Higher Education Review of Brockenhurst College

June 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Brockenhurst College. The review took place from 17 to 19 June 2014 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Daphne Rowlands
- Mr James Freeman (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Brockenhurst 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 a Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
    - the setting and maintenance of threshold 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 Brockenhurst 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 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement, and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[3] A dedicated section explains the method for Higher Education 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/qualitycode.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.
[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 Brockenhurst College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets** 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 Brockenhurst College:

- The thorough and comprehensive assessment process which is over and above the requirements of the awarding organisation (Expectations A6 and B6).
- The range of vocational learning opportunities at programme level which develop and enhance employability skills (Expectation B3).

Recommendations

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

By October 2014:

- formalise procedures and documentation requirements for the approval of new programmes (Expectations A4 and B1)
- implement the plans for student engagement in deliberative structures (Expectation B5).

By July 2015:

- improve its internal annual higher education report to enable an effective overview of its provision informed by quality assurance processes and data (Expectation B8)
- contextualise awarding organisation programme specifications into statements specific to its higher education provision and make these available to prospective and current students (Expectation A3 and C).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps taken to promote a distinct higher education identity (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

Brockenhurst College (the College) is increasing its focus on employability as part of a strategic drive towards high quality outcomes and efforts to focus provision on labour market needs. The College is responding to national initiatives by introducing science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects and agreeing progression agreements with local higher education institutions. Its three higher educational programmes so far are all vocational in nature. Work-based learning, work experience and assessment related to 'real-life' scenarios are increasingly important elements of the College's provision.

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

About Brockenhurst College

Brockenhurst College is a medium-sized further education college providing a wide range of courses for many different ages. The College is based in the village of Brockenhurst in the New Forest in Hampshire. It has been in existence since 1909, became a sixth-form college in 1969 and a tertiary college in 1984. It is judged outstanding by Ofsted and has Beacon College status.

The College offers vocationally-based higher education courses that lead to employment, enhance promotion within current employment or lead to additional higher education study at universities. The higher education provision is intended to reflect local needs and offer an opportunity for students to obtain cost effective higher level qualifications in a well-supported learning environment.

The mission statement is:

- to encourage, support and enhance learning by responding to the needs and demands of individuals and employers through high quality provision, collaboration and innovative practice
- to increase and widen participation and achievement in education and skills training for all our learners.

The College has over 2,800 full-time students and over 10,000 part-time adult learners. In 2013-14, the College enrolled 25 students on three full-time Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) awarded by Pearson.

Higher education has a significant focus in the College's strategic planning and is seen as a potential growth area. The higher education provision has changed in recent years because higher education institutions which had allocated student numbers withdrew them from the College. The College was therefore unable to run its successful Foundation Degree in Early Years. The College had recently gained validation for a BA top-up in Early Years which was then unable to start because of the lack of places awarded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Potential course developments agreed in principle with university partners were halted by the freeze on higher education funding.

In 2012 the College was awarded a number of HEFCE places and introduced HND provision in Early Years and Photography. October 2013 saw the introduction of a further HND in Computing and Systems Development. The College is working closely with Bournemouth University, the University of Chichester and Southampton Solent University on progression agreements to provide top-up opportunities for HNDs. A BA top-up in Early Years validated by Chichester University is planned for delivery at Brockenhurst in September 2014.

The College has addressed the good practice and recommendations identified in the QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2010 through consolidation of refinements to quality assurance procedures, the introduction of the virtual learning environment (VLE) in February 2014 and improved public information. This activity has been based on the College IQER Action Plan 2010.

Explanation of the findings about Brockenhurst 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: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

Expectation (A1): Each qualification (including those awarded through arrangements with other delivery organisations or support providers) is allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: The national level*

Findings

1.1 The content of the College's three HND programmes is prescribed by the awarding organisation, Pearson, which has the primary responsibility for aligning qualifications with the FHEQ. Pearson uses the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), structuring programmes around units and credits. HNDs are level 5 qualifications on both the QCF and FHEQ. The College contributes to ensuring its provision is aligned with the FHEQ by selecting units and setting assessments that enable students to meet intended learning outcomes reflective of level 5 qualification descriptors.

1.2 Programme teams select units from Pearson's Unit Catalogue, considering a range of factors, but there is no formal approval process. Although the Higher Education Programme Review and Approval Process is in place, it does not define procedures for programme approval or unit selections. The Higher Education Academic Board focuses on reviewing programmes in operation, and does not formally ratify unit selections or review the rationale behind such choices. The Higher Education Academic Board was only established in the 2013-14 academic year and its terms of reference do not define an oversight role in programme approval or unit selection. Lead internal verifiers approve assignments and are responsible for ensuring that students' work 'meets the required standards and level as well as all of the assessment criteria'.

1.3 The College has internal processes for designing, scheduling and approving assessment tasks, which students receive as assignment briefs clearly stating intended learning outcomes. Lead internal verifiers approve assignments and are responsible for ensuring that students' work 'meets the required standards and level as well as all of the assessment criteria'.

1.4 External examiner reports reassure the College that its unit selections, assignment design and assessment marking reflect the appropriate FHEQ level.

1.5 The absence of a formal approval mechanism for unit selections limits the College's ability to ensure programme teams explicitly align unit selections to a programme's overarching intended learning outcomes, volume of study requirements, and FHEQ qualification descriptors. This contributes to the recommendation made under Expectation A4. However, because the awarding organisation sets unit combination rules and ensures all units available are aligned to the relevant qualification frameworks, the team considers the effect on FHEQ alignment a low risk while provision is limited to qualifications written entirely by an awarding organisation. Therefore, despite a lack of formal approval procedures, the combination of robust assignment approval processes with other quality assurance mechanisms allows Expectation A1 to be met.

1.6 The team analysed internal documentation and awarding organisation guidance and met with staff and students to evaluate the effectiveness of unit selection, delivery and assessment design processes in allocating programmes to the appropriate FHEQ level.

1.7   Programmes are correctly allocated to the relevant FHEQ level (via QCF), which is identified on most schemes of work. Awarding organisation unit specifications indicate the required volume of study, QCF level and credit values. Although the awarding organisation encourages providers to include the FHEQ level in contextualised programme specifications, as discussed under Expectation A3, these do not currently exist. Programme handbooks make variable reference to levels and credits, with some adopting a different framework to that of the awarding organisation. Neither course profiles nor programme webpages situate programmes within the FHEQ or QCF, qualification descriptors, or credit structures, although the titles of qualifications are clearly shown. Students and staff, however, are aware of each qualification's level and distinguish the learning expectations of level 5 programmes from other levels of provision at the College. A robust system of teaching observations confirms programmes are delivered at the appropriate level.

1.8   External examiners state that assessment planning and approval processes operate effectively and align programmes to the relevant frameworks. In one case, the external examiner raised an essential action to ensure that assignment briefs written by students allowed them to meet all the assessment criteria and reflect the appropriate level of study. Subsequent reports, staff and internal follow-up documentation indicate that this has been resolved. Programmes' overall intended learning outcomes coverage is effectively monitored during assessment planning.

1.9   Notwithstanding some variation in the information available to students, the sound alignment of programmes and assignments with the FHEQ and the effective operation of assignment approval procedures and quality assurance mechanisms mean that Expectation A1 is met with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2): All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level*

Findings

1.10   Relevant subject benchmark statements are not available for HND qualifications, and the College relies upon its awarding organisation for programmes' academic content and setting learning outcomes.

1.11   None of the provision involves professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, and there are no qualification benchmark statements for HNDs. Instead, the College benchmarks its assignments and teaching against other colleges and higher education institutions. The College has used its experience with the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark statement* to assure the level of its higher education provision.

1.12   Given that no directly relevant statements exist, and the College has limited responsibilities for the academic content of its provision, the team considers Expectation A2 met with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3): Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: The programme level*

Findings

1.13   The College works with its awarding organisation to produce definitive information about programmes' aims, structure, intended learning outcomes, assessments and expected achievements. As well as generic unit-level specifications, the awarding organisation supplies standard BTEC qualification guidance documents, which contain full, national-level specifications for qualifications. However, the awarding organisation mandates that colleges produce contextualised programme-level specifications, unique to their provision, and sets minimum content requirements for these statements. College staff were unaware of this obligation and have not contextualised the national awarding organisation guidance to their own provision at programme level. As a result, no single definitive, detailed version of programme-level information feeds into other publications, such as handbooks, prospectuses or course profiles. While providing some information about programmes' aims and intended learning outcomes, these documents are not equivalent to the awarding organisation's required programme specifications. The team **recommends** that by July 2015 the College contextualise awarding organisation programme specifications into statements specific to its higher education provision and make these available to prospective and current students.

1.14   Programme teams are responsible for producing programme information, drawing on Pearson guidance, internal templates and college-wide policies to produce programme handbooks. The lack of a formal programme approval process stipulating documentary requirements and affording opportunities for scrutiny outside programme teams weakens the College's ability to assure itself that definitive programme information is consistent when first produced.

1.15   The College has a robust Public Information Review Process, with clearly defined roles and sound integration into a Higher Education Quality Cycle and evaluation timeline. The Higher Education Academic Board reviews all information annually. Marketing ensure the timely updating of Higher Education Academic Board approved information, informs the Higher Education Academic Board of required updates, monitors information, and ensures all uploaded documents are authorised. Heads of Department must inform the Higher Education Academic Board and Marketing of changes.

1.16   Overall, while the College needs to fulfil its awarding organisation's requirement to contextualise generic guidance into detailed programme specifications, the processes underpinning the review of information generally allow Expectation A3 to be met but with moderate risk.

1.17   The team tracked these processes through internal documentation, scrutinised published material, and held detailed conversations with academic staff, marketing professionals and students to evaluate the sources, production, accuracy and accessibility of definitive programme information.

1.18   Procedures for reviewing programme handbooks and other sources of definitive programme information are mostly effective. The College conducted a comprehensive review of programme handbooks in late 2013, and these now contain a helpful range of policies and procedures alongside some programme-specific information. However, handbooks describe programme aims and intended learning outcomes to inconsistent depth,

frequently merging the two categories. Students and staff use programme handbooks as a source of definitive programme information, and these are available via a virtual learning environment (VLE). However, some students had not received handbooks, although they were aware of, and involved in, ongoing developments in this regard.

1.19   Assignment briefs outline relevant programme aims and intended learning outcomes. Similarly, detailed awarding organisation unit-level descriptions of aims and intended learning outcomes are available to students and staff in print and as a contextualised version via the College's VLE. For staff, schemes of work relate intended learning outcomes and aims to specific tasks and lessons.

1.20   Course profiles briefly describe programme structure and basic information, but do not contain a sufficient level of detail, especially on intended learning outcomes, aims and teaching and assessment strategies to act as definitive programme information. The College's website publishes clear summary programme information, often including unit lists, but no information on programme intended learning outcomes or aims is available. Similarly, a Higher Education Prospectus understandably does not list intended learning outcomes or programme aims in sufficient detail to replace programme specifications.

1.21   Therefore, the team concludes that prospective students would find it difficult to obtain definitive programme information. The steps taken to review handbook information and the inclusion of unit-level intended learning outcomes in assignment briefs and on the VLE mean that Expectation A3 is met, despite the need to contextualise awarding organisation information into programme-level definitive information.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (A4): Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter A4: Approval and review*

Findings

1.22   The decision to restart higher education that falls within the scope of QAA reviews was sanctioned by the College Corporation, but driven by the Senior Management Team and Higher Education Strategy. At the same time, the College's quality assurance policies, strategies and procedures for higher education have been updated, including those concerning programme approval and review. The Higher Education Strategy outlines a detailed rationale for higher education at the College, and sets conditions for continued validity.

1.23   The College must obtain approval from its awarding organisation to run HND programmes. The awarding organisation makes available the programmes academic content so the College has a secondary role in programme design, selecting units and designing assessments. In the past, the College relied upon higher education institutions' validation panels to set documentary requirements and conditions for programme approval, and this was also the case when seeking institutional approval from the University of Chichester in spring 2014, to run a Level 6 BA Early Childhood Studies top-up. However, the College's internal Higher Education Programme Review and Approval Process does not define principles, documentary requirements or procedures for programme approval. The Higher Education Academic Board's role in programme approval (as opposed to review) is not defined in policies or terms of reference. The Assessment and Quality Handbook cites a New Course Approval Process online, with the Quality Nominee monitoring approvals, but this is yet to be embedded. Staff confirmed there was no formal, codified programme design and approval process. Instead, programme teams discuss the validity and relevance of new programmes and unit selections informally. There is no formal externality in the decision to run HND programmes.

1.24   A formal policy of programme review mandating programmes' continuing validity and viability is required by Pearson and is considered annually. The Higher Education Academic Board facilitates such reviews and takes account of student and employer feedback, required skills, destinations data, predicted demand and funding opportunities. The College Leadership Team discusses the outcomes of reviews and makes recommendations to the Planning and Advisory Board, which also receives Higher Education Academic Board minutes. Programme Review is a formal stage in the Higher Education Academic Board's business cycle, the Higher Education Quality Cycle, and evaluation timeline. Programmes have not been running long enough to require periodic review.

1.25   The College operates a system of annual self-assessment reports. Department-level self-assessment reports evaluate the College's provision across subject areas, but include little reference to higher education programmes. Partly in recognition of this, the College has recently produced a Higher Education Self-Assessment Report, which evaluates the College's provision against Quality Code indicators and results in a Higher Education Quality Development Improvement Plan. At programme level, external examiner reports, student feedback surveys, focus groups, and teaching observations feed into discussions between programme team staff, before issues are raised at the Higher Education Academic Board or with the Head of Division or Deputy Principal Director of Skills, Adults and Higher Education (Deputy Principal). Formal reporting processes monitor external examiner reports and action plans, student surveys, and observations.

1.26   A College Quality Nominee ensures all internal quality assurance systems operate effectively. Lead internal verifiers for each principal subject area coordinate quality assurance procedures. The Deputy Principal has overall responsibility for higher education programme design, approval and review, although the College Senior Management Team and Higher Education Academic Board operate a system of collective responsibility.

1.27   As with its other provision, responsibility for higher education ultimately rests with the College's Corporation and Principal. The Senior Management Team and broader College Leadership Team devolve responsibility for higher education to the Deputy Principal, In turn the Head of Division for Adults and Higher Education works operationally with the Director of Quality and Heads of Department in the day-to-day management of programmes.

1.28   The Higher Education Academic Board brings together the leaders of higher education programmes with the Deputy Principal and Head of Division and the Director of Quality. This committee reports to the Planning and Advisory Board which in turn reports each term to the Corporation. The Principal and other members of the Senior Management Team can table higher education items on the agendas of their respective meetings.

1.29   Overall, the College's informal programme development practices, combined with robust, formalised procedures for reviewing the continuing validity of programmes, allow Expectation A4 to be met in principle, but with moderate risk due to the lack of codified processes and documentary requirements for programme approval (see Expectation B1).

1.30   The team evaluated the operation of these procedures by meeting with senior managers, academic staff and support staff while examining associated documentation, including self-assessment reports, Higher Education Academic Board and programme team minutes. The Higher Education Strategy is appropriately updated and ensures the College is aware of the risks and benefits associated with developing its provision.

1.31   Programme teams, support staff and senior staff are aware of, and involved in, the informal programme approval and unit selections processes described above. Discussions consider destinations data, local and national priorities, and opportunities to extend level 3 provision. Staff take account of resourcing, cost implications, likely demand and staff specialisms, or, at a unit level, the employment needs of current or prospective students. However, programme team meetings record only limited detail about the rationale for unit selections and programme developments. The Higher Education Academic Board has not yet approved or discussed any new programmes, ratified unit selections, or reviewed the rationales behind those choices. The Higher Education Academic Board was established during 2013-14, but, as noted above, its terms of reference do not clearly define its role in programme approval or modification. Moreover, upcoming modifications to programmes mentioned by staff were not discussed during the Higher Education Academic Board Higher Education Programme Review, as per the policy cited above. Because it is unclear how senior staff exercise formal oversight regarding programme development and modification, the team **recommends** that by October 2014 the College formalise procedures and documentation requirements for the approval of new programmes.

1.32   The Higher Education Academic Board facilitates effective review of programmes' continuing validity, and, notwithstanding the above comments regarding the recording of unit modifications, the committee confirms that programmes should continue to run and notes other changes to delivery. Student feedback is aggregated and reviewed at the Higher Education Academic Board, and external examiner reports are received by the Quality Office, with actions logged and followed up. The Higher Education Self-Assessment Report and Higher Education Action Plan identify cross-provision strengths and weaknesses and are monitored, reviewed and updated at Higher Education Academic Board meetings. However, as discussed under Expectation B8, the Higher Education Self-Assessment

Report does not simply collate relevant parts of department self-assessment reports. This is appropriate given the department-level self-assessment reports' lack of focus on higher education, but it is unclear what quality assurance data the Higher Education Self-Assessment Report draws upon or how senior staff bring together this data to gain an overview of the entire provision's continuing validity.

1.33   The College has evaluated the effectiveness of many of its quality assurance mechanisms and policies and introduced innovations where necessary. Staff can access awarding organisation guidance and training in planning HNDs.

1.34   Taken together, the effective operation of systems for reviewing the validity and relevance of its programmes allow Expectation A4 to be met, but with moderate risk arising from the informality of approval processes.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (A5): Higher education providers ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards.

Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality*

Findings

1.35   The College's awarding organisation is a key source of externality in the management of academic standards, as the College's responsibilities are limited to delivery, selecting units and writing assessments. The College's higher education provision operates within awarding organisation and college-wide guidance on quality assurance, both of which are readily available to staff.

1.36   The lack of formal internal programme approval processes noted in Expectation A4 limits opportunities for structured externality in HND unit selection. However, employers can influence assessment design, and the Assessment Handbook suggests staff use 'external links' to judge the suitability of assignments. Employers can join an Employers Group, which can impact on the curriculum across the College, particularly in arranging work experience projects.

1.37   Relationships with higher education institutions are becoming important sources of externality as the College engages with outside quality assurance systems. A recent Institutional Approval event, organised by the University of Chichester, included representation from a third-party university and afforded greater externality in programme approval.

1.38   External examiners, appointed by the awarding organisation, are the main form of externality contributing to quality assurance. Pearson's system of external examining sits on top of the College's internal verification processes and considers the standards and management of programmes alongside assignment briefs and assessment decisions. The Quality Office receives the reports and sends them to Heads of Department and other senior staff with responsibility for higher education. Reports are risk assessed, action planned and signed off by senior staff and the Quality Office, who then monitor progress against actions. External examiner reports are suitably integrated into the College's Evaluation Timeline and Higher Education Quality Cycle. Both the Quality Nominee and the lead internal verifier for each programme ensure these processes operate effectively. The Quality Nominee monitors and shares good practice arising from external examiner reports. External examiners can attend assessment boards in an advisory role. Higher Education Self-Assessment Reports do not contain external input beyond external examiner reports.

1.39   Given the small scale and very recent development of higher education provision, the substantial degree of externality offered by the College's awarding organisation and external examiners, and its own efforts to develop links with the higher education sector and employers, enable Expectation A5 to be met.

1.40   The team held detailed discussions with staff and students, tracked external examiner reports and subsequent actions and responses, and scrutinised a range of supporting documentation to evaluate the effectiveness of externality in quality assurance procedures.

1.41   The College appropriately benchmarks its provision against similar providers and effectively works with local higher education institutions and employers to tailor assessments to students' progression needs and select appropriate units.

1.42   External examination is carried out rigorously across all programmes, assuring the College and stakeholders that programmes' structure, aims, intended learning outcomes,

teaching, management, assignment setting, marking and results processing are appropriate. Reports are detailed, constructive and generally complimentary about the College's provision, highlighting suggestions, actions and good practice. Associated processes, arrangements and roles are well-defined and understood by staff. The Quality Office signs-off and follows up external examiner actions effectively, using a risk-based grading system. Programme teams discuss external examiner reports and respond to these fully when actions are required. Students do not have access to external examiner reports, but the College states that these will be made available via the VLE.

1.43   Overall, an effective response to external examiner reports and a willingness to seek their input into the design of assessment ensures that Expectation A5 is met with a low level of risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A6): Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Quality Code, *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes*

Findings

1.44   The College designs, schedules and marks assessments within the framework set by its awarding organisation. The College does not have a higher education assessment strategy, although the Development of Learning Strategy refers to assessment as part of the college-wide student journey. Instead, assessment is governed by the Assessment and Quality Assurance Handbook, which outlines key roles and responsibilities alongside the principles of assessment design. A set Work Submission Procedure clearly details the stages of assessment to staff and students, as well as setting policy on feedback, extenuating circumstances, deadlines, and missed assessments. An Appeals Policy is in place, which makes reference to awarding organisation procedures. A range of college-wide policies, such as a Plagiarism Policy and Equality and Diversity Code, support assessment and are included in student handbooks. In combination, these documents demonstrate a strategic approach to assessment.

1.45   The College has responsibility for assessment, although the awarding organisation uses its quality assurance systems to ensure the validity of its awards. Within the College, the Deputy Principal takes overall responsibility, but, in practice, most duties are delegated to programme teams, working under their respective heads of department as well as the Head of Division responsible for higher education and the Director of Quality.

1.46   Because the College writes its own assessments, programme teams produce schemes of work, assessment plans and assignment briefs, which are checked by lead internal verifiers. Lead internal verifiers check the accuracy of information, clarity of deadlines, that unit intended learning outcomes and marking criteria are matched against tasks, and that briefs use vocationally-orientated language. Assessments must allow the student to address the targeted criteria and learning outcomes, be set within a vocational context, define roles and tasks clearly, and incorporate equal opportunities.

1.47   Internal verification systems operate in each programme in addition to the external examiner arrangements described under Expectation A5. Lead internal verifiers are responsible for programme-level grade standardisation, verification arrangements and risk assessing associated processes. Verification is normally done via sampling, and all decisions must be recorded. Termly standardisation meetings are recorded and minutes made available to all assessors and the Quality Nominee. An Internal Quality Assurance post in each division ensures consistent decisions and that these meet national standards. The Assessment and Quality Handbook clearly outlines the roles, responsibilities and activities of those involved, including suggested questions verifiers should consider. External examiners scrutinise the suitability of assessment for meeting the programme's intended learning outcomes and level, as well as independently verifying assessed work.

1.48   The College uses assessment boards to confirm results and progression decisions, with external examiners able to attend in advisory roles. Assessment board decisions are ratified by the Higher Education Academic Board. Certification is double-checked to ensure accuracy, and advice and guidance sessions are arranged for those not achieving their expected grades.

1.49   Taken together the College's rigorous policies, clear guidance and well-designed processes assessment meet Expectation A6.

1.50   The team tested the effectiveness of assessment procedures by analysing a sample of assignment briefs, plans and schemes of work, student feedback, quality assurance documentation, and by meetings with staff and students.

1.51   Programme teams are properly qualified to conduct assessment, relevant continuing professional development is in place, and the College monitors staff development needs.

1.52   Assessments are well-designed, carefully scheduled and rigorously matched to intended learning outcomes to ensure overall coverage of programmes' aims. Schemes of work, assessment plans and assignment briefs state the intended learning outcomes assessed, give clear deadlines, break down the required tasks and contextualise marking criteria. Assignments, deadlines, intended learning outcome coverage, and use of merit and distinction criteria are effectively monitored. Live briefs in photography are a much-appreciated and particularly effective means of relating assessment to intended learning outcomes and the programme's aim to develop vocational skills. Similarly, assignments in early years are related to the workplace learning environment. These vocationally orientated assignments contribute to the feature of good practice identified under Expectation B3.

1.53   Students find the timely, detailed, and developmental feedback they receive helpful in achieving their awards. Student requests to adjust the assessment schedules to avoid the bunching of assessments have been heeded, and teaching and assessment are well-coordinated.

1.54   The internal verification system operates very effectively, providing students with further valuable and detailed feedback on their work. Moderation meetings are also an effective means of ensuring consistency and developing members of staff. Lead internal verifiers perform their quality assurance roles admirably, meeting with other markers, recording discussions and decisions, and approving assignments. The profile of internally verified work is monitored, and sampling plans mitigate the restrictions of small programme teams. External examiner analyses of assessment briefs, schemes of work and assessed work are thorough and can reassure stakeholders that assessments are robust, valid and reliable and that the awarding organisation's regulatory framework has been translated into local practices appropriately. As discussed under Expectation A5, effective processes are in place for the receipt of external examiner reports and required actions are closely monitored. External examiners' recommendations concerning assessment design and grading are resolved appropriately. Students understand the internal verification and external examiner systems, but are not aware they have access to the latter's reports.

1.55   The team consider the thorough and comprehensive assessment process which is over and above the requirements of the awarding organisation, to be **good practice**.

1.56   Given the size of the provision, the effective implementation of robust policies and procedures for assessment design, internal verification and external examining, allow Expectation A6 to be met with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.57   In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. All of the expectations for this judgement area were met. The associated level of risk of two expectations were moderate and four were low. Although the awarding organisation has final responsibility for setting academic standards, the College is aware of its responsibilities for maintaining standards. External examiners are satisfied that the programmes are delivered at the right level.

1.58   There was one feature of good practice, the thorough and comprehensive assessment process, which is further explained in Expectation B6.

1.59   The review team identified two recommendations with moderate risk. One concerns informal procedures for new programme approval (Expectation A4 and discussed in B1); the other relates to the lack of contextualised programme specifications that contains definitive information (Expectation A3).

1.60   The review team concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2   Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval*

Findings

2.1   Because the College delivers Pearson HNDs it has no responsibility for the design of its higher education programmes. Pearson has awarded the College centre approval to run a number of programmes. The College has recently developed a BA Honours programme in partnership with the University of Chichester as a top-up to its early years programme. The College's rationale for delivering higher education is set out in its strategy and discussed in Expectation A4. The policies and procedures enable the College to meet Expectation B1.

2.2   The review team scrutinised centre documentation, the prospectus and the College's programme approval process guidelines and held meetings with senior and academic staff.

2.3   The evidence shows that the process for new programmes is largely informal with the newly formed Higher Education Academic Board giving final approval to new programmes although the Higher Education Academic Board has not yet had to fulfil this function. Programmes are informed by local labour market information. The College's Quality Improvement Development Plan shows that local employment information also informs its review process. As identified in Expectation A4, the review team recommends that the College formalise procedures and documentation requirements for the approval of new programmes.

2.4   The review team concludes that the College's policy and proposed procedures for programme design and approval, though informal, meet Expectation B1. The associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (B2): Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions*

Findings

2.5   Most students enrol on higher education programmes through an internal progression route. The College has a clear admissions procedure for its higher education students which is embedded within its college-wide admissions. The College uses standard guidance when interviewing students and considering appeals. Admissions information, including entry requirements, is available on the website and at the annual higher education fairs the College hosts. The policy includes the procedure to follow when an applicant is unsuccessful. The College has no appeals from higher education applicants on record. The policies and procedures enable the College to meet Expectation B2.

2.6   The review team tested the operation of the Admissions Procedures Policy by talking to support staff and students and by looking at documentation and the College website.

2.7   The evidence confirms that the admissions process is clear and effective. The procedure takes into account additional learning needs which are assessed during the process in order to provide appropriate support. Students confirm that information received is clear and comprehensive, interviews are useful, an information pack is received and student experience following admissions matches information received. Standard induction information is given at interviews; students undergo an induction process when starting College but the benefit of this experience is variable between programmes. There is a clear understanding of staff about the whole admissions procedure.

2.8   The review team concludes that the College has clear and consistently applied admissions policies and procedures which are accessible to students and well understood by staff. Therefore, Expectation B2 is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*

Findings

2.9 A college-wide Development of Learning Strategy informs learning and teaching within the College. It contains measurable outcomes and includes references to staff development plans and the importance of support staff input into student success. Learning and teaching is underpinned by a system of lesson observations which are both critical and developmental.

2.10 The Staff Development Policy outlines requirements for staff induction and guidelines for further development. There is some higher education-specific staff training and staff attend Pearson training on delivering Higher National programmes. They have the opportunity and financial support to attend conferences. Staff are appropriately qualified and the College is supportive in encouraging staff to work towards higher level degrees. There is a clear process for applying for funding. Staff record staff development activities in their appraisal when further development opportunities may be identified. The processes enable the College to meet Expectation B3.

2.11 The review team tested the evidence by meeting with a range of staff and students. The team also examined a variety of documentation including policy documents, staff records and observation forms.

2.12 There are three types of lesson observations. Management observations contribute towards appraisal. Peer observations are encouraged and form a valuable source of good practice. Action points arising from documentation are amalgamated into a composite list which is available for dissemination as the College recognises the need for a more developmental observation system. Tutorial classes are included in the observation system. 'Learning Walks' is a new system introduced to encompass a theme; results are analysed to determine any weaknesses which may lead to further staff development, for example questioning techniques. The majority of students are happy with the teaching and support they receive.

2.13 Elected student representatives work with programme leaders, take part in focus groups and complete end-of-module evaluations. There is some indicative representation in the Higher Education Academic Board. As described in Expectation B5, a Student Engagement Policy outlines what is expected of students. The College recognises that there is limited student engagement in learning and has plans to improve this.

2.14 The selection of units in the three HND programmes ensures a vocational curriculum. The range of learning opportunities at programme level develops and enhances students' employability skills and is considered to be good practice. Examples are given of photography students working on a live brief set by a local employer. Plans are in place for computing students to undertake work experience for a local company. Early years students broaden their knowledge with a series of visits, for example, to a local hospice. Since most early years students are employed, the workplace is an important setting for their programme.

2.15   The review team concludes that there is effective learning and teaching and Expectation B3 is met with a low risk. The range of vocational learning opportunities at programme level help develop and enhance employability skills (Expectation B3).

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement*

Findings

2.16   Resources for higher education programmes are allocated according to need and fit into the overall College budget. Initial investment is made at the start of a programme and resources are monitored annually to ensure they are adequate The Learning Resources Centre provides books, e-books and learning skills support. The higher education photography students have a dedicated room with further shared photography resources. The VLE is a repository of information providing support. Careers advice and a range of support services are available. The processes enable Expectation B4 to be met.

2.17   The review team tested the effectiveness of resources by talking to staff and students, looking at documentation and the VLE which is used by all higher education programmes with variable amounts of information available. There is no minimum content requirement but the College intends to improve consistency as it changes the learning platform to a more comprehensive facility.

2.18   Programmes are adequately resourced. The Learning Resources Centre staff work closely with academic staff to ensure that the book stock is appropriate and current. A laptop loan scheme is available for higher education students. At the start of a new programme subject-specific library ambassadors work with academic staff to identify what is needed. Students are positive about resources.

2.19   Student guidance arrangements are effective. All students are interviewed and receive information prior to programme entry, together with a self-referral form detailing additional support required. Students confirmed that the information is helpful and comprehensive.

2.20   Every student has a personal tutor for academic support which varies in its provision with some programmes having scheduled tutorial times and others when they are needed. Students confirm that staff are very approachable and that tutorial support is helpful. Targets are set and recorded on Individual Learning Plans. Training in study skills is available at the beginning of a programme, and throughout the duration of a programme to those who require it. Learning Resources Centre staff provide additional help in referencing and essay writing. Support is given to students with additional needs.

2.21   Early years students are allocated a mentor in their workplace. The relevant tutor liaises with mentors to ensure they know what to expect. Mentors support students in achieving their objectives by providing appropriate work opportunities. They meet students on a regular basis, countersign evidence and meet the programme tutor on visits.

2.22   The review team concludes that resources are suitable and students are given sufficient support to facilitate their development. Expectation B4 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student engagement*

Findings

2.23   All programmes have elected student representatives but there is little representation on College committees. The Student Engagement Policy states that the College welcomes student feedback. The College surveys its higher education students during the year and analyses the findings. The College's evaluation timeline provides the schedule for garnering student feedback.

2.24   The review team looked at the range of opportunities for student engagement by meeting staff and students and examining documentation.

2.25   The evidence analysed by the review team shows that there is limited formal student engagement in the College's deliberative structures. The terms of reference of the Higher Education Academic Board that state that students are part of the committee membership are not fully implemented. Students contribute to the Higher Education Academic Board for part of the meeting and present information but do not always stay for the whole meeting Students stated that there is no formal student forum for higher education but are happy that the student voice is heard. The Student Engagement Policy for higher education programmes encourages students to participate in feedback opportunities Examples were given of requests for a separate lanyard to differentiate higher education from further education students and timetable and assessment changes. Specifically in early years, interim developmental feedback is now provided which improves the student experience. The Higher Education Academic Board minutes clearly show discussions about student feedback and improvements that can be made. Students liaise with programme managers at course boards. Student feedback surveys conducted during the year are analysed at programme level and students complete end-of-module evaluations. Early years students confirm the teaching is good and that modules are interesting.

2.26   The review team found that limited formal student engagement is in place and there is no training for student representatives. This is complicated by the fact that students attend College on different days; some are in employment and find it difficult to attend meetings. The College intends to expand its Student Engagement Policy and has drawn up a draft Student Representative Policy. The review team **recommends** that by October 2014 the College implement the plans for student engagement in deliberative structures.

2.27   Overall, the review team concludes that student representation is not always working adequately; it is informally implemented and therefore Expectation B5 is not met although the risk is low.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.

Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning*

Findings

2.28   Since programmes delivered are all Pearson HNDs, the College is only responsible for the design of assessments and the marking and internal verification procedures. Assessment processes follow Pearson assessment guidelines. Staff follow procedures outlined in its Assessment and Quality Handbook. The procedures enable Expectation B6 to be met.

2.29   The review team tested the assessment process by talking to staff and students and by looking at a range of assessment documentation, processes and marked assignment briefs. Recognition of prior learning, which is Pearson's version of accreditation of prior learning, is mentioned in programme handbooks but there has not yet been a case to implement it.

2.30   Assessment briefs are written by the programme team and checked by the programme leader. The lead internal verifier checks to ensure that all learning outcomes are covered and tracking documents meticulously ensure the system is working effectively. The internal verification system up to level 3 has been extended to higher education programmes to make a more robust assessment system, largely by retaining the role of the lead internal verifier. Assignments are approved before distribution to students and again internally verified when marked for standardisation of grades.

2.31   Students confirmed that the amount, loading and variety of assessment instruments is good. Vocationally-based assignments lend reality to assessments as described in Expectation B3 and maintain students' interest in their subject. Students understand what they have to do to obtain their qualification and are also familiar with the internal verification system.

2.32   Feedback is developmental and comprehensive in most cases. The detail and quality of feedback is commended by external examiners in the early years programme. Turnaround time for assignments is two weeks and students agree that most work is returned within that timescale.

2.33   External examiners confirm that assessment is in line with national standards. The comprehensive internal verification system within the early years programme is particularly commended by external examiner reports. Procedures are in place for holding assessment boards but as yet no Higher National programme has completed the whole programme.

2.34   As identified in Expectation A6, the review team concludes that the thorough and comprehensive assessment process which is over and above the requirements of the awarding organisation is **good practice**. Expectation B6 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External examining*

Findings

2.35   The awarding organisation appoints external examiners who visit the College twice a year and assessment boards are held at the end of a programme. Clear guidelines prescribe the composition and process of assessment boards but since none of the programmes have yet completed, none have been held to date. The procedures in place enable Expectation B7 to be met. The review team examined documentation and spoke to students and staff to ascertain the effectiveness of the system.

2.36   The Assessment and Quality Handbook provides guidance in preparation for external examiner visits. External examiner reports are generally positive and confirm the appropriateness of assessment. External examiner reports are received by the Quality Office, logged and passed to the relevant department. Action plans are subsequently followed up by the Quality Office. A process exists for logging quality activities. Students confirmed that they meet external examiners during visits and have a good awareness of the role they play. Students do not have access to external examiner reports. Arrangements for external examiner reports, responses to them and actions arising from them are effective in spite of the provision being at an early stage.

2.37   The review team concludes that the external examining process is effective; Expectation B7 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review*

Findings

2.38   The main mechanism for monitoring programmes is the College's self-assessment process augmented by quarterly Heads of Department meetings. Review processes are overseen by the Higher Education Academic Board. These processes enable the College to meet Expectation B8.

2.39   The review team tested the effectiveness of monitoring and review processes by examining annual monitoring documentation and meeting a range of staff.

2.40   The Principal and governors review provision annually and the Deputy Principal has senior oversight of higher education provision. An evaluation timeline sets out a linear schedule for monitoring processes. This effectively informs staff when an action should be undertaken and provides a method of standardising the timing of procedures.

2.41   The process for monitoring higher education programmes includes discussion through the Higher Education Academic Board. The minutes demonstrate that higher education issues are discussed. For example, it is clear that an improvement in the photography programme had been monitored and noted. Assessment boards are held in July. Currently no higher education programmes have completed and so no examination boards have yet been held. Monitoring of programmes also occurs following lesson observations that identify specific needs. An action log is compiled and monitored by the Quality Office and reported to the leadership team.

2.42   The self-assessment report is completed at school-level and whole-college guidance is available. Teaching teams have input into a programme level report which covers data, progression and learning and teaching. This report is amalgamated into a school-level report which includes further education programmes. From the school programmes a Higher Education Self-Assessment Report is compiled, using QAA references. Although the Higher Education Self-Assessment Report may be a useful document, it does not contain information in a way that enables the reader to form an overview of its higher education provision. Following this the Quality Improvement Development Plan is updated. It lists strengths and weaknesses but the review team is unclear of their provenance as it is not referenced to any documentation. Actions taken to address weaknesses are cited but future actions are not given time targets and it is not clear where the responsibility lies. The team concludes that it is not transparent how management gain an effective overview of the College's higher education provision. The College acknowledges that the college-wide self-assessment is not a suitable measure of effectiveness for higher education programmes. The review team **recommends** that by July 2015 the College improve its internal annual higher education report to enable an effective overview of its provision informed by quality processes and data.

2.43   Through consideration of the evidence the review team concludes that there is satisfactory monitoring of higher education programmes, Expectation B8 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals.

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals*

Findings

2.44   The complaints procedure encompasses all types of complaints; it is current and clearly states when it is due for revision. It outlines stages of formality leading up to the relevant awarding organisation. The Admissions Policy makes reference to appeals. The appeals procedure gives guidance to students and signposts them to their programme handbooks. These policies enable Expectation B9 to be met.

2.45   The review team scrutinised appeals and complaints policies and spoke with students and staff to test the procedures.

2.46   Students confirmed that they know how to make a complaint or appeal and obtain access to support services. Information on support available is introduced during induction and information for most programmes is in their handbooks. Most students are issued with handbooks which they find helpful. There was a delay in producing and distributing the handbook for photography students but the College rectified this.

2.47   The review team concludes that there are fair and effective procedures for handling complaints, Expectation B9 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others*

Findings

2.48   The College is responsible for delivering programmes and writing assignments. Academic standards are assured by external examiners. The College works with employers for delivery of its early years programme and there is some collaboration with photography employers, for example, in work experience and live briefs.

2.49   The review team scrutinised student work and the outcome of a live brief and met staff and students to test the processes.

2.50   Students on the early years programmes are allocated mentors but there is no formal training for mentors. Tutors visit students in the workplace during year one and in year two if they are not practitioners. Photography students are given a live brief prepared by an employer. No written information is given to early years employers on College expectations although tutors liaise with mentors in the workplace. Mentors are not directly involved in assessment but ensure that the student has sufficient opportunity to gain the qualification. Guidelines for employer/staff relationships are provided in both the Student Handbook and mentor documentation.

2.51   Through consideration of the documentation provided and meetings with staff and students the review team concludes that Expectation B10 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research degrees*

Findings

2.52 The College does not offer research degrees therefore Expectation B11 is not applicable.

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.53   In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. Nine of the expectations for this judgement area were met at low risk, one being unmet but at a low level of risk. The review team identified two features of good practice related to the assessment process (Expectation B6, see also Expectation A6) and the range of vocational learning opportunities (Expectation B3).

2.54   There are three recommendations. One concerns formalising new programme approval (Expectation B1) at a moderate level of risk; one concerns the plans for student engagement in deliberative structures (Expectation B5) and the third relates to the effectiveness of annual higher education reporting (Expectation B8). There were no affirmations in this area.

2.55   The review team concludes that the quality of student opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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

Quality Code, *Part C: Information about higher education provision*

Findings

3.1   The College publishes information about its provision via the website, a printed higher education prospectus, and course profile documents. College staff attend UCAS fairs, run publicity campaigns, send letters to schools in the local area, and organise a Higher Education Fair to inform students about higher education opportunities. Interviews and induction events familiarise students with College processes, resources and opportunities for support. The VLE provides students with electronic copies of the above documentation, as well as further details about their programmes and quality assurance information. Staff are kept informed of developments via a newsletter and regular briefings, and an Assessment and Quality Assurance Handbook outlines many of the College's procedures. As HND programmes' first cohorts are yet to complete, there is no completion or certification information, although students are advised what opportunities for further study or work are available via the Next Steps programme event series.

3.2   The College is responsible for the accuracy and quality of the information produced about its provision, although the awarding organisation monitors some categories of information to ensure the validity of its awards and issues guidance. Some key pieces of information like unit specifications are awarding organisation documents, but most should be contextualised into college-specific versions. The 2010 IQER report recommended that the College improve its management of information. In response, the College standardised the format and content of unit information on its VLE and held an internal consultation on the management of information, developing procedures and clarifying staff responsibilities for information review and updating. Programme teams are responsible for producing programme information, drawing on awarding organisation guidance, College templates and college-wide policies to write programme handbooks. Working with Marketing, the Head of Division for Adults and Higher Education signs off all public information, and the Head of Quality, who is the College's principal contact with its awarding organisation, disseminates changes to college-wide guidance through the Higher Education Academic Board. The Division Secretary requests changes to course profiles, which feed up to Heads of Department. Collectively, members of the Higher Education Academic Board ensure Marketing has the correct information to publish.

3.3   The College has a robust Public Information Review Process, with clearly defined roles and sound integration into a Higher Education Quality Cycle and evaluation timeline. The Higher Education Academic Board reviews all information annually. Marketing ensures information approved by the Higher Education Academic Board is uploaded, informs the board of required changes, monitors information accuracy and suitability, and ensures all uploaded documents have been authorised by the Head of Division for Adults and Higher Education. Heads of Department must inform the Higher Education Academic Board and Marketing of relevant changes. The accuracy and suitability of information is further quality assured through student surveys and focus groups.

3.4   Considered, well-defined processes for the review and monitoring of a good range of information meet Expectation C.

3.5   The team evaluated information published online and in print before meeting students and staff to test both the effectiveness of the College's procedures and the quality and extent of information available. Processes for review of public information operate effectively. The Higher Education Academic Board conducted a major review of programme handbooks and website information during the academic year 2013-14, involving students in the former's development. An effective system of version management and review date tracking ensures documentation is kept updated.

3.6   A wide range of policy and corporate governance information is available via the College's website, including complaints and appeals policies, equality and diversity statements and terms of reference and minutes of major committees. An Admissions Policy, suitably tailored for higher education students, is published online, as is a brief College Charter stating mutual expectations of the College and students. Accurate website information offers a good overview of programmes: units are listed, entry requirements stated, and brief descriptions of programme content, teaching methods, fees and progression opportunities accompany clearly displayed award titles and codes. Although it has not yet run, the Early Years top-up validated by the University of Chichester is appropriately publicised with module breakdowns and a clear statement about the role of the degree-awarding body.

3.7   Effective arrangements are in place to use interviews and inductions as opportunities to disseminate key pieces of information and students are positive about these.

3.8   As discussed under Expectation A6, assignment briefs provide students with high-quality information about their assessments. Programme handbooks vary in detail, but incorporate a consistent set of college-wide reference policies and follow a common format. Most students are aware of complaints and appeals policies and cited handbooks as a repository for key information. However, some photography students received no handbook or induction, a situation corroborated by focus group discussions, in which students also stated they would have been unaware of services on offer if they had not attended the College previously. However, this was due to a temporary staffing problem; most students find the College's information accurate, helpful and easy to access both before and during their programmes. Students are not aware of their entitlement to see external examiner reports, although these are now available via the VLE.

3.9   The College's VLE is undergoing a major upgrade to become a fully interactive learning platform rather than merely a document repository. In the medium-term, the College is working with a large corporation to significantly develop its online learning, and proposes to trial innovations with its higher education students.

3.10   Students find programme teams' use of the VLE inconsistent and staff are unaware of any minimum VLE content guidelines. However, the Learning and Innovation Group organises a system of 'champions' to spread good practice in this area.

3.11   As highlighted under Expectation A3, the College has not followed its awarding organisation's requirement to publish contextualised programme-level specifications following minimum content requirements. As a result, no definitive version of programme-level information exists, and prospective students in particular would have difficulty accessing detailed statements of the College's programmes aims and intended learning outcomes. This contributes to the recommendation made under Expectation A3.

3.12   Overall, while there are some omissions and inconsistencies, taken together, the range of information available, and a robust review process, ensures Expectation C is met with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Quality of the information produced about its provision: Summary of findings

3.13   In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this area.

3.14   The College is responsible for the accuracy and quality of the information produced about its provision, although the awarding organisation monitors some categories of information to ensure the validity of its awards and issues guidance. A wide range of publications are produced, including handbooks, course profiles, policies and procedures and the VLE. Following the IQER report of 2010, the College standardised the format and content of unit information on its VLE and held an internal consultation on the management of information, developing procedures and clarifying staff responsibilities for information review and updating. It is now clear where responsibilities lie for producing, overseeing and signing off information. An effective system of version management and review date tracking ensures documentation is kept updated.

3.15   The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.

4   Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1   The College has a generally strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities. Its Development of Learning Strategy, Strategic Plan and Higher Education Strategy all emphasise commitment to improvement for students' learning. Information, including the College's commitment to improving learning, is disseminated to staff through Heads of Department Strategy sessions. The College's recent introduction of the Higher Education Academic Board, which oversees its higher education provision, is one example of its desire to improve its monitoring of learning opportunities as is the creation of a middle manager post to focus on higher education. The processes and procedures adopted by the College to develop and implement a strategic approach to the improvement of student learning opportunities enable it to meet the expectation. The review team looked at a variety of evidence and had meetings with a range of staff and students.

4.2   The lesson observation scheme has recently been changed to move the emphasis from measuring teaching to developing teaching (see Expectation B8). Results are recorded on a software programme, Pro-Observe, which improves management information on lesson observations. The College has a log for recording and sharing good practice arising from its peer observation scheme, which is maintained by the Quality Office.

4.3   Quality assurance procedures are used for improvement of learning opportunities. These include programme reviews, the self-assessment process and student feedback. The annual review of programmes informs the curriculum and helps to ensure it is current and relevant. Minutes of Learning Matters, a group which discusses improvements in information technology, demonstrates the way learning improvements are developing. The evaluation timeline sets out a timescale for reviewing programmes.

4.4   Vocationally-related assessment opportunities enhance students' learning opportunities, for example, the photography live brief, the opportunity for computing students to work with a local information technology firm, and visits to child-related institutions. These initiatives are part of the strategic focus the College is using to enhance and drive an institutional approach to vocational programmes.

4.5   A number of initiatives are designed to improve students' learning experience. For instance, in order to enhance the vocational content of higher education programmes, the College, in collaboration with a multinational technology company, is introducing a project designed to improve outcomes for students in a number of ways using technology. This project represents a considerable investment on both sides. Additionally, the College is migrating its VLE to enable the development of an interactive learning platform and plans to pilot the changes with higher education students.

4.6   The College has useful agreements with a number of universities which facilitate progression onto top-up degrees. The College also has a planning application to convert Brock House, one of its campuses, into a discrete building for higher education students, in order to foster a distinct identity separate from further education students. The review team **affirms** the steps taken to promote a distinct higher education identity.

4.7   While the review team did not find a clearly articulated institutional strategy for enhancement, there is an underlying understanding of the ethos of improving higher

education student learning opportunities through the strategic consideration of information and the development and implementation of strategic initiatives. Given the many examples of relevant initiatives, the review team considers the expectation to be met and the risk is considered to be low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.8   In reaching its judgement about enhancement of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. There are no features of good practice or recommendations but one affirmation relating to the development of a distinct higher education identity. The review team considers that understanding of the expectation is not consistently articulated as an institutional strategy. Since the IQER in 2010, the College has identified a number of ways of making its higher education distinctive. These include a new post of responsibility for higher education, the establishment of the Higher Education Academic Board and plans to convert Brock House into a building specifically for higher education students.

4.9   A college-wide project to introduce a learning platform in partnership with a multinational technology company will be tested first on higher education students. The teaching observation scheme has been modified to allow for peer observation for staff involved in higher education. The College is developing useful progression agreements with local universities.

4.10   Given the range of initiatives to develop a singular higher education identity, the team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The College has increased its focus on employability as part of a strategic drive towards high quality outcomes and efforts to focus provision on labour market needs. The College is responding to national initiatives by introducing science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects and agreeing progression agreements with local higher education institutions.

5.2   Induction and interviews are used to identify students' skill development needs, referring them to the relevant members of the Skills Development Team if necessary. Programmes have built-in study skills elements, but students can also request additional support or be signposted to help via personal tutors. In photography, the programme team selects units that allow students to critically reflect on their skillset and career trajectories, and invites guest lecturers with experience in the photographic industry to critique portfolios.

5.3   The College funds careers service staff to take level 7 qualifications. The Careers Adviser uses one-to-one meetings and group sessions to concentrate on employability skills and support progression to employment and apprenticeships.

5.4   Work-based learning, work experience and assessment related to 'real-life' scenarios are increasingly important elements of the College's provision. 'Live briefs' in photography allow students to respond to a real client's project. Students felt this engagement with employers was very important preparation for future employment, especially as the experience of meeting a client's requirements rather than their own was a new experience. Students highlight the links between the photography programme and real-life scenarios generally. The majority of learning in early years is work-based learning, and all units make use of workplace experiences in assessments. Students appreciated the vocational nature of the programme, which they felt linked well with their practice and contributed to their skillset in the workplace. Work experience units are being planned for computing and photography HNDs as those programmes develop.

5.5   The College's Higher Education Programme Review and Higher Education Academic Board regularly consider the destinations and outcomes of leavers but this is at a very early stage given the provision.

5.6   The College has invested significant time and effort in securing progression agreements with local higher education institutions, including Bournemouth University, Southampton Solent University and the University of Chichester, allowing students to pursue their subjects to degree level. The extension of provision to a top-up degree for early years students, validated by the University of Chichester, will significantly benefit students currently studying at level 5 looking to progress.

5.7   The Next Steps programme was introduced to prepare students for higher education and employment. It includes sessions on preparing curriculum vitae, applications and personal profiles, researching job opportunities, and preparing for interviews. However, the higher education students the team met were not aware of the Next Steps programme or the sessions it featured, and, while staff reassured the team that sessions would be relevant to level 5 students, the majority were targeted at levels 2 and 3.

5.8   The lack of formal internal programme approval processes noted under Expectation A4 might limit opportunities for structured employer involvement in HND unit selection or decisions to run new programmes. However, employers do influence assessment design, and the Assessment Handbook suggests staff use 'external links' to judge the suitability of

assignments. Employers can join an Employers Group, which influences the curriculum across the College, particularly in arranging work experience projects. As noted above, employers have had effective input into the design of live brief assignments on the photography programme, and workplace mentors are well used in the delivery of early years. The HND Computing programme team have contacted employers to link future aspects of the programme to work experience opportunities. Staff use labour market information to shape their provision and unit selections. Students report learning new skills that will be relevant to their current and future employment.

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 27-29 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/assuringstandardsandquality.

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.