking their work in College to the external environment. The unit is supported by an extensive programme of visits, exhibitions, and networking opportunities across the academic year. Students also volunteer in the on-site Parkshot Gallery and Gallery Shop. In addition, the College has recently developed an Artist in Residency programme, giving former students the use of facilities to develop their early professional careers. The programme is aimed at the transition between being a student and a self-employed artist, thus creating a bridge to the world of work.

1.85   The College reports a strengthening of systems for identifying learners at risk, and there is a safeguarding policy in place. The interview and induction process is used to identify student support needs and to highlight the existence of the Additional Learning Support Service. Academic staff can also ask the Service for advice on supporting students. Following the initial assessment of Mathematics and English at interview, students are encouraged to undertake further diagnostic screening at an early stage post-enrolment, with the results recorded on eTrackr. Teaching teams subsequently track students' progress through the programme via eTrackr, attaching risk ratings to students and completing and monitoring online individual learning plans. Programme team meetings are used to confirm the initial assessment and diagnostic tests. Students praise the comprehensive programme to support individuals with special learning needs.

1.86   Support services for students are detailed in the generic learner handbook, available to all students on the VLE. These services are comprehensive and include a Matrix-accredited advice and guidance service, which can support applications through UCAS for progressing students, and a drop-in mental health service. University admissions tutors are also invited into classes to advise students on progression opportunities.

1.87   Disability declaration rates have increased over time, with nearly half of all students on the HN programmes declaring a disability. Students who declare a disability receive information and advice on the support available, and the team was given examples of this in practice. Where required, the Learning Support Team works with tutors to make reasonable adjustments to programmes or assessments, or facilitates access to specialist resources. All tutors attend mandatory equality and diversity training. Recent destinations of leavers surveys identify that most students reported gaining confidence and feeling more confident about their employment prospects. Students feel supported and cite helpful and experienced tutors, specialist support and small group teaching as enabling them to achieve their goals.

1.88   The review team found that the integrated student support systems that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential are **good practice**.

1.89   In summary, the team concludes that the processes and resources in place at the College, which are designed to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, are used effectively. The Expectation is met, with the level of risk deemed 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

1.90   The College aims to work in partnership with students and their representatives. The College learner engagement strategy is contained in the generic Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and Procedures, and includes course evaluation and outcome feedback, a complaints procedure, and systems for gathering learner feedback, including learner forums. The College operates a number of formal and informal mechanisms, such as student surveys, in order to provide opportunities for the wider student body to provide feedback on their educational experience. There is an established student representative system. Feedback is considered by the Quality Team, included in the School SAR, monitored regularly by CSMT and Academic Board and appropriately responded to. The structures and processes in place at the College would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.91   In considering this Expectation, the review team examined relevant documentation such as the Learner Engagement Strategy, the learner involvement report, relevant committee minutes, student survey and programme evaluation results, and action plans. The team tested the effectiveness of the processes in place in meetings with staff and students.

1.92   The small student numbers on the higher education programmes at the College allow good relationships to develop between staff and students and encourage informal feedback. The College systems for gleaning student feedback are generic, with higher education student input encouraged through information at induction and in the Learner Handbook; the subsequent reports and analyses are not disaggregated for higher education. The College gathers formal student feedback throughout the year via online and paper-based course evaluation surveys, 'Tell Us What You Think' sessions, where senior managers meet learners, and through specific forums for learners with disabilities. Feedback from these fora are reported in Learner Involvement Reports. A separate system of feedback is in place for students to comment on College services. Further feedback is gathered via the website, email, feedback cards, complaint forms, and letters.

1.93   Survey response rates are low, resulting in the development of the forums, and, for higher education, meetings with the lead student representative and the Head of School. The Quality Team collects feedback and ensures responses, with all comments being logged and sent to managers for action planning, and headline aspects feeding into the course-level SARs and QIPs. Students reported that they have several feedback opportunities via feedback forms, informally and in the classroom, and that they receive updates from staff on actions taken in response, either face to face or by telephone or email. You Said We Listened posters are also put up around the College.

1.94   The College closely monitors student feedback via a range of useful reporting mechanisms, including detailed Learner Involvement Reports, learner course evaluation results, and the generic Learner Views and Feedback Report. However, higher education student responses are not disaggregated from those at lower levels, and are therefore of indeterminate value to staff and managers working specifically at higher education level. Similarly, the draft School SAR for 2014-15, while containing a discrete section on higher education, does not contain detailed information on student feedback. The generic section of the report notes a high level of student satisfaction, again not disaggregated for the higher education programmes.

1.95   The College has established a higher education student representation system. Students feel their voice is heard, with an overall higher education student representative supported by representatives for each programme, taking responsibility for feeding back to the Head of School. With the small number of higher education students currently studying at the College, and the close relationship between the teaching team, support staff and students, this arrangement is deemed effective. The most recent external examiner report noted that student feedback had led to improvements to the programmes. This was corroborated by students, and the team heard of examples of change in response to student feedback, for example to the delivery pattern of the Professional Practice Unit and the improvement to computing facilities.

1.96   There is no formal representation of higher education students on any of the College deliberative committees, but the College states that students are welcome to attend quality meeting forums, School and programme meetings and give informal feedback via tutors and the Head of School. In order to strengthen the collective engagement of students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience, the review team **recommends** that the College ensures higher education student membership of appropriate deliberative committees.

1.97   In summary, the review team concludes that the College takes deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. Therefore, Expectation B5 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.98   The College has an Assessment Policy which aims to ensure that assessment is inclusive, equitable, and carried out competently in accordance with Pearson's requirements. Academic Board is responsible for the academic work of the College, although the QSC and Teaching Quality Group also have roles in ensuring academic standards and quality are maintained and that the Assessment Policy is applied consistently.

1.99   Each programme's assessment strategy is considered during the Curriculum Review and Approval Process, and standard templates are used for assessment planning. Assignments are internally verified before they are distributed to students. The Quality Team audits the internal verification processes.

1.100   There is no higher education assessment board in place at the College. The College also does not have its own recognition of prior learning (RPL) policy but relies on the awarding organisation's policy and guidance. Assessment boards and an institution-specific policy on RPL are clear Pearson requirements. Therefore the Expectation cannot be met.

1.101   To test the effectiveness of the College's assessment policies and processes, the review team examined graded work, internally verified briefs, and external examiner reports. The team also met students, senior and academic staff.

1.102   The cross-College Assessment Policy is appropriately detailed, setting out the processes and procedures for assessment for the College's further and higher education students. The policy includes initial and diagnostic assessment in addition to formative and summative assessment. Assessment purpose and design are described, together with the process for marking and feedback and appeals against assessment outcomes. The policy is available on the College website and reflects the procedures described by staff. However, the College does not meet the requirements of Pearson with regard to the assessment of students as it does not hold assessment boards (see Expectation A2.1 and associated recommendation).

1.103   Examples of assessment briefs and schedules seen by the review team are detailed, including unit learning outcomes, the assessment purpose and scenarios that make strong links to the external environment. Written feedback to students is generally very detailed, both in terms of strengths and also areas where a higher grade could have been obtained. Internal verification of briefs and assignments is carried out effectively, with good practice logged and actions required and signed off when completed. The process for internal verification is noted as good practice in recent external examiner reports.

1.104   Students reported positively on their assessment and feedback, indicating that the latter is appropriate and mostly timely, although there were individuals who perceived a delay in receiving feedback. The review team heard that while the formal policy stated a six-week turnaround time, in practice work was normally returned within two working weeks. Some students reported that the grading criteria and briefs were not initially clear to them,

although the team noted the explanation of assignment briefs given during induction and subsequently in class.

1.105   The College makes particularly good use of 'live briefs', during which students construct a project around a real-life commission, for which they may be chosen to produce artwork. For example, a unit covering site-specific art included a live brief designed around a commission for a local infant school. The brief required students to research the national curriculum, children's handwriting, health and safety and cost for the client. The school commissioned one of the students to turn their proposal into reality. Recently these live briefs have been used on units taken by all three of the College's HN programmes. A recent example has designed assignments around a current exhibition taking place at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Similar briefs are being embedded into proposals for future programmes. Students, staff and external examiners confirm the value of these live briefs, which are particularly well aligned with the College's strategic aim to develop its students as independent artists. The review team considers the effective use of live briefs in the enhancement of assessment processes to be **good practice**.

1.106   External examiner reports repeatedly recommended that the College devise a mitigating circumstances policy. While this recommendation was logged in both moderation action plans and programme reviews the policy was still in draft during the review process. The 2013-14 programme review highlights that one student had some units deferred due to mitigating circumstances. In the absence of a policy, the Head of School approved an extension using the appropriate documentation, but without the confirmation of Academic Board. Pearson's Centre Guide to Assessment states that assessment boards should be charged with making recommendations on extenuating circumstances. At present, the College's policy is to refer decisions to Academic Board, which, as discussed above, is not currently constituted as an assessment board given its terms of reference and membership. The team therefore **affirms** the steps taken to develop a mitigating circumstances policy.

1.107   As mentioned, the College does not have its own RPL policy. Instead, the review team was directed to Pearson's policy and guidance. However, this document states that while the use of RPL is not mandatory, 'Centres which wish to support it must have an internal policy on RPL and the appropriate resources to do so'. The team heard that the College did not have an RPL policy partly because it had not yet had occasion to use those provisions. The team considered this an unclear position: prospective students could not know whether RPL would be available to them, and existing students would have to rely on the reactive development of a policy. The team was also pointed to a College-wide Policy on Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). However, the provisions detailed in this policy exclusively concern National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) rather than Higher Nationals and are therefore not readily applicable to higher education programmes. The College acknowledges that this policy, which has not been reviewed since 2013, needs aligning with Pearson's guidance. Moreover, very few staff met by the team were aware of this policy. The team therefore **recommends** that staff formally define the College's position on the RPL for higher education students.

1.108   The College does not meet Pearson's requirements regarding the establishment of assessment boards. While there is good practice in assessment design, the lack of an assessment board, an unclear position on APL/RPL, and an only recently developed mitigating circumstances policy lead the review team to conclude that the Expectation is not met, with moderate risk.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

1.109   As a provider of HN qualifications, the College has limited responsibilities for external examining. Pearson is responsible for defining the role, nomination, training and recognising the work of external examiners, whereas the College is primarily responsible for 'putting into effect the recommendations of external examiners and making effective use of their reports in quality assurance and enhancement'.

1.110   The Director of Quality is the Quality Nominee responsible for direct contact with Pearson. The Curriculum Quality Procedures Manual details the role of external examiners and the use of their reports as a source of evidence for other quality assurance activities. The design of procedures for the receipt of external examiners' reports and the information available to staff on how to make use of them would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.111   To test the effectiveness of procedures for the receipt of, and response to, external examiner reports, the team read external examiner reports and traced the use of these in the College's internal quality assurance documentation, such as SARs and moderation action sheets. The team also met academic and senior staff, and students.

1.112   Heads of School are responsible for liaising with external examiners and ensuring that Pearson's procedures are adhered to. The Quality Team monitors external examiner reports using moderation action sheets, which are prepared by Heads of School and summarise both areas of good practice and areas for improvement. Heads of School and the Director of Quality must sign off these action sheets. Essential actions, recommendations or good practice highlighted in external examiner reports feed into programme reviews, and then into School-level self-evaluation reports. The Principal would become aware of serious concerns raised by external examiners either by the awarding organisation contacting them directly, or through the reporting that takes place at Academic Board.

1.113   External examiners are positive about the programmes offered by the College and the arrangements enabling them to carry out their role, with no essential actions raised. The College makes external examiners' reports available to students via the VLE, although not all students are aware of this. The team noted that the publication of part B of reports could have data protection consequences (see Expectation C).

1.114   In general terms, moderation action plans, programme reviews and School-level SARs summarise external reports effectively. However, the team noted that the latest external examiner report had repeated the recommendation from the previous year for the College to introduce a mitigating circumstances policy. The report set a deadline of September 2015, but the policy was still in draft form during the time of the review. Although this recommendation was listed in both the moderation action plans for 2014 and 2015, neither was signed off by the Head of Quality. Likewise, it was an action in the 2013-14 annual programme review. Although the College now has a policy document, the College's response to the external examiner's recommendation has been slow and suggests that the quality systems in place do not act as a guarantee that timely action will be taken as a result of external examiner recommendations. The team therefore **recommends** that all recommendations from external verifier reports are completed in a timely manner.

1.115   The review team found that the College has generally effective procedures for using external examiner reports. The timeliness of responses to an external examiner's

recommendation should be improved. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met, with a moderate risk.

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

1.116   The College's small HN provision is managed within College-wide quality systems and procedures, which are adapted where necessary to meet the specific expectations of higher education programmes. While the Principal has overall responsibility for standards and quality at the College, the Vice Principal Curriculum and Learner Services has oversight of the quality systems. These systems are managed by the Director of Quality, who works with the Heads of Schools to operate quality processes for their provision.

1.117   A College-wide Quality Cycle integrates the outcomes of quality processes, and the Curriculum Quality Procedures Manual provides specific guidance for higher education curriculum areas. The design of a range of quality assurance procedures and well defined reporting lines would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.118   The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising the documentary evidence provided by the College, which included annual programme reviews for the higher education programmes, the latest Art and Design School SAR, the cross-College SAR and minutes from deliberative committees. The team also met senior and teaching staff to discuss the College's processes for programme monitoring and review.

1.119   The College monitors its provision annually through a combination of data analysis, observation of teaching and learning, external examiner reports, student surveys and focus groups. This information feeds into annual programme reviews with action planning completed, which in turn feed up into a School SAR. A College-wide SAR is drawn from the School-level SARs. QIPs result from both types of SARs. Progress against the cross-College SAR and QIP is monitored by the Quality and Standards subcommittee of the governing body. Cross-College and School-level SARs and QIPs are monitored by Teaching Quality Group and CSMT meetings, which feed into Academic Board.

1.120   In addition, the College regularly reviews recruitment, retention and achievement data during Meeting Our Target reviews (MOTs), which form part of many of the College's meetings involving different levels of staff. For example, Heads of School meet at the Teaching Quality Groups to update senior managers on key performance indicators, areas of concern addressed, and specific actions underway to redress factors affecting student progress, predicted success rates and quality issues. More formally, Heads of School produce termly Position Statements to update the Quality Team, Academic Board and governors on their performance against key performance indicators or any issues arising. HN planning meetings allow programme teams to consider curriculum-specific issues and student feedback.

1.121   Staff and deliberative committees effectively scrutinise quality assurance reports and management information. Although they have broader remits than higher education provision, Teaching Quality Group and Academic Board consider the outcomes of observation processes, position statements, SARs and QIPs, as well as raw data for several key performance indicators.

1.122   Both senior staff and academic staff fully understand the College's quality assurance procedures for monitoring and review of programmes and operate these

effectively. There is an overarching plan with data census dates to support the quality cycle. Programme reviews log external examiner actions, consider key performance indicators, and grade programmes' overall effectiveness in a number of areas. Likewise, the School-level SAR identifies actions from external reports, action plans against perceived strengths and weaknesses, and makes use of appropriate metrics to judge performance. The College-wide SAR does not explicitly report on the performance of higher education provision, but reports to Quality and Standards Working Group to ensure that College governors are made aware of how this provision is performing.

1.123   The College does not operate an internal periodic review procedure. The review team heard that this would not suit the currently small HN provision, which the College feels is best reviewed annually in response to changing student needs. The College's provision is, however, periodically externally scrutinised by Pearson via a quality review process, which supplements the programme-specific scrutiny afforded by external examiners and the internal annual monitoring of programmes.

1.124   The review team found that the College has effective processes and procedures for the monitoring and review of its higher education programmes that are appropriate for the size of its current provision. The team concludes that the Expectation is met, with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.125　The cross-College Complaints Policy and Procedure details the process the College applies for handling student complaints and academic appeals. The Complaints Policy and Procedure is available on the College website and students are also informed of its existence and how to use it through the Learner Handbook and during induction, as well as via posters on College notice boards. The Assessment Policy and Procedure includes the College's policy for Appeals Against Internal Assessment of Work for External Qualifications. The design of the processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.126　The review team tested the College's procedures through examining policy and guidance documents, as well as relevant meeting minutes. The team further tested the procedures through discussions with students and staff.

1.127　All formal complaints are received by the Quality Department, which is also responsible for logging and monitoring them, and providing a summary of complaints for the Senior Management Team. The Complaints Policy has a built-in level of informality and makes suitable commitments to prompt resolution, enhancement from complaints, clarity, and transparency of processes and responsibilities. The policy includes helpful references to other documents, such as the Appeals Policy, and has a document management stamp indicating owner and renewal date. There is provision for a suitable level of confidentiality where appropriate.

1.128　The Learner Handbook directs students to the College Complaints Policy, but does not contain the policy or link to it, although it is available on the College website. While students are able to receive support in making a complaint or appeal from their tutor, Programme Leader, Head of School or the Quality Department, in practice the close relationships at the College lead this support to be provided by tutors. The 2015-16 HNC/D Course Handbook provided to the students in hard copy and available on the VLE does not give any information regarding how they may make a complaint or appeal a grade; however, students are aware of the process through specific information on the VLE and in the generic Learner Handbook. None of the students whom the team met at the visit had made a formal complaint, but were satisfied with the response they had received to an informal complaint.

1.129　In the first instance, complaints should be raised with the persons concerned within three months of the incident and a meeting held between the parties. Complaints about staff should be referred to line managers or, if about accommodation, then to the Estates Team. Formal complaints can be raised by completing a complaints form and returning this to the Quality Team, who will acknowledge complaints within five days and commit to investigating them within 20. The complainant may be invited to meet the investigating manager and can be accompanied. The investigator can either dismiss, uphold or partially uphold, taking steps to avoid repetition. Complainants may appeal to the Principal within 20 days. The Head of School communicates the outcome to the complainant.

1.130　Staff and students confirmed that the small group nature of the provision, and the close relationship of students and staff in the community of practice that exists at the College, lead to any informal complaints being dealt with at source, and gave examples,

for instance the improvements to wireless access and the provision of high-specification computing equipment in the studio space. There have been no formal complaints.

1.131   If a student wishes to appeal an assessment outcome, the Learner Handbook directs them to the relevant section in the Assessment Policy and Procedure, which includes the Appeals Policy. However, this internal College procedure does not contain the information required by Pearson regarding the escalation of an appeal. Pearson has a clear requirement that the College should 'have in place a means for ensuring all students and staff are aware of the process that exists to enable students to make an appeal with Pearson relating to external or internally awarded assessment outcomes'.

1.132   Staff were unclear about the details of the policy, and agreed that students had been given incomplete information about the right to escalate appeals. Senior staff confirmed that there is no provision in place to inform students that they can appeal to Pearson. Students confirmed that although none had used the appeals process, they were aware of where to find the information, and how to seek support should it be required. Some students had sought further information regarding an assessment grade but had not felt it necessary to make a formal appeal and were satisfied with the responses received. Since the inception of the higher education programmes in 2013 there have been no academic appeals for the College's higher education provision. While being cognisant of the small group nature and effective support from staff, the review team **recommends** that the College takes steps to fully align the Appeals Policy with Pearson's requirements.

1.133   In summary, the team finds that the College has robust complaints and adequate appeals policies and procedures in place. The team concludes that this Expectation is met, but the risk level is deemed moderate, due to a weakness in part of the College's appeals policy structures and a lack of clarity about responsibilities.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.134   The College does not deliver any of its HN programmes through any provider or organisation other than Pearson, nor do any of the HN programmes offered include work-based learning or work experience units. As no credit-bearing learning is delivered in partnership with others, the provision considered during this review falls outside the scope of Expectation B10.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

1.136   Of the 11 Expectations in this judgement area, nine Expectations are applicable to the College. Out of these, eight are met and one is judged not met. Expectations B10 and B11 do not apply to the College as it does not deliver higher education programmes through any provider or organisation other than Pearson. The College also does not offer research degrees. Three Expectations are judged to have a moderate risk and all others have a low risk. This is reflected in the recommendations made by the review team, which concern the articulation of the College's position regarding the recognition of prior learning, the timely completion of actions in response to external verifier reports (Expectation B7) and the alignment of the College's Appeals Policy with Pearson's requirements (Expectation B9). There are two further recommendations in this judgement area for Expectations that have been met, namely the strengthening of the programme approval process (Expectation B1) and student membership of appropriate deliberative committees (Expectation B5). The recommendation made in Expectation A2.1 concerning the need to establish assessment boards in accordance with Pearson's requirements is also relevant in this judgement area.

1.137   The review team identified three features of good practice in this judgement area. Two are located in Expectation B4 and one in Expectation B6. They relate to the integrated student support systems that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, the Higher Education Pass system, which enhances students' ability to develop as confident and independent learners (Expectation B4), and the effective use of live briefs in the enhancement of the assessment process (Expectation B6).

1.138   There is one affirmation in this judgement area, located in Expectation B6. It concerns the steps being taken to develop a mitigating circumstances policy.

1.139   The review team notes that all but one of the Expectations in this judgement area are met. Although there are a number of recommendations, there are also features of good practice. The majority of the Expectations have a low risk rating. On balance, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at Richmond Adult Community College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

1.140 The College provides a range of information about its higher education provision to students, staff and external stakeholders, and in a variety of ways, including print and digital formats. Responsibility for the College provision of a large proportion of information, including publishing data, rests with the College Information Services. For the higher education provision in scope of the review the Head of the Art School has overall responsibility for the evaluation, review and accuracy of higher education information. There is no formal policy for the production and quality assurance of print and web information, despite the desirable recommendation following the previous review that the College 'review and formalise its policies and procedures for the quality assurance and monitoring of public information'. The lack of a formal approach leads to inaccuracies and omissions and does not allow the Expectation to be met.

1.141 The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing the procedures and a range of published information, including web-based information about the College and Pearson, and information about the College's programmes published on its website, on the VLE and in prospectuses, as well as handbooks and guidance published for students and staff. The team also discussed the effectiveness of the College's practices and procedures for the publication of information with students and senior, academic and professional support staff.

1.142 The College website contains the College's strategy, mission and values, as well as information regarding all courses delivered, including the separate HNC/D titles. There is also a link to the cross-College prospectus, with the higher education programmes in scope of this review being listed under the Art School provision. Further links are provided should further information be required, and separate information is available regarding open days. Key information sets for the provision are absent from the website. The College stated that exemption had been granted by HEFCE regarding the requirement for key information sets to be available on the website.

1.143 The way in which the College states the titles of the HN programmes it delivers has the potential to create confusion for students and could be misleading (see also Expectation A 2.2). The most recent external examiner report states that the awards on offer are HNC and HND in 3D Design, HNC and HND in Fine Art and HNC in Photography, aligning with the award titles stated in the national Pearson programme specifications. This contrasts with information provided to the review team by the College, on the College website and in the Course Guide 2015-16, which gives the titles as HNC and HND 3D Crafts Ceramics, HNC 3D Crafts and HNC and HND Fine Art. Only the last of these is correctly titled as per the Pearson specifications. In addition, while the learning hours for the HNC are as stated, those for the HND, as an independent qualification, are incorrect, as the programme is delivered part-time over two years, in addition to the two years of the HNC. As the College has no formal policy for the production and quality assurance of print and web information, these inaccuracies and inconsistencies have not been identified and corrected.

1.144   The application and admission process is described in full on the College website and in prospectuses regarding the enquiry, application and on-programme stages. The website programme pages give information on entry requirements, how to make an application and the fee payable, with links to student finance information. There are also links to the College Charter, the Admissions Policy, the Complaints Policy and Procedure, the Equality and Diversity Policy and the Assessment Policy. Information is made available in different formats on request.

1.145   At the commencement of their programme, students receive induction information and a Course Handbook, generic Learner Handbook and unit specifications in assignment briefs. Information in the Learner Handbook regarding appeals is incomplete (see Expectation B9) and the Course Handbook for the HNC/D Art and Design provision does not contain accurate definitive programme records (see Expectation A2.2). Programme level learning outcomes are detailed for Fine Art, Ceramics and Photography, for an Art and Design award title, but these are not differentiated between Levels 4 and 5, nor for the separate award titles. Programme specifications on the VLE for 3D Design, Fine Art and Photography are Pearson documents, and are not contextualised. Unit level outcomes are stated on the assessment briefs. These are available to staff and students on the VLE.

1.146   During induction the students are also given information regarding the various communication methods, including how to use the VLE. The VLE contains useful information for students, and staff, including the Learner Handbook, Edexcel BTEC generic grading criteria, information regarding learning support, sources of information, advice and guidance, learning resources, information on careers and employability, and information on UCAS for progressing students. It also provides all course information, timetables, teaching materials and assessment details. The VLE also hosts the eTrackr system, which has online tutorials, action planning and target-setting facilities. The VLE is monitored by the Quality Team and IT Services and Marketing, and is supported by Information Learning Technology (ILT) mentors.

1.147   The Course Handbook contains information about the course team and the support available at the College, including careers and progression advice availability, together with the responsibilities of the students regarding plagiarism and examination misconduct. Programme Leaders work with the Head of School to compile course outlines and update them annually.. The review team also found evidence that the CSMT regularly checks the quality of information such as course outlines and actions staff to update these.

1.148   Students met at the review visit reported general satisfaction with the information that the College had provided regarding application, induction and courses. However, they also report some initial confusion regarding grading criteria at the commencement of their course, and issues with entry criteria where they felt they could have progressed onto a higher course. The College is responding to student feedback in this regard, with the Head of School and Marketing Manager checking all information for accuracy. The grading criteria detailed on assessment briefs are supported by the generic criteria on the VLE. Students have the opportunity to evaluate the accuracy of information through programme evaluation forms.

1.149   On completion of their studies, students receive a certificate from Pearson. Certificates are for the Art and Design programme title, rather than the titles given by the College in its programme information and expected by some students (see Expectation A2.2).

1.150   Data on student enrolment, personal details and progression are available to all relevant staff and are fed into the College's quality cycle, allowing evaluation and analysis of outcomes. Reporting of data is undertaken regularly in Meeting our Targets meetings and to

the CSMT, the Teaching Quality Group and Academic Board. Student destination data feeds into programme SARs and School Position Statements.

1.151   The College states that it has effective data controls in place, and its security policies are up to date and fit for purpose in ensuring that information is secure and accessible only via valid and protected routes. However, the external examiner report available on the College VLE includes both parts A and B, therefore making individual student assessment information publicly available, contrary to the College's position on the security of student data.

1.152   In summary, the review team found that a range of useful information is provided by the College for its intended audiences. However, information for prospective and current students regarding the programme titles is incorrect; the HND as advertised is inconsistent with delivery practice; information regarding appeals is incomplete; and programme information is not made available in the form required by Pearson. The team therefore **recommends** that the College ensures that the information for current and prospective students is fit for purpose and trustworthy.

1.153   The review team concludes that the College's processes and procedures for the production and management of information are not sufficiently robust to ensure that information is always fit for purpose and trustworthy. While the identified shortcomings do not directly affect teaching and learning due to appropriate unit selection and secure assessment, the insufficient emphasis given to assuring the completeness and quality of information leads to the Expectation not being met and the risk level being moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

1.155   Expectation C is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate. There is one recommendation in this area concerning the trustworthiness and fitness for purpose of the information the College provides with regard to programme titles and duration of study. The recommendation on the production and maintenance of definitive programme records for each programme and qualification (located in Expectation A2.2) and on the alignment of the appeals policy with Pearson's requirements (located in Expectation B9) are also relevant to this judgement area. There are no affirmations in this judgement area.

1.156   Given that the Expectation is not met and the level of risk is moderate, the review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at Richmond Adult Community College **requires improvement to 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

1.157 The Pearson responsibilities checklist states that it is the College's responsibility to ensure that appropriate processes are in place to improve systematically the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. A College-wide Strategic Plan outlines the College's core beliefs and translates these into institutional priorities and projects intended to enhance all students' learning opportunities. With regard to higher education in scope for this review, the College is committed to enhancement initiatives that better prepare students for employment in the creative industries and as independent artists.

1.158 The College enhances students' learning opportunities, both as a result of projects initiated at College-level and as a result of sharing instances of good practice. Responsibility for enhancement is spread throughout all College staff and committees, with clearly defined responsibilities. Although the College has no single, formalised enhancement strategy, a widely shared focus on enhancing students' learning opportunities, combined with the effective design of management structures and opportunities for sharing good practice, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.159 To evaluate the effectiveness of the enhancement procedures and activities, the review team scrutinised committee minutes and papers, including those of higher education planning meetings, Academic Board, and Teaching Quality Group. The team also held meetings with senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students, and considered quality assurance and staff development documentation, such as SARs and sections of the VLE.

1.160 The Principal has final responsibility for the successful enhancement of students' learning opportunities, but the CSMT is responsible for ensuring that particular strategic objectives are delivered. The Vice Principal Curriculum has oversight of quality systems, and the Heads of School have direct responsibility for the delivery and quality of all programmes. The Director of Quality works with the Heads of Schools and the Vice Principal Curriculum to identify and disseminate areas of good practice through staff development activities and observation processes. Teaching staff feed ideas up to senior management via their Head of School.

1.161 While not specific to higher education programmes, the responsibilities of Academic Board include the duty to monitor the quality of students' learning experience, to receive reports of quality assessments, and to oversee and monitor the implementation of quality improvement action plans. Likewise, the Teaching Quality Group's terms of reference include 'identifying and acknowledging good practice and ensuring it is shared' and 'monitoring the quality of learners' experience through feedback and learner forums to inform improvement'.

1.162 The College's processes for capturing and disseminating good practice operate effectively. Teaching and Quality Group devotes much of its agenda to discussing good practice, and the means of sharing good practice effectively. The Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy ensures that quality assurance procedures are conceptualised as integrated mechanisms for capturing and disseminating good practice. For example, lesson observation and staff development processes are designed to identify and acknowledge outstanding practice and ensure that it is shared. This is achieved through an observation procedure, which encourages those staff rated 'outstanding' to share their

practice through bite-size CPD sessions on top of a termly summary report received by Teaching Quality Group that links observations with staff development needs. Good practice can also be shared via the staff area of the VLE. Furthermore, annual monitoring processes allow good practice and enhancement initiatives to be shared across the provision. The Curriculum Quality Manual mandates that SARs highlight good practice, and this opportunity is built into the programme review and School-level SAR documentation.

1.163   Deliberate steps are taken at institutional level to enhance students' learning opportunities effectively. Although the College's small HN provision is rarely singled out, CSMT and Teaching Quality Group are effective means of managing enhancement initiatives or College-wide projects. For example, following discussions about how to make use of volunteers and translate the College's strategic aims into enhancement activities, an Artist in Residence will be appointed in 2015-16 to work with the programmes and create work on site. This post will allow a graduate from the HN programmes to continue to use College facilities and technical support so as to develop new work in their first years of practice while maintaining strong links with the College. This role will also directly enhance current students' learning experiences, with the Artist in Residence acting as a role model whose work will build on the College's creative capacity.

1.164   School and programme-level committees are also used to drive initiatives that students consider to be valuable enhancements to their learning. HN programme planning meetings allow staff to plan enhancement activities directly related to their programmes and the close network of staff involved allow for ongoing communication about planned initiatives. For example, students' Higher Education Passports allow them to take supplementary classes, and staff have related these opportunities to core learning outcomes by signposting those that will complement specific HN intended learning outcomes or enhance their learning experience. Students value the breadth of learning opportunities these passports offer.

1.165   The College took a strategic decision to develop an adult learning campus at the Parkshot site with state-of-the-art creative and performing arts spaces. Students greatly appreciate improved access to studios outside of scheduled classes, which allows them to experiment with new techniques and work independently. Students also value the technicians who support this access, not least because of their background as practitioners and their willingness to demonstrate how to use equipment safely and creatively.

1.166   Delivery of individual units has also been enhanced via a range of planned initiatives, such as cross-programme field trips, master classes, and industry-relevant guest speakers including glass artists, photographers, and fine art animators. Similarly, students from all HN programmes participate in exhibitions, competitions and live briefs to develop their CV. Students also have the opportunity to volunteer in the on-site gallery.

1.167   Academic Board effectively monitors the implementation of enhancement initiatives, such as improvements to the VLE. Resources available on the VLE and staff development sessions are beginning to facilitate the dissemination of good practice, although these are not as yet linked to higher education pedagogy as they might be. Observation forms, position statements, programme reviews and SARs allow staff to capture good practice, and external examiner reports are used alongside student focus groups to enhance the provision. For example, in response to an external examiner's comments the College decided to apply some of the lessons learned from the successful integrated teaching of first and second year Fine Arts and Photography students to the 3D Design programme.

1.168   The review team found that the College takes deliberate steps to enhance students' learning opportunities at both institutional and programme level and effectively records and

shares good practice. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met, with low risk.

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

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

1.170   The Expectation is met and the associated risk is low. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area.

1.171   Given that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at Richmond Adult Community College **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

1.172 The College's 2012-15 Strategic Plan sets out employability as a key aspect of the College mission and vision, in the context of serving the local community and the local strategy for arts. In particular, the College's HN provision seeks to develop students as independent artists, who can go on to work in the creative industries or continue their studies to degree level. The College has implemented its vision strategically through the establishment of the Art School, the development of state-of-the-art studio space and the College art gallery and Artist in Residence initiative.

1.173 The Strategic Plan also contains an objective to 'continue to provide stimulation, challenge and links to industry where appropriate'. The College actively supports the transition of its higher education students into employment by embedding vocational aspirations and skills into its programmes and offering a range of employment-related opportunities. For example, students are assessed via live briefs and are expected to produce work of a professional standard. One live brief seen by the review team tasked students with pitching a design for artwork in a local infant school and required them to research the national curriculum, children's handwriting, health and safety and cost for the client. The school subsequently commissioned one of the students to turn their proposal into reality. More broadly, the review team found that many assignment briefs link to the external environment and encourage students to explore future employment opportunities.

1.174 The College helps students to achieve incremental career progression as they acquire new skills, enabling those who have previously faced barriers to learning to make progress and achieve new qualifications. Higher education student destination data is recorded. Staff have both educational and practitioner experience, which is appreciated by students as providing an immediate bridge to the external environment. The College successfully prepares its students for employment or further study, with students giving the examples of working with practitioners and on live briefs as particularly useful. The College-wide October 2014 destination survey reported that 87.6 per cent of those not working felt more confident about their work prospects following their studies at the College.

1.175 The College has selected a Level 5 professional practice unit for delivery across the second year of all HN programmes, which relates students' skills to their personal career goals, producing a self-promotion package. The latest external examiner report cites activities such as research on curriculum vitae development, presentation and career analysis taking place.

1.176 There is evidence of significant work-related learning opportunities, through which students experience a range of links to the external environment, including a programme of guest speakers, who are invited to talk about their work and practice to give students an insight into working as a practitioner. Students are given a range of exhibition, competition and live brief opportunities to support the development of their work in a professional context. Students are also encouraged to sell their work and volunteer in the onsite gallery to further develop their curricula vitae, develop employability skills and gain gallery experience. The exhibition was noted by the external examiner as being 'to a professional standard', and further, that 'the College encourages links with outside galleries and the Craft Council'.

1.177 In meetings with staff and students the review team heard how employability is fundamental to its operation, with links to local businesses, the availability of sessions with a national careers adviser and job opportunities advertised around the College. Students report that they are encouraged to consider opportunities following their study, including job opportunities, artists' local business community, government agencies and charities.

Students and alumni met by the team also felt that the personal support and opportunities available to them while completing their programmes had prepared, or were preparing, them for study at degree level or independent practice.

1.178   Students especially value their Higher Education Passports, which enable them to take supplementary classes. Likewise, students greatly appreciate their out-of-class access to studios, which allows them to experiment with new techniques and work independently. Students value the technicians who support this access; each is an experienced practitioner able to demonstrate how to use equipment safely and creatively.

1.179   Students also report positively regarding the recent development of an annual Artist in Residence programme, to be launched in 2016. The programme will offer ex-HNC and HND students the use of studio facilities together with support to develop new work in their first years of practice, and is a way for students to maintain even longer links with the College.

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 to 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.