



Higher Education Review of Plymouth College of Art

November 2015

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Plymouth College of Art. The review took place from 18 to 19 November 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Polly Skinner
- Professor Hastings McKenzie
- Miss Lucy Bannister (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are on page 6 with numbered paragraphs starting on page 7.

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

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

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

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Plymouth College of Art

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Plymouth College of Art.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Plymouth College of Art.

- The proactive and collaborative approach to the design and development of programmes (Expectation B1 and Enhancement).
- The extensive opportunities for students to engage with employers (Expectation B4 and Enhancement).
- The comprehensive programme review and monitoring process that effectively captures and responds to emerging issues (Expectation B8 and Enhancement).
- The rigorous implementation of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy which engages staff, students and employers in creating a vibrant learning experience (Enhancement).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Plymouth College of Art.

By March 2016:

- strengthen its procedures to enable effective institutional oversight of employer-based live assignments and work placements (Expectation B10)
- improve the accessibility of information identifying the awarding body (Expectation C).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action that Plymouth College of Art is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- the steps being taken to develop a definitive assignment format that makes learning outcomes explicit (Expectation B6).

Theme: Student Employability

The College's Strategic Plan sets clear targets for graduate employment. The Employability Strategy sets out the College's approach to establishing aspirational learning environments that encourage the development of creativity and innovation together with professionalism and business acumen. The strategy is supported by a small staff team dedicated to the

implementation of employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship (3Es) activities. The Business Development Committee has a specific remit to enhance the interface with external stakeholders in support of the employability agenda. To ensure the relevancy and currency of its provision, the College widely engages with external bodies, employers, alumni and other stakeholders and many staff of the College are active practitioners who maintain positive links with the industry.

Coherent efforts have been made to embed the 3Es within the curriculum. All programmes include elements of professional practice and business studies and specific year-long modules linked to personal development plans are also being integrated into the curriculum. The 3Es and Careers teams in the Student Hub provide advice and guidance for students so that they can seek placement, internship and live project opportunities, thereby gaining valuable experience and enhancing their employment opportunities. The College also sponsors crafts festivals as a vehicle of engagement in enterprise and entrepreneurship for its current students and alumni. Students met by the review team spoke highly of the wide variety of opportunities they have to engage with industry and the beneficial impact on their studies and future professional careers.

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

About Plymouth College of Art

Founded in 1856, Plymouth College of Art is an independent Art College with a strong vocational orientation. It operates as a specialist provider of education and professional development in contemporary art, craft, design and media practices.

The College's mission is defined in terms of its vision, ethos, purpose and values. Its vision is for high-quality education for life in contemporary arts practice and as the creative catalyst for personal, professional and cultural transformation. The College aims to fulfil its vision and purpose through strategic direction provided by formative developmental horizons. These are described in the Strategic Plan. One key objective is the achievement of taught degree awarding powers.

The College is located in a region that under-performs for progression to higher education and has low numbers of self-employment and new business start-ups. It engages directly with educational disadvantage, widening participation and Plymouth's priority to raise aspiration. The College works on a variety of local and regional community initiatives and projects and for greater infrastructural development for graduate retention in Plymouth's creative industries. In September 2011 the College embarked on the foundation of a Free School, the Plymouth School of Creative Arts.

In 2011 the College underwent Summative Review by QAA as part of the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) method. The College has since gained partnership status with the Sector Skills Council, Creative and Cultural Skills. It also underwent a periodic institutional review with its awarding body, the Open University (OU). A large number of undergraduate and postgraduate programme validations and revalidations have taken place subsequently. At the time of the current review, the College offered 21 undergraduate and five postgraduate programmes validated by the OU with 1,145 students studying for its awards full-time and 52 part-time.

The key change since the 2011 QAA review has been the transition from further to higher education. The College's transfer into the higher education sector was approved by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in July 2014. Since 2010, the College has experienced a shift in the demand from foundation degrees to three-year

BA honours degrees. At the same time the College has also seen a significant growth in student numbers both from within and beyond the region.

With the move into the higher education sector, the College realigned key roles, responsibilities of its Senior Management Team (SMT) and line management reporting structures, updated its educational policies and procedures, and made significant investment in new administrative and information systems. The Registry infrastructure was reorganised in 2013 and the new post of College Registrar created. In 2014 a review of the deliberative committee structure was conducted which led to a redefinition of the structure of Academic Board and its subcommittees. In the same year the post of Head of Learning and Teaching was created. At programme level, academic management of the undergraduate provision was strengthened by the appointment of principal lecturers.

The College's provision offers good progression routes from further into higher education and flexible study routes, including part-time study, to serve a range of diverse entrants. Extended degree programmes provide progression opportunities into undergraduate degrees for those with non-standard qualifications.

The College follows the national trend in terms of creative arts and design subjects having the highest proportion of students in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). Coupled with low participation rates, the disability profile poses challenges for retention. The College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy aims to address this through professional development leading to more effective programme design, teaching strategies and the development of flexible approaches such as technology-enhanced learning and teaching. Supported by an Employability Strategy, the College also introduced the development of employability skills. There is also a focus on external activities, study visits and exhibitions to enhance students' learning horizons and to enable them to gain direct experience of the creative sector. Following a review of the College's Student Engagement Strategy, a Student Engagement and Experience Committee was created to drive forward improvements in student engagement towards a more collaborative partnership between College and students.

The College has undertaken a review of its physical resources and invested significantly in new buildings and updated equipment since the 2011 review. It intends to create a discrete higher education centre on its Tavistock Square Campus in September 2016.

The IQER report of 2011 identified 10 areas of good practice, which have been maintained and developed further.

- Student progression has become one of the key performance indicators (KPIs) used in the programme performance review process.
- Comprehensive data continues to be provided to staff for producing module evaluation reports which feed into annual programme evaluations.
- The arrangements for monitoring and reporting the outcomes from management processes have been further developed using online systems where documents can be shared, reducing bureaucracy and enhancing ownership by staff and engagement of students.
- The College continues to engage fully with, and respond promptly to, the awarding body's annual monitoring findings.
- The programme development and review process has been reviewed regularly, with programme development further enhanced by the integration of employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise modules into revalidated programmes.
- Comprehensive and accessible student handbooks that are tailored to the individual programmes remain available electronically through the student portal.

- Management of the input of visiting artists, local employers and other practitioners remains effective and contributes to research-informed teaching and learning.
- The contribution made by the College's associate organisations to teaching and learning, networking and work opportunities remains highly valuable.
- The website has been developed further and retains a useful range of information for potential students.
- While the College diary has been discontinued, the generic student handbook remains a useful document alongside programme-specific handbooks. These are easily accessible to students via the student portal.

The College has fully addressed the three advisable recommendations made in the 2011 report.

- To review the approach to the monitoring and amending of the regulatory framework with a view to a more transparent and inclusive process of consultation and deliberation.

Academic regulations are submitted annually to Academic Board for approval. The restructure of the academic committees enables discussion with a broader range of staff. In addition, the Deputy Registrar consults with staff on proposed changes and holds briefings to clarify the approved changes.

- To strengthen arrangements for reviewing the effectiveness of the main processes for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities and consider incorporating this into revised terms of reference of relevant boards and committees.

The College further strengthened arrangements following the review of its deliberative committee structure in 2014, resulting in revised terms of reference, membership and frequency of meetings.

- To revisit the historical retention data from foundation degree programmes to determine the underlying causes of low completion rates and address any associated issues in the area of student support.

The College analysed the historical data and improved its data capture, retention monitoring, and student support management. Student retention remains a focus, and retention targets are set and monitored at programme level and institutional level.

The College also responded to the six desirable recommendations raised in the 2011 QAA report and all areas have been addressed.

Explanation of the findings about Plymouth College of Art

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College validates undergraduate and taught postgraduate degrees through the Open University (OU), its only awarding body. The OU Handbook for Validated Awards, Section D and the College's Procedures for the Validation, Re-validation and Withdrawal of Higher Education Programmes describe processes for programme approval and re-approval. Both endeavour to align with the Quality Code and aim to ensure that programmes align with the FHEQ. The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.2 In considering the Expectation, the review team examined College and awarding body procedures for programme approval; sample validation proposals, internal approvals of programme proposal, background documents, programme specifications; and reports of programme approval events. The team tested its findings through discussions with members of senior and academic staff.

1.3 The College's deliberative committee structure provides adequate oversight of programme approval. New programme proposals are discussed in relevant Academic Board subcommittees including the Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC) and the Learning Teaching and Curriculum Committee (LTCC). Approval in principle by Academic Board is required for a programme to proceed to validation.

1.4 Prior to validation or revalidation, a development team is formed which develops a background document, undertaking detailed background research and including the views of students, external advisers and external examiners. The team is led by the Vice Principal

Academic and a designated programme leader for undergraduate validations and the Vice Principal Academic, and the Head of the Graduate School for postgraduate validations. Programme teams include well-qualified staff with a broad range of higher education and arts practitioner experience. Programmes are developed with reference to Subject Benchmark Statements and master's degree characteristics, the FHEQ and the Quality Code. Induction and development opportunities are provided to ensure that staff are aware of them and other key external reference points.

1.5 The documentation set required for approval events includes the background document, programme handbooks, programme specifications and definitive module records (DMRs). These are scrutinised during a series of activities prior to convening a prevalidation meeting which includes external representation and is chaired internally. The prevalidation meeting is the first meeting in a two-stage process required by the OU. Final documentary amendments are undertaken prior to the second stage of the validation process, the formal validation event itself. This is held at the College and is chaired by a senior member of the OU.

1.6 The College ensures that suitably managed and qualified programme teams are assigned to the approval and reapproval of programmes. Recent appointments aimed at improving programme stewardship have included four new principal lecturers. The revised academic management structure has driven staff development to facilitate a broader understanding of the relationship between the curriculum, Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ. In addition, the appointment of a Head of Graduate School to further develop the postgraduate and research culture at the College has increased the emphasis on research underpinning practice and pedagogy.

1.7 The team concludes that the College has in place adequate processes and sufficient safeguards to ensure that threshold standards are met across its academic portfolio. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8 The OU and College academic regulations, relevant sections of the College's Quality Cycle Handbook and related policies and procedures, including those relating to academic appeals, constitute the College's academic framework. Academic Board retains ultimate responsibility for maintaining the standards of the awards, and delegates aspects of the approval, monitoring and review of programmes to the LTCC and the ASQC. Regulatory requirements are sufficiently robust and the College's processes are appropriately designed to allow Expectation A2.1 to be met.

1.9 In considering this Expectation the review team examined the OU and College academic regulations, the College's Quality Cycle Handbook; Academic Board and subcommittee terms of reference, sample DMRs and programme specifications; as well as reports of programme approval events. The team tested its findings through discussions with members of senior and academic staff.

1.10 Until September 2015, the College followed its own academic regulations which were approved by the OU and align with its assessment guidelines. From September 2015 all fresh cohorts follow the OU's academic regulations. A dual system operates with existing students remaining on and subject to the College's own academic regulations. The Registry has set in place plans to ensure that the system operates effectively and clearly. Academic staff confirm that there are effective measures in place to ensure their own and students' confidence in working with the dual system.

1.11 Academic Board approval is ultimately required for the approval and reapproval of all programmes. The LTCC oversees programme curriculum development and the ASQC has oversight of compliance to the validation procedures. The College's approval processes ensure that credits are allocated appropriately and consistently for each relevant level and against the national credit framework. Relevant information regarding academic credit, learning outcomes, notional learning hours and qualifications are presented in programme specifications and the DMRs.

1.12 The College's system of academic governance and its adherence to awarding body approved academic regulations ensure the transparent award of credit and qualifications. The programme approval process confirms that all programmes comply with the relevant academic regulations. The College keeps a careful track of students and the regulations that govern their assessment. Staff and students are provided with accurate and informative information about the regulations governing each programme. Both sets of academic regulations are available internally through the staff and student portals.

1.13 The College has an appropriate academic framework and an adequate system of governance in place in order to secure academic standards. The review team concludes that Expectation A2.1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.14 DMRs and programme specifications are the definitive records of the College's provision and the main documentation for the approval of programmes. These documents demonstrate compliance with the OU's and the College's academic and regulatory frameworks, and requirements are laid out in the Open University's Handbook for Validated Awards, Section D and the College's Procedures for Validation, Revalidation and Withdrawing Higher Education Programmes.

1.15 DMRs and programme specifications prepared for approval require specification of the FHEQ level and the credit value of both proposed award and constituent modules in line with the OU's and the College's academic frameworks and regulations. The College uses OU templates for the creation of these documents. The OU's requirements are robust and the College's processes are appropriately designed to allow Expectation A2.2 to be met.

1.16 In considering this Expectation the review team examined the OU Handbook for Validated Awards and the College's Procedure for Validation, Revalidation and Withdrawing Higher Education Programmes; sample programme specifications; DMRs; and programme handbooks together with the College website and staff and student portals. The review team also met staff involved in programme approval and review.

1.17 Programme specifications and DMRs are available in programme handbooks. These include details of learning outcomes and the specified number of credits. The awarding body has scrutiny of these documents during programme approvals and through them maintains an overview of the award, credit and qualifications structure. Significant changes during the period of programme approval are progressed according to OU procedures following the permitted changes process and are overseen by the College Registry.

1.18 The Registry is also responsible for ensuring that accurate versions of programme specifications are kept and published. They are readily available for potential applicants on the College website and for staff and current students in programme handbooks and on the relevant web portals.

1.19 The review team considers the College's processes for the production and maintenance of definitive programme records to be fit for purpose and saw evidence of compliance with the OU's requirements. The team also considers that programme specifications and DMRs provide a definitive record of the College's provision, and are approved and modified through approved due processes. The team therefore concludes that Expectation A2.2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.

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

Findings

1.20 The programme approval process takes account of the national qualifications and credit frameworks and the OU's regulations for the award of qualifications and credit. The OU's Handbook for Validated Awards, its academic regulations and the College's Procedures for Validation, Revalidation and Withdrawing Higher Education Programmes cover the process, roles and responsibilities for programme design, development and approval.

1.21 Programme approval and modification processes are supported by documents that describe the content and level of modules, qualifications and awards. In a two-stage process, the documentation is peer-reviewed by panels that contain appropriate externality and confirm alignment with national qualification and level descriptors, Subject Benchmark Statements and the OU's regulations. Approval reports are received and considered within the College's and the OU's deliberative committee structures before programmes are approved by the OU for delivery by the College. The processes described in the guidance documents are clear, detailed and comprehensive and would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.22 In considering this Expectation, the review team examined sample programme approval documentation and the associated guidance for its completion, together with sample reports of programme approvals and modifications, and relevant College committee minutes. The team also explored the programme approval process through discussions with senior and academic staff.

1.23 Standard programme and module specifications are produced for every validation and revalidation and form the basis of evidence for programme approval. Specific staff training by the Registry ensures that programme development teams are fully conversant with the OU's academic requirements and expectations. The approval process is used to test the alignment to national qualifications and credit frameworks; relevant Subject Benchmark Statements; and awarding body regulations. It also tests that assessment schemes adequately align to learning outcomes. Background documents clearly confirm that programmes align with the appropriate FHEQ level and reflect relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. The procedures also require that the intended learning outcomes are appropriate to the programme level, and align with the Quality Code and any requirements of relevant professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

1.24 The approval process involves sufficient externality from peer institution academics who comment on compliance with UK threshold academic standards. The OU Quality and Partnerships Manager acts as a critical friend on approval panels and helps to determine whether the assessment scheme adequately tests the intended learning outcomes. Internal observers from other programme teams have the opportunity to attend validation and revalidation meetings to enable them to gain experience for their own programme approval activities. Academic staff are enthusiastic about the benefits of observing validation events and the ensuing conversations and debates about curriculum innovation.

1.25 Reports are considered by the College's ASQC and through the OU's deliberative committee structure, and confirm that due process has been followed and academic standards for programmes delivered at the College are set at an appropriate level.

1.26 Major and minor modification processes for existing programmes and modules are clearly defined in the OU Handbook for Validated Awards and are strictly adhered to by the College. These ensure that the academic standards set at approval are not compromised. Module evaluations and external examiners' comments contribute to changes in programmes and modules at revalidations. Their comments ensure that credible assessment schemes are in place to adequately test the intended learning outcomes. When closing existing provision, the College requires the ASQC to take appropriate measures to maintain the student experience and academic standards during teach-out in accordance with the awarding body's academic regulations.

1.27 Programme approval and modification procedures take appropriate account of awarding body regulations when maintaining academic standards. On this basis, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.28 The OU has overall responsibility for the qualifications and credit awarded to the College. Its academic regulations stipulate the assessment and award of credit and are used for entrants from September 2015. The College's own academic regulations, which operate along the same principles, continue to be applied for previous cohorts. Programme approval and review processes require that all programmes have clearly defined learning outcomes for target and exit awards. Credit is awarded at module level on demonstration of the achievement of defined module learning outcomes. The amount of credit is calculated on notional learning hours that relate to module size. The Award Assessment Board, which is chaired by senior staff of the awarding body and includes external examiners, makes decisions about progression and awards and ensures they are in accordance with regulatory frameworks. External examiner reports record the extent of the achievement of programme and module learning outcomes.

1.29 The requirements and processes documented in the OU's regulations address the College's academic standards, UK threshold standards and the level and definition of credit. The application of these processes by the College would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.30 The review team tested the systems in place by reviewing the academic regulations, programme approval documentation, the College's assessment and moderation guidelines, the Academic Staff Handbook, standardisation notes, award board minutes and external examiner reports. The review team also discussed assessment processes in meetings with senior academic managers, academic staff and students.

1.31 The College's Assessment and Moderation Guidelines and the Academic Handbook provide detailed guidance on the processes of assessment, marking, grading and moderation. Module learning outcomes have to be mapped to programme learning outcomes to ensure these are attained. Regular learning and teaching events, internal workshops and external speaker events provide support to academic staff in designing learning outcomes and assessments. The College also holds an annual standardisation workshop with contributions from the OU Academic Reviewer to support parity of standards. This is highly valued by staff.

1.32 DMRs state the intended learning outcomes and include details of the assessment tasks. Assessment tasks and the grading matrix are available via the virtual learning environment (VLE). Students who met the review team appreciate the completeness of the assignment briefs and find that the learning outcomes together with the grading matrix enable them to be very clear about assessment. External examiners' reports show general satisfaction with the achievement of learning outcomes through assessment.

1.33 The consistent implementation of the OU's requirements and regulations by the College provides an effective system for the assessment of learning outcomes, which is

clearly understood by staff and students. The review team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met with a low level of associated risk.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.34 Operational responsibility for the monitoring and review of programmes lies with the Registry through the LTCC. Key guidance documents for programme monitoring and review are the Open University's Handbook for Validated Awards and the College's Quality Cycle Handbook. The College monitors and evaluates each programme's effectiveness against its validation conditions and in the light of feedback from students and staff at key points in the academic year. The reports of external examiners are used to confirm that the standards set at approval are being maintained and achieved by students.

1.35 The review activity culminates in detailed annual programme evaluations (APEs) and action plans. These are collated and reported within the Annual Institutional Overview (AIO) and all of them are submitted to the OU. The OU scrutinises the reports and passes on commendations and recommendations for improvement in the form of an annual monitoring report to which the College responds. The process is designed to allow any standards-related issues to be addressed and for Expectation A3.3 to be met.

1.36 In considering this Expectation the review team explored the annual monitoring and review processes through consideration of guidance documentation; sample monitoring and revalidation reports; minutes of relevant College committees; and discussions with academic staff and students.

1.37 The College's programme monitoring process is a continuous activity. At termly intervals programme teams conduct a programme performance review using live data from the College's management information system as well as other pertinent information such as external examiner reports. Performance reviews also monitor the ongoing achievement of College key performance indicators.

1.38 The results of each monitoring event feed into an annual programme evaluation report, which is updated at each review meeting and finalised at the end of the academic year for submission to the OU. Reports are accessible via the staff portal. The process works well and is clearly understood by staff and students. The systematic updating process allows staff to identify and quickly respond to any issues arising. The monitoring and review process thus effectively supports the maintenance of academic standards and the enhancement of the student experience.

1.39 Students play an important role in monitoring their programmes. Student representatives attend programme team meetings and actively contribute to the programme performance review process. They also attend relevant Academic Board subcommittees and student voice meetings, and all students complete module evaluations which inform programme performance reviews. Students are also involved in the review of programmes. The background document and critical appraisal of the revalidation process contain detailed information regarding student consultation.

1.40 External examiners comment explicitly on whether programmes meet the national threshold standards as defined by FHEQ level descriptors and Subject Benchmark

Statements, and the extent to which standards are comparable with those of similar provision of other higher education institutions. Comments from external examiners are evaluated in programme performance review meetings, noted in annual programme evaluation reports and responded to via action plans.

1.41 The College's Annual Institutional Overview report includes an enhancement action plan and comments on progress made with the implementation of the previous year's plan and actions taken in response to external reviews. It also reports on complaints and appeals; evaluates student feedback and NSS results; and highlights enhancement and good practice across programmes. The report is considered and approved by Academic Board. The College's response to the recommendations in the OU's annual monitoring report on the College is detailed and comprehensive.

1.42 The periodic review process enables longitudinal analysis of cohort achievement and progression to confirm that the standards set at programme approval are being maintained and achieved. Revalidation reports confirm that the College's programmes remain aligned with the relevant national academic reference points and appropriate academic standards are being maintained. The review team considers that the College's monitoring procedures address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and enable it to maintain the academic standards of the OU. The programme review process takes appropriate account of the national qualifications framework and Subject Benchmark Statements. On this basis, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.3 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.4): In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:

- **UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved**
- **the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.**

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

Findings

1.43 The College follows the OU's procedures, ensuring that independent external expertise is used when approving new programmes and reviewing existing ones. Programme development and approval must be informed by independent external advice from subject specialists, from industry or other relevant stakeholders. The OU also requires that external examiners are appointed to advise and comment on the maintenance of threshold standards. External examiners are nominated by the College and formally approved by the OU. The implementation of OU's procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.44 The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing OU documentation and guidance relating to programme approval and review; the appointment and role of external examiners; programme approval and review reports; and external examiner reports and responses to them. The review team also discussed arrangements for the involvement of independent external experts in meetings with academic staff and employers.

1.45 The College adheres closely to the OU's procedures and new programme development is carefully managed through a well-governed process which ensures that external expert input contributes to the design of programmes. The team saw evidence of constructive industrial advice sought during programme development, and met practitioners from industry who confirmed their engagement in programme development.

1.46 Externals are also appropriately involved in the approval and review of programmes. Programme approval is a two-stage process with a preliminary and final event and external experts are involved in both. At the preliminary stage, externals who have specialist expertise in the relevant field comment on the programme proposals. The final validation meeting is chaired by a senior external academic of the OU, with approval panel membership including independent external academics, and experts from the creative industries. The reapproval of programmes follows a similar process with the option of reduced external representation.

1.47 External examiners are nominated by the College and formally approved by the OU who retain overall responsibility for their activities. The College provides orientation and induction sessions for new external examiners. These processes are detailed in the College's external examiner's process guidelines.

1.48 External examiner reports are based on templates provided by the OU and require comment on the maintenance of UK threshold academic standards. The external examiner reports seen by the team confirm that standards meet the threshold requirements, that programmes remain current, and that programme learning outcomes are in line with the relevant qualification descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements. In accordance with the awarding body's regulations the College consults with external examiners for major and

minor changes to programmes. The process is well documented and clearly understood by staff.

1.49 The College effectively implements the OU's procedures which ensure that threshold academic standards are maintained. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

1.50 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All seven of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated level of risk is low in each case. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area.

1.51 The College has rigorous policies and procedures for maintaining academic standards; the review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the College offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 For the approval of programmes the College follows its Procedure for Validation, Revalidation and Withdrawing Higher Education Programmes which complies with the Open University's Handbook for Validated Awards (Section D: Programme Approval and Review) and details the principles and processes for programme approval and review together with the documentation required. The College has mapped its approval process and activities against *Chapter B1* of the Quality Code. The approval process adopts a staged approach to business planning and programme approval. Programme approval and modification are supported by documentation that describes the content and level of modules and awards. Approval documentation is peer-reviewed by an academic panel containing appropriate externality, which reports through the College's and OU's deliberative committee structures before programmes are approved for delivery by the College. This process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.2 In considering this Expectation the review team examined the College's procedures and the OU's guidance for programme approval and modifications to existing programmes. The team sampled programme approval and modification documentation, and the reports of programme approval events. It examined the minutes of College committees where programme approvals and modifications were considered or reported. The team also explored the programme approval process through discussions with senior and academic staff, employers and students.

2.3 The College SMT initially scrutinises proposals for validation, to ensure alignment with its strategic direction, as outlined in its Higher Education Strategy, before presentation to and approval in principle by Academic Board. Following this, programme development teams present outline proposals to the LTCC and the ASQC.

2.4 Detailed background research takes place which takes account of the FHEQ, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, master's degree characteristics and the Quality Code as well as views of students, external academic advisers, industry and external examiners. Evidence of employer involvement ranges from comments on proposed curricula to more general support, including offers of work placements.

2.5 Development teams produce a comprehensive and informative background document to an OU template as well as a programme handbook. Programme specifications and DMRs are also developed. Both form part of the programme handbook and provide adequate details of the programme aims, programme and module learning outcomes and assessment methods for each programme. The process culminates in a preliminary internal validation event chaired by a senior College academic. The event is in part to explicitly test that the intended learning outcomes are appropriate to the level of the programme and align with the Quality Code and any further requirements of relevant professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

2.6 Once any recommendations from the preliminary validation meeting have been resolved, a final validation event takes place at the College. The validation panel comprises

independent sector specialists nominated by the OU. Following a fixed agenda, the panel scrutinises documentation, questions staff members of the development team and students, and confirms that sufficient resources are in place. Students also attend and contribute to programme approval events. Approval reports are received and considered by Academic Board.

2.7 The College has made a significant investment in developing its staff experience and competence in programme design, development and approval. It increasingly recruits experienced programme leaders one year prior to the start of the programme so that sufficient time is available for them to carry out research and develop the programme documentation. The College also enables the development of academic staff by nominating an observer to attend validation meetings. This opportunity is highly valued by staff, and over time has led to a group of experienced senior, academic and support services staff. Further training is provided by the Registry. The Deputy Registrar attends a range of programme team meetings and conducts briefings to increase staff understanding of the academic regulations and their implementation in the design of new programmes.

2.8 There is strong cross-College collaboration between academic and professional services staff in the programme approval process, resulting in a shared understanding of, and willingness to, support curriculum needs and resources. Professional services staff provide a responsive service to programme areas that enhances the overall quality of the student learning opportunities and ensures adequate resourcing of the library and specialist equipment. The 3Es team coordinates engagement of employers in the programme approval process. The proactive and collaborative approach to the design and development of programmes is **good practice**.

2.9 The Open University's Handbook for Validated Awards outlines the criteria for distinguishing minor and major modifications which reflect the nature of the proposed change and its impact on the learning outcomes as well as the processes the College has to follow for making any changes. All changes require consultation with external examiners and are considered by the College Academic Board before being passed on to the OU for information in the case of minor changes and approval for major changes. The College strictly follows the OU's processes.

2.10 The review team found that the College has robust processes for the design and development of programmes and it fully adheres to the OU's procedural and documentary requirements. The programme development and approval processes make good use of externality. The College's proactive and collaborative approach to the design and development of programmes is a feature of good practice. On this basis, the review team concludes that Expectation B1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.

Quality Code, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education

Findings

2.11 The College's Admissions Policy adheres to the principles of fair admission. The College seeks to recruit, select and admit students who meet appropriate entry criteria and are able to complete their programme to the standards required. Recruitment, selection and admission of students is managed by the Head of Admissions. The Admissions Policy and processes are clear, detailed, transparent and inclusive, and would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.12 In considering the Expectation the review team examined key documents in relation to recruitment, selection and admissions, including published information on the College intranet and its external website. Aspects of the admissions process were explored through discussions with students and staff.

2.13 The College has a comprehensive Admissions Policy, which is made available to applicants on the website. Staff can access it and other relevant information including information on the accreditation of prior learning through the staff portal. The Admissions Policy is supported by a Single Equality Scheme and an Equality Protocol which provides guidance for staff on making reasonable adjustments. The Admissions Policy makes provision for appeals against admissions decisions.

2.14 The College undertakes a range of inclusive recruitment activities, including informative open days. Information on them is available to prospective students on the College's website. The College makes good use of graduate assistants and alumni to support recruitment activities, visits to feeder institutions and UCAS events alongside the involvement of student ambassadors at open days.

2.15 The College receives applications from two different routes. All applicants for full-time undergraduate study apply via UCAS with the exception of students progressing through the College from foundation degrees to BA (Hons) top-ups who can apply directly to the College. Applicants for pre-degree and postgraduate programmes, and part-time undergraduate study apply directly to the College. The review team saw evidence of fair and reliable selection and admissions procedures. Selection is against defined criteria for each programme. All undergraduate applicants are interviewed prior to making an offer, and staff are trained to conduct admissions interviews. Postgraduate applicants are selected for interview by academic staff based on a review of the applicant's project proposal and online portfolio.

2.16 The Head of Admissions supported by a dedicated admissions team provides a single point of contact for all admissions queries and information requests. The College provides helpful guidance for students on how to prepare for interview and putting a portfolio together. Students are enrolled online which is followed by face-to-face registration. The College also gathers feedback on its enrolment procedures and marketing activity to continually improve the process. Students confirm that the recruitment, selection and admissions process is straightforward and all the information they required was available through the website, open days and tutors at interview.

2.17 The College management information system allows tracking of application data and overview reports are considered termly by Academic Board which also monitors applications and offers against KPIs. Applications are also monitored at programme level through the termly programme performance review process, which considers information on recruitment targets and reflects on the previous year's performance.

2.18 The College has clear and comprehensive policies and procedures for the recruitment, selection and admission of students which are underpinned by appropriate structures and processes. Practices are fair, transparent and supportive. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation B2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.19 The College's approach to teaching and learning is articulated in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS). It is referenced against other College strategies and has an associated implementation plan. Teaching and learning procedures are described in the Academic Staff Handbook supported by Assessment and Moderation Guidelines. These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.20 In considering this Expectation, the review team examined relevant documentation provided by the College, including strategies, policies and procedures, and committee minutes, and looked at online learning resources. The team tested its findings in meetings with academic and support staff, and with students.

2.21 The LTAS steers the review and enhancement of learning opportunities and teaching practices at the College. The strategy implementation plan sets out clear targets, methods, indicators and staff responsibilities for a range of areas including enterprise, employability and entrepreneurship, and technology-enhanced learning. A set of interrelated strategies such as the Employability and Student Engagement Strategies have been developed and carefully aligned with the LTAS. The Head of Learning and Teaching has effective oversight of the LTAS and it is actively monitored and updated by the LTCC.

2.22 The College approach is to operate in a culture of continuous improvement and this is supported by the LTAS and the processes in place to capture feedback on, and measure the effectiveness of, teaching and learning. At College level, data is gathered to enable performance against KPIs to be measured. This data set includes the results of the National Student Survey (NSS), internal surveys, module evaluations, student attendance, retention, achievement and progression, and the uptake of peer observation. Progress is reported to the LTCC and Academic Board. Students have the opportunity to influence the LTAS through representation in meetings and survey feedback.

2.23 At programme level, the annual programme evaluation process also plays a clear role in enabling continuous improvement. It requires formal and periodic reflection on KPIs throughout the academic year. Student feedback from the NSS, internal surveys and meetings is actively used by the College in programme monitoring and the 'You said, We did' process to improve the learning environment.

2.24 The College has an effective Teaching Development and Observation Scheme. It aims for every member of the teaching and technical demonstrator staff to be peer-observed at least once annually. The process invites observer, observee and student views on teaching and learning which offers a 360-degree view of delivery. Good practice is encouraged and promoted while areas for improvement are identified and brought to annual performance appraisal where development needs are agreed.

2.25 General points identified from performance appraisal form part of the continuous professional development programme and include enhancement sessions for the whole academic team by the Head of Learning and Teaching and the Registry. The Learning and

Teaching symposium brings together staff to take a reflective approach to the enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment. There is an intention to work towards achieving membership of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) for all teaching staff.

2.26 The College prides itself in the quality and accessibility of its physical learning resources. In general, students are happy with the learning resources that are made available to them to support their studies. Students met by the team praised the physical learning resources, their accessibility and the helpfulness of staff in creating an environment in which it was safe to experiment creatively. All students have the opportunity to use resources associated with any of the College's specialisms. The College has made a significant and recent investment in a new building that includes updated workshop facilities and a Fabrication Laboratory.

2.27 The College's online resources are routinely accessed by students and play an active role in their learning. Students access online learning materials through the student portal and the VLE. While the Registrar and the Head of Teaching and Learning monitor the content of the VLE regularly, the College had not chosen to publish any minimum set of expectations regarding its content.

2.28 The staff and student portals, the student records system, online document storage and email, and the VLE provide a wide variety of information but until recently have not been connected through a single integrated access route for the separate systems. Although this did not demonstrably impact negatively on the learning experience, it was a source of frustration for some students. In particular, students found the presentation and arrangement of the different online interfaces confusing. The College responded to this issue by streamlining access to the student portal.

2.29 The College has clear processes in place to monitor and enhance the quality of learning resources. Academic planning is central to the College's resource management, enabling it to invest proactively in dedicated physical and virtual resources that support a broad range of creative and digital arts degree programmes. Its strategic approach to the allocation of resources includes an annual capital bid process, careful scrutiny of resource requirements prior to validating new programmes, and high responsiveness to student feedback and concerns. Annual programme evaluation reports and the College's Annual Institutional Overview report to the OU include ongoing reflections on the adequacy of learning resources and responses to student concerns.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.31 The College's approach to enabling student development and achievement is incorporated in its Student Engagement Strategy, and supported by staff development and extensive investment in learning resources. The undergraduate student learning agreement and the Student Charter set out the responsibilities and expectations of students and staff for the development of studentship at the College. The principles of student support are described in the Academic Staff Handbook with more issue-specific information provided in student support guidelines for staff. The College provides an induction for all its students. The Student Hub provides a variety of pastoral support services. These policies and procedures, and the advice and support services provided for students, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.32 In considering this Expectation the review team examined relevant documentation, including strategies, policies and procedures. The team tested its findings in meetings with academic and support staff, and with students.

2.33 The Student Engagement Strategy is intended to promote an environment in which students are encouraged and empowered to contribute towards or challenge any aspect of College life. The College has developed an undergraduate student Learning Agreement that explains how student engagement with study is key to success. There is also a College Student Charter compiled with the support of students that further communicates responsibilities for the development of studentship.

2.34 The College has put in place active measures to promote accessibility. These are overseen by the Diversity and Inclusivity Working Group (DIWG). The College has produced a Single Equality Scheme supported by an implementation plan and developed further guidance in an Equality Protocol document. Application data is analysed to capture trends and determine if any potential shortfall in the delivery process exists for any protected characteristics. The DIWG uses equality objectives and monitors the implementation of the Single Equality Scheme. It also reviews new legislation that may have implications for students' achievement.

2.35 The measures taken by the College are proactive and focused on supporting all students as fully as possible to ensure that they have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Any student declaring special needs upon application or thereafter is guided to the support processes offered by the Student Hub. In such cases student support staff proactively contact students to enable early adoption of suitable support arrangements.

2.36 The induction processes are effective, and key documentation is made available via the student portal. All students receive an induction which comprises both generic College-wide events and programme-specific activities. A typical schedule includes dyslexia screening, library, IT and student support inductions and a Student Hub visit. As part of the induction process, key documents and their purpose, such as the generic student handbook and the academic regulations, are brought to the attention of students. All students are also inducted into the use of personal development plans to help them identify skill and experience shortfalls. Programmes embed specific year-long modules linked to student personal development.

2.37 Students who met the team commended tutors as being positive, helpful and approachable and technicians as being positive in facilitating a friendly and constructive environment for creative practice in the workshops and laboratories. The Student Hub is very accessible and active in ensuring that students receive the assistance they require to enable them to be successful in their studies.

2.38 All of the College's programmes include opportunities for engagement with professional practice, work experience, work-based projects and visiting professionals. The team met employers and alumni who described a range of opportunities for students to engage with them including project work, work placements, festivals and shows. Students confirmed they were actively encouraged to seek industrial placements and projects for the benefit of their work and professional practice. This strong engagement with industry and employers, driven by the College Employability Strategy, helps students to realise their individual potential and career ambitions with the creative industries. The extensive opportunities for students to engage with employers in developing their professional practice is **good practice**.

2.39 The review team finds that the College has in place robust and effective systems to support students in their academic, personal and professional development. As noted, the extensive opportunities for students to engage with employers in developing their professional practice is good practice. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.40 The College aims to work in partnership with students and their representatives. Student engagement is a key objective of the Student Engagement Strategy. The strategy is overseen by the Student Engagement and Experience Committee. The College's approach to partnership working is articulated in the Student Charter and programme-specific learning agreements. There is an established student representative system which is managed by the Students' Union (SU), working closely with the College. Student membership in key academic committees is provided for. The College operates a number of formal and informal mechanisms, such as student surveys, to provide opportunities for the wider student body to provide feedback on their educational experience, and the full range of feedback is considered by the Student Engagement and Experience Committee, which reports to Academic Board. The strategies, policies, procedures and systems in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.41 In considering this Expectation the review team examined relevant documentation such as strategies, committee terms of reference and minutes, responses to student surveys and action plans. The team tested its findings in meetings with senior management, academic and support staff, students and student representatives, including SU Sabbatical Officers.

2.42 Students are represented on the main College-level committees through student representatives and the SU President, including Academic Board, Board of Governors, LTCC, Student Engagement and Experience Committee and the Business Development Committee. This ensures that the student voice is heard at the highest level of decision-making at the College. Students who serve on these committees are briefed to ensure they are able to undertake the role effectively. Student representatives met by the review team reported that they were well supported to carry out their roles effectively. At programme level, student representatives actively participate in programme team meetings and programme performance reviews.

2.43 The SU is responsible for administering the student representative system and provides training for its representatives. Its constitution lays out student involvement in key quality processes within the College. The College has increased its support for the SU through the appointment of a dedicated SU Coordinator to support the SU Executive, and the SU has recently been allocated a larger space within the College.

2.44 Students participate in a range of internal surveys on academic and non-academic matters such as module evaluations, induction surveys, and surveys on access to resources which are coordinated by the Registry. Students also take part in external surveys like the NSS. The outcomes are considered in the quality systems review reported to the QASC and Academic Board. The College holds bi-monthly student voice meetings where SU representatives discuss non-academic matters with senior support staff. In addition, the College Principal meets informally with every cohort each year to hear their views and directly engage with students. The informal outcomes of these meetings feed into SMT meetings.

2.45 The College operates a 'You said, We did' interface on the student portal to communicate actions taken in response to issues raised, and, more recently, progress

made where actions may not have been completed. Students who met the review team stated that they felt the College takes their views seriously and their voices are heard. The enhanced You said, We did scheme has improved communication between the College and students.

2.46 The development of studentship is one of the College's key priorities. The generic student handbook introduces all students to the College's concept of studentship and outlines the student representation arrangements. The Student Charter, which was developed in consultation with students, details the responsibility of the College and students in the learning and teaching process. This is supplemented by programme-specific learning agreements for all undergraduate programmes.

2.47 One of the main mechanisms for driving student views forward is through the Student Engagement and Experience Committee. The committee receives reports on student views from the College's monitoring processes and considers actions to be taken. It is responsible for the implementation of the Student Engagement Strategy and monitors NSS and internal survey results, student complaints and generic themes from programme performance reviews.

2.48 Students on all levels of study are also actively involved in the validation and re-validation of programmes.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.50 The College follows either the OU's or its own academic regulations depending on a student's start date. Both sets of regulations set out the policy for determining assessment grades, progression and the award of credit. They also describe the function and remit of Award Assessment Boards whose operation is overseen by the ASQC. A comprehensive set of guidance material assists staff in designing assessment tasks, grading student work and in the provision of feedback to students on assessed work. These are readily accessible on the staff portal. The policy for the recognition of prior learning is included in the College's academic regulations. The procedures and processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.51 In considering this Expectation the review team scrutinised relevant regulations and guidance manuals, minutes of meetings, assessment-related staff development activities, and a range of external examiner reports. The team met academic staff and students and viewed assessment-related information for students on the College's VLE.

2.52 The College's academic regulations set out the policy for recognition of prior learning. To support the process, the College has published simple guidelines for staff and students on applying for and assessing and recording prior learning, which are as yet untested as no cases have been recorded.

2.53 Assessment strategies are scrutinised during programme approval and monitored through annual programme evaluation and periodic review. Programme specifications and DMRs identify the full range of learning outcomes for every module and programme. All formative and summative assessment activity is through coursework with no summative exams. Students report that module inductions clarify the learning outcomes while peer group critiques develop students' understanding of assessment literacy. Tutors play a key role in enabling them to understand the assessment expectations.

2.54 Staff are supported in the design of assessment through a range of helpful guidance materials. The Assessment and Moderation Guidelines provide comprehensive guidance on feedback, marking and moderation. The guidelines are flexible to allow assessment strategies to be adjusted to meet the needs of students with diagnosed learning needs and those with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) requirements. Staff and students comment on assessment in the end-of-module evaluations and comments are used to enhance the process.

2.55 The newly developed assignment brief format enables the coverage of different elements of the learning outcomes. Assignment briefs now identify all of the intended learning outcomes, the tasks to achieve them and the grading criteria. This provides students with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes for the award of credit or qualifications. Students confirm that the assignment briefs are very clear. The review team **affirms** the steps the College has taken to develop a definitive assignment format that makes learning outcomes explicit.

2.56 The development of learning outcomes is shaped by teaching staff as well as external input. Internships, work placements and live briefs are often generated by employers or by visiting artists. These support the development of employability skills and enhance learning opportunities that are highly valued by students and employers.

2.57 The process for dealing with academic misconduct is explicitly detailed in both sets of academic regulations. They also state the processes to be adopted to address extenuating circumstances. Academic misconduct is further explained in the College's student disciplinary procedures and discussed at inductions and before submission of assessments. All students who met the team were clear about academic misconduct and how they would use the extenuating circumstances process, giving a range of examples where academic staff had responded to the requests quickly and professionally.

2.58 The Assessment and Moderation Guidelines define the timelines, range and medium required for feedback on summative assessment and associated feedback to help improve learning. Templates available on the College portal are used to record the process of assessment double-marking and sample moderation. The Tutorial Practices Guidelines stipulate that formative assessment progress records are to provide students with many opportunities to gain feedback on progress.

2.59 Assessment feedback to students is undertaken online. A pilot project was introduced in the academic year 2014-15 with the aim of creating an accessible, responsive system for recording and sharing tutorial, formative and summative feedback. This has been rolled out to all programmes and is welcomed by students. The system is gradually being populated, but is not fully operational yet. The Registry periodically reviews the quality of feedback through direct observation of comments provided to students, and through feedback from students.

2.60 Students who met the review team reported that feedback is very structured and an ongoing dialogue with tutors continues after the return of work. In this way reflection embeds learning, although sometimes the next assignment starts before they have received feedback from an earlier assignment. Some students were also critical of dissertation marks and feedback being withheld until after assessment boards had sat, resulting in a long period between submission and the provision of feedback and results. The College explained that an earlier release of grades and feedback does not benefit students.

2.61 Award Assessment Boards are well established and their remit is clearly defined within the academic regulations. The College fully adheres to the OU's requirements. Boards are chaired by the Vice Principal Academic and supported by the Registry. The relevant external examiner and an awarding body representative countersign all records. The records of proceedings adequately cover the required process and include progression and award decisions, appeals, plagiarism cases and summaries of external examiner matters. Results are reported to the ASQC.

2.62 External examiner reports generally comment positively on the design and conduct of assessment and highlight that the marking is in line with other higher education providers nationally, and that feedback to students and assessment relates well to the learning outcomes. Previously, overassessment was an issue that was raised by external examiners; this is being addressed as programmes are revalidated. The chief external examiner's annual report for 2014-15 notes that for programmes that had undergone a review, the curriculum has been rationalised to allow for more cohesive assessment.

2.63 The College regularly evaluates its assessment processes and practices based on feedback from students and staff. Programme leaders frequently check the feedback given by module leaders and during staff development sessions best practice on providing feedback is identified, shared and implemented. NSS results show a reasonable comparison

with national sector averages for assessment and feedback. Student surveys generally provide positive comments on the speed and quality of feedback received. Students appreciate the personalised feedback from their tutors.

2.64 The OU scrutinises the curricula vitae of all new staff who contribute to programme delivery and assessment. Staff involved in the assessment of student work are required to have teaching expertise. The majority of academic staff also have a recognised teaching qualification. While not mandatory, full-time teaching staff are encouraged to complete one and work towards it via the HEA fellowship route.

2.65 The standards of assessment are tested during developmental standardisation workshops. Pre-assessment workshops help to gauge the level and coverage of module aims and learning outcomes, before any briefs are put into operation. Cross-discipline standardisation meetings, held post-assessment, provide a good opportunity for staff to compare and contrast marking against anonymised work to ensure greater consistency and fair assessment.

2.66 The review team concludes that the College adheres to the OU's requirements for the assessment of students. Guidance related to assessment ensures that the requirements are widely understood by staff and students. The responsive approach that the College takes to provide equitable, valid and reliable assessment processes enables the review team to confirm that Expectation B6 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.67 The OU has responsibility for the appointment of all external examiners to programmes delivered by the College. The College nominates suitably qualified candidates for approval. Induction of external examiners is undertaken both by the OU and the College. The College has processes in place for the consideration of and response to external examiner reports. The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.68 In considering this Expectation the review team tested the application of the procedures by scrutinising relevant regulations and guidance, a range of external examiner reports, and the College responses to external examiner reports. The review team also discussed the sharing of external examiner reports with students and staff.

2.69 At the time of the review the College had 13 external examiners. External examiners are nominated by the College in accordance with the OU Handbook for Validated Awards (Section F2) and are formally approved and trained by the OU. External examiner induction is thorough. In addition to the training provided by the OU, the College provides orientation and induction sessions for new examiners to familiarise them with the College, programme staff, academic regulations and the programmes for which they will be responsible. These processes are detailed in the College's external examiner's process guidelines and ensure that external examiners are appropriately prepared to oversee the maintenance of academic standards and quality of learning opportunities. Following each appointment, the relevant programme handbook is updated with details of the allocated examiner.

2.70 The College nominates a chief external examiner with the remit to provide an overview of all external examiner activity, and to provide a broad account of its performance with respect to academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The chief external examiner reviews all external examiner reports and award board minutes at undergraduate and postgraduate level to conduct a thorough overview of external examiner activity. This review is summarised in a report for the College and considered by the ASQC. This independent, critical and constructive oversight of the work of its examiners offers the College useful feedback on key quality and standards issues and highlights good practice.

2.71 External examiners have a defined period of duty. Their role involves reviewing the assessment and moderation evidence. They also meet members of programme staff and students. The College encourages its own academic staff to undertake external examiner roles at other institutions as part of staff development and to share good practice.

2.72 All external examiners provide annual written reports to the awarding body to a template. Oral reports are also given by examiners at Award Assessment Boards and recorded in the minutes. The College has effective mechanisms in place to ensure effective oversight of external examiner reports and the responses to them. Reports are sent to the College by the OU within an agreed timescale. With the exception of confidential feedback, which is passed on to the Principal, full details of the reports are issued to programme teams and to the relevant student cohort via their specific programme pages in the student portal. Reports are fit for purpose and comment on the standard and quality of student work along with associated learning materials and resources. They also comment on whether previous issues identified have been addressed.

2.73 Programme teams consider the reports at team meetings and the programme leaders provide a formal response. This response is also used in subsequent programme performance review meetings to identify and develop required actions. Copies of the response letter and actions resulting from programme performance review in the form of APEs are issued to the OU.

2.74 The review team concludes that the processes for consideration of and responses to external examiner comments are robust and issues raised are tracked and resolved effectively through established review mechanisms. The team confirms that the Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.75 Annual monitoring and institutional review of programmes is overseen by the LTCC. Monitoring and review processes consider evidence of cohort performance and feedback from external examiners and students to confirm that the standards set at programme approval are being maintained and achieved, and the quality of learning opportunities maintained and enhanced. Reports of both processes are received and considered by the College's deliberative committees, which allows any standards or quality-related issues to be addressed and good practice shared. This process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.76 In considering the Expectation the review team examined the OU's guidance for annual monitoring, revalidation and periodic review. The team sampled programme performance reviews; annual programme evaluation and institutional-level reports; and revalidation reports. The team examined the minutes of committees where the reports were received and considered. The team also explored the monitoring and review processes through discussions with senior and academic staff, and students.

2.77 The OU Handbook for Validated Awards identifies the minimum requirements for programme monitoring and review. The College's quality cycle of programme monitoring and reporting comprises monthly programme team meetings, termly programme performance reviews with student representation, and regular meetings of Academic Board and its subcommittees. The Quality Cycle Handbook and the Academic Staff Handbook define the roles and responsibilities of staff for programme monitoring and review.

2.78 The programme monitoring and evaluation process is thorough. The main vehicle through which the College monitors its programmes is the cyclical programme performance reviews which result in the production of annual programme evaluation reports and action plans. These evaluate cohort recruitment, retention and performance data, and feedback from students and external examiners against performance indicators and are regularly updated throughout the academic year. Students are actively involved in the programme performance review meetings.

2.79 Module evaluations also feed into programme evaluation reports. The Module Evaluation Guidelines set out the module review process. Module tutors generate module evaluation reports on the basis of feedback from students and their own reflections.

2.80 The programme monitoring process is well developed and effective. Staff cited a number of enhancements made as a result of programme monitoring. The programme evaluation reports seen by the review team are comprehensive, and allow extensive opportunities for staff and students to add their reflection on key actions. They evaluate academic and resource challenges and provide a critical analysis of external examiners' reports. Reports also include a section on employer feedback and comment on the instigation and management of student and employer expectations of live projects. Any issues identified in reports are carefully monitored in-year through the repeated updating of reports that are held as live, open electronic documents.

2.81 Programme evaluation reports inform the Annual Institutional Overview which summarises generic issues from programme monitoring. Both are considered by the LTCC

before submission to the OU. Scrutiny of the College reports results in an annual monitoring report by the OU on the College highlighting any outstanding issues that the College fully addresses to complete the monitoring cycle. The latest annual monitoring report observed significant enhancement made to benefit students' learning experience.

2.82 At College level, NSS results are reported to Academic Board. By comparing and analysing programme data, the Registry produces easily accessible summaries of its findings to inform strategic development of programmes.

2.83 The periodic OU institutional review process complements annual programme monitoring and review and allows for a more holistic consideration of programmes through self-evaluation and peer review. It is intended to ensure that programmes continue to be current, meet their aims and learning outcomes, and are adequately managed and resourced. The next institutional review will be in 2017.

2.84 The principles and processes for programme review are outlined in the College's Procedure for Validation, Revalidation and Withdrawing Higher Education Programmes which complies with the OU Handbook for Validated Awards Section D: Programme Approval and Review. Programme revalidation follows the same pattern as validation, with a focus on evaluating the success of the programme in practice and how it has developed. This is accomplished in part by a critical review of the programme that reflects on module evaluation outcomes, programme performance reviews and APEs.

2.85 Programmes are reviewed on an iterative yearly cycle. Self-evaluations in the form of background and critical appraisal documents seen by the review team were detailed and informed by programme-level data on student recruitment. There was an evaluation of the currency of the programme against external reference points; of the continuing effectiveness of the teaching methods and the assessment strategy in enabling the achievement of learning outcomes; and an analysis of feedback from students, external examiners and employers. Revalidations follow the same two-stage process as validations and make appropriate use of externality. Review panels include independent external specialists.

2.86 Programme monitoring and review are thorough and implemented rigorously. Processes are designed to effectively capture and respond to emerging issues. This is **good practice**.

2.87 The review team considers that the College has comprehensive and thorough processes for the monitoring and review of programmes, which are effective, regular and systematic. Outcomes of programme monitoring and periodic review are routinely reported through relevant College committees. The comprehensive programme monitoring and review process has led to good practice. On this basis, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.88 The College has a clear policy for appeals against the decision of an Award Assessment Board, which is included in the College's academic regulations and guidelines for making a complaint. These align with the OU Handbook for Validated Awards and are published on the College's website. Each process has a clear set of timescales. Before engaging these processes, students are encouraged to raise any concerns through informal means. The design of the processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.89 The review team tested the College's procedures through examining policy and guidance documents, the complaints register and annual review of complaints, as well as relevant minutes from team meetings. The team further tested the procedures through discussions with students and staff.

2.90 The College is responsible for handling academic appeals and complaints in the first instance, but there is the opportunity to escalate cases to the OU and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. The number of complaints and appeals each year is monitored; numbers are very low and falling. Support is available to students throughout the process.

2.91 The complaints guidelines are made available to students on the website and the student portal, and referenced in the generic and programme handbooks. Complaints are initially dealt with informally and can be raised through student representatives for resolution during programme team meetings. Monitoring of complaints takes place at each programme performance review. If the issue cannot be resolved satisfactorily, a formal complaints process is invoked. Complaints will be formally responded to, logged and investigated in a laid-down timescale. The Registry manages this process and monitors the outcomes, which are reported to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. Students stated in a submission to the review team and in meetings with the team that they were aware of where and how to access complaints information. They would liaise with their tutors before using the formal procedures.

2.92 The Academic Appeals Policy is located in the College's academic regulations and made available to students on the College website and student portal. It is also referenced in the generic and programme handbooks. The academic appeals procedure outlines grounds for appeal, extenuating circumstances and the overall process of an academic appeal. In addition, results letters refer to the opportunity to lodge an appeal. Information for academic staff on handling complaints and academic appeals is included in the staff handbook and also available through the staff portal. Students reported that they were aware of how to make an academic appeal, and stated that the information is available online.

2.93 The College has clear complaints and appeals procedures which are easily available. Staff and students demonstrate awareness of the relevant processes. The College regularly monitors the number and resolution of academic appeals and complaints. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others

Findings

2.94 The College engages in the delivery of learning opportunities with others through live assignments and work placements. Management of these opportunities occurs at programme level. Employers do not take part in the formal assessment of students. The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.95 In considering this Expectation the review team examined the arrangements for the management of live assignments and work placements, including guidance material for students. The team further tested its findings in meetings with academic managers, teaching staff and students.

2.96 Students are encouraged to undertake work placements, internships and live assignments to support their studies. These learning opportunities are managed by programme teams. It is the responsibility of the student with the support of the programme team to establish and formalise a placement, although the College assists students in seeking placements.

2.97 A range of supporting resources are available online via the student portal and the Careers Service pages. These include an agreement between the student, the placement provider and the student's tutor, and a health and safety assessment form that must both be initiated and concluded by the student. In addition, students are encouraged to ask the placement provider to complete a web-based feedback form that assesses the student's engagement with the placement.

2.98 It is the College's view that work placements are not mandatory or integral to any module assessment. The review team determined that this was not an accurate representation of students' learning experience. The team found that, in practice, students across a range of programmes are expected to undertake employer-based live assignments to satisfy specified module learning outcomes and at least one module included a formal work placement. As such, some aspects of the College's delivery of learning opportunities rely on partners in industry.

2.99 The engagement of students with the placement is primarily driven through individual contacts at programme team level with the assistance of the Careers and 3Es teams. The review team learnt that some employers regularly provide multiple placement opportunities for students based upon trust rather than formal agreement. Students would be quizzed upon their return by programme staff to determine if the learning outcomes had been achieved without any formal contact with the placement provider. Although sufficient safeguards are in place to ensure the integrity of the placement and protect the student, the College does not seek to formally recognise the role of the placement provider in achieving a learning outcome. Programme-level administration of placements is adequate with risk being managed through a mandatory but student-driven process.

2.100 Although at programme level the relationship between programme teams and employers is good, and tutors and students undertake a clearly documented process to determine expectations and risk prior to the student undertaking a live assignment or

placement, the College does not have formal oversight of placement activity. The review team **recommends** that the College strengthen its procedures to enable effective institutional oversight of employer-based live assignments and work placements.

2.101 The College is an active participant in the ERASMUS student exchange programme and has links with a limited number of European awarding bodies. Development and maintenance of the ERASMUS agreements is overseen by the LTCC. Programme teams make assessment decisions for visiting students based on comparison criteria agreed with the receiving institution, and the Head of Teaching and Learning provides oversight of academic standards.

2.102 The review team concludes that at programme level the College has adequate processes in place for the delivery and management of learning opportunities with others. The lack of awareness across the College that in some cases live assignments and work placements are integral to the programme and the achievement of module learning outcomes has led to a recommendation to strengthen institutional oversight of such activities. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met although the level of associated risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

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

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.105 Of the 11 Expectations in this judgement area, all 10 that are applicable to the College are met and nine are judged to be with a low risk. The exception is Expectation B10, which is judged to have a moderate risk. This is reflected in a recommendation made by the review team which concerns strengthening procedures to enable effective institutional oversight of work placement activities.

2.106 The review team identified three features of good practice in this judgement area. These are primarily located in Expectations B1, B4 and B8 but are also relevant to the Enhancement Expectation. The good practice identified relates to the proactive and collaborative approach to the design and development of programmes (Expectation B1); the extensive opportunities for students to engage with employers in developing their professional practice (Expectation B4); and the comprehensive programme review and monitoring process that effectively captures and responds to emerging issues (Expectation B8).

2.107 There is one affirmation in this judgement area, located under Expectation B6. It concerns the steps being taken to develop a definitive assignment format that makes learning outcomes explicit.

2.108 The review team notes that all of the Expectations in this judgement area are met. Furthermore, there are features of good practice in this judgement area and the single recommendation is confined to a small area of the provision. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The College provides a wide range of information about its higher education provision to students, staff and external stakeholders in a variety of ways, including print and digital formats. Communications are underpinned by a comprehensive and embedded strategy. The management and publication of information about the College's academic provision is governed by the Information Distribution Procedure which details the type of information provided to prospective and current students and staff. It also lists the communication channels and responsibilities for the maintenance and approval of information. This approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

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

3.3 The College website and online prospectus provide detailed information for prospective students on the programmes and awards offered. The website also has information about open days, the Admissions Policy and the application process including details on admissions appeals, student fees, and student support for financing studies. The website also allows direct access to the UCAS application system and KIS data, via a widget located at the foot of each course information page. The prospectus and programme information are also available in print format.

3.4 Programme information is very comprehensive and includes an overview of each programme, a description of the modules associated, the programme specification, staff involved in the delivery of the programme, examples of past student work, careers and alumni information, what existing students say about the programme and an opportunity to ask online questions.

3.5 For external stakeholders the College website provides links to the corporate strategy, ethos, vision, values and governance arrangements. There are also links to its Data Protection Policy and the College guide for information, which provides an indicative list of the type of information available from the College under its Freedom of Information commitment.

3.6 The College has an effective and robust system for reviewing and amending published information with clear responsibilities and timescales. The Director Communications oversees the publication of information on the website and liaises with content owners to ensure the accuracy of information. Programme information is reviewed each semester, the remaining information annually. The College logs these reviews and ensures that actions are carried out to the deadlines specified in the documentation. The Director Communications also oversees the publication of externally facing print materials, which are approved by the SMT and the OU.

3.7 When reviewing information on the website and in the print prospectus, the team noted that information on the OU was difficult to locate. On the College website it can be found under a separate tab, but programme information does not mention the OU. Furthermore, while information on the awarding body is available in the prospectus, it is located towards the back and again lacks prominence. This could potentially lead applicants to believe that the College is the awarding body. Therefore, the team **recommends** that the College improve the accessibility of information identifying the awarding body.

3.8 Students access generic and programme-specific handbooks, unit and module details, the academic regulations and information about learning resources, student support, student feedback and academic progress via the student portal. The Registry is responsible for the publication of academic regulations and maintains the accuracy of handbooks and module information. The remaining information published on the student portal is approved and maintained by the Associate Director Quality. Most of this information is reviewed annually. Key policies and other documents are linked to a central online drive which ensures updates to key documents are issued once and all references are automatically updated.

3.9 Student policies, such as disciplinary procedures, are also kept on the student portal. It outlines the student code of conduct, and minor and major academic misconduct offences. Students also have access to a guide to studying a programme validated by the OU, which predominantly signposts links or other policies and includes information on appeals and complaints, inductions and assessment. The review team found the information held on the student portal to be comprehensive. Students confirmed that the information they receive is accessible, accurate and up to date.

3.10 The College VLE is overseen by the Vice Principal Academic and managed by each programme leader. The VLE contains DMRs, assignment briefs, hand-outs, and other learning support materials such as videos, reading lists, work placement arrangements, external examiner reports, and personal development plans. Students originally identified access to online resources as an area for improvement in their submission to the review team. The College has since responded to their concerns by streamlining access to the student portal via a single login and clearer links to email, personal data, timetable, academic records, programme information, and support and resources information. Students who met the review team confirmed that the situation has improved.

3.11 The staff portal publishes a good range of information such as committee activities, strategies, policies, regulations, procedures, guidelines and associated templates. Their publication is overseen by the Associate Director Quality.

3.12 The review team considers that the College provides information that is clear, accessible and fit for purpose. Information is judged by those accessing it to be helpful and trustworthy. The College has robust systems in place to assure the accuracy of its published information. The location of information identifying the awarding body gives rise to a recommendation to improve its accessibility. The review team concludes that, overall, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.14 Expectation C is met and the associated level of risk is low. There is one recommendation in this area concerning the accessibility of information identifying the awarding body in the College's prospectus and on its website. There are no affirmations in this judgement area.

3.15 Given that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low, the review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The Strategic Plan identifies the pursuit of outstanding provision across the College as a principal strategic aim and core success driver. The Strategic Plan is enabled through three key strategies - the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy, the Student Engagement Strategy and the Employability Strategy, each with success measures, KPIs and an operational plan.

4.2 The Student Engagement and Experience Committee oversees the implementation of the Student Engagement Strategy. The Engagement Strategy is explicitly designed to promote an environment in which every student is empowered to fully engage in all aspects of College life. The aims of the strategy include developing a genuine collaborative partnership to provide the best possible experience for all students.

4.3 The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy confirms the College's commitment to 'adapt to change and to continue to embed a learning culture and ethos based upon critical self-evaluation and continuous improvement through systems that effectively use qualitative and quantitative information'. The Quality Implementation Plan included in the strategy defines the strategic objectives for the enhancement of quality and learning opportunities and sets out the actions to achieve them, together with measures of success.

4.4 The Quality Cycle Handbook explicitly details, in its framework, a commitment to enhancement of the student experience. It also highlights the pivotal role of, and opportunities for, students to engage in quality assurance and enhancement of their programmes, and the processes through which they can make an active contribution through formal and informal means. Module and annual programme and Annual Institutional Overview reports are all designed with a strategic approach to enhancement, using management information and student feedback to produce action plans to continually improve the quality of learning opportunities.

4.5 The College has appropriate strategies, policies and procedures in place that would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.6 In considering this Expectation the review team examined relevant strategies, policies and procedures; the Quality Cycle Handbook; completed annual programme evaluation and institutional overview reports; action plans; and reports of various enhancement initiatives. The team tested its findings in meetings with senior management, academic and professional support staff, students and student representatives.

4.7 The Quality Cycle Handbook sets out the current quality monitoring mechanisms to support the enhancement of student learning opportunities. These mechanisms are reviewed annually at Academic Board level. The ASQC oversees the implementation of the quality monitoring strategies. Each of the Academic Board subcommittees has a specific function to enhance a different aspect of the student experience. Strategies are scheduled for review annually.

4.8 The Associate Director Quality is responsible for ensuring, through a systems review and mapping exercise, that the delivery of academic standards and learning

opportunities meets the requirements of the Quality Code. Senior staff have a designated lead responsibility for accurately reflecting on the level and range of compliance with each Expectation of the Quality Code; there is evidence of improvements made as a result.

4.9 The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy provides an effective framework for enhancement, and guides staff in the use of monitoring and review processes. Annual programme evaluation reports effectively evaluate the previous year's enhancement activity, note good practice and develop appropriate enhancement plans for the coming year, with clear responsibilities and timescales for implementation. Termly programme performance reviews resulting in the ongoing updating of the annual programme evaluation reports facilitate prompt programme-level responses to any emerging issues highlighted by data sources and staff and student feedback (see good practice under Expectation B8).

4.10 Enhancement actions at institutional level are raised in the Annual Institutional Overview report, approved annually by Academic Board together with the institutional action enhancement plan. Thereafter the action plan is reviewed regularly by the ASQC on behalf of Academic Board. As well as confirming that standards are being maintained, APEs and institutional overview reports use management information such as attendance, retention, progression, induction survey satisfaction, NSS satisfaction and response rates, module evaluations and exit surveys to inform the development of enhancement plans.

4.11 The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy contains a generic retention strategy and an implementation plan that is monitored termly to ensure its effectiveness. The management information system provides monthly retention and comparison reports to programme teams, the SMT and Academic Board with data being used in programme performance reviews to ensure awareness of any students who are 'at risk'. NSS survey data is monitored and analysed by the Registry who also monitor weekly reports to help maximise response rates at cohort and College level. The SMT and programme leaders deliberate on the analysis and use it to develop enhancement actions via the termly and annual review activities.

4.12 There is a clear commitment to engage students in both strategic committees and operational groups and to enable them to make meaningful contributions. The student engagement map shows how the College captures students' views and formally acts on them through the committee and quality review structures. Students are actively engaged at all levels of College quality monitoring and enhancement activity, from attendance at the Board of Governors, Academic Board and other key committees, programme team meetings, and meetings with the Principal, to participation in module reviews, programme approval and review meetings. In addition, student voice meetings are held termly with a group of student representatives relating to issues that impact on the quality of their work such as the availability and quality of, and access to, resources.

4.13 The appointment of a Head of Learning and Teaching has reinvigorated the debate among staff regarding best and shared practice. The role was created explicitly to advance academic staff's professional teaching and assessment practice across a range of media to help enhance student learning opportunities. Recent events to support this, delivered by external facilitators, have resulted in changes to the assignment brief format and in a greater focus on adherence to regulations and guidelines for assessment and tutorials.

4.14 Ownership of enhancement is embedded into the job descriptions of principal lecturers. Staff placements, research projects and a range of hosted events encourage local, regional, national and international creative partners, staff and students to develop practice to enhance learning opportunities. Good examples that show these engagements are the 'I'm a Creative' conference, Making Futures research conference and the HEA employability research project.

4.15 Plans are in place to introduce individual HEA membership, and potentially more fellowships, for all teaching staff. The College is also introducing a new staff contract that will embed the ethos of research and scholarly practice as the main driver for enhanced teaching practices. Technical support staff are encouraged to take professional development in their specialist areas of practice and in learning and teaching.

4.16 The strategic development of the lecturer and technical staff resource significantly contributes to the enhancement of learning and teaching. Timely appointment of new and well-qualified teaching, technical and demonstrator staff and the creation of the post of principal lecturers with cross-programme responsibilities have resulted in an improved human resource. The College's investment in expert teaching staff, who are either part-time creative industries practitioners or full-time academic staff, supports students' awareness of professional and contemporary sector practices. The practice of employing new programme leaders a year in advance of the approval and delivery of a programme brings significant benefits for programme design which ultimately enhances the student learning experience. As internal observers of programme approval events, they have the opportunity to gain experience for their own validation activities. There is a high level of collaboration between academic and professional support staff in the approval and delivery of programmes (see good practice under Expectation B1).

4.17 Considerable work is being done to improve the quality of learning opportunities through the development of employability skills. The Employability Strategy describes the vision, goals and ambition of the College to deliver activities to enhance employability that are evidence-based and measurable, relating to each subject area and to wider transferable skills. The strategy aims to maximise students' progression opportunities by focusing on the '3Es': employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship. Professional practice modules, embedded into all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, help to develop business acumen. The 3Es team analyses the results of the ongoing dialogue with industry, commerce and education networks. On that basis each programme team identifies and embeds opportunities for industry-relevant experiences to enrich their curriculum delivery, often through live projects, visiting speakers and work experience. To ensure the curriculum remains up to date and relevant, and provides an opportunity for students' professional practice, the College is in the process of establishing Industry Liaison Groups in each programme area. Meeting minutes show the high level of engagement with a wide range of employers.

4.18 Enhancement activities, focused on employment and work with practitioners, are pivotal in enabling students to be prepared for the challenges and reality of the creative industries. Students are encouraged to seek opportunities to develop their technical, intellectual and business skills, in the pursuit of becoming independent creative practitioners ready for working in careers within the creative industry sector. Employers and students whom the review team met gave effusive accounts of their interactions. Students are engaged with either one or more of the following activities - internships, work placements, live briefs and working with visiting artists, which is a feature across all curriculum areas. The extent to which students are able to engage with employers in developing their professional practice is credible (see good practice under Expectation B4). The review team also heard about activities in theatres, art galleries, printing and in unusual school liaison opportunities, where students work alongside young people showing them how to use materials and inspiring them through live demonstrations. Interdisciplinary studies enable students to spend time exploring the nature of materials, to expand and develop techniques in a variety of other disciplines, different to their main study area. This is highly valued by students who are able to enhance their creative work in more innovative ways.

4.19 The Strategic Plan indicates the intention to build European and worldwide partnerships as part of the development of an international strategy and project work.

Students are currently engaged in an EU-funded project to develop soft skills, such as interpersonal skills and confidence to enhance their employability options. All students are also encouraged to participate in national and international competitions and exhibitions.

4.20 The College takes a strategic approach to the development of physical resources to enhance learning environments for existing curriculum areas and to develop new areas of study. The Estates Strategy aligns with the Strategic Plan, reflecting the College's purpose to provide a distinctive, innovative and supportive learning community in contemporary arts practice. The College environment and associated workshop, studio spaces and learning resources available to students are reviewed annually to ensure they reflect industry standards and encourage genuine engagement with the College ethos. Student feedback informs the estates master plans. The College's Fabrication Laboratory (Fab Lab) is part of an international network of Fab Labs, offering students and external local practitioner employers the opportunity to use specialist sector equipment in a dedicated space within the College environment. This is well supported by local industries and used by the students.

4.21 The review team concludes that the College has an effective, cohesive framework of strategies, policies, procedures and guidance materials through which it communicates and manages the continuous improvement of the student experience. Enhancement is strategically led, clearly demonstrated at all levels and outcomes are regularly analysed by the SMT and through the College's deliberative committee structure. The rigorous implementation of the quality assurance and enhancement strategy, which engages staff, students and employers in creating a vibrant learning experience, is **good practice**.

4.22 The review team considers that deliberate steps are being taken at College level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities, and noted a number of wide-ranging features of good practice located both primarily and secondarily in this Expectation. There are no recommendations or affirmations. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.24 The Expectation is met and the associated risk is low. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area. There is one feature of good practice, which is the rigorous implementation of the quality assurance and enhancement strategy which engages staff, students and employers in creating a vibrant learning environment. The good practice identified under Expectations B1, B4 and B8 is also relevant to this judgement area. These concern the proactive and collaborative approach to the design and development of programmes (Expectation B1); the extensive opportunities for students to engage with employers in developing their professional practice (Expectation B4); and the comprehensive programme review and monitoring process that effectively captures and responds to emerging issues (Expectation B8).

4.25 The review team notes that the feature of good practice located in this judgement area is significant and encompasses the entire judgement area. Moreover, the review team notes that the features of good practice located in section B of this report that are relevant to this judgement area are also significant and wide ranging. In addition, there is an institution-wide commitment at all levels of the College to enhancing the student learning experience. Student engagement in the management of this area is widespread and the needs of students are a clear focus of the College's strategies and policies. In view of the above and as there are no recommendations for improvement in this area, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College is **commended**.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The employability of its students is a key strategic driver at the College. It is implicit within the College's vision, its stated values, development horizons and the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan sets a target for graduate employment to exceed 85 per cent by 2020. This aspiration is set against a methodology for monitoring and reporting graduate destinations that is viewed as problematic by the College as it considers the creative sector to have part-time working, portfolio careers and small business start-ups as the norm. Consequently, although the College's graduate employment record is strong, it does not meet national benchmarks.

5.2 The College is working to offset this gap by extending its academic portfolio to offer undergraduate programmes that offer more direct opportunities for work with mainstream employers. The College chose the 3Es to capture its approach to employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship. It works to establish an aspirational learning environment that encourages the development of creativity and innovation together with professionalism and business acumen.

5.3 To further this aim, the College recently created a Business Development subcommittee of Academic Board with a specific remit to enhance the interface with external stakeholders in support of the employability agenda. The College has also produced an Employability Strategy which has seen the establishment of a small staff team dedicated to the implementation of the 3Es. Coherent efforts have been made to embed the 3Es within the curriculum and all programmes include elements of professional practice and business studies. This can be through placements, live projects and visiting professionals. There is also evidence of increasing use of specific year-long modules linked to personal development plans. This aims to assist the development of skills and encourage personal reflection to increase employability and the development of a broader employer-relevant skillset.

5.4 The 3Es and Careers Team in the Student Hub provide advice and guidance for students so that they can seek placement, internship and live project opportunities with the industry regionally and nationally. All students met by the review team spoke of their involvement with industry and the beneficial impact on their studies. Alumni also reflected on the benefits of work placement, and employers were active in seeking the College's students not just for placement but also for employment. However, concerns were voiced among some students that greater consideration should be made by the College for students who are not interested in starting their own business and would prefer to enter mainstream employment.

5.5 The Careers Adviser provides advice and presentations to students on creating a CV. While this is appreciated by students, some students would also find advice and guidance on interview techniques useful, as well as highlighting job opportunities outside of the creative industry for students who are about to graduate.

5.6 To ensure the relevancy and currency of its provision, the College engages with external bodies such as Creative Skillset and Creative and Cultural Skills in addition to employers, alumni and other stakeholders. The College also sponsors crafts festivals as a vehicle of engagement in enterprise and entrepreneurship for its current students and alumni. For example, the College is an active sponsor of the Bovey Tracy Contemporary Crafts Festival in Devon that celebrates the best of British design and making, and the Cornish Port Eliot Festival. Additionally, the College has begun to increase its attendance

at international trade fairs and events to interface with creative industries internationally for the benefit of staff and students.

5.7 The College considers itself to be the creative hub for local and regional practitioners and has embarked on a plan for new business incubation. This involves the development of managed workspace for artists and designers, and in the last few years the College has successfully operated a city centre shop to sell student work on a rotational basis. During summer 2015 the College Gallery held a 'marketplace' for graduate work as part of the tourist trail in the city and has further plans for developing incubation space for its graduates along with its active support for pop-up shops on campus to sell and promote student work.

5.8 The recent investment in physical resources led the College to develop an accredited Fabrication Laboratory (Fab Lab), part of the international network of Fab Labs initially started by Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The resource is open to members of the community and to businesses that need to access the latest digital-making knowledge and 3D printing equipment and is intended to enhance engagement opportunities with industry in the region for the benefit of students. It also enables students to work with the latest industry-standard equipment to develop prototypes and understand the potential and limitations of modern small-batch production techniques.

5.9 Overall, the College takes its responsibility for promoting student employability seriously both academically and strategically. The creation of the 3Es team and the instigation of the Business Development Subcommittee demonstrate an ongoing commitment to promoting external links and employability. The College is active in using internal and external survey data as a measure of its success. Students commented very favourably on their ability to gain and benefit from work placements and many staff of the College are active practitioners who maintain positive links with the industry. This benefits students studying on the College's programmes by keeping the curriculum in touch with the latest developments in the industry. Coupled with the College's strategic and responsive approach to investment in physical resources, its students are well equipped to succeed in the creative industries upon graduation.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 30 to 33 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See [technology enhanced or enabled learning](#)

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

QAA1474 - R4581 - Feb 16

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