



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Grafton College Ltd trading as Grafton College of Management Sciences

June 2016

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Grafton College Ltd trading as Grafton College of Management Sciences. The review took place from 20 to 23 June 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Martin Stimson
- Dr Fiona Thompson
- Ms Cara Williams (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Grafton College Ltd trading as Grafton College of Management Sciences 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 (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

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

In reviewing Grafton College Ltd trading as Grafton College of Management Sciences the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability, and Digital Literacy,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are found on page 4 followed by numbered paragraphs starting on page 5.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.³ A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).⁴ For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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

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

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

⁴ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/RSCD.aspx

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Grafton College Ltd trading as Grafton College of Management Sciences

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Grafton College Ltd trading as Grafton College of Management Sciences.

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

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Grafton College Ltd trading as Grafton College of Management Sciences.

By October 2016:

- review the student membership of the Academic Board and its subcommittees to align with practice (Expectation B5).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that Grafton College Ltd trading as Grafton College of Management Sciences is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The steps taken to ensure a thorough analysis of progression rates for programmes and units (Expectation B2).

Theme: Student Employability

The College has taken strategic steps to make employability a key theme within its academic offering for students. Employability, along with enterprise, sustainability and creativity are the four principles within its Strategic Plan. The College has a strong commitment to providing high quality vocational programmes which are skills-focused and employer-relevant and which support employability. To support this commitment the College developed an employability action plan for students and for staff and has taken steps to engage effectively with employers. The employability offer is currently optional for students but there are plans to embed these into the curriculum. The College has also set up a business incubation unit to provide support and guidance to students wishing to set up their own business.

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

About Grafton College Ltd trading as Grafton College of Management Sciences

Grafton College Ltd trading as Grafton College of Management Sciences (the College) was founded in 2004. It is an alternative provider of higher education provision and operates from one campus in Shepherd's Bush. The College has been approved by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills to provide designated programmes which qualify for support from the Student Loans Company. The College's current academic provision is limited and consists of one Higher National programme in Business which is awarded by Pearson. Two hundred and seventy full-time students are enrolled on business and marketing pathways. The majority of students are from the UK and the EU. The College employs 10 academic members of staff, including part-time and hourly paid staff. A further eight management and administrative staff support the academic provision.

The College's mission is to provide a high class learning environment and access to learning opportunities for all students regardless of their background and prior level of education. The College aims to establish a reputation for high quality provision across a range of business-related programmes.

Since the 2014 Review for Educational Oversight (REO) by QAA, the College has streamlined its academic procedures and adopted a more strategic approach to managing higher education. It achieved matrix accreditation in 2015. The College has built on the two aspects of good practice identified in the REO report in relation to annual programme reviews and student support in the form of timetabled study skills programme. The three advisable and two desirable recommendations from the previous review have been fully addressed. The College has revised its management and committee structures, clearly aligned the terms of reference to the business of the committee and any actions taken are now formally documented in the committee minutes. The College has also revised its lesson observation reporting process to include student views and an evaluation of the student learning experience with reference to the learning outcomes. Finally, the College introduced a regular audit of its published information to ensure it provides consistent and reliable information for students and other stakeholders.

The College has responded to the recommendations from a full investigation under QAA's Concerns Scheme in 2015. This is discussed further in this report.

Explanation of the findings about Grafton College Ltd trading as Grafton College of Management Sciences

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College delivers one full-time programme consisting of two pathways in business and management, leading to the award of a Higher National Diploma, which is part of the national qualifications framework and awarded by Pearson. The programme consists of a number of core units, and a range of electives from which the College selects. The programme is delivered at level 4 (120 credits) and level 5 (120+ credits) and, in providing a minimum credit value of 240, qualifies the learner for the award of a Higher National Diploma (HND). The College uses the guidance supplied by Pearson in the delivery of the programme, for the sequencing of units and the combination of core units and electives.

1.2 Academic standards for the Higher National Diploma are embedded in the qualification specification and guidelines published by Pearson, including key aspects of the assessment of learning outcomes, assessment criteria and threshold academic standards. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.3 The team examined documentation including the Pearson qualification specification, course leaflets, and the College's credit breakdown information and explored the Expectation with staff and students through a range of meetings.

1.4 Pearson awards are aligned with the FHEQ and with Subject Benchmark Statements. The awarding organisation's Academic Management Review Report 2015-16 and external verifier reports confirm that the College adequately maintains the academic standards set by the awarding organisation. The Pearson qualification specification for the HND references the FHEQ and the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement.

1.5 The College identified the programme units it offers through an analysis of market demand, and in response to feedback from students and the delivery team. Progression through and transition between levels 4 and 5 is managed through a comprehensive module induction. Students welcomed the induction process and noted a change in expectations and challenge between levels through teaching, learning and assessment. External examiner reports demonstrate that academic standards are being met.

1.6 The College's policies and its teaching observation process are aligned to relevant sections of the Quality Code, and meetings with staff identified a clear understanding of the Code and how it relates to their roles.

1.7 The review team concludes that the College understands and fulfils its responsibilities to secure academic standards. The use of external reference points such as the FHEQ, as defined by Pearson, confirms that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8 The College has separate management and governance structures. These have defined lines of responsibility and accountability. Academic Board is the main body within the governance structure, with six subcommittees that have delegated responsibility for programme management, assessment, admissions, attendance monitoring, students' welfare and staff-student liaison. There are terms of reference for each committee identifying the scope of deliberations and membership.

1.9 Academic frameworks and regulations are determined by Pearson. The College effectively operates within these frameworks as affirmed by Pearson's review processes. Within their delegated responsibilities, the College applies its own regulations for academic misconduct, internal verification, mitigating circumstances, and reasonable adjustments, which are readily available on the College website and the virtual learning environment (VLE). These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.10 The team tested this Expectation through consideration of a range of documentation including committee minutes (Attendance Monitoring; Programme Management; Academic Board), external examiner reports and awarding body annual management reports, and through meetings with students and staff.

1.11 The team recognised that the current committee structure is relatively new. The recording of meetings through the minutes is still developing such that more recent minutes capture the details of discussions effectively. The membership of committees, as defined within the terms of reference, did not reflect the practice with regard to student representation (see the recommendation in Expectation B5).

1.12 Pearson external examiner reports and annual management reports are routinely considered via relevant committees such as Academic Board and at Programme Management Committee (PMC) meetings. The Assessment Board considers student achievements and outcomes of the external examiner visit and report as well as module review. Through this Board actions are identified for addressing any issues arising. This approach ensures that marks are awarded in line with Pearson's academic framework for the award of credit. The operation of College processes relating to this framework are reported on via the Pearson annual management report and the most recent report indicated effective implementation. Staff and students demonstrated a clear understanding of the role of the committees and the team considers that overall the committee structures are working effectively while recognising they need time to fully embed.

1.13 The College has recently established an Advisory Board with the aim of providing 'a formal platform to enable nominated external independent members to review College strategy and policy and to advise the Directors upon the future direction and operational management of the College'. At the time of the visit, the exact membership had not been established.

1.14 After consideration of the evidence and discussions with staff and students, the team considers that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.15 Pearson is responsible for providing the definitive information for the HND award including the overall qualification specification. Based on the information provided by Pearson, the College produced definitive programme information such as a tailored programme specifications, which it uses as a reference point to devise its own delivery schemes and for the monitoring and review of the programmes. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.16 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of these arrangements by examining the Pearson qualification specification, the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment and Standards Verification Level 4-7, the programme handbook and module study guides as well as the responsibility checklist. The review team also met senior and academic staff and students, and was provided with a demonstration of the VLE.

1.17 The College maintains a definitive record of the nature and scope of its current provision. The programme handbook for the HND Business 2015-16 includes a contextualised programme specification which references the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. The programme handbook also incorporates the aims and learning outcomes for each unit of study. The College has recently revised modules study guides which include details of each programme unit. The programme handbook and unit guides have been standardised to include other aspects, such as student support arrangements, teaching strategies and assessment criteria to enhance student learning. They are made available to staff and students in hard copy, and on the VLE.

1.18 Students the review team met confirmed that detailed information on their programme is made available to them in a timely manner at the start of their programme during induction. Students were clear on the shape of the programme, the overall requirements of assessment and grading criteria, and the levels of performance required to successfully complete their qualification. Students also confirmed that access to detailed module guides for each unit is available to them through the VLE.

1.19 The 16 units of the Higher National Diploma constitute the reference point for the summative assessments, the recording of outcomes, and the award of credit. Curriculum teams reference the qualification descriptor to inform their teaching and assessment practice and ensure assignments focus on skills development. Teaching staff are familiar with the qualification and contextualised programme specifications and their purpose. Changes to the curriculum are approved at Assessment Board, discussed, recorded and signed off at Academic Board, and disseminated to staff and students by the Head of Academics.

1.20 The review team concludes that the College meets Expectation A2.2 and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.21 The responsibilities of Pearson and the College are detailed in the responsibilities checklist. The College's responsibilities for programme approval are limited. Pearson is responsible for ensuring that academic standards are secure and established when a programme is developed and approved. The awarding organisation also takes responsibility for confirming that programmes meet the qualification descriptors and threshold standards specified in the FHEQ and in Subject Benchmark Statements. Pearson approves the delivery of its programmes by the College with written notification of approval provided prior to course commencement.

1.22 The College's Academic Board is the senior authority which determines the course portfolio. Programme design responsibilities for the College include the identification of programme units to be delivered according to the rules of combination set by the awarding organisation and the setting of assessment activities at the appropriate level for the qualification. The awarding organisation's own processes for course approval and the clearly defined responsibilities of both parties would enable this Expectation to be met.

1.23 The review team considered College and awarding organisation documentation relating to programme approval. Internal processes for approval of programmes including selection of unit combinations and setting of assessments were discussed in meetings with senior staff, teaching and support staff, and students.

1.24 The College has not introduced new academic programmes for a number of years. The review team therefore examined the existing arrangements for approving new combinations of units and the internal processes for approval. Senior and teaching staff clearly understood their delegated responsibilities for programme design and the role of the College's Academic Board in the approval process. They confidently described the programme design processes adopted which corresponds to the documentation seen by the team, confirming that the College operates appropriate procedures for programme design and complies with Pearson's guidelines and academic regulations. The College confirmed that it delivers core units and electives in an agreed sequence and approved by Pearson, avoiding what Pearson notes as inappropriate subject combinations. The College indicated that if any new programmes were proposed they would be considered by senior staff and approved by Academic Board.

1.25 Information relating to the setting of academic standards established at the approval stage is available in the Pearson qualification specification, which includes the intended learning outcomes. This information is locally contextualised, and included in the programme handbook in the form of a tailored programme specification. Credit combinations are clearly articulated in College documentation. Staff responsible for quality and standards understood their responsibilities for academic standards and the provision of learning opportunities as indicated in the responsibilities checklist.

1.26 The College follows Pearson guidelines thoroughly, and implements its responsibilities for the selection of programme units, the setting of appropriate assessments and the contextualisation of the programme information carefully. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met, and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.27 The responsibilities of the College and its awarding organisation for maintaining academic standards, including the award of credits and qualifications, are set out in a responsibilities checklist. Ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of programmes offered by the College lies with Pearson. The College is responsible for the delivery of the approved programmes and the assessment of students in line with the qualification specification and unit guides. Pearson ensures through external scrutiny, including the use of external examiners that the achievement of the relevant learning outcomes has been adequately demonstrated through assessment.

1.28 The College has an Assessment Policy and an Assessment Malpractice Policy and operates an Assessment Board which confirms the achievement of unit learning outcomes prior to confirmation by Pearson. Programme documentation identifies the award of credit where the achievement of the learning outcomes occurs. The College uses its policies for effective staffing to ensure that teaching staff are appropriately qualified to deliver programmes at the correct academic level. The College maintains threshold academic standards through the implementation of its Assessment Policy and through assessment-related staff development activities. This approach would enable Expectation A3.2 to be met.

1.29 The review team considered the effectiveness of these practices by examining programme documentation such as handbooks and unit descriptors, assignment briefs, internal verification reports, external examiner reports, staff CVs and staff development activities. The team also held meetings with students, senior staff, teaching staff and staff responsible for quality processes.

1.30 The documentation confirms that the implementation of systems for the assessment of students by the College follows agreed processes. The PMC routinely discusses the setting of appropriate assessment tasks and the College supports new and existing teaching staff in relation to standardisation of assessments. Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of the systems and processes used to determine whether students have achieved the learning outcomes of the award through assessments. This is supported by the external examiner reports which indicate that Pearson's requirements for assessment and the award of credit are implemented carefully.

1.31 The documentation examined by the team also confirms that staff are appropriately qualified and supported to design and deliver assessment at the appropriate level. Senior staff and teaching staff confirmed that staff development and support mechanisms enabled them to carry out their assessment duties appropriately. Teaching staff also demonstrated a good understanding of the Quality Code and how they make use of it to maintain academic standards. Students showed a clear understanding of the assessment process.

1.32 The review team found that assignments designed by the College are consistently and accurately linked to programme and unit learning outcomes. The assessments conform to Pearson's assessment guidelines and show the relevant level of authenticity and quality required by the awarding organisation. Assessment follows a three-stage process of assessment brief review, marking of assessments and internal standards verification, and external verification of assessment decisions by Pearson. A comprehensive standardisation process is in place where the assessors reflect carefully on the marks awarded to ensure they are accurately awarded and reflect the achievement of the learning outcomes and that threshold standards are met. External examiner reports confirm the maintenance of academic standards and highlight the consistent application of grade criteria.

1.33 The College's rigorous implementation of Pearson's assessment requirements and processes, including standardisation of grading and the internal verification of marking, combined with the scrutiny of assessment decisions by external examiners, ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.34 Overall responsibility for monitoring and review in relation to academic standards, and ensuring alignment with the UK threshold academic standards, rests with the awarding organisation, who makes use of external examiners and undertakes periodic academic management reviews (AMRs). In addition, the College undertakes an annual review of programmes involving external expertise, which is overseen by Academic Board. The arrangements in place would enable Expectation A3.3 to be met.

1.35 The review team tested this Expectation by examining College documentation relating to monitoring and review, including internal and external monitoring and review reports. The team also explored the effectiveness of processes in place through discussions with senior staff, staff involved with the monitoring and review process, and students.

1.36 Academic Board, through the PMC, has oversight of the programme monitoring and review process. The College's annual programme review is detailed and reflects on the individual units as well as the whole programme. It makes use of independent external expertise and is undertaken on an annual basis, and has a number of clearly defined aims. The latest report concludes that the academic standards of the programme meet both the expectations and control benchmarks of Pearson and the expectations of the Quality Code. The annual review report also contains actions, identifies good practice and areas of enhancement.

1.37 Reports of the AMRs conducted by Pearson confirm that the College processes for monitoring and reviewing programmes are appropriate for the level of responsibility the College has in this area.

1.38 The College effectively implements its processes for review and monitoring which assist in ensuring the maintenance of academic standards. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.39 The College's main source of external and independent expertise in maintaining academic standards are the external examiners appointed by Pearson. The role and responsibilities of these external standards verifiers are clearly defined in Pearson documentation. Pearson appoints the external examiners who visit the College and produce reports on a regular basis on academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. External examiner reports are considered via relevant committees such as Academic Board and at PMC meetings. The College also makes use of independent external expertise in programme monitoring and review, observation of teaching and the development of its quality assurance processes. This approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.40 To evaluate the College's use of externality to set and maintain academic standards, the team met academic and senior staff. The team also scrutinised external examiner reports and minutes of relevant committees.

1.41 External examiner reports are positive and identify that standards are met and assessment processes are valid and robust. Where issues are raised in the reports the College uses the committee structure effectively to identify actions to be taken and subsequent reports from Pearson confirm the effectiveness of such actions.

1.42 The College also draws on external expertise to support the development of its quality processes and procedures. For example, it engaged the services of a consultancy company to support students and staff in their engagement with relevant aspects of quality assurance and employed a consultant, who is experienced in higher education, to act as Quality Assessor and as a member of the management team. The College has also recently introduced peer observation of teaching staff mapped to both the Quality Code and the UK Professional Standards Framework which is carried out by an external observer. The annual programme monitoring process also benefits from the input of an external expert. The use of externals has enabled the College to develop a more robust and rigorous approach to quality assurance and enhancement with processes and policies referenced to, and aligned with, the Quality Code and with staff familiar with its use. This has also contributed to enhancement opportunities for students and staff relating to employability as shown in the events calendar and referred to in meetings.

1.43 The team considered that the College is using external input effectively in both the setting and maintaining of standards and the enhancement of activities. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the awarding organisation: Summary of findings

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

1.45 The College has rigorous policies and procedures for maintaining academic standards. The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at Grafton College Ltd trading as Grafton College of Management Sciences offered on behalf of the awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College's responsibilities for the design, development and approval of programmes are limited. The programmes the College delivers are designed and approved by Pearson. The awarding organisation approves the College as a delivery centre and the programmes it is allowed to offer. The College can choose the units for delivery within the rules of combination specified by Pearson. The College is also required to implement Pearson's procedures for the design and approval of learning and related assessment activity, which is scrutinised by internal and external verifiers. This approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.2 The review team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation including minutes and terms of reference of key academic committees, and background documents. Details were explored in meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, as well as students.

2.3 The College has not developed any new courses since it was approved by Pearson to offer the HNDs in 2011. In discussions with the team, staff confirmed that any portfolio expansion would be discussed by the senior management team and final approval obtained from Academic Board. For the current provision the College agrees the electives with Pearson and publishes its customised programme offer in a course leaflet. In determining which electives it will offer the College solicits feedback from staff, student enquiries, and from student destination data.

2.4 The College fully implements Pearson's procedures for the design of assessments. The College sets assessment activities at the appropriate level for the qualification, making effective use of Pearson's guidance documentation. The suitability of assessment briefs is checked through an internal verification process and augmented by Pearson's assessment approval service. External examiner reports confirm that the College develops quality assessments.

2.5 The review team concludes that the College has effective processes in place for the development of programmes that are appropriate for the level of responsibility it has in this area. The Expectation is therefore met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.6 The College is responsible for promoting and marketing the programme of study, selecting applicants, making offers and enrolment, and the induction and orientation of new students in a timely manner. Recruitment must be undertaken in line with the Pearson *BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment (Level 4-7) 2015-16*. The awarding organisation is responsible for maintaining a register of all students enrolled on the Higher National programme. Pearson is also responsible for ensuring that the College has appropriate policies and procedures for student admissions. This is monitored through the AMR process.

2.7 The College has an Admissions and Enrolment Policy which is available to prospective students on the College website. The policy also provides significant detail on the appeals process that can be accessed by rejected applicants. The College website also clearly sets out entry requirements for each programme which are reviewed in line with amendments made by Pearson. The College has established an Admissions Committee. Its primary function is to ensure that the admission process provides equal opportunities for all suitable applicants and that it fully complies with the expectations set out within the Quality Code. The College's approach to admissions would allow Expectation B2 to be met.

2.8 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College arrangements by meeting senior and academic staff, support staff and students. The team also scrutinised policy documents, minutes from Academic Board and the Admissions Committee meetings, and internal and external monitoring reports. In addition, the review team considered the progress the College has made with the implementation of the actions relevant to this Expectation in response to the 2015 QAA Concerns investigation.

2.9 Prospective students are assisted in making informed choices with the help of programme handbook information and leaflets, the public website, information held at the College reception desk and by speaking to student support staff. This process enables students to make the transition from prospective learner to current student. Students confirmed that the information provided to them was clear and a fair representation of their experience.

2.10 The College has fully addressed the issues raised in the 2015 Cause for Concerns report and has implemented actions one, two and three from its action plan which are relevant to this Expectation. The College revised and updated the Admissions and Enrolment Policy to ensure that all applicants are assessed on their individual potential. Implementation of the policy ensures a shared understanding among all those involved in recruitment, selection and admission and contains a strategic approach to recruitment and selection by entry route. The Admissions and Enrolment Policy also allows applicants to raise their concerns or dissatisfaction with the outcome of an application decision. The College aims to resolve any concern informally, and applicants can discuss the nature of their complaint in the first instance with the Admissions Officer and receive written feedback if requested.

2.11 The College also conducts periodic audits of student admission records to ensure that records are clear. The latest audit of student admissions records, conducted in December 2015, demonstrated that all paperwork and student records were complete. In future the College will also use these audits to analyse the withdrawal and progression profile of students. It is hoped that they will also assist academic and student welfare staff in identifying and arranging timely additional learning support to enhance the achievement percentage across the various entry groups.

2.12 The College revised its admissions process and clarified the minimum threshold for entry to the Higher National Diploma programme it is running. In response to the Concerns report, the College aims to reduce systematically the number of non-standard entrants, and consequently to recruit a greater proportion of students with level 3 qualifications. This aim is enshrined in the College's Strategic Plan. The College has made a commitment to reduce the percentage of non-standard entrants (mature students) to 50 per cent in the first instance, with a systematic reduction to 30 per cent and 20 per cent thereafter.

2.13 There were no admissions in September 2015. In May 2016 the College recruited 100 students onto the HND Business programme. The review team examined a sample of student files and found that the College had applied the revised admissions process and threshold entry criteria. This has resulted in the latest intake of students being split between 63 per cent who have a level 3 qualification compared to 37 per cent entering as mature students. The team was informed that students who do not fulfil the entry requirements for the HND programme are encouraged to take a level 3 course to build a strong base for future study at level 4 and above. To facilitate this transition, the College intends to offer its own level 3 programme starting in September 2016.

2.14 The College made use of external expertise in the development of its admission policy and practices. As a result it has introduced a mandatory interview for all applicants with a standardised interview form being used as a record. This process is inclusive and linked to the College's widening participation strategy to actively recruit students from a variety of backgrounds. The College takes a holistic approach to admissions by considering experience, skills, ability and motivation in addition to academic qualifications, when evaluating an application. The College does this by referring to references, the applicant's personal statement and by interviewing every applicant. Admissions staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and which criteria to apply when making an admission decision. Students reported that the admissions process is rigorous and fair.

2.15 The College has revised the admissions checklist to improve upon its decision-making rationale and a record is kept on each student file. Student files the review team examined contain clear documentary evidence including the checklist, personal statement of the applicant, a standardised interview record, NARIC international qualification comparisons (where necessary), the offer letter, the enrolment letter, English and maths tests (where required), references and copies of qualification certificates.

2.16 The College action plan stated that the College will 'clarify the nature, scope and duration of acceptable work experience that can be seen as replacing academic entry qualifications'. The College confirmed its position to the review team during the review visit. The team heard that all students must meet the Pearson entry criteria by possessing a level 2 qualification alongside some aspect of work experience. This is in addition to proven competence in English for non-native speakers. The team also heard that Pearson reviews the entry qualification of every student and will only register those students who meet all aspects of the entry requirements. As a result of this the College does not, in assessing any application for entry, use work experience 'as replacing academic entry qualifications'.

2.17 Previously the College admitted a disproportionate number of mature students via the work-experience route leading to a concern that these students might under-achieve in comparison to those admitted with level 3 qualifications. The College undertook a retrospective exercise comparing student achievement by entry routes. The enquiry, carried out by an external consultant, concluded that there was no marked difference in achievement at the threshold standard of pass, but that level 3 entrants had a marginally better profile at merit and distinction levels. Subsequent Assessment Boards also separately considered the results of students by entry and compared them to ensure parity of experience and outcome. The results confirmed no adverse impact on the achievement of students from other entry routes. The latest Pearson AMR report is positive about this process. The College has firm plans to apply the process of reviewing new students' entry profiles and relating them to student attainment to all future cohorts. At the time of the review a new cohort had just started and it was too early for the team to see its implementation. The review team **affirms** the steps taken by the College to ensure a thorough analysis of progression rates for programmes and units.

2.18 The Admissions Committee which incorporates a student as a full member, meets twice yearly (or as required), reporting directly to Academic Board. The Committee monitors and reviews the effectiveness of the admissions process at least annually, using key performance indicators. Initially it was tasked with developing the new admissions procedures. Now that these are in place, the committee will also focus on annual review and monitoring.

2.19 The College has in place robust and fair policies and procedures for the recruitment, selection and admissions of students. The review team concludes that the College has implemented the actions it developed with regard to admissions in response to the recommendations made in the 2015 Concerns report. The changes made to admissions policies and practice have equipped the College to carry out admissions activities competently and there is an auditable record of decisions made. The Expectation is met with a low level of associated risk.

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

2.20 The College has recently revised three linked policies under the umbrella of 'effective learning'. These are the Learning and Teaching Policy, the Attendance Monitoring Policy, and the Policy on Special Consideration and Reasonable Adjustment. All policies are referenced to the Quality Code and provide a clear framework for learning and teaching. The policies set out the principles, aims and procedures for delivering the curriculum, and support the delivery of the College's Strategic Plan. The approach taken by the College would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.21 In considering this Expectation, the team met students and staff and considered a wide range of documentation. Additional scrutiny was given to the action the College has taken to address the recommendations in the 2015 QAA Concerns report relevant to this Expectation.

2.22 The College policies, 11 in total, provide an appropriate framework for its learning and teaching activities and their effectiveness was demonstrated through meetings with staff and students, where awareness and experience of the policies in practice was exemplified. The College has, in recent years, drawn on a range of external input to support learning, teaching and assessment and as a response to issues raised through external reports including the QAA Concerns report.

2.23 The review team considered the actions taken with regard to the QAA Concerns recommendations five, seven, eight, eleven and twelve which are relevant to this Expectation. The College has reviewed its staffing and ensured that academic staff are suitably qualified for delivery at higher education level, usually holding a higher academic qualification and/or professional qualification appropriate for the unit of delivery. Teaching staff are encouraged, and supported with time, to take additional qualifications and to gain Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). All staff receive an induction and are provided with an Employee Handbook. Teaching staff indicated that workload had been adjusted to enable them to engage with other activities such as lesson preparation and attendance at meetings.

2.24 The College has delivered a range of staff development activities with regard to learning and teaching. An annual calendar of events is published and attendance at these sessions is monitored. The review team noted that the College had drawn on a range of external input in support of its approach to learning, teaching and assessment and that staff were very positive about these opportunities. There had been a focused, externally delivered, staff development event to support teaching staff in delivering to smaller groups. Teaching is now timetabled to facilitate groups of 50 with sessions split between lecture and interactive learning opportunities. The teaching team meets regularly to ensure consistency of delivery across different groups. Teaching staff competently articulated the way in which their continuous professional development (CPD) and engagement with the HEA informs their approach to teaching; for example through the introduction of different teaching styles and encouraging a student-led learning approach, where appropriate.

2.25 The College operates both a peer and an external observation process and the outcomes are mapped to the Quality Code and the UK Professional Standards Framework. Staff considered the process useful as a means of enhancing their, and the students', experience. One report seen by the team specifically refers to the techniques being used to draw out quieter members of the group. Staff welcome the independent scrutiny they were offered and see this as supportive and developmental. In addition, a new annual appraisal scheme has been introduced which will be used to identify training needs for the individual and feed into College-wide CPD activities. At the time of the review it was too early to comment on its effectiveness.

2.26 The College supports students in their learning through the use of formative and summative assessment tasks. Formative assessment is built into each unit at three, six and nine weeks of teaching as articulated in the Assessment Policy. The College also provided staff development on assessment as a result of which assessment briefs were revised and module handbooks updated accordingly. Students commented favourably on the approach to assessment, the assessment information provided and the feedback they received on their work.

2.27 The College has put in place mechanisms for the effective tracking of students. This includes effective attendance monitoring; the introduction of a personal tutor system; formative feedback at regular intervals; and, in future, the disaggregation of data so that the attainment of different types of cohorts can be more effectively managed and monitored. In addition, one day per week the College makes available tutorials for students who have been identified as needing additional support. The processes in place for the systematic monitoring of students through the Attendance and Programme Management Committees will allow for the early identification of those students unlikely to complete units. The designed interventions by the College in such circumstances will ensure that students can complete their studies in time. It is too early to comment on the effectiveness of these approaches but recent data suggests that 91 per cent of students will complete this academic year.

2.28 The College regularly reviews resources such as the library and IT, drawing on formal and informal feedback from students and from Pearson. Recent changes have included upgraded and enhanced computing resources and the provision of learning resources via EBSCO. These changes are welcomed by students.

2.29 The College has in place adequate procedures for the systematic review and enhancement of the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The College has addressed the recommendations from the 2015 QAA Concerns report relevant to this Expectation and implemented appropriate actions. Although the effectiveness of some actions cannot be assessed yet, on the basis of the evidence provided and the meetings with students and staff, the review team considers that this Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.30 The College recognises that students may have different needs in terms of the transition to higher education and endeavours to guide students to complete their programme of study and to acquire functional and transferable skills. In support of this, the College has developed policies that cover the student and staff journey. These policies and associated processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.31 The review team explored the Expectation through consideration of a range of evidence including student-facing handbooks and induction material, monitoring processes, committee minutes and the VLE, as well as through meetings with staff and students. The team also reviewed the College's engagement with the recommendations from the QAA Concerns report in respect of this Expectation.

2.32 Students receive a thorough induction where they are given detailed information about attendance requirements, module content and assessment including learning outcomes, assessment deadlines, grading criteria and credits, plagiarism and the use of the VLE. Inductions take place at the beginning of the programme and at the beginning of each term and include support for transition into higher education and between levels 4 and 5. The College regularly evaluates the induction through student feedback. The results are analysed and feedback is generally positive.

2.33 The College has revised the Student Information Handbook to better support students' engagement with their studies. The handbook is very concise and is mapped against various sections of the Quality Code. The study skills programme and accompanying handbook has also been enhanced. Students consider the information they receive through these handbooks to be very useful and reliable. The study skills programme is embedded in the teaching timetable which is valued by students.

2.34 To monitor student progress more effectively the College has recently introduced a personal tutoring system to complement the Academic Adviser system. This ensures that students have a contact for both academic and pastoral matters. Formative feedback on all unit assessment at fixed intervals and the disaggregation of student achievement data by entry route provide opportunities for monitoring that students make adequate progress in their studies. This will be fully implemented for the current cohort.

2.35 The review team also considered the actions taken in response to the 2015 QAA Concerns report recommendations with regard to student attendance monitoring. The College systematically monitors student attendance and, where attendance is a concern, the matter is referred to the Attendance Monitoring Committee for relevant and tracked action, including termination of studies. Attendance is recorded at each class and then input to a central database. The team examined a sample of attendance sheets and compared these against the central record where there were minor errors of inputting. The team saw evidence of attendance being considered via the committee structure and of study being terminated. Students are clear on the process and on the penalties for not attending.

2.36 The College uses the VLE to provide a range of useful information to students and to provide support in advance of assessment submission. Students spoke very positively

about the type and quality of information available on the VLE and the use of plagiarism-detection software for draft submissions.

2.37 The College provides pastoral care through a range academic support and student welfare services. The 'effective student' policy area set out the policies for student representation, welfare, student conduct and discipline and the provision of feedback. The Student Welfare Officer is the first port of call for all pastoral support needs. Students are advised at induction about how to contact the Student Welfare Officer. Students value their engagement with the College through the contact they have with staff when needing additional support and through the Student-Staff Liaison Committee, and feel well supported in their learning.

2.38 The College has recently identified employability as a College priority and published a student employability action plan and schedule of events for the year. A range of external speakers and employers support students in the acquisition and development of employability skills.

2.39 The College has adequate arrangements and resources in place which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The College has fully implemented the actions with regard to student attendance and progress monitoring arising from the 2015 QAA Concerns report. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.40 The College is responsible for developing, implementing and facilitating arrangements and processes that ensure the engagement of students, individually and collectively, in the enhancement and assurance of their educational experience. The College's Effective Student policy area includes the Student Representative Policy, Student Welfare Policy, Student Code of Conduct, Student Disciplinary Policy and the Student Feedback and Evaluation Policy. The College seeks to gather students' views in a variety of ways. Student membership of several deliberative committees promotes regular opportunities to engage at a strategic level. The College also engages students through a course representative system, timetabled tutorial sessions, one-to-one meetings with a personal tutor and general student surveys. Students are informed of these opportunities at induction, through the VLE and the Student Information Handbook. The arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.41 The review team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements to engage students by examining documentation, including student surveys, minutes from course representative meetings, the Student Welfare Committee and the Staff Student Liaison Committee, reports from student focus groups and examples of student feedback on specific course units. The team also held meetings with students and their representatives, senior and teaching staff.

2.42 The College process for collecting and analysing student feedback on their experience is effective. Students have the opportunity to provide feedback on the delivery of each unit, the study skills programme, pastoral support arrangements, and on induction. Student feedback is analysed by the Head of Academics and discussed at the Academic Board. This forms part of the College's annual programme review process.

2.43 All teaching groups have one student representative. Student representatives are elected by peers and receive training on their role. Students are members of all relevant academic committees including Academic Board, Admissions Committee, Attendance Monitoring Committee, Student Welfare Committee and the Programme Management Committee. The Assessment Board does not include students due to the confidential nature of the discussions. Students manage the Staff Student Liaison Committee. This committee provides a framework for formal meetings between staff and students to help them engage in constructive dialogue and free and objective feedback between the two parties.

2.44 Although the terms of reference state that four student representatives will attend Academic Board and all student representatives will attend the other committee meetings, in reality this is not the case. The review team found that it is usually the lead student representative plus one other student representative who attend. For the Student Welfare Committee, more representatives may attend. The College also clarified that student representatives only attend the general business of the Attendance Monitoring Committee. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College review the student membership of the Academic Board and its subcommittees to align with stated practice.

2.45 The review team found that the College is committed to receiving and responding to student feedback; and working in partnership with students in order to improve the quality of their experience and enhance their learning within the College. Students gave examples of

how, as a direct outcome of their feedback, the College had made improvements to the learning space. There is an environment which encourages students to contact academic and support staff informally. Students are also invited to make suggestions or raise any concerns directly with the College Director, and the College holds regular focus groups sessions. Student feedback also informs the annual programme review process. Students confirmed their satisfaction with the way the College listens and responds to their voice through informal and formal mechanisms.

2.46 The effectiveness of student engagement in quality assurance is monitored and reviewed at least annually, using pre-defined key performance indicators. Outcomes of student surveys and feedback from student representatives form part of this evaluation process. Minutes of committee meetings demonstrate students' involvement and effectiveness in making meaningful contributions. For example, the team found evidence showing how student suggestions were being discussed and approved at Academic Board.

2.47 The College recently introduced an ideas competition for students aimed at motivating them to develop practical and 'out of the box' ideas for improvement with the chance of winning an award. Students are encouraged to make suggestions on how to improve the College website, use of social media, the support and welfare systems, learning resources, the College infrastructure, and attendance strategies.

2.48 The review team concludes that the College takes deliberate steps to engage students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. It offers a range of opportunities for student engagement. There is an ethos of working in partnership with students to build upon the features that work well. Students are able to make meaningful contributions and the College is responsive to feedback from students. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.49 Oversight of the College's assessment process is the responsibility of Pearson which provides external verification of assignment briefs and assessment results. Academic and assessment regulations are also determined by Pearson and implemented by the College. The regulations are embodied in the College-devised Assessment Policy. The College also has a policy on late submission of student work. It is responsible for ensuring assessment opportunities cover the unit learning outcomes and for first marking, internal verification and the provision of feedback to students on assessed work. Assessment activities are overseen by the Assessment Board, a subcommittee of Academic Board. Credit is awarded to students after internal verification by the College and external verification by the Pearson standards verifier.

2.50 Information about assessment requirements and criteria are outlined in the programme handbook, unit guides and assignment briefs and aim to develop assessment literacy in students. Assessment information is also available on the VLE. The design of the assessment is often determined by the nature of the unit, the Learning and Teaching Policy and the Assessment Policy. The policy documentation includes reference to formative and summative assessment as well as the recognition and accreditation of prior learning and for extenuating circumstances. The College's procedures for assessment and its approach to complying with Pearson's regulatory systems and processes would allow this Expectation to be met.

2.51 The review team scrutinised assessment documentation including handbooks, minutes of the Assessment Board, Pearson guidelines, programme specifications, and external examiner reports. The team explored the effectiveness of the assessment arrangements through meetings with senior and teaching staff, staff responsible for quality processes and students. An additional structured meeting for the demonstration of the VLE was used to confirm assessment information available to staff and students. The review team also explored the progress the College had made with the implementation of the actions from the 2015 QAA Concerns investigation that are relevant to this Expectation.

2.52 The College's approach to assessment is mapped to the indicators of the Quality Code, *Chapter B6* and enshrined in its policy on assessment which is reviewed on an annual basis. Staff who met the review team demonstrated a good understanding of the policy. The College has robust internal arrangements for ensuring that its assessment procedures meet the requirements of its awarding organisation. Assessment tasks comply with the Assessment Policy and are designed in such a way as to ensure that they are appropriate for the level, focused on employability skills, and clearly articulated with assessment criteria so that the learning outcomes are assessed. Detailed information is provided in the scheme of work and lesson plans.

2.53 Students can easily access information on assessment through the VLE and student handbooks which have been reviewed to support assessment literacy. The College policy on the submission of late work is clearly articulated and understood by students and staff.

2.54 The review team also discussed actions taken in response to recommendations six and eight of the 2015 QAA Cause for Concerns report which are relevant to this Expectation. The team concluded that the College provides sufficient opportunities to use assessment to support students' learning. The College now routinely provides formative assessment opportunities at regular intervals. Students are also provided with detailed feedback on each aspect of formative assessment, enabling them to reflect on their performance and refine their skills and knowledge to improve performance. Students who met the review team spoke enthusiastically and knowledgeably about formative assessment and its contribution to their learning. To support students' assessment literacy the College has also introduced a structured timetable of tutorials with nominated tutors.

2.55 Teaching staff have been recruited, in line with the College's policy on effective staffing and are capable of assessing students at the correct level of study. This is confirmed by the latest external examiner reports. The development of teaching staff as assessors is supported through lesson observations and assessment-focused CPD activities.

2.56 The review team also confirmed that the College has responded positively to the recommendation relating to the differentiation of assessment. A review of a sample of assessment documentation and discussions with staff indicated that the revised practice ensures there are differentiated assessment instruments for each unit for each academic year. Assessment practice has been amended so that assignment activity is broad, varied and related to employability. This also enables staff to give full consideration to the pass, merit, and distinction criteria which students and staff fully understand.

2.57 All assignment briefs are effectively internally verified and approved by Pearson prior to distribution to students. The latest external examiner report is complimentary about assessment design, noting significant improvements and identifying good practice.

2.58 Student work is subject to internal verification, prior to external review by the Pearson standards verifier. External verifier reports confirm that marking of student work is undertaken to an appropriate standard and appropriately verified internally. In discussions with the review team, staff described the detailed consideration of marking in standardisation meetings. Procedures exist for collecting witness statements and observations of students' learning performance against targeted assessment criteria. Assessment Board minutes confirm that the Board operates according to its terms of reference and in line with Pearson's requirements. Assessment Boards effectively manage issues arising from assessment and minutes are submitted to Academic Board for information.

2.59 Students have the opportunity to appeal against assessment decisions. The College has an Academic Appeals Policy which is available on the VLE. The process of appealing is understood by students. The rare applications for extenuating circumstances are managed in a consistent manner in line with the College's Special Consideration and Reasonable Adjustments Policy. The College also has a policy for the accreditation of prior learning. However, this has not been used yet as there have been no applications to date.

2.60 The College makes effective use of Pearson's assessment guidance and rigorously implements its academic framework to ensure equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment. Assessment practices enable students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended unit learning outcomes for the credit and qualifications sought. The College has fully implemented the actions taken in response to the 2015 QAA Concerns investigation. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.61 The College has limited responsibilities for external examining. The appointment of external standards verifiers who act as external examiners is the responsibility of Pearson. The College has no role in their appointment. The nature and scope of the role is defined by Pearson as is the tenure of the post-holder.

2.62 The College makes use of the standards verifier as a quality-focused critical friend. They review draft assignments to ensure they meet Pearson's requirements. The standards verifier also confirms the integrity of the internal verification process and reviews assessment decisions through sampling of student work. This culminates in a formal external examiner report on all these aspects and the quality and adequacy of learning resources. Reports include recommendations and any actions required of the College. The College considers the reports through its academic committees and tracks completion of actions. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.63 The review team considered external examiner reports and relevant committee minutes and explored the College's approach for the use of external examiners in meetings with staff and students.

2.64 Consideration of external examiner reports and resolution of issues raised is evident from relevant committee minutes including those of the Assessment Board and the Academic Board, with actions identified and monitored effectively. The team tracked one action through with regard to the differentiation of criteria for merit and distinction and noted that, as well as addressing the issue, the College has used this as an opportunity for cross-College externally delivered staff development on assessment.

2.65 External examiner reports are made available to students through the College website. The students who met the team were aware of the reports and how to locate them. Overall, students have minimal engagement with the external examining reporting process, though external examiners meet small groups of students during their verification visits and student views are included in their reports.

2.66 The review team found that the College has effective mechanisms for using external examiner reports and takes appropriate and timely action in response to any recommendations made. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.67 The College operates regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review of programmes making use of standards verifiers and their reports and annual management reviews. The College is responsible for ensuring appropriate processes are in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes. The College undertakes an annual review of the HND programme it delivers to which all stakeholders including students contribute. The review has clear objectives to improve the programme and is authored by a senior member of staff and an independent external reviewer. The College's approach to the monitoring and review of programmes would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.68 The review team considered relevant documentation including the annual programme review report, reports from Pearson, external examiner reports, handbooks, and minutes of meetings. The effectiveness of the monitoring arrangements were explored in meetings with senior staff, teaching and support staff, staff responsible for quality processes and students. The review team also explored the progress the College had made with the implementation of the actions from the 2015 QAA Concerns investigation that are relevant to this Expectation.

2.69 The College's annual programme review is a comprehensive internal review, with input from an independent external expert. The report emanating from the review is enhancement driven, and provides a valuable summary document with clear aims. Chairs of academic committees, student representatives, and support staff are consulted in its compilation. Student views also feed into it through end-of-unit feedback. The report identifies good practice and a series of recommended actions and is considered by the PMC. Staff and the lead student representative are familiar with the role of PMC for the monitoring and review of programmes on behalf of Academic Board. The review team noted that the College intends to produce a wider annual College monitoring report at the end of the current academic year.

2.70 Pearson's Academic Management Review reports confirm that the College adheres to requirements for the monitoring of programmes. These reports are discussed by Academic Board and PMC. The review team recognises the value of informal review that occurs in a small team where students are known to the team. The latest AMR report was very positive and reflects on the processes relating to the full student experience.

2.71 The review team explored the effectiveness of the actions taken in response to recommendations nine and 10 of the 2015 QAA Concerns report which are relevant to this Expectation. The College continues to develop the usefulness of its annual review processes and aims to ensure that annual review reports provide more analysis of student performance and progression rates. To this end the College now considers student performance at Assessment Boards in two distinct categories so that level 3 entry students can be directly compared with mature entrants. The findings will inform annual programme review reports.

2.72 The College also reviewed the assessment schedule to provide a structured programme of assessment completion dates. This information is available to students on the VLE. The review team discussed with staff the way in which additional support is provided to

students who fail to meet assessment deadlines. The team heard that accurate attendance monitoring records are now kept and student absence is used as a flag for staff to intervene.

2.73 The College has appropriate mechanisms in place for the monitoring and review of its programmes. It has addressed and implemented the actions relevant for this Expectation arising in response to the 2015 QAA Concerns report. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.74 It is the College's responsibility to provide students with information on their right to appeal, and the processes for internal appeal and subsequent external appeals to Pearson. The process is described in its internal appeals procedure. The College is also responsible for the implementation of a fair and accessible complaints procedure for the informal, and where appropriate, formal investigation and determination of a student complaint. The College's complaints procedure provides details of the process of making formal complaints. If a student remains dissatisfied after exhaustion of the College internal complaints procedure, Pearson is responsible for dealing with the complaint and its determination is final. The College's academic appeals and complaints procedures are available to students and staff on the College website. This approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.75 To determine the effectiveness of the College's procedures the review team examined minutes from key academic committees, external examiner reports and Pearson AMR reports and held meetings with students and staff.

2.76 The College recently reviewed and revised its appeals and complaints procedures to ensure they offer sufficient opportunities for students to raise matters of concern without the risk of disadvantage. The appeals procedures cover appeals against admissions decisions and assessment. Students are able to enquire about, or appeal to the College, against assessment decisions or other decisions. The College has a clear and transparent procedure and all appeals to the College must be authorised by the Quality Nominee. An appeal must first go through the internal appeals procedures of the College before the appeal is submitted to Pearson. The Quality Nominee is required to submit the appeal on behalf of the student to Pearson where it is considered if procedures followed by the College were consistent with the College Appeals Procedure. The appeals procedures clearly set out what students can expect to happen during each of the four stages. Students are fully aware of both procedures which are available to them on the College website. There have been no academic appeals recently.

2.77 The complaints procedures indicate what students can expect to happen at various stages of the process, not least in terms of when feedback will be received and from whom. While the College seeks to provide a resolution acceptable to the student through an informal process, it accepts that this is not always achievable. The complaint form is accompanied by detailed information on how unresolved complaints can be addressed at various levels within the College structure. Further details are given of how, if still unresolved, complaints can be escalated to Pearson. There have been no recorded formal complaints or academic appeals in recent years. Staff explained that all complaints have been resolved at the informal stage and believe this demonstrates that effective mechanisms are in place which allow the College to respond to issues quickly.

2.78 The College monitors the efficiency and effectiveness of its current approach to academic appeals and complaints as part of its annual policy review. This involves gathering student and staff feedback as part of the process.

2.79 In summary, the review team finds that the College has robust and fair complaints and academic appeals procedures in place. The effective resolution of appeals and complaints at the informal stage fosters good relations between staff and students, in the spirit of cooperation. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.80 The College has no current relationship with any organisation other than Pearson. It does not offer any credit-bearing work experience or placements.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.82 Of the 11 Expectations in this judgement area, nine Expectations are applicable to the College all of which are judged to be met with a low associated risk. Expectation B10 is not applicable as the College does not have any relationship with any other organisation other than Pearson. It also does not offer any credit-bearing work placements or work experience. Expectation B11 is not applicable as the College does not offer research degrees.

2.83 The review team identified no features of good practice in this judgement area. There is are also no affirmations. One Expectation, although met and with a low risk attracts a recommendation. This is located in Expectation B5 and concerns the student membership of the Academic Board and its subcommittees.

2.84 Applying the criteria specified in the published handbook, the review team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at Grafton College Ltd trading as Grafton College of Management Sciences **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The College formalised its Publications Policy and developed a publications audit schedule, thereby enhancing its procedures. There are clearly defined responsibilities for the approval and review of published information. Academic Board approves all marketing materials bearing the details of programmes and awards the College offers, as well as the academic and procedural contents. The material is forwarded to the marketing team who make it accessible to the target audiences. The College website, academic policies and student handbooks are reviewed regularly. This approach would enable Expectation C to be met.

3.2 The review team considered the effectiveness of these practices and procedures in meetings with students, teaching staff and senior staff. The team also reviewed various documents, including staff and student handbooks, academic policies and the contents of the website and the VLE.

3.3 The College website is well designed and offers adequate information for prospective students, the public and other stakeholders. Although the College does not publish the full programme specification on its website, prospective students do have access to all the necessary information they require via a direct link to the Pearson website for programme information and learning resources. College policies are also made available on the website. All policies have a control box, clearly identifying the owner and review cycle. The website is also used to convey information about the College strategies and policies, as well as details about admissions and term dates. External examiner reports can also be found on the website. Students confirmed that the quality of information provided to them on the College website is clear, up to date, accurate and beneficial.

3.4 The College website is reviewed twice a year by the Registrar and the Head of Academics. The Registrar is also responsible for ensuring information is accessible, fit for purpose and trustworthy. Marketing materials are first approved by the Marketing Manager, and then passed to the Registrar for second approval.

3.5 All academic policies are reviewed annually by the Academic Board. It will receive recommendations for the publication of information, but not the details - its function is simply to agree to publish. During the review visit, the team observed an instance where one external examiner report being available on the website included student details. On this occasion, the internal review and approval processes for published information did not work. This was discussed the College and the issue rectified immediately.

3.6 The review team noted that the College is taking a more rigorous approach to the systematic use of data to inform, monitor and enhance provision. The College is beginning to use statistical data and incorporate it into the management of quality and standards. Student data has recently been grouped and analysed by entry qualification, and the results between students from various entry routes are compared. The improved management information system has made it easier to monitor student achievement, track deficient students and offer

remedial support, and resulted in improved completion rates. Furthermore, the Admissions Committee is working towards key performance indicators to disaggregate admissions data to manage and enhance provision. It is clear that the College has embedded the good features of the matrix Report (Information, Advice and Guidance) across the College. Recording of student management information is continuously under review and being improved, as noted by Pearson, matrix, and the external audit. The College provided data to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in 2015 and was subject of a HESA audit.

3.7 A wide range of academic and non-academic information is supplied to current students through the VLE. The VLE holds programme information including lecture slides and hand-outs. It is also the central repository for staff and student handbooks, College policies, induction materials, student feedback, staff appraisal documents, minutes of all meetings, training presentations, and student employability initiatives. The VLE also provides anticipated study hours, a draft timetable, and the nature and scope of available academic and pastoral support. Staff and students have access to the VLE both at the College and externally. Students are satisfied with the materials being available to them through the VLE and gave examples of the materials available, supporting them well for each unit of study. Students are also invited to provide feedback on improvements to the VLE.

3.8 Students are provided with three handbooks: a Student Information Handbook; a Programme Handbook; and a Study Skills Handbook. These are regularly updated and made available to students at induction and on the VLE. Any changes to the handbooks are discussed at the PMC meetings, forwarded to the Web Manager for upload and checked for accuracy by the Programme Leader. The Programme Handbook provides information on areas such as student welfare services, learning and teaching strategies, student-focused policies and procedures, course content and assessment grading. The Study Skills Handbook provides students with general academic support and refers them to sources of pastoral help available to them. The Student Information Handbook outlines what the College expects from its students, and what the students can expect from the College. It introduces students to the services and learning opportunities available to them, key contacts, essential term dates, student support services, the teaching environment, and information about assessment procedures. Students confirm that these three handbooks provide them with a comprehensive range of accurate and current resources, which they find helpful and sufficient.

3.9 The College publishes information that is accurate, fit for purpose and informative. The review team concludes that the College has appropriate systems in place to check the accuracy of its published information despite the shortcomings identified above which was an isolated incident. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.11 The Expectation is met and the associated risk is low. There is no good practice and no affirmations in this judgement area.

3.12 Given that the Expectation is met the review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at Grafton College Ltd trading as Grafton College of Management Sciences **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College links its approach to improving the quality of the learning opportunities to its Strategic Plan 2015-20. The College states that it includes enhancement as a standing agenda item on its academic deliberative committees. Enhancement activities arise as a result of monitoring and review activities and are clearly identified, and shared across the College. Students have the opportunity to provide feedback for the enhancement of their learning experience, particularly through the Staff Student Liaison Committee. This approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.2 The review team explored the terms of reference and minutes of the College's deliberative committees, reports from external examiners, and annual monitoring reports relating to enhancement, and held meetings with staff, students and employer representatives.

4.3 The College's approach to enhancement is linked to the strategic objective of employability which is a core theme of its curriculum. To this end the College has developed an employability action plan, consisting of a programme of activities delivered by external speakers and local employers who support students in the development of employment skills and career development. These recent extracurricular and voluntary activities are well attended, and welcome by students. Students also appreciate the opportunities the College is offering them through the student reward scheme, the STAR scheme (Student Taking an Active Role), and the business incubation unit, with one student benefiting so far from support in setting up their own business.

4.4 The College's strategic approach to enhancement is also evident in its attempt to include enhancement as a routine agenda item on all of its deliberative committees. Reviewing the minutes of committees meetings the review team found, however, that this was still an aspiration rather than reality. Enhancement has yet to become a fixed feature of the agenda in many cases. The team appreciates that this lack of consistency is due to the very recent introduction of this approach.

4.5 In meetings with the review team, staff confidently referred to the range of measures that the College Senior Management Team has identified as enhancements and displayed on a poster within the College. Examples include the extended study skills programme, the introduction of additional tutorials to support students, a revised assessment strategy with a focus on formative feedback, and the use of external expertise in teaching observations. Although these activities were considered valuable by the students, the review team noted that a number of them were introduced in response to the 2015 QAA Concerns report and resulting action plan.

4.6 The review team confirmed with students that the Staff Student Liaison Committee provides an effective opportunity for them to raise issues with the College which leads to the enhancement of learning opportunities. The improvement to the teaching room and computer labs were cited as an example of enhancement of the learning environment emanating from student feedback.

4.7 In meetings with the teaching staff the review team heard how assessments had been improved to be more group-orientated and related to the workplace to help generate

employability skills. The College is also developing connections with the local business community. The team also heard how the inclusion of external expertise in the preparation of the Annual Monitoring report had supported the College in developing its staff as well as enabling an independent voice to help balance the internal reflections. An external experts have also delivered staff development, improving the teaching team's knowledge of the external environment and enhancing the design of assignment briefs. The use of an external consultant in the peer observation process was also proving to be beneficial in developing the College's approach to learning and teaching. Staff who met the team referred to the external focusing on practice in the classroom which was directly relevant to the students.

4.8 The review team concludes that the introduction of a suite of strategic initiatives is clearly intended to improve the learning environment and experience of the students. Some of the activity builds usefully on previous good practice in student support and the use of externality. The team found evidence of many opportunities where good practice is shared. This included staff development events as well as through discussion of external verifiers reports at Academic Board, Assessment Boards and PMC meetings. The annual programme monitoring report also reflects on good practice.

4.9 While the College's strategic approach to enhancement is a recent development, the outputs of which have yet to be fully evaluated, meetings with the staff and students confirmed that a culture of support, and reflection on practice exists which leads to continuous improvement. This was also noted by the external standards verifier. The team therefore concludes that the College has taken deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

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

4.12 Given that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at Grafton College of Management Sciences **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The College has taken a strategic step to have employability as a theme within its student offer. Employability, along with enterprise, sustainability and creativity are the four principles within the Strategic Plan.

5.2 The College has a strong commitment to providing high quality vocational programmes which are skills-focused and employer-relevant and which support employability. To this end it has undertaken a review of its activities and developed an action plan for students and for staff which has identified '19 steps to a better future provision'.

5.3 Employability as a theme is, therefore, aspirational at the moment but the College has taken steps to engage effectively with employers and is developing a number of partnerships that will enhance the student experience. This was confirmed by employers the team saw during their visit.

5.4 The review team noted a number of initiatives which were part of an events calendar and which saw a number of high calibre speakers invited onto campus to offer sessions to students and staff on mind-mapping, SWOT analysis and CV writing. The employability offer is currently optional to students but, with the introduction of new modules to the HNC/HND, the intention is to embed these as part of the curriculum. In addition, the College has set up a business incubation unit to provide support and guidance to students wishing to set up their own business.

5.5 The College website includes an enhanced feature on employability, which fosters links with local industry and anticipates the College building becoming a focal point for the local business community.

5.6 The College has developed an Alumni Society to support employability ambitions. The first phase started in March 2016 and seeks to offer a range of opportunities for alumni to maintain their involvement with the College and develop their skills after leaving.

5.7 Students and staff were aware of, and welcomed, the emphasis on employability and employers commented positively about the opportunities for working with the College in supporting their aspirations.

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 22-25 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#)

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Awarding organisation

An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications

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* (FHEQIS).

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.

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.

Self-evaluation document

A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

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.

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