# Higher Education Review of Brooklands College

June 2014

# Contents

# About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Brooklands College. The review took place from 25 to 27 June 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Martin Lockett
- Mrs Marian Stewart
- Mr Nizam Uddin (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Brooklands 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 threshold academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

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

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

The themes for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

# Key findings

## QAA's judgements about Brooklands College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

## Good practice

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

- The involvement of employers in the planning and design of courses (Expectation B1).
- The proactive engagement with awarding bodies and other colleges to develop staff and enhance learning opportunities for students (Expectation B3, Enhancement).
- The comprehensive academic and pastoral support available to assist students in their learning and personal development (Expectation B4).
- The extensive range of learning opportunities provided to students both within and beyond the core curriculum on the higher national public services courses (Expectations B3 and B4).

## Recommendations

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

By October 2014:

- ensure all course handbooks contain full and relevant information, and that these are made available through the College virtual learning environment (VLE) (Expectations C, A3, B6 and B9).

By April 2015:

- develop and implement a clear process for the use of anti-plagiarism software which gives appropriate consideration to the nature of assessment (Expectation B6).

## Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The implementation of minimum standards to achieve consistency in the use of the virtual learning environment (Expectation B3 and C).

- The action being taken to improve the IT infrastructure and availability of non-specialist IT resources (Expectation B3).
- The action being taken to strengthen student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement (Expectation B5 and Enhancement).

## Theme: Student Employability

Student employability and career progression are an integral part of the College's higher education offer. Established links with a network of employers enables the College to integrate employability directly into the delivery of the curriculum, and to support students in accessing work-based learning opportunities. This is complemented by personal support tailored to the needs of the individual and intended to enable students to fulfil their professional potential.

# About Brooklands College

Brooklands College (the College) is a general further education college located in Surrey with two campuses: one in Weybridge; and the other in Ashford. The College is one of the largest providers of vocational-based training in Surrey, with a focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Through its higher education offering the College aims to provide opportunities to local residents who may not have otherwise entered into higher education. The College's mission statement is to 'be an outstanding provider of education and training for every member of our community, every day.'

At the time of the review visit the College had some 5,000 students of whom 209 were enrolled on a higher education course. The College's provision of higher education is not significantly different from that at the time of the last QAA review and comprises: partnerships with the University of Greenwich (Greenwich), Oxford Brookes University (Oxford Brookes) and Kingston University (Kingston) to provide courses in teacher education, engineering and early years respectively; and approval by the awarding organisation Pearson to deliver higher nationals in public services, graphic design, music and, since the academic year 2013-14, in media. As well as offering a foundation degree in Motorsport Engineering, since 2013 the College has been approved to deliver the final top-up year in BSc (Hons) Motorsport Technology, allowing students to obtain their full bachelor's degree locally.

Since the College's last engagement with QAA (Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review in 2009) there have not been any major changes in its range of provision. The College continues to tailor its higher education offering to part-time students as part of its strategy for widening participation and meeting the needs of the local community. However, the College has experienced a decline in the overall number of higher education students, from 276 at the time of the last QAA review, to 209. This is reflective of the national trend in falling numbers of higher education students in further education colleges, particularly from the part-time market. In order to support recruitment and retention the College has recently joined the National Scholarship Programme which aims to 'help individual students from low-income backgrounds as they enter higher education'. Financial support is also made available to students through the College's own bursary fund.

There have been some significant changes in the College's staffing since the last QAA review. A new Principal and Deputy Principal have been appointed. A number of permanent appointments have been made to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to replace the interim staff at the time of the last review. This has resulted in a more stable management structure ensuring appropriate oversight of higher education at a strategic level.

The College's last review resulted in a positive outcome, with three features of good practice and seven recommendations. The present review team found that the College has generally taken effective action in addressing the recommendations, and further embedding the areas of good practice, from the last review. One of the recommendations arising from the review related to the College establishing 'an effective procedure for the introduction and evaluation of learning initiatives, such as the use of anti-plagiarism software, which takes into account both the differing needs of programmes and also of their students'. The current review team found that while anti-plagiarism software has been introduced in a more systematic way than previously, there are still inconsistencies in the way it is used across all higher education courses, and this has resulted in a further recommendation from this review.

# Explanation of the findings about Brooklands College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

# 1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter A1: The national level***

**Findings**

1.1     The College's degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation are responsible for the allocation of qualifications to the appropriate level in the FHEQ. In addition, there is internal scrutiny through a course approval process before a formal proposal is submitted to an external validating body. This is preceded and accompanied by wide-ranging internal discussion and detailed consideration of the academic standards of awards, including the appropriate level of the qualification.

1.2     In the case of degree-awarding bodies, the College's provision is subject to the processes and requirements of the relevant university's regulatory framework, which include the level and volume of study. In relation to higher national courses, the College is responsible for the selection of units where choices are available within the relevant Pearson specification. These choices reflect the level and volume of study required by the awarding organisation.

1.3     The team tested the College's approach to meeting Expectation A1 through a review of the documented course approval process, records of internal and external approval events and minutes of relevant meetings. The review team also met with staff involved in the approval of courses.

1.4     There is a clearly documented internal course approval process accompanied by the use of standard pro forma. Documentary evidence of the process being used in practice at various stages specifies the level of the proposed course. Although the focus of College documentation is on marketing, funding and resource factors, staff the team met confirmed that in addition there was in-depth discussion of curriculum and other academic considerations for any proposed course. It was also confirmed that a similar approval process applies in the case of 'substantial changes' to courses, such as changes to the range and choice of optional units for a higher national course.

1.5     Module-level information contained within course handbooks makes explicit reference to the level of study in relation to course learning outcomes and other factors such as graduate attributes. Assessment criteria also distinguish the relevant level in the FHEQ. Students the team met confirmed that information about their course makes clear the intended learning outcomes and expected level of study.

1.6     The College states that staff development is driven by factors including the FHEQ. Staff the team met demonstrated a good understanding of the academic levels of study and how they differed in relation to degree characteristics and the expectations of learning.

1.7     In summary, ultimate responsibility for allocating each qualification to the appropriate level in the FHEQ rests with the College's awarding partners. The College effectively fulfils the requirements of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation, complemented by its own internal course approval processes and staff awareness of the FHEQ. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is therefore low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.8     The College's degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation are responsible for ensuring that relevant account is taken of the subject and qualification level during the development and design of courses. The College's approach to meeting Expectation A2 is therefore through its adherence to awarding partners' processes for course approval. Hence the College's own course approval process does not make explicit reference to subject and qualification statements. Higher national qualifications are designed by the awarding organisation and staff are expected to align teaching and assessment to Pearson curriculum requirements.

1.9     In evaluating how the College meets Expectation A2 in practice, the team considered records of external course approval events, programme specifications and external examiner reports. The review team also met senior staff, and teaching staff involved in the delivery of courses.

1.10     Degree-awarding body approval events give consideration to the use of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements through a review of the specification for the course being validated. Programme specifications are the responsibility of the relevant university, and the extent to which these make explicit reference to external reference points, including benchmark statements, is variable. However, external examiner reports confirm that awards reflect the appropriate subject and qualification level.

1.11     Teaching staff regularly engage in development activities with partner universities to facilitate their understanding of how external reference points should inform the delivery of teaching. Staff the team met demonstrated a good understanding of their subject areas and commented on how the strong relationship with university staff allows them to ensure academic standards are comparable to those of the degree-awarding body. For higher national courses, staff adhere to programme specifications devised by the awarding organisation.

1.12     In relation to professional body accreditation, the Motorsport Engineering courses are accredited by the Institute of Mechanical Engineers. Although accreditation is the responsibility of the University, College staff actively engage with the process and the College is subject to an on-site visit by the professional body. There is also sound evidence of engagement with the Engineering Council's *UK Standard for Professional Engineering Competence*, and with Oxford Brookes University for the Institute of Engineering and Technology accreditation.

1.13     The responsibility for ensuring that courses are mapped to relevant benchmark statements during the design stage is that of the awarding partners and the level of risk is low. The College meets the Expectation, and maintains academic standards on behalf of its awarding partners, through the delivery of courses by competent staff that have an appropriate understanding of the subject and qualification level.

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

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter A3: The programme level***

**Findings**

1.14 The College makes available definitive course information to staff and students through course handbooks that incorporate a programme specification. For university courses, the content and format of specifications and handbooks is defined by the relevant degree-awarding body. In the case of higher national qualifications, the College is responsible for developing contextualised programme specifications, though most of the content is defined by Pearson as the awarding organisation.

1.15 The team evaluated the quality of definitive course information and the way in which this is made available within the College through a review of programme specifications and course handbooks. The team also met staff and students to establish their views of course-level information.

1.16 The team found that in the case of university courses, each qualification has a programme specification or equivalent that meets the requirements of the relevant degree-awarding body. Course handbooks generally contain a copy of this definitive information at course level, together with individual module specifications. The way in which course information is presented varies across university provision, and in some cases across different courses awarded by the same university. The team was informed that this variability arises from the need to conform to the relevant degree-awarding body's template for handbooks.

1.17 In general, higher national course handbooks contain less extensive information than those for university awards. During the review, the College stated that it does not wish to impose a common template for higher national course handbooks, though internal checks are made to ensure they contain appropriate information. However, the review team found that complete definitive course information was not readily available for all courses. Higher national course handbooks do not make explicit reference to the awarding body documentation of the award. In one case, the requirement to pass were not clearly documented. In another, the course handbook was in three distinct parts without clear cross-referencing across the constituent parts.

1.18 The team also noted that definitive course information is not consistently made available through the virtual learning environment (VLE). For Kingston, Greenwich and Oxford Brookes Universities respectively, electronic information is given to students on a memory stick, CD-ROM or through the College VLE. Scrutiny of the College VLE revealed that definitive course-level information is uploaded only for some courses. Information in handbooks is verbally contextualised by staff during induction and at relevant points throughout the academic year to ensure students are aware of the intended learning outcomes and expected achievements for their course. However, this information could be made available more consistently through inclusion in course handbooks that are uploaded to the VLE (see recommendation under Expectation C).

1.19 Notwithstanding the inconsistencies in the content, and availability through the VLE, of course handbooks, the team is satisfied that students are made aware of the intended learning outcomes for their course and how these are to be achieved. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code,** *Chapter A4: Approval and review*

**Findings**

1.20    The College's awarding partners are ultimately responsible for approving and periodically reviewing the validity and relevance of the awards delivered on their behalf. The College's approach to meeting this Expectation is two-fold: adherence to awarding partners' processes for approval to deliver an award, and the application of an internal course approval procedure. The College's own two-stage course approval comprises an initial consideration of the fit of the course within the existing portfolio and financial implications, followed by a more detailed needs analysis of resources and learning and teaching strategies. The second stage concludes with sign-off from a Course Approval Panel which meets to consider the validity and relevance of the proposal.

1.21    For university courses, the periodic review of awards occurs on a defined cycle determined by the relevant degree-awarding body and laid out in university regulations. For higher national awards, the College uses its annual self-evaluation process as an internal periodic review mechanism for checking the ongoing relevance of courses.

1.22    The team tested the rigour of the approval and periodic review processes by reviewing records of internal and external course approval events, a sample of completed course approval pro forma, external examiner reports and course self-evaluation documents (SEDs). The review team also met senior and teaching staff to gain a thorough understanding of the College's approval and review processes.

1.23    The College has a good success record in applying to and gaining approval for the delivery of qualifications on behalf of degree-awarding bodies, and the awarding organisation Pearson. Documentation demonstrates that course teams have been thorough in addressing actions arising from external approval events. The internal course approval process which usually precedes application to a validating body includes dialogue with employers, and assures the College of its ability to maintain academic standards on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and Pearson. External examiner reports confirm that the design and content of courses is comparable to other similar qualifications in the sector.

1.24    There is also sound evidence of the College adhering to its degree-awarding bodies' processes for periodic review. For example, the College recently underwent a revalidation of the Foundation Degree in Motorsport Engineering and records of the event demonstrate the high level of scrutiny applied by the University panel, which included an external member. College staff then submitted a formal response to Oxford Brookes addressing recommendations arising from the revalidation process to ensure the continuing currency of the course.

1.25    The team concludes that the processes the College follows on behalf of its awarding partners, supplemented by its own approach to course approval and review, are operating effectively in ensuring the validity and relevance of courses. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality***

**Findings**

1.26    The College's degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation are ultimately responsible for ensuring independent and external participation in the design, approval and ongoing review of courses. The processes involved are stipulated in each University's own quality assurance policies. Clear guidance is provided in University documentation to support externality through course development and validation, with approval events requiring the presence of an external panel member. Kingston and Greenwich retain responsibility for appointing external advisors and examiners, while Oxford Brookes makes external appointments in partnership with the College. For higher national awards, it is the responsibility of Pearson to ensure external input during the design of qualifications and to appoint an external examiner who visits the College on an annual basis. The College's main responsibilities in meeting this Expectation are to ensure appropriate consideration is given to the feedback provided by externals on the management and delivery of courses. Through the College's own internal course approval process there is also extensive engagement with employers to support the development of provision which is shaped by local industry needs.

1.27    The review team considered evidence of external involvement in the approval and revalidation of university courses, reports of external approval events, minutes of internal approval activities and assessment boards. The team met staff to further clarify and consolidate its understanding of how externality supports course design, development, approval and review.

1.28    Although not always explicit from the College's pro forma for internal course approval, there is good evidence that the College engages with external stakeholders in the development of its higher education provision. The College has established a good network of local employers and works with other nearby colleges involved in the delivery of similar courses to ensure provision is in line with the wider higher education sector. College course approval panels also include staff from other curriculum areas that have experience of managing higher education and can provide an objective view in the decision making process. Reports from external validation and revalidation events confirm that degree-awarding bodies seek appropriate input from external representatives, and that the College takes effective action in responding to actions arising from these events.

1.29    Annual external examiner reports verify the College's effective management of threshold academic standards for the qualifications it offers on behalf of its awarding partners. Actions arising from reports are addressed by College staff in liaison with the relevant university to ensure feedback from external examiners informs the ongoing management and review of courses.

1.30    The team concludes that the College makes appropriate use of external input in several aspects of its provision including in the approval, design and delivery of courses. The Expectation is met and presents a low risk to the College's management of academic standards.

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

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

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

## Findings

1.31     In ensuring the processes for assessment meet Expectation A6, the College complies with the regulatory frameworks of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation, as set out in respective quality assurance policies and programme specifications. The College's Quality Handbook also has a section which sets out the expectations for assessment and verification accompanied by a formal Assessment Policy which stipulates the regulations governing assessment. This is a college-wide policy and it therefore does not make separate reference to the processes for higher education qualifications. However, the Policy does distinguish between assessment used for diagnostic purposes and that which is used to measure the achievement of learning outcomes.

1.32     The College has delegated responsibility for the design of assessment which is overseen by the respective degree-awarding body or Pearson. For university courses, assessment tasks are approved by the relevant degree-awarding body during the approval and planning stages. Ongoing validity and robustness is then monitored through annual monitoring and external examining processes. For higher national awards, an appointed external examiner samples assessment tasks and feedback to ensure Pearson requirements are being met. The management of assessment is overseen by the College's Higher Education Working Group (HEWG).

1.33     The team considered an extensive range of documentation to test the robustness, validity and reliability of assessment; this included: the College Quality Manual; programme and module specifications; assessment schedules; exemplar assignment briefs with evidence of internal verification; external examiner reports; and minutes of relevant meetings.

1.34     Assessment scheduling for all courses is carefully planned over the academic year to avoid unnecessary bunching of assessments, although there is a degree of overlapping of assignments on some courses. Assessment tasks are clear and explicitly linked to the intended learning outcomes of modules to ensure their validity. All assessments are subject to peer review through the application of comprehensive internal verification processes. For university courses, this is followed by approval from the relevant degree-awarding body to ensure assessment design and weighting is in line with programme specifications. Despite the College using a generic Assessment Policy, teaching staff the team met were clear about their responsibilities in fulfilling the requirements of individual degree-awarding bodies and Pearson. Students the team met demonstrated a good understanding of how assessment activity links to module and course learning outcomes.

1.35     The marking of assessments is also subject to robust internal verification and external moderation processes to ensure consistency and reliability in the award of credit, both for individual modules and whole courses. Assessment boards are held in accordance with the awarding partners' processes and are used as an effective mechanism to calibrate student achievement relative to threshold academic standards. External examiner reports confirm that the assessment of achievement of learning outcomes aligns to this Expectation. In particular, a number of the reports comment positively on the robustness of assessment tasks in testing the achievement of stated learning outcomes and the rigour with which assessment is conducted.

1.36     The College has recently launched an internal college-wide Assessment Forum aimed at providing a platform for the standardisation of assessment activity, particularly for higher national courses. Teaching staff the team met confirmed that the Assessment Forum meetings held to date have been useful in promoting the consistency of assessment practice and compliance with the College Assessment Policy. The HEWG has oversight of assessment through the receipt of regular SEDs which report on the effectiveness of assessment processes and incorporate comments from external examiners on assessment-related issues.

1.37     The team concludes that the College maintains academic standards on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation through the design and grading of assessment which ensures students have demonstrated the required learning outcomes before the award of credit or qualification. The College applies the academic regulations of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation diligently, and has in place appropriate internal processes to ensure assessment is robust, valid and reliable. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

1.38     In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All six expectations in this judgement area have been met with the associated level of risk low in each case. The College's main responsibilities for maintaining threshold academic standards are for adhering to the policies and processes of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation, which it does effectively.

1.39     There are no features of good practice or recommendations within this area. However, the recommendation under Expectation C regarding the need to improve the information contained in handbooks and their availability is of relevance to Expectation A3. However, the team concludes that this area for improvement does not pose a high risk to academic standards as it relates to amendments to documentation that is already in existence, and to making this information more readily available. The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.

# 2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

**Findings**

2.1 The processes for course approval are described in paragraphs 1.21 and 1.22. Although the design of courses is ultimately the responsibility of the College's awarding partners, the internal course approval process is used to consider the fit with, and relevance of the course to, strategic plans for the development of higher education. Agreements with degree-awarding bodies encourage the College to actively contribute to the development of courses through engagement with the relevant university's processes. For higher national qualifications, the College is responsible for the selection of optional modules to supplement mandatory modules in providing the required credit for the level of the award. The HEWG has overall responsibility for supporting strategic and operational development of the College's higher education provision.

2.2 The review team examined collaborative agreements with degree-awarding bodies, records of external approval and revalidation events, completed course approval pro forma and minutes from course approval panels. The team further explored the College's approach to meeting Expectation B1 in practice through discussions with staff and students.

2.3 The College has in place an effective and thorough course approval process; ensuring new proposals are given careful consideration prior to approaching a degree-awarding body or awarding organisation. Although pro forma do not always explicitly reflect the detailed discussions which precede the approval process, it was evident from meetings with staff that new provision is diligently planned and executed. The process includes the consideration of market research, identified skills gaps, staffing and learning resource implications, local competition and progression opportunities for students. Students the team met made reference to the College's willingness to develop provision that provided local progression opportunities into higher education.

2.4 The use of a Course Approval Panel, whose membership includes a staff member who is independent from the proposing department, allows the process to be conducted with rigour and probity. Following approval, a detailed action plan is prepared by the relevant course team outlining the development work needed to be undertaken before the first delivery of the course.

2.5 In particular, the course approval process incorporates a high level of engagement with employers and early on in the process course teams are expected to consult with local employers to consider the appropriateness of proposals. Staff involved in submitting proposals engage in dialogue with local businesses to ensure the content of the course will support graduate employability. The College also undertakes employer surveys and holds liaison forums to understand the needs of local employers and uses this feedback to inform the development of new provision. For example, the proposal for the HND in Popular Music secured the commitment of instrument manufacturer Roland (UK) Ltd and has resulted in the College acquiring Roland Music Academy status. The selection of specialist units for higher national awards is based both on staff expertise and local trends in employment to provide tailored qualifications which meet the professional needs and aspirations of students. The team considers the involvement of employers in the planning and design of courses to be **good practice**.

2.6      From the evidence analysed and discussions held with staff, the team is satisfied that the College has in place effective procedures for course planning, design and approval. The systematic involvement of employers in these processes makes a particularly positive contribution to this Expectation. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions***

**Findings**

2.7 The College has in place a clear and comprehensive procedure outlining the processes for handling applications from prospective students, making arrangements for personal interviews and for identifying and responding to additional learning needs. College procedures make a clear distinction between the responsibilities of admissions staff and curriculum tutors, ensuring the decision to offer a place on a particular course is made by the interviewing tutor. Procedures also give due consideration to applicable equality and diversity legislation and set out the expectations for admissions processes to be conducted in a fair and consistent manner. Information about the higher education on offer at the College is made available through a Higher Education Prospectus and through the public website. Both sources of information clearly stipulate the entry criteria for individual courses.

2.8 The team tested the College's operation of its admissions procedures through a review of the student submission, information available to prospective applicants and records of additional learning needs identified during admissions. The review team also met teaching and support staff involved in admitting applicants and students who have experienced the admissions process.

2.9 The information available to prospective applicants reflects the relevant awarding partners' requirements set out in programme specifications. Students are provided with sufficient information to enable them to make an informed choice about their course of study and on how the qualification may be used for further progression. Despite some comments in the student submission regarding the length and complexity of the application process, students the team met confirmed that the process was relatively straightforward and that the College provided personal support for completing the application. This suggests that if there was an issue previously this has now been resolved. Students also confirmed that they were invited to attend a one-to-one interview with a member of the curriculum team. The admissions process is also used as an opportunity for the early identification of disabilities and learning needs which may require additional attention and support and these are promptly referred to the Additional Learning Support Team.

2.10 The team is satisfied that the admissions process is undertaken by competent staff who exercise their responsibilities with probity, ensuring applicants are admitted on the grounds of academic merit. The exact procedure for admitting students varies according to the degree-awarding body or awarding organisation but staff the team met demonstrated a sound understanding of the different requirements of awarding partners. The effectiveness of admissions procedures is evaluated through a departmental Performance Improvement Review, which all support areas are subject to, and results in an action plan identifying areas for improvement. Students are encouraged to provide feedback on their admissions experience and this is formally captured through an induction survey which informs the Performance Improvement Plan.

2.11 The team concludes that there is a sound framework in place to manage and review admissions processes, with a clear delegation of responsibilities between academic and support staff. The Expectation is met and poses a low risk to the management of learning opportunities.

**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**

2.12     The Quality Handbook articulates the college-wide approach to learning, teaching and assessment and the processes for the systematic review of learning opportunities which include: the Teaching and Learning Observation Scheme; self-evaluation and improvement planning; and performance reviews. Course-level strategies for learning and teaching are encapsulated in programme specifications.

2.13     The College assures itself that staff involved in the delivery of higher education are appropriately qualified by ensuring the relevant degree-awarding body's criteria for recruitment are met, and by requiring all teaching staff to hold a formal teaching qualification after five years of employment. The College has in place a Staff Development policy which addresses the ongoing training needs of staff, including access to funding for formal qualifications.

2.14     The team tested the College's approach to meeting the Expectation in practice through a review of the student submission, College Quality Handbook, minutes of the HEWG, completed SEDs, sample staff development programmes and documentation pertaining to teaching observations. The team also met a range of staff and students.

2.15     The HEWG, whose remit includes monitoring the learning experience of higher education students and identifying strategic staff development needs, is effective in systematically reviewing the provision of learning opportunities. Minutes of the HEWG reveal discussions around the performance of individual courses and curriculum areas through the receipt of comprehensive SEDs. Student views are used to inform the review of learning and teaching through feedback surveys, the results of which are analysed and addressed through the self-evaluation process and corresponding quality improvement plans.

2.16     The evidence available demonstrates that the College provides appropriate and varied learning opportunities for its students. In particular, in the view of the team, the breadth and depth of learning and teaching activities employed on the higher national qualifications in public services is worthy of wider dissemination. These activities include: the mentoring of lower level students; external visits; the use of specialist outdoor sports equipment; an annual national competition run by students for local colleges; lectures from external speakers; and networking events such as a 'Dining in night' organised by students for employees of public service organisations. This approach to learning and teaching not only provides students with opportunities to achieve their intended learning outcomes but also engages them in learning experiences that go beyond the curriculum and contribute to their personal development. The student submission provides positive accounts of the way in which public services students are encouraged to take ownership of their own learning; these views were reaffirmed by students during the visit. The team considers the extensive range of learning opportunities provided to students both within and beyond the core curriculum on the higher national public services courses is **good practice**.

2.17     Teaching observations are undertaken by staff with experience of higher education and, although Ofsted criteria are used for grading observations, separate consideration is

given to the autonomous and independent nature of higher level learning. Teaching and learning mentors are appointed to support new and existing members of staff that have particular development needs. Staff involved in the mentoring scheme reported positive experiences. The HEWG identifies trends arising from the observation process and uses these to shape future staff development programmes.

2.18     The College is committed to the professional development of its staff and works in partnership with its degree-awarding bodies and a network of local colleges to support staff in developing their teaching capabilities. There are strong links with degree-awarding bodies at all levels of the organisation, facilitating the effective exchange of knowledge. Staff the team met provided several examples of how they engaged with degree-awarding bodies: observation of level 6 teaching and access to subject-specific mentors at Oxford Brookes; attendance at marking moderation meetings and 'away days' organised by Kingston; and involvement in the development of the curriculum and opportunities to share practice through network events involving other partner colleges arranged by Greenwich. The College has also recently launched a web-based teaching resource (HOW2) with components tailored specifically to support the development of teaching practices in higher education. The College has attended regional network events to collaborate with other local colleges using HOW2 and to establish an inter-college peer observation process, promoting the wider dissemination of good practice across the sector. The team concludes that the proactive engagement with awarding bodies and other colleges to develop staff and enhance learning opportunities for students is **good practice**.

2.19     Learning resources available to higher education students include an onsite library, free wireless access, a College VLE, and access to the relevant university's physical and electronic resources. Students have a good awareness of their entitlement to resources available through the partner university and staff actively encourage students to make good use of these. While appropriate specialist resources are in place for individual courses, there have been issues with providing reliable general purpose IT equipment and internet access to students. The College has already identified this as an area requiring improvement and is in the process of taking appropriate action through its quality improvement planning processes. The team **affirms** the action being taken to improve the IT infrastructure and availability of non-specialist IT resources.

2.20     The College currently uses the VLE as a repository of information and at the time of the review visit was in the process of changing IT platforms, with the new VLE intended to be fully operational from September 2014. Students reported variable experiences of using the VLE with some finding it a useful resource while others were not fully aware of its existence or functionality. During the visit the team explored the VLE and found some inconsistencies in the content of information available under individual course pages. The College is in the process of addressing these inconsistencies by using the change in platform to reform the content and structure of the VLE and is in the process of introducing criteria for the minimum content expected to be uploaded by staff. The team **affirms** the implementation of minimum standards to achieve consistency in the use of the VLE.

2.21     To summarise, the College has in place appropriate overarching and course-level strategies to support effective learning and teaching. These facilitate the systematic review of learning opportunities and promote planned improvements to teaching practices. The team concludes that the Expectation is met. The effectiveness of the College's processes in meeting this Expectation is evidenced by the fact that where areas for improvement have been identified then action is already in progress to address these. Therefore, the 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**

2.22    The College's higher education recruitment profile includes a large number of students progressing internally from level 3 and part-time students in employment. Its approach to supporting students in achieving their qualification is therefore an adaptive one tailored to meet the needs of individual students. Students are expected to attend a generic induction followed by a more focused orientation to the course. The provision of tutorials varies according to the course and mode of learning but students have the opportunity to meet on a one-to-one basis with a member of academic or support staff. The Additional Learning Support Team provides tailored assistance to students that declare a learning need for which additional support is required. Careers advisors located within the Careers Centre are responsible for organising group seminars and providing individual careers advice and guidance.

2.23    The College's approach to meeting the Expectation was tested through a review of sample induction programmes, records of academic tutorials and in discussions with staff and students.

2.24    Induction is used as an effective tool to support students in their transition into higher education. Induction programmes are delivered in partnership with support services and include familiarisation with the library and the development of digital literacy skills. Further sessions are then arranged according to the specific needs of particular groups of students identified by academic tutors. In general, views conveyed in the student submission and during meetings with students confirm that the induction is useful in raising awareness of entitlements to support and learning resources. However, some students felt that more focused attention could be given to introducing their course.

2.25    Throughout meetings with students, reference was made to the high quality support provided by academic staff both in and out of the classroom. In particular, students value the detailed formative feedback provided on a one-to-one basis to encourage academic development and progression. Tutorials provide a more formal opportunity to identify and address personal development needs, and some courses include personal development planning as an integrated part of the curriculum. Students with additional learning needs are identified at an early stage and appropriate arrangements are put in place through a coherent and integrated approach between the Additional Learning Support team and course staff. Support for students with specific learning needs ensures an inclusive learning environment is created and that due consideration is given to equality of learning opportunities. The team met a number of students who considered the additional support received to be transformational in enabling them to achieve their academic and personal potential. The comprehensive academic and pastoral support available to assist students in their learning and personal development is **good practice**.

2.26    Support for developing employability skills and entering into employment post-education are available through the Careers Centre and embedded within the delivery of the curriculum. Most courses make use of 'live' assessment briefs to provide students with exposure to real-life work situations. The extracurricular activities provided on the HNC/HND in Public Services promote the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours valued by employers (see findings under Expectation B3). The Careers Centre runs seminars which prompt students to access individual careers guidance provided by qualified

careers advisors. Services include information on higher level study opportunities, job-seeking assistance and preparation for interviews.

2.27      The team is satisfied that the College has in place appropriate arrangements to enable student development and achievement. This is accomplished through planned and easily accessible support mechanisms which reflect the diverse needs of its student body. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student engagement***

**Findings**

2.28     The College has in place a number of mechanisms by which it endeavours to capture and respond to student views on the quality of learning opportunities. These mechanisms are the same as those used for further education and include: informal verbal feedback; internal and external surveys; a student representation system; and a student conference. Opportunities for engaging in these activities are promoted in course handbooks and through flyers distributed to students.

2.29     The team evaluated the effectiveness of the College's processes for engaging students in quality assurance through a review of the Student Submission, minutes of meetings attended by representatives, course SEDs, quality improvement plans (QIPs) and reports from external reviews. The review team also held a number of meetings with staff and students.

2.30     Although the College uses the same processes for student engagement across further and higher education, there is appropriate differentiation of the higher education student voice through the separate consideration of feedback obtained through these channels. Module evaluations and informal verbal engagements between academic staff and students inform the ongoing and annual review of individual courses. SEDs at course level are explicitly required to consider the ways in which student feedback has been obtained and responded to. Feedback on induction and learning resources is also captured through surveys which then inform the performance reviews of support departments. Each course has a student representative invited to attend termly course meetings, and action taken in response to issues raised is fed back at future meetings. For Oxford Brookes courses, representatives also attend joint meetings held at the University. Students the team met were aware of the feedback mechanisms in place and were able to cite examples of improvements to course delivery such as the provision of extra classes for a particular module and the purchase of additional books.

2.31     The College values student contribution and uses student views to shape learning opportunities at a local level but there is less evidence of this happening systematically at a strategic level. The uptake of student engagement mechanisms is variable and this is partly due to the largely part-time nature of the student body. Although higher education students are provided with the opportunity to become a Student Governor, which would allow them to influence decision making at a senior level, none have taken up this role to date. There is also currently no student representation on the HEWG, which has oversight of all higher education within the College. The College is aware of the challenges of engaging a diverse student body characterised by varied attendance modes, and has taken steps to address these including scheduling course meetings in the evening and visits to classes by senior staff to obtain direct feedback. Student engagement is also identified as an area for improvement in the College QIP with priority being given to developing a more coherent approach**.** The team **affirms** the action being taken to strengthen student engagement in quality assurance

2.32     The team concludes that there are mechanisms in place to encourage student participation in managing the quality of their learning opportunities, and there is evidence of improvements being made in response to the student voice. The College is aware of the

need to further develop its mechanisms for engaging all higher education students and has put in place a plan of action to achieve this. The team concludes that the Expectation is met. Any action needed to address the area of weakness is already underway and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.33      The College's responsibilities for assessment and the processes by which these are fulfilled are described in paragraphs 1.32 and 1.33. Regulations governing assessment are outlined in a generic College Assessment Policy and provide clear guidance to staff on providing feedback, handling the late submission of work, academic malpractice and appeals against assessment. Throughout the Policy appropriate reference is made to when the awarding partner's processes are to be applied. In addition, there is a section in the College Quality Manual which provides advice on the planning and design of assessment tasks. Assessment boards for university courses are held in accordance with the processes prescribed by the respective degree-awarding body. The College has full responsibility for arranging assessment boards for higher national qualifications, for which college-devised terms of reference are in place. Information regarding assessment is provided to students through course handbooks, module specifications and assignment briefs.

2.34      The team reviewed assessment regulations, course handbooks, programme and module specifications, assessment schedules, assignment briefs and external examiner reports. This process was supported by discussions with senior and teaching staff, and students.

2.35      Teaching staff prepare and publish clear schedules of the complete assessment cycle for their course, ensuring students are provided with regular and planned opportunities for demonstrating the achievement of learning. The College uses a range of assessment strategies, including live work briefs based on real-life problems and tasks encouraged to develop a range of professional and vocational skills. Assessment boards are operated in accordance with published regulations and clearly document the outcomes of assessment decisions.

2.36      On the whole, information provided to students on assessment is clear. Assignment briefs are detailed and clearly articulate what is expected and how this can be achieved. This is supplemented by verbal information during teaching sessions to help contextualise tasks. Information on assessment regulations, including academic malpractice, is not always contained in course handbooks and in some cases supplied as a separate booklet or on the VLE. Some students the team met were not fully aware of the written guidance available on referencing and avoiding plagiarism (see recommendation under Expectation C).

2.37      The College states that it uses anti-plagiarism software to encourage students to adopt good academic practice and as a tool to help staff detect plagiarism. However, the team found that the software is not consistently used across all courses and most students the team met had not had access to the 'originality reports' generated by the software. While the team acknowledges that the use of anti-plagiarism software may not be appropriate for all types of assessment, it is important to set clear expectations for both staff and students. The team therefore **recommends** that the College develops and implements a clear process for the use of anti-plagiarism software which gives appropriate consideration to the nature of assessment.

2.38      Students confirmed that feedback both verbal and written is timely and constructive, identifying strengths and areas for improvement. College-devised feedback sheets make

clear whether feedback is formative or summative. External examiner reports provide a positive account of the College's management of assessment with several making reference to the detailed and supportive feedback provided to students.

2.39      To conclude, the College's approach to assessment ensures students are provided with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the achievement of intended learning outcomes for their course of study and the Expectation is met. Having a clear process for the use of anti-plagiarism software will support better assessment conduct. However, this identified area for improvement does not have a significant impact on the College's overall management of assessment and is considered to present a low risk.

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

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

### Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External examining*

### Findings

2.40    For university courses, the College follows the relevant degree-awarding body's regulations for external examining. In all cases, the University is responsible for the selection, appointment and induction of external examiners. For Oxford Brookes courses, the external examiner may be appointed in consultation with the College. External examiner reports for Greenwich and Kingston relate to a network of colleges delivering the same course, whereas Oxford Brookes' reports look at each partner separately. The College's responsibilities for university courses relate mainly to the provision of timely information to external examiners and to taking appropriate action in response to recommendations raised in reports, in consultation with university staff.

2.41    Pearson selects, appoints and inducts external examiners who undertake an annual visit to the College to sample assessed work and comment on the quality of the provision. For higher national awards, the College is responsible for responding to recommendations arising from external examiner reports.

2.42    In reviewing the College's approach to meeting the Expectation, the team considered external examiner reports, course SEDs, QIPs and minutes of meetings. The team also met a range of staff and students.

2.43    In general, external examiner reports provide positive accounts of the College's management of learning opportunities. Where recommendations have been raised, subsequent reports confirm that appropriate action has been taken to address these. Minutes of university assessment boards provide evidence that these are attended by external examiners, and this allows for staff to meet examiners in person

2.44    The College operates effective processes for reviewing and responding to external examiner reports within the context of its agreements with its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Course teams meet to discuss the content of reports and any arising recommendations which relate specifically to College delivery of the course. For university provision, staff discuss issues with the corresponding University link tutor to decide the appropriate action to be taken. However, the College's degree-awarding bodies are responsible for preparing and submitting a formal itemised response to the external examiner. For both university and higher national provision, actions from reports inform the annual self-evaluation process and are addressed through a course-level QIP. Progress against this plan is monitored through subsequent course meetings which take place once a term. The HEWG takes a collective view of external examiner feedback identifying common themes across courses to inform the college-level QIP.

2.45    External examiner reports are shared with students although the mechanism for doing this varies across courses. In most cases reports are made available through the VLE, in other instances they are discussed at staff meetings to which student representatives are invited. Students confirmed that they are aware of the role of the external examiner, some having engaged with them during their annual visit to the College. Not all students the team met were fully aware of the existence of external examiner reports, but when prompted confirmed that this information could be obtained from academic staff, if necessary.

2.46    The team concludes that the College makes appropriate use of external examining processes to provide independent and objective input into the management and review of its higher education provision. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.47     Higher education courses are subject to the College's internal quality review cycle. In addition, university courses are required to conform to the degree-awarding body's annual monitoring procedure. The processes for reviewing courses and the expectations of staff involved in preparing the paperwork for review are set out in the College Quality Handbook. Each course team is expected to complete a SED, which incorporates a QIP, which is regularly updated and developed throughout the year, informed by discussions at termly course meetings. The review process culminates with the approval of a final version of the SED accompanied by a QIP, identifying changes to be made in the forthcoming year. Course SEDs feed into curriculum-level, and ultimately college-level, SEDs with corresponding QIPs. The HEWG maintains oversight of the review processes through the receipt of SEDs and by monitoring progress against the College higher education QIP.

2.48     The review team tested the effectiveness of how the College's review processes work in practice by looking at SEDs, annual monitoring reports (for university courses), external examiner reports, module evaluation forms, QIPs, and minutes of relevant meetings. The team also held a number of meetings with staff and students.

2.49     Through the work of the HEWG the Quality Impact Manager ensures the methodical and consistent application of the course review process. Review follows a prescribed cycle with key dates for the completion of SEDs and other associated paperwork identified in a quality calendar.The self-evaluation process serves both as a continuous check on the academic health of courses and as a holistic review of learning opportunities. Teaching staff confirmed that by approaching course review in this way minor changes to delivery can be made promptly without having to wait until the end of the year, providing a good balance between quality assurance and enhancement. Discussions at termly course meetings facilitate the review process and allow contributions from all those involved in the delivery of the course.

2.50     SEDs provide an evaluative commentary of aspects of delivery that impact on academic standards and the student learning experience, as well as a comprehensive review of progress against the previous year's improvement plan. Information used to inform the review process is wide ranging and includes student achievement and progression data, feedback from module evaluations and surveys, and reports from external examiners. Action planning demonstrates a good correlation between identified areas for improvement and recommendations arising from external reviews that have taken place during the year.

2.51     The HEWG uses the outcomes from course and curriculum reviews to identify overarching themes which require college-level action and these are addressed through a higher education QIP. This enables the College to identify strategic priorities for the forthcoming year and to carefully plan how these cross-college improvements will be made.

2.52     The team concludes that the processes for course review and monitoring are operating effectively and enable the College to make planned improvements to the student learning experience. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code,** *Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals*

**Findings**

2.53      The College has a clear Student Complaints Procedure that includes both formal and informal mechanisms for raising concerns. There is a well-presented student guide, 'How to Complain', available to all complainants. The mechanisms for academic appeals differ by awarding partner but in each case the College's role is clearly defined. The College Assessment Policy lays out the internal processes for handling academic appeals, with final recourse to appeal to the degree-awarding body or awarding organisation. This includes the College's responsibility for some stages of an academic appeal.

2.54      The team tested the appropriateness of the College's processes for dealing with complaints and appeals, and the way in which this information is made available to students, through a review of the written procedures and course handbooks. The team also met with staff and students.

2.55      The College states that information regarding complaints and appeals is made available to students in course handbooks and during the induction process. The team found that appropriate high level information outlining complaints and appeal processes is published in most but not all course handbooks. Although students are generally aware of who to ask about accessing formal processes, fuller written information could be provided in all course handbooks (see recommendation under Expectation C). However, the definitive sources of information are not referenced fully, and in one case the course handbook conflicts with the general complaints procedure.

2.56      In almost all cases complaints and appeals are dealt with informally through discussions with a member of academic or support staff. Appeals are subject to both the College's and relevant awarding partner's processes. The College stated that in the last three years all academic appeals have been dealt with locally by the College and none have needed to be referred to the degree-awarding body or awarding organisation. Similarly, no formal complaints have been received by the College in the last two academic years. Although there is limited evidence of the formal processes being used, the team is satisfied that students are generally aware of their right to exercise formal processes for appeals and complaints. Students the team met confirmed that they preferred to raise concerns informally and would ask staff for information on formal procedures, if the need arose. Students also have access to independent advice from Student Services regarding appeals and complaints.

2.57      The review team concludes that, while written information on complaints and appeals could be made clearer in course handbooks, the College's approach to handling complaints and appeals meets the Expectation. In particular, students are satisfied with the informal opportunities available to them to raise concerns or to appeal an academic decision. Therefore, this Expectation presents a low risk to the quality of learning opportunities.

**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**

2.58     The College's main responsibility for fulfilling this Expectation is in its management of arrangements with employers to deliver compulsory work-based learning for the Foundation Degree in Motorsport Engineering. Access to work-based learning is an explicit entry requirement for the Postgraduate Certificate in Education and therefore the arrangement with employers is outside the scope of the College's responsibilities. The College has in place a set of standard documentation supplied to employers at various stages to make clear what is expected of them in providing a work placement. There is also a workplace coordinator who is responsible for liaison with employers. Students are also provided with guidance on 'how to achieve a successful work placement' and any health and safety implications given the nature of placement in the engineering sector.

2.59     The team scrutinised the information available to both students and employers. Meetings were also held with staff and students involved in the Foundation Degree in Motorsport Engineering.

2.60     A systematic approach is applied to supporting students in undertaking compulsory work placements. Employers are vetted for their appropriateness, and this includes a health and safety visit by staff to the premises followed by a written report. A summary register of employers offering work placement opportunities across all the College's activities is maintained. Standard letters are issued to both students and employers to confirm the formal arrangements for the placement and to provide the foundation for a successful experience for both parties. Students the team met felt that they were well prepared for placements which were a valuable learning experience.

2.61     Employers are not responsible for any formal assessments associated with work placements and this allows the College to retain control over the quality of the design and marking of assessments. The quality assurance processes for ensuring assessment is valid and reliable is the same as those for other forms of assessment.

2.62     Overall, the review team concludes that the College has in place effective mechanisms for managing arrangements with providers of work-based learning, which forms the only area of its activity covered directly by this Expectation. The processes in place ensure students have access to work placements which allow them to achieve and demonstrate the intended outcomes for their course. Therefore, Expectation B10 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code,** *Chapter B11: Research degrees*

**Findings**

2.63     The College does not offer research degrees and the Expectation is therefore not applicable.

# Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.64     In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The 10 applicable Expectations in this judgement area are met with low levels of risk.

2.65     The team identified four features of good practice relating to: the involvement of employers in course planning and design (Expectation B1); the positive impact of proactive partnerships with external bodies on learning and teaching (Expectation B3); the wide-ranging and high quality of learning opportunities on the HNC/HND in Public Services; and the high level of support provided to students (Expectation B4).

2.66     The review team also made one recommendation and three affirmations of action. The recommendation relates to the more effective use of anti-plagiarism software by providing clear guidance on when and how it should be used. This recommendation was made under Expectation B6, and in the view of the team poses a low risk to the management of this area as it relates to the need to develop clearer processes for the use of existing software to improve assessment practice. Another recommendation made under Expectation C, which relates to updating course handbooks, is also of relevance to this area as some handbooks did not always contain full information on academic malpractice, and complaints and appeals. The three affirmations are in recognition of the action the College is taking to upgrade IT resources, improve the VLE and strengthen student engagement.

2.67     In summary, there is low risk to the present or likely future management of the quality of student learning opportunities. Therefore, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

# 3    Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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

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

**Findings**

3.1    The website communicates information on the College's mission, the range of provision on offer and the entry criteria for individual courses. Prospective applicants are also able to request a copy of the prospectus through the website. During the course of their study students are provided with course handbooks (incorporating programme and module specifications), assignment briefs and internally produced careers information. Staff are provided with comprehensive guidance on the processes for managing higher education through the College Quality Handbook and policies and standard templates for course approval and review. The College VLE is used to make course information available to students in an electronic format.

3.2    The marketing department coordinates the review of public-facing information in liaison with academic staff, and in accordance with a prescribed annual timetable. For university courses, information is approved by the relevant degree-awarding body before publication. All College policies are also reviewed annually and version controlled, with an identifiable person responsible for approving any changes to content. For university courses, handbooks and programme specifications conform to the relevant degree-awarding body's template. For higher national courses, each team is responsible for producing a course handbook. All handbooks are checked by the Head of Department and formally signed off by the HEWG.

3.3    The team reviewed the College website, the VLE, the Prospectus, College policies, course handbooks and assignment briefs. The team also met a range of staff and students to understand the processes for managing information and to obtain student views on the quality of information produced by the College.

3.4    Students confirmed that the information available prior to applying for higher education study at the College was informative and helpful in selecting the most appropriate course. A review of course handbooks revealed that they do not always contain full information on intended learning outcomes, academic malpractice and complaints and appeals. Although students were generally satisfied with the information available to them during their course of study there is a degree of reliance on the verbal information provided by staff. The team acknowledges that a prescribed template for course handbooks may not be appropriate, but students would benefit from receiving essential information in one definitive document. Therefore, the team **recommends** the College ensure all course handbooks contain full and relevant information, and that these are made available through the College's virtual learning environment.

3.5    Although the College intends to make all relevant course information available through the VLE the team found that this is not always the case. The introduction of minimum standards for the VLE is supporting the College in ensuring relevant information is uploaded and that it is consistent across all provision (see affirmation under Expectation B3).

3.6      Appropriate checks are in place to manage the accuracy and reliability of information. Academic and support staff are clear on their responsibilities for contributing to the review and updating of information on the website and in documents. Course SEDs require staff to comment on the information available to students, and where improvements are identified these feed into QIPs. The HEWG, whose membership includes the Marketing Manager, has oversight of all information produced by the College for its internal and external audiences.

3.7      Team concludes that the College has in place effective mechanisms for assuring the quality of information produced about its higher education. There are some minor inconsistencies in handbooks and the way in which this information is made available to students, but this does not present a high risk to the management of information. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

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

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

3.8    In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information the College produces about its provision, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.9    The team found that overall information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. However, there are some inconsistencies in the information provided in handbooks on course learning outcomes, academic malpractice, and complaints and appeals. The team has made one recommendation to address the latter relating to the need to amend existing documentation and to make this more readily available. This presents a low risk to the management of this area and it is therefore concluded that the quality of information **meets** UK expectations.

# 4      Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

**Findings**

4.1      The College has a systematic approach to the enhancement of its higher education provision at provider level. The strategic aims identify the College's priorities for enhancement which include raising student achievement, providing high quality teaching and support, and developing resources. The HEWG, which comprises academic, support, quality and senior staff, plays a pivotal role in the implementation and operational management of enhancement initiatives. The HEWG has clear terms of reference which are focused on enhancement of the learning experience in a number of areas. This focus includes: strategic and operational higher education development; the student's learning journey; employability; staff development; monitoring of performance and progress against the higher education QIP.

4.2      The College's three-tier self-evaluation process, which works at course, curriculum and College level, is the main vehicle for identifying and planning for improvements. The higher education QIP brings together a range of initiatives across the College's provision as well as recording progress against objectives.

4.3      The team tested the College's approach to enhancement through a review of College strategies, minutes of the HEWG, SEDs and associated QIPs. A number of meetings were also held with a range of staff and students.

4.4      The higher education QIP captures themes emerging from course and curriculum level SEDs resulting in identified areas for improvement addressed through time-bound actions, with key performance indicators to measure success. Scrutiny of HEWG minutes indicates that the Group's activities cover a range of enhancement initiatives, though often with a relatively operational focus. While minutes make limited reference to the higher education QIP, HEWG members saw the review of actions identified within the Plan as central to the work of the Group.

4.5      The team found evidence of enhancement in practice through a number of college-level initiatives intended to improve the quality of learning opportunities. The implementation of the web-based HOW2 software has promoted the sharing of good practice in higher education teaching and learning and stimulated innovation in assessment, for example the consideration of group work and peer assessment. The College Assessment Forum, although not specific to higher education, is used to develop consistency in assessment practice across the College and focuses on improving record keeping, developing robust marking practices and providing high quality feedback to students. There has also been a strategic approach to the development of online resources and e-book packages to respond to student feedback on the shortage of books at key times.

4.6      Staff the team met considered student feedback as a valuable input into course level improvement and institutional enhancement. In some cases College initiatives to improve academic or non-academic facilities taken in response to feedback had not been fully taken up by students. During meetings, students confirmed that in general their feedback was taken seriously and contributed to the enhancement of learning opportunities. However, the part-time mode of study makes it challenging for most students to fully engage in feedback opportunities, particularly those at college-level which may contribute to enhancement. The College recognises this as an area for further development and is

considering the ways in which higher education students can be more involved in enhancement (see affirmation under Expectation B5).

4.7      The strong partnerships with its degree-awarding bodies and other local colleges facilitate enhancement within the College. Regular and planned engagements with University partners support the College in delivering teaching that is comparable to that of its degree-awarding bodies. Local initiatives with other further education colleges, including participating in a network for peer observation of teaching, has led to opportunities for the wider sharing and dissemination of good practice. There is also strategic interaction with employers in the development of the curriculum and decision making on new courses (see good practice under Expectation B3).

4.8      The team concludes that the College, in partnership with other external bodies, meets the Expectation for Enhancement. There is strategic oversight of higher education through the work of the HEWG and a planned approach to making college-level improvements through the implementation of the higher education QIP. Therefore, this Expectation is met and the risk is low.

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

# Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.9　　In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There is appropriate oversight of higher education within the College which enables deliberate action to be taken at a strategic level to enhance learning opportunities.

4.10　　The team did not identify any recommendations or good practice. However, the College is aware of the need to further develop student engagement at college-level, and is addressing this through its improvement planning processes. The team recognises the action being taken by the College through an affirmation made under Expectation B5. The team also acknowledges the positive impact of good practice located under Expectation B3, which relates to the proactive engagements with external bodies to enhance learning opportunities. The team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

# 5    Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

**Findings**

5.1      The majority of higher education students studying at the College are part-time, and many are in employment and using their course of study for career progression. The College's main approach to student employability is therefore through curriculum design and assessment, intended to fulfil students' career aspirations. The College achieves this through strong links with a network of local employers that support its delivery of higher education.

5.2      Close links with employers enables the College to address local and regional employment requirements and support economic growth and development. Employers inform the strategic direction of the College's higher education provision and are involved in the approval of new provision to ensure currency and relevance to the employment sector. Course teams also hold employer forums to forge new links with employers and to obtain constructive feedback on College delivery of higher education. Relationships with employers are used to provide students with access to work-based learning opportunities. Examples include live music performances, work experience with McLaren for engineering students and industrial mentoring.

5.3      Curriculum delivery, learning activities and assessment tasks are designed to enhance student employability. Staff involved in teaching are often practising professionals who are able to provide an employment focus and expose students to work-based learning opportunities. The emphasis on employability is achieved through work-based assessment tasks developed in conjunction with employers, external guest speakers from industry, compulsory skills development modules, and the use of learning activities such as problem-solving and presentations to develop a broader range of interpersonal skills. For example, graphic design students are involved in the annual redesign of the College's prospectus. The wide-ranging opportunities available on the public services courses also encourage student employability and personal development (see findings under Expectation B3).

5.4      Independent advice and guidance is also available through careers advisors. One-to-one guidance interviews are used as an opportunity for students to discuss their long-term career aspirations and to support students in making an informed choice about their future. On request, students are also able to access support for obtaining work experience.

5.5      The College is committed to supporting the employability of its students, with a tailored approach to meet the needs of its diverse student body. There are also plans to further improve student employability by establishing a more coherent approach to embedding work-based learning into curriculum delivery across all courses, and by setting up a college-level employer forum.

# Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27-29 of the Higher Education Review handbook

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

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: http://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.