

# Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students

**Marine Learning Alliance Ltd**

**Review Report**

October 2020



**Working as the Designated Quality Body for England**

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## Summary of findings and reasons

Ref	Core practice	Outcome	Confidence	Summary of reasons
S1	The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications' frameworks.	Met	High	<p>From the evidence seen, the review team considers that the standards set for the College's programmes are in line with the sector-recognised standards defined in paragraph 342 of the OfS's regulatory framework. Based on the evidence provided, the review team also considers that standards described in the approved programme documentation are set at levels that are consistent with these sector-recognised standards and the College's use of its validating University's academic regulations and policies should ensure that standards are maintained appropriately.</p> <p>The review team considers that, based on the evidence scrutinised, the standards that will be achieved by the College's students are expected to be line with the sector-recognised standards defined in paragraph 342 of the OfS's regulatory framework. The review team also considers that the College's use of the validating University's academic regulations and policies will ensure that these standards are maintained. The review team considers that staff fully understand the College's approach to maintaining these standards and that the evidence seen demonstrates they are committed to implementing this approach. Therefore, based on its scrutiny of the evidence provided, the review team concludes that this Core practice is met.</p>
S2	The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably	Met	High	The review team, based on the evidence presented to it, determined that the standards set for students to achieve beyond the threshold on the College's courses are reasonably comparable with those set by other UK

	comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.			<p>providers. The review team considered that the standards described in the approved programme documentation and in the University's academic regulations and policies adopted by the College should ensure that such standards are maintained appropriately.</p> <p>Therefore, the review team concludes, based on the evidence described above, that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers and this Core practice is met.</p>
S3	Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.	Met	High	The review team concludes that where the College works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them. By adhering to the academic cooperation agreement with the University, and by embedding the University's academic regulations and policies within its operational procedures, the College has developed credible and secure arrangements to ensure the standards of awards it delivers on behalf of the University are credible and secure. It implements these with vigilance through its robust processes of internal moderation, its engagement with External examiners and its engagement with the regulations of the University. The review team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.
S4	The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.	Met	High	The review team concludes that the College uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent. This is

				<p>because the College has comprehensive regulations and policies describing its requirements for using external expertise in setting and maintaining academic standards and these requirements are delivering the stated objectives. The processes for assessment and classification are clear and transparent and approved course documentation demonstrates they are being implemented effectively. The College's plans for using external expertise in both setting and maintaining academic standards and assessment and classification are robust and credible because there is evidence of engaging appropriate external expertise in programme approval and annual programme review as per the stated policies. Evidence from samples of student work, external examiner reports and ongoing review of these processes by the University through the Joint Board of Studies confirm the effectiveness of the College's approach to the use of external expertise and the reliability, fairness and transparency of assessment and classification process. Staff understand the requirements for the use of external expertise and assessment and classification processes in all aspects of delivering high-quality academic experiences. The review team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.</p>
Q1	The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.	Met	Moderate	<p>The team concludes that the College has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system. This is because the College has a credible and robust approach through its policies and plans and following the University's academic regulations for the recruitment and admissions of students that demonstrate reliability, fairness and inclusivity. The information given to applicants is transparent and fit for purpose, and students tend to agree that the information and process are helpful,</p>

				<p>supportive and implemented fairly. Entry requirements are aligned with the overall regulations and policies of the College and the University, and admissions decisions reflect the published entry requirements agreed with the University through the programme validation process. Admissions records demonstrate that the College's policies are implemented in practice and that admissions decisions are reliable, fair and inclusive. Data collection with respect to equality and diversity is under-developed, and thus analysis to monitor diversity and inclusivity is very limited and analysis of admissions and applications data between the College and University have been problematic due to the incompatibility of IT systems. The review team concludes that the Core practice is met.</p>
Q2	The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.	Met	High	<p>The review team concludes that the College designs and delivers high-quality courses. This is because the College has in place credible processes for the design and delivery of high-quality programmes. Approved programme documentation indicates that the teaching, learning and assessment design enables students to meet and demonstrate module and programme learning outcomes. External examiner reports and information from employers confirm that the courses are of a high quality. Feedback from students confirms that they regard their courses as being of high quality. Staff are able to articulate what 'high quality' means in the context of the College and demonstrate how the provision meets that definition. The Total Learning Packages demonstrate good planning and organisation, a sound approach, strong delivery, appropriate content, effective use of resources and student engagement. The design and presentation of the learning materials facilitates learning at the time and place the student finds most</p>

				beneficial. The review team concludes, therefore, that that the College has in place credible, robust and evidence-based arrangements to design and deliver high-quality academic programmes and that the Core practice is met.
Q3	The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.	Met	High	The review team concludes that the College has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience. This is because the number of staff currently employed at the College, including academics and associate lecturers and tutors directly involved in programme delivery, is proportionate to the number of programmes delivered and the number of students enrolled. Staff CVs demonstrate that those employed in key roles are well qualified and skilled. Students express satisfaction with the skills of teaching staff and with the support that they provide. Observations of pre-recorded content delivered in the total learning package indicates that teaching staff are appropriately skilled. Staff feel well supported by the College in terms of induction and opportunities for staff development. The team, therefore, concludes that the Core practice is met.
Q4	The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.	Met	High	The College has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience. This is because the strategies for facilities, learning resources and student support services are credible, realistic and demonstrably linked to the delivery of successful academic and professional outcomes for students. Evidence from students and from direct assessment indicates that facilities, learning resources and student support services are sufficient and appropriate. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities in using

				resources to provide a high-quality academic experience to students. The review team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.
Q5	The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.	Met	High	The College actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience. This is because staff understand the importance of the student voice and are committed to improving the student learning experience as a result of student engagement. The College acknowledges the challenges of engaging with students given the nature of the cohort and distance provision. It has implemented a number of different solutions to these challenges. The establishment of online forums, which are embedded into the learning experiences of students through their module assessments, coupled with a commitment to reflect on and respond to student feedback, gave the team confidence that the College has developed a clear and effective approach which provides appropriate mechanisms to facilitate students with opportunities to provide feedback, individually and collectively, on their experiences. The College's plans for the engagement of students are credible and robust because they are clearly understood by students and staff and are supported by appropriate resources and infrastructure. Students who met with the review team confirmed the impact of these approaches, reporting that they had a range of channels for providing feedback and provided examples of where changes had been made to provision as a result of student engagement. The team concludes, therefore, that this Core practice is met.



Q6	The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.	Met	High	<p>The team concludes that the College has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to students. The College has developed robust and credible procedures to handle complaints raised by students. Examples of complaints reviewed by the team were dealt with according to College and University procedures. Complaints by students are handled by the College fairly and investigated in a timely manner. Responses are detailed and clearly communicated. Any deviations from the procedures relate to minor differences in response times which do not harm the integrity of the procedure or the interests of the students.</p> <p>The College follows the University's procedures for complaints, undertaking resolution at the informal stage and then signposting students to the University's formal complaint procedure. Staff at the University confirm that there have been no appeals submitted by College students either via the College or directly to the University. The team reviewed the University procedures via links from the Student Handbook and considered them to be accessible, with College students able to access them quickly and easily.</p>
Q8	Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.	Met	High	<p>The team concludes that where the College works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements and credible, robust and evidence-based plans to ensure that the academic experience is high quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them. Both University and College staff understand their roles in the partnership arrangements. The University's regulations are applied effectively by the College. External examiners agree with students' views that the programmes are effective and high quality, and also confirm that the University's procedures are properly applied. The team's analysis of the evidence</p>

				demonstrates that the College has developed effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience on the programmes it operates in partnership with its awarding body is of high quality. The review team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.
Q9	The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.	Met	High	The review team concludes that the College supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes. The College has policies, processes and infrastructure in place to facilitate successful academic and professional outcomes. These are comprehensive, robust and credible in that they are detailed, realistic and appropriate and the support infrastructure is in place with clearly articulated plans for how this will develop as the College grows and needs change. There is evidence of timely and comprehensive feedback that helps students to understand how they can improve or maintain performance levels. Academic and support staff understand their roles in supporting student achievement and the various approaches used for this. They are fully committed to delivering successful academic and professional outcomes for their students. Students reported that they were satisfied with the support mechanisms available, in particular personal tutors, and that they received comprehensive, helpful and timely feedback. The review team therefore concludes that the College supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes and that the Core practice is met.

## About this report

This is a report detailing the outcomes of the Quality and Standards Review for providers applying to register with the Office for Students (OfS), conducted by QAA in October 2020, for Marine Learning Alliance Ltd.

A Quality and Standards Review (QSR) is a method of review QAA uses to provide the OfS with evidence about whether new providers applying to be on the OfS Register meet the Core practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), based on evidence reviewed by expert assessors. This report is structured to outline the review team's decisions about the providers' ability to meet the Core practices through detailing the key pieces of evidence scrutinised and linking that evidence to the judgements made.

The team for this review was:

Name: Prof Alan Howard  
Institution: University of Reading  
Role in review team: Subject reviewer - Physical, Material and Forensic Sciences

Name: Prof Ian Robinson  
Institution: University of Lincoln  
Role in review team: Subject reviewer - Engineering and Computing

Name: Mrs Lesley Smith  
Institution: Independent  
Role in review team: Institutional reviewer

Name: Dr Tracy Scurry  
Institution: Newcastle University  
Role in review team: Subject reviewer - Business and Management

The QAA officer for the review was: Ms Jo Miller.

The size and composition of this review team is in line with published guidance and, as such, is comprised of experts with significant experience and expertise across the higher education sector. The team included members with experience of a similar provider to the institution and knowledge of the academic awards offered. Collectively, the team had experience of the management and delivery of higher education programmes from academic and professional services perspectives, included members with regulatory and investigative experience, and had at least one member able to represent the interests of students. The team included at least one senior academic leader qualified to doctoral level. Details of team members were shared with the provider prior to the review to identify and resolve any possible conflicts of interest.

## About MLA College

Marine Learning Alliance Ltd, trading as MLA College, (the College), is located in Plymouth. MLA College was formed in 2014 by the Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST) building on the Hydrographic Academy which was acquired from the University of Plymouth. An Academic Co-operation Agreement was formed, and the University of Plymouth (the University) has continued as the sole validating partner for MLA College programmes.

In 2019, BAU Global Ltd became the major shareholder with IMarEST (through its subsidiary company Marine Management Holdings Ltd) of MLA College. The College asserts that the affiliation with BAU Global brings significant additional academic resource to MLA College, and provides opportunities for growth in new subject areas and in new international markets.

There are 269 part-time students enrolled on 11 programmes at Level 5, 6 and 7 (as of July 2020) in marine and maritime disciplines. All degree programmes, which are validated by the University of Plymouth, are delivered by distance or blended learning through the Total Learning Package (TLP), the College's online learning platform. The TLP, which has been developed by the College to work either on or offline, has been developed to provide an inclusive, easy to navigate package, which contains all the teaching and learning materials necessary to successfully complete each stage of a programme.

The College senior leadership team includes the Chief Executive, Chief Operating Officer, Rector, Head of Academic Operations and Head of Academic Quality and Standards.

MLA College's academic strategy includes gaining successful registration with the Office for Students as its first step in securing new degree awarding powers and to be established as a private university.

## How the review was conducted

The review was conducted according to the process set out in [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

When undertaking a QSR all 13 of the Core practices are considered by the review team. However, for this review it was clear that the provider does not offer a research degree programme. Therefore, the review team did not consider Q7 (where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments).

To form its judgements about the provider's ability to meet the Core practices, the review team considered a range of evidence that was submitted prior to the review visit and evidence gathered at the review visit itself. The review visit was undertaken during October 2020 and, in line with guidance from government at the time, the review team and staff at the provider were working from home. For this reason, the review visit meetings were conducted online. To ensure that the review team focused on the principles embedded in the Core practices, and that the evidence it considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other reviews, the team utilised Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers to construct this report and detail the key pieces of evidence seen.

Annex 4 expects that review teams will sample certain types of key evidence using a combination of representative sampling and randomised sampling. In this review, the review team sampled the following areas for evidence for the reasons given below.

- To test that specified standards beyond the threshold for courses sampled are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers and are consistent with relevant national qualifications frameworks, the review team scrutinised the approved course documentation (programme quality handbooks, including module records and programme specifications) for a representative sample of six programmes. During the review visit, the team asked for approved course documentation relating to a newly validated

programme.

- To assess the reliability, fairness and transparency of assessment and classification processes the team considered examples of approved course documentation (programme quality handbooks, including module records and programme specifications).
- To test whether admissions requirements for courses sampled reflect the College's overall regulations and policy and provide reliable, fair and inclusive admissions decisions, the team considered approved course documentation (programme quality handbooks, including module records and programme specifications) for four sampled programmes representative of the College's provision. These four programmes comprised 157 students, which is 54% of the College's total higher education provision.
- To test that marks and awards given to students are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers and reflect the relevant threshold standards, the team viewed a random and representative sample of assessed student work from eight of the College's 37 active modules. The sample drew from all FHEQ levels delivered (5, 6 and 7) over the last three years, and because only small numbers of students were registered, work was scrutinised from every candidate, thus embracing the full range of grades awarded. In total, 105 pieces of assessed work were sampled (some 33% of the work available), including work marked by a number of different members of staff. There were, in addition, a further 10 examples of formative and summative assessment provided prior to the review visit. Each sample included pieces of assessed work, the assignment brief, assessment and marking criteria, marked work and the feedback provided to the student, outcomes of internal and external moderation, and records of the relevant assessment panel.
- To test whether students are given comprehensive, helpful and timely feedback and whether students consider they are engaged in the quality of their educational experience, the team viewed a random and representative sample of assessed student work from eight of the College's 37 active modules. The sample drew from all FHEQ levels delivered (5, 6 and 7) over the last three years, and because only small numbers of students were registered, work was scrutinised from every candidate, thus embracing the full range of grades awarded. In total, 105 pieces of assessed work were sampled (some 33% of the work available), including work marked by a number of different members of staff.
- To identify students' views about student engagement in the quality of their educational experience, the team considered representative samples of student surveys and evaluation results relating to their student experience.
- To assess whether the admissions criteria were consistently applied and met, the team randomly sampled admissions records provided by the College in summary format for 27 students from a total enrolment in 2018-19 of 187 students. Of these, 12 records were for applications to the suite of awards in Sustainable Maritime Operations; three from each of the PG Certificate and PG Diploma awards in Sustainable Maritime Operations, and three from each of the BSc and MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations degrees.

- To check that external examiners confirm threshold standards are consistent with national qualifications frameworks, and that credit and qualifications are awarded only where those threshold standards have been met, the team considered a representative sample of 17 external examiner reports reflecting the full range of the College's provision for the last two academic years.
- To test whether external examiners consider that standards are credible and secure, the team scrutinised external examiner reports for the last two academic years, together with the responses made to the externals by the College. The team also reviewed the records of associated assessment panels and boards and the ensuing annual reports, to determine the effectiveness of the underpinning arrangements.
- To identify externals examiners' views about reliability, fairness and transparency of assessment and classification processes, the team considered a representative sample of 17 external examiner reports for the last two academic years, together with the responses made to the externals by the College, reflecting the full range of the College's provision.
- To interrogate the use of external examiners and that the College considers and respond to externals' reports regarding standards appropriately, the team scrutinised a representative sample of 17 external examiner reports for the last two academic years, together with the responses made to the externals by the College.
- To assess whether staff are appropriately qualified and skilled to perform their roles effectively, the review team considered a representative sample of nine job profiles and accompanying CVs, covering senior leadership, professional support, and academic and associate tutor roles for current staff working at the College.

## Explanation of findings

### S1 The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications' frameworks

1 To meet this Core practice a provider must ensure that threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications' frameworks. The threshold standards for its qualifications must be articulated clearly and must be met, or exceeded, through the delivery of the qualification and the assessment of students.

2 The sector-recognised standards that are used in relation to this Core practice are those that apply in England, as defined in paragraph 342 of the OfS regulatory framework. That is, those set out in Table 1, in paragraphs 4.10, 4.12, 4.15, 4.17, 4.18, in paragraphs 6.13-6.18 and in the Table in Annex C, in the version of [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#) (FHEQ) published in October 2014. These sector-recognised standards represent the threshold academic standards for each level of the FHEQ and the minimum volumes of credit typically associated with qualifications at each level.

3 The QAA review team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

#### The evidence the team considered

4 The QAA review team assessed the evidence presented to it, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The review team utilised that matrix to ensure that the evidence it considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other reviews and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

- a College Programmes and Student Numbers
- b College Governance and Management Structure Revised
- c College Programme approval policy
- d Sustainable Maritime Operations Academic Partnerships Annual Review
- e Interim Review Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Action Plan
- f Academic Co-operation Agreement with University
- g Joint Board Studies Minutes
- h Sustainable Maritime Operations Subject External Examiners Reports
- i Sustainable Maritime Operations level 6 and 7 assessment
- j University Academic Regulations\_2019-20
- k University Assessment Policy
- l College Admissions Committee
- m College Bursary Scheme Panel
- n College Ethics Committee
- o College Programme Committee
- p Academic Partnerships Quality Assurance Meetings Terms of Reference (2)

q	College Academic Board Meeting
r	DipHE Hydrography EHYD203 moderation
s	PGCert SM0701 Internal moderation
t	PGDip SMO705 Internal Moderation
u	BSc SMO603 internal moderation June 20
v	MSc Engineering internal moderation
w	Record of moderation samples to External Examiners
x	PGCert Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Quality Handbook
y	PGDip Hydrography Programme Quality Handbook
z	PGDip Advanced Hydrography assessment brief
aa	MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Quality Handbook
bb	MSc Engineering Programme Quality Handbook
cc	Sustainable Maritime Operations External Examiner Report and Responses
dd	Award External Examiner Report and Response
ee	Hydrography External Examiner Report and Response
ff	Award External Examiner Report response
gg	Award Assessment External Examiner Response 2018_19
ee	HA External Examiner June 2018_2019
ii	External Examiner Sustainable Maritime Operations June 2018_2019
jj	Engineering Annual Subject Report 2019 (3)
kk	College Award and Subject Assessment Board Minutes
ll	College Subject Assessment Panel Minutes June 2019 Final
mm	MLA604 and MLA702 internal moderation
nn	MLA601 1st and 2nd assessment internal moderation
oo	MLA703, MLA705 and MLA610 internal moderation
pp	Marking and Moderation Policy
qq	Academic Board Agendas 2019-20
rr	BSc Global Sustainable Development validation report
ss	Meeting with University staff
tt	Meeting with members of Academic Board
uu	Meeting with Staff responsible for programme development

5 Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the review team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this review are outlined below:

- third party endorsements as none are available for the provision on offer at the College.

### **How any samples of evidence were constructed**

6 To test that specified threshold standards for courses sampled are consistent with relevant national qualifications frameworks, the team considered examples of approved course documentation (programme quality handbooks, including module records and programme specifications).

7 To test that students' assessed work reflects the relevant threshold standards, the team viewed a random and representative sample of assessed student work from eight of the Colleges' 37 active modules.

8 The sample drew from all FHEQ levels delivered (5, 6 and 7) over the last three years, and because only small numbers of students were registered, work was scrutinised from every candidate, thus embracing the full range of grades awarded. In total, 105 pieces of assessed work were sampled (some 33% of the work available),



including work marked by a number of different members of staff. There were, in addition, a further 10 examples of formative and summative assessment provided prior to the review visit.

9 Each sample included pieces of assessed work, the assignment brief, assessment and marking criteria, marked work and the feedback provided to the student, outcomes of internal and external moderation, and records of the relevant assessment panel.

10 To check that external examiners confirm threshold standards are consistent with national qualifications frameworks, and that credit and qualifications are awarded only where those threshold standards have been met, the team considered a representative sample of 17 external examiner reports reflecting the full range of the College's provision.

### **Why and how the team considered this evidence**

11 As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider was considered by the review team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the review team to make its judgement regarding the providers ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision-making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the review team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below.

12 To identify institutional approaches to course and assessment design, marking and moderation, requirements for awards and approaches to classification as the underlying basis for the standards of awards, the review team considered the Academic Co-operation Agreement with the University, the University Academic Regulations, the University Assessment Policy, and the Marking and Moderation Policy.

13 To interrogate the robustness and credibility of the College's plans for ensuring threshold standards, the review team considered the current list of programmes delivered and student numbers, the College governance and management structure, the College's programme approval policy, the Academic Co-operation Agreement with the University, the terms of reference, agendas and minutes of College Academic Board and subcommittees, minutes of subject assessment panels and award assessment boards, the University annual quality cycle, an annual review report, programme plan, minutes of the Joint Board of Studies with the University, and the validation report for BSc Global Sustainable Development. The team also discussed the College's plans with members of Academic Board and staff responsible for programme development.

14 To test that specified threshold standards for courses sampled are consistent with relevant national qualifications frameworks, the team considered the University Academic Regulations and examples of approved course documentation (programme quality handbooks), and assessment briefs.

15 The team considered moderation records relating to modules from which student work was sampled.

16 To test that staff understand and apply the College's approach to setting and maintaining threshold standards, the team met members of Academic Board, staff responsible for programme development and University partnership staff.

## What the evidence shows

17 The review team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

18 A signed formal academic co-operation agreement exists between the College and the University which grants permission for the College to deliver higher education programmes validated by the University. Ultimate academic responsibility for the award of qualifications and the setting and maintenance of academic standards rests with the University. The College is, however, required to maintain the academic standards of awards delivered on behalf of the University. In line with the co-operation agreement, the College follows the academic regulations, assessment policies and academic partnership processes of the University, including the Marking and Moderation Policy. These academic regulations and policies are clear and comprehensive because they provide detailed guidance on programme approval processes, assessment requirements, the operation of subject assessment panels and award assessment boards, the role of University-appointed external examiners and requirements for progression and classification of awards. The University academic regulations also articulate the threshold requirement to pass a level of study and individual module. The review team therefore took the view that the application of the University's clear and comprehensive academic regulations and policies enables the College to fulfil its responsibility to support the maintenance of academic standards at the relevant sector-recognised level.

19 The College's plans for maintaining sector-recognised standards are robust and credible in that they have been closely aligned with the University's academic regulations, policies, and academic partnership processes since establishment of the College in 2014. The College, through its co-operation agreement with the University, delivers programmes and modules, including setting and marking of student assessment, leading to the award of a qualification by the University. The College engages fully with the University's annual quality cycle, including submitting an annual subject review and programme plan and through attending the Joint Board of Studies with the University. The University-appointed external examiners are integral to the assessment process and attend both subject assessment panels and award assessment boards.

20 The College has established its own internal deliberative governance structure and an internal Programme Approval Policy. An Academic Board with oversight for quality and standards was established in 2019 and meets fortnightly with standing and responsive agenda items. Terms of reference and membership for several subcommittees concerned with assessment and programme matters have been produced, including an Admissions Committee, College Bursary Panel, Ethics Committee and Programme Committee. The current size of provision (269 part-time students on 11 programmes as of July 2020) means that the business of subcommittees is dealt with at Academic Board meetings through standing agenda items.

21 The College has developed an internal Programme Approval Policy to guide future new programme development. This is a robust policy because it includes clear reference to external reference points, including the FHEQ, used in setting sector-recognised standards. Senior staff, including members of the Academic Board and staff with responsibility for programme development, understand the importance of external reference points, including the FHEQ, and explained how the FHEQ was used to guide the design and development of the newly validated programme BSc Global Sustainable Development. The University's Teaching, Learning and Quality Committee confirmed that the requirements of the FHEQ had been appropriately considered and that the programme proposal met the University's requirements in relation to academic frameworks and regulations for the award of credit.

22 The review team concludes that the College has credible and robust plans for ensuring that its programmes align with sector-recognised standards, both through development of its own deliberative committee structure and policy and through continued engagement with the University's quality assurance and academic partnership processes.

23 The approved course documentation presented in programme quality handbooks and assessment briefs is clear and robust. Programme quality handbooks are produced for each programme and provide comprehensive and definitive information, including the programme specification and module records (descriptors). In each programme quality handbook, programme learning outcomes are mapped against modules and the assessment strategies and methods to be used in modules are clearly presented using the University's pro forma. Mapping of learning outcomes at different levels of study is undertaken and the team found this to be consistent with the FHEQ. Assessment briefs include a description of the assignment and its assessment criteria appropriate to the level of study. For example, Level 7 assessment briefs include descriptors of originality and independent thinking expected at this level in the FHEQ. The requirement to pass a module is set at 40% for undergraduate modules and 50% for master's programmes. Students in Hydrography programmes must pass all modules and no compensation in individual modules is permitted to ensure that professional body requirements are met in full, including the 'Recognition of Individuals in the FIG/IHO/ICA Standards of Competence for Hydrographic Surveyors at Category B' (IHO Cat B). The review team took the view that the sector-recognised standards described in definitive course documentation are consistent with relevant national qualifications frameworks.

24 External examiners' reports include written confirmation that threshold standards set for the awards are appropriate and that the College properly engages with the University's assessment procedures. External examiners confirm that threshold standards are consistent with the relevant national qualifications' framework, and credit and qualifications are awarded only where those sector-recognised standards have been met. The University's annual review of the College is informed by the external examiners' reports and finds that standards are secure. The team concluded that external examiners confirm that the College properly applies the arrangements underpinning academic standards in its partnership with the validating university, and that academic standards are credible and secure.

25 Sampled assessed student work reflects the relevant sector-recognised standards set out in the approved course documentation. This is because marks awarded are carefully justified with written comments which align with the assignment criteria specified in the assessment brief. The internal moderation process is documented and robust and, in some cases, work is double marked. The feedback provided to students is consistently sufficient to justify the mark awarded and to guide them on how to improve. The review team took the view that assessed student work demonstrates that credit is awarded only where the relevant sector-recognised standards have been met.

26 Members of Academic Board were able to describe their responsibilities in respect of maintaining sector-recognised standards and the requirement to comply with the regulations and policies of their validating university. A programme manager clearly articulated the use of the FHEQ in the development of a new programme. Staff at the validating university considered that the College staff have a good understanding of the various partnership arrangements that underpin academic standards. The review team was assured that staff understand and undertake their responsibilities in respect of maintaining threshold standards.

## Conclusions

27 As described above, the review team considered all of the evidence submitted to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing, the review team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other reviews and remained outcomes focused. Its conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

28 From the evidence seen, the review team considers that the standards set for the College's programmes are in line with the sector-recognised standards defined in paragraph 342 of the OfS's regulatory framework. Based on the evidence provided, the review team also considers that standards described in the approved programme documentation are set at levels that are consistent with these sector-recognised standards and the College's use of its validating university's academic regulations and policies should ensure that standards are maintained appropriately.

29 The review team considers that, based on the evidence scrutinised, the standards that will be achieved by the College's students are expected to be in line with the sector-recognised standards defined in paragraph 342 of the OfS's regulatory framework. The review team also considers that the College's use of the validating university's academic regulations and policies will ensure that these standards are maintained. The review team considers that staff fully understand the College's approach to maintaining these standards and that the evidence seen demonstrates they are committed to implementing this approach. Therefore, based on its scrutiny of the evidence provided, the review team concludes that this Core practice is met.

30 The evidence underpinning this judgement reflects all evidence described in the QSR evidence matrix and leads the team to have a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

## **S2 The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers**

31 This Core practice expects that the provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.

32 The QAA review team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

### **The evidence the team considered**

33 The QAA review team assessed the evidence presented to it, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The review team utilised that matrix to ensure that the evidence it considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other reviews and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

- a College Governance and Management Structure Revised
- b Sustainable Maritime Operations Academic Partnerships Annual Review
- c Interim Review College Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Action Plan
- d Academic Co-operation Agreement with University
- e Sustainable Maritime Operations Subject External Examiner Reports
- f Sustainable Maritime Operations Annual Award External Examiner Report
- g Sustainable Maritime Operations Interim Subject External Examiner Reports 2020
- h Student Handbook 2019\_2020
- i College Subject Assessment Panel Minutes 30062020 Approved
- j College Award Assessment Board Minutes 30062020 Approved
- k DipHE Hydrography assessment brief
- l BSc Hons assessment brief project handbook
- m PGDip Sustainable Maritime Operations assessment brief
- n University Academic Regulations 2019-20
- o University Assessment Policy
- p PGDip SMO705 Internal Moderation
- q PGDip SMO705 External Examiner coursework correspondence
- r BSc SMO603 internal moderation June 20
- s PGDip Advanced Hydrography assessment brief
- t MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations Assessment MSc project handbook
- u MSc Engineering Assessment MSc project handbook engine
- v MSc Advanced Hydrography Assessment MSc project handbook hydro
- w Sustainable Maritime Operations External Examiner Report and Responses 11 Dec 2018

x	Award External Examiner Report and Response 11 Dec 2018
y	Hydrography External Examiner Report and Response
z	Award External Examiner Report Dec2019 response
aa	External Examiner Award Assessment Response 2018_19
bb	HA External Examiner June 2018_2019 2
cc	External Examiner report Sustainable Maritime Operations June 2018_2019
dd	Engineering Annual Subject Report 2019 (3)
ee	College Award Assessment Board Minutes June 2019 Final
ff	College Subject Assessment Panel Minutes June 2019 Final
gg	College Subject Assessment Panel Mins December 2018
hh	MLA610 Internal moderation
ii	Marking and Moderation Policy
jj	Meeting with University staff
kk	Meeting with Members of Academic Board
ll	Meeting with Staff responsible for programme development
mm	Meeting with Students

34 Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the review team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this review are outlined below:

- Third party endorsements as none are available for the provision on offer at the College.

### **How any samples of evidence were constructed**

35 To test that specified standards beyond the threshold for courses sampled are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers, the team reviewed the approved course documentation for a representative sample of six programmes: Diploma in Higher Education for Hydrography for Professionals (Level 5), BSc (Hons) Sustainable Maritime Operations (Level 6), PGDip Sustainable Maritime Operations (Level 7), PGCert Sustainable Maritime Operations (level 7), Postgraduate Diploma in Advanced Hydrography for Professionals (Level 6), and MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations (Level 7). During the review visit, the team asked for approved course documentation relating to a newly validated programme: BSc Global Sustainable Development (Level 6).

36 To test that marks and awards given to students are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers, the team viewed a random and representative sample of assessed student work from eight of the College's 37 active modules. The sample drew from all FHEQ levels delivered (5, 6 and 7) over the last three years, and because only small numbers of students were registered, work was scrutinised from every candidate, thus embracing the full range of grades awarded. In total, 105 pieces of assessed work were sampled (some 33% of the work available), including work marked by a number of different members of staff. There were, in addition, a further 10 examples of formative and summative assessment provided prior to the review visit. Each sample included pieces of assessed work, the assignment brief, assessment and marking criteria, marked work and the feedback provided to the student, outcomes of internal and external moderation, and records of the relevant assessment panel.

37 To check that external examiners confirm threshold standards are consistent with national qualifications frameworks, and that credit and qualifications are awarded only where those threshold standards have been met, the team considered a representative sample of 17 external examiner reports reflecting the full range of the College's provision.

## **Why and how the team considered this evidence**

38 As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider was considered by the review team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the review team to make its judgement regarding the providers ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the review team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below.

39 To identify the institutional approach to course and assessment design, marking and moderation, requirements for awards and approaches to classification as the underlying basis for the standards of awards, the team reviewed the Academic Co-operation Agreement with the University, the University Academic Regulations, the Assessment Policy and the Marking and Moderation Policy.

40 To test that standards beyond the threshold for programmes sampled are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers, the team considered examples of approved course documentation (programme quality handbooks including module records and programme specifications, and assessment briefs).

41 To interrogate the robustness of the College's plans for setting and maintaining comparable standards and to ensure that plans are credible and evidence-based, the team considered the Academic Co-operation Agreement with the University, the University academic regulations, the University assessment policy, the marking and moderation policy, the College governance and management structure, the student handbook, examples of assessment briefs and project handbooks, examples of coursework moderation, minutes of Subject Assessment Panels, Award Assessment Boards, and external examiner reports. The team also discussed the College's plans with members of Academic Board, University staff and staff responsible for programme development.

42 To test that specified standards beyond the threshold for courses sampled are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers, the team sampled 115 pieces of marked student work from eight programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The team considered moderation records where notably high marks had been recorded.

43 To assess whether students understand what is required of them to reach standards beyond the threshold, the team met four students enrolled on MSc programmes of study and one student taking a work-related learning module at the Hong Kong Marine Department.

44 To test that staff understand and apply the College's approach to maintaining comparable standards, the team met members of Academic Board, staff responsible for programme development and University partnership staff.

## **What the evidence shows**

45 The review team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

46 A formal Academic Co-operation Agreement exists between the College and the University which grants permission for the College to deliver higher education programmes validated by the University. Ultimate academic responsibility for the award of

qualifications and the setting and maintenance of academic standards rests with the University. The College is, however, required to maintain the academic standards of awards delivered on behalf of the University. In line with the Academic Co-operation Agreement, the College follows the academic regulations, assessment frameworks and academic partnership processes of the University. These regulations and policies include comprehensive and clear detail about all aspects of programme design, delivery, and assessment. The academic regulations, for example, outline procedures for Subject Assessment Panels and Award Assessment Boards and the requirements for the awards of each qualification, including calculation of degree classification and the role of external examiners. Relevant to College provision are the award requirements for the Diploma in Higher Education, postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma, BSc, MSc, and MBA qualifications. The Assessment Policy and Marking and Moderation Policy detail the purpose of assessment, expectations for the student experience of assessment, the requirements of staff involved in assessment and how the University will support staff and the assessment process.

47 The approved course documentation presented in programme quality handbooks and assessment briefs is clear and robust. Programme quality handbooks are produced for each programme and provide comprehensive and definitive information, including the programme specification and module records (descriptors). In each programme quality handbook, programme learning outcomes are mapped against modules and the teaching and learning and assessment strategies and methods to be used in modules are clearly presented using the validating university's pro forma. Mapping of learning outcomes at different levels of study is undertaken and the team found this to be consistent with the FHEQ. Assessment briefs include a description of the assignment and its assessment criteria which the team considered to be appropriate to the level of study. For example, Level 7 briefs include descriptors of originality and independent thinking expected at this level in the FHEQ. Students are encouraged to familiarise themselves with marking criteria to understand what is required to achieve the highest possible mark.

48 The College's plans for maintaining comparable standards are robust and credible in that they are closely aligned with the University's well established and evidence-based regulations, assessment policies and academic partnership processes. The agreement with the University delegates to the College responsibility for setting, marking and moderation of assessments. The process is robust because assignment briefs are subject to review by an external examiner prior to release to students and further review following any substantive changes to the assessment. Information on progression and marks calculations is given to students in the Student Handbook and assessment briefs. In line with the University's assessment policy, staff responsible for programme development informed the team that formative assessment is deployed in modules as a strategy to support student academic development and their potential to achieve beyond the threshold standard.

49 The College implements the University's marking and moderation policy, including the internal and external moderation of a representative sample of student assessed work. Moderation decisions are documented, reported to the external examiner, and ensure that academic standards are comparable and are being maintained. Marks are confirmed by Subject Assessment Panels and decisions in respect of progression and award of qualifications are made at Award Assessment Boards. These meetings are chaired by a member of the University and include College staff and external examiners. Minutes of Subject Assessment Panels and Award Assessment Board carefully document external examiner input. The team took the view that the standards beyond the threshold for programmes sampled are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.



50 In setting and marking student assessments, the College is executing its responsibilities for the maintenance of academic standards of awards delivered on behalf of the University. The College is supported by the University's Academic Partnership Manager and staff development and training opportunities delivered by the University. The College has established its own internal deliberative governance structure, including an Academic Board with oversight of academic standards. The review team therefore took the view that the College's plans for maintaining comparable standards are robust and credible.

51 Sampled assessed student work reflects that credit and qualifications are awarded only where the relevant standards have been met. This is because marks awarded are carefully justified with written comments which align with the assignment criteria specified in the assessment brief. The feedback provided is consistently sufficient to justify the mark awarded and in most cases to guide students on how to improve. The review team found that several research project proposals for BSc Sustainable Maritime Operations were initially graded at a very high level, but this was picked up on in moderation resulting in changes to marks. This is a good example of effective and robust moderation procedures working well in practice.

52 In all reports seen by the team the external examiners confirm that standards beyond the threshold level are reasonably comparable with those in other UK providers, and credit and qualifications are awarded only where those standards have been met.

53 External examiner reports comment favourably on the nature of assessments set, the quality of marking and feedback provided, and opportunities for formative assessment and feed-forward. For example, the subject examiner for programmes in Hydrography notes that assessments comprise formative and summative continuous assessment, portfolio, essay, residential school-based assessment, or other end-of-module assessment. The external examiner considered the emphasis on providing students with opportunity to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes that have both academic and employability value to be commendable. The external examiner also notes that marking and feedback are clear and provide both a qualitative narrative for students and detailed quantitative marking, with some evidence of 'feed-forwards' on scripts in order to help students prepare for subsequent formal assessments.

54 The subject external examiner for programmes in Sustainable Maritime Operations notes that the nature and level of assessments are appropriate and are described in the assessment briefs. This external examiner was impressed with the quality of formative and summative feedback, particularly when points were highlighted for further discussion at the next individual tutorial. A subsequent report highlights the effective use made of Turnitin with the lecturer using both the quick comment labels and more detailed comments. These examples of comments are representative of those made in external examiner reports seen by the team. No issues have been raised in relation to marking standards, and the University's annual review of the College is informed by the external examiners' reports and finds that standards are secure.

55 There was limited opportunity for the team to meet students because all students currently enrolled on College programmes are learning at a distance, with Hydrography programmes delivered via blended learning, usually in employment in the maritime sector and sometimes out at sea. The team met four students enrolled on MSc programmes of study and one student taking a work-related learning module at the Hong Kong Marine Department. Students noted that assignment briefs are comprehensible and include a matrix showing grading criteria. They stated that the student handbook is clear and provides comprehensive information about academic quality, deadlines, word count, format and referencing. They also confirmed that, in their experience, the same marking

standards and expectations are consistently applied across modules. Taking account of the views of the small number of students available to meet the team, the team concluded that students understand what is required of them to reach standards beyond the threshold.

56 Members of Academic Board were able to describe their responsibilities in respect of maintaining comparable standards and the requirement to comply with the regulations and policies of the University. Staff responsible for programme development described how formative assessment is used and embedded in modules to help students develop to achieve beyond the threshold standard. Staff responsible for programme development understood the process for moderation and recognised its importance in maintaining standards. Staff at the University considered that College staff have a good understanding of the various partnership arrangements that underpin academic standards. The team was assured that staff understand and undertake their responsibilities in respect of maintaining comparable standards.

## **Conclusions**

57 As described above the review team considered all of the evidence submitted to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing, the review team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other reviews and remained outcomes focused. Its conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

58 The review team, based on the evidence presented to them, determined that the standards set for students to achieve beyond the threshold on the College's courses are reasonably comparable with those set by other UK providers. The review team considered that the standards described in the approved programme documentation and in the University's academic regulations and policies adopted by the College should ensure that such standards are maintained appropriately.

59 Therefore, the review team concludes, based on the evidence described above, that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers and this Core practice is met.

60 The evidence underpinning this judgement reflects all evidence described in the QSR evidence matrix and leads the team to have a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

### **S3 Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them**

61 This Core practice expects that where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.

62 The QAA review team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

#### **The evidence the team considered**

63 The QAA review team assessed the evidence presented to it, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The review team utilised that matrix to ensure that the evidence it considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other reviews and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

- a College Governance and management Structure
- b College programme approval policy
- c Partner Subject Review January 2020
- d Interim programme action plan
- e Academic Board Minutes
- f Academic co-operation agreement with the University May 2015 and Amendment
- g Joint Board of Studies minutes January 2020
- h External examiner reports
- i Sustainable Maritime Operations level 6 and 7 assessment briefs
- j College responsibilities checklist
- k Academic Partnerships Changes to Existing Programmes Process 2019-20
- l June 2020 Interim Review Hydrography Suite Programme Action Plan
- m DipHE Programme Quality Handbook 2019\_20
- n BSc (Hons) Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Quality Handbook2019\_20
- o University of Academic Regulations 2019-20
- p College Admissions Committee
- q College Bursary Scheme Panel
- r College Ethics Committee
- s College Programme Committee
- t Academic Partnerships Quality Assurance Meetings Terms of Reference
- u College Assessments Committee Terms of Reference
- v Academic Board Meeting minutes

w	MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Quality Handbook
x	HKMD Work Based Learning (WBL) Handbook
y	MLA079 Assessment September 2020
z	University External Examiner Policies and Procedures for Taught Programmes
aa	QSR Response to request for additional evidence
bb	MLA709 and the Hong Kong Marine Department Professional Training Standard
cc	MA709 Professional Training Standard Assistant Marine Officer (AMO)
dd	Sustainable Maritime Operations External Examiners Report and Response
ee	Award External Examiner Report and Response
ff	Hydrography External Examiner Report and Response 11 Dec 2018
gg	HA External Examiners June 2018_2019 2
hh	External Examiners June 2018_2019
ii	HA Annual Subject Report 2019 (2)
jj	Engineering Annual Subject Report 2019 (3)
kk	Sustainable Maritime Operations Annual Subject Report 2019 (4)
ll	Joint Board of Studies Minutes
mm	Subject Assessment Panel Minutes June 2019 Final
nn	Award Assessment Board Minutes June 2020 Approved
oo	QSR request for additional evidence MLA Response
pp	MLA709 Mentor Work-based Learning for Marine Professions (Mentors)
qq	Annual Review - Programme Plan Operational Guidance
rr	University Academic Partnership Annual Programme Review – Guidance
ss	MLA601 and MLA501 assessment
tt	College Academic Calendar 19-20
uu	College Proposal for Administration June 2020
vv	Agreed support staffing
ww	BSc Outcome Record Desk BasedSt2
xx	College Module Records BSc Global Sustainable Development 19-20 Programme Specification, Operational Specifications and Update on Conditions BSc Global Sustainable Development (1)
yy	University email re Global Sustainable Development
zz	QSR visit meetings - Points of clarification - Facilitator email
aaa	Meeting with Senior staff
bbb	Meeting with staff from the University
ccc	Meeting with members of Academic Board
ddd	Meeting with staff responsible for programme development
eee	Meeting with responsible for managing the Student forum
fff	Meeting with Professional support staff
ggg	Meeting with Associate tutors
hhh	Meeting with Employers
iii	Meeting with staff from the Hong Kong Marine Department
jjj	Meeting with staff responsible for developing and maintaining the learning platform
kkk	Meeting with Senior staff

64 Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the review team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this review are outlined below:

- Third party endorsements as none are available for the provision on offer at the College.

## **How any samples of evidence were constructed**

65 To test that the standards of awards delivered in partnership are credible and secure thus confirming the effectiveness of the underpinning arrangements the team viewed a random and representative sample of assessed student work from eight of the Colleges 37 active modules.

66 The sample drew from all FHEQ levels delivered (5, 6 and 7) over the last three years, and because only small numbers of students were registered, work was scrutinised from every candidate, thus embracing the full range of grades awarded. In total, 105 pieces of assessed work were sampled (some 33% of the work available), including work marked by a number of different members of staff. There were, in addition, a further 10 examples of formative and summative assessment provided prior to the review visit.

67 Each sample included pieces of assessed work, the assignment brief, assessment and marking criteria, marked work and the feedback provided to the student, outcomes of internal and external moderation, and records of the relevant assessment panel.

68 To test whether external examiners consider that standards are credible and secure, the team scrutinised external examiner reports for the last two academic years, together with the responses made to the externals by the College. The team also reviewed the records of associated assessment panels and boards, and the ensuing annual reports, to determine the effectiveness of the underpinning arrangements.

## **Why and how the team considered this evidence**

69 As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the Provider was considered by the review team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the review team to make its judgement regarding the provider's ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision-making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the review team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below.

70 To assess whether the College has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for securing standards in partnership work, the team scrutinised the Academic Co-operation Agreement between the College and the University and met staff from both the University and the College in order to clarify aspects of policy and procedures. The team also scrutinised records of and explored the College's approaches and internal procedures for implementing the University's academic regulations for partnership working programme specifications, governance committee meeting minutes, outcomes of internal moderation and staff roles and responsibilities.

71 To interrogate the basis for the maintenance of academic standards within specific partnerships, and that those arrangements are in line with the College's regulations or policies, the review team scrutinised the Academic Co-operation Agreement between the University and the College and associated responsibilities. Arrangements for one module in which students reflect on their workplace experiences were explored through programme documentation; discussions with College staff, University staff and industrial mentors; and reading the appropriate national professional standards framework.

72 To identify how other organisations regard the standards of awards of courses delivered in partnership, the team met staff from a national government shipping agency, employers of graduates from a range of marine industries and associate tutors who work for the majority of their time in the marine sector, and a number of whom hold positions within the principal UK marine professional body.

73 To test that standards of awards are credible and secure, thus confirming the effectiveness of the underpinning arrangements, the team sampled marked student work from eight programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. One hundred and five pieces of graded work with formative and summative feedback were scrutinised, together with assessment briefs and criteria, outcomes of internal moderation, scrutiny by external examiners and consideration by assessment panels.

74 To test that staff understand and discharge effectively their responsibilities to the University, the team met senior staff, staff responsible for programme development, members of Academic Board, associate tutors and professional support staff from the College. The team was able to further explore the locus of responsibilities in discussions with staff during demonstrations of the student online forum and the Total Learning Package.

75 To test the University's understanding of its responsibilities and how this is implemented and monitored in practice, the team met staff from the Academic Partnerships team at the University.

### **What the evidence shows**

76 The review team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

77 The College and University hold a formal Academic Co-operation Agreement within which the College is permitted to develop and deliver University-validated higher education programmes. A formal process is in place to both approve the partnership and re-approve it on a periodic basis.

78 The University requires the College to align with University policies, and to adhere to its academic regulations and procedures. Three minor procedural non-standard regulations that increase the window within which extenuating circumstances can be claimed, that permit internal interim assessment boards to grant immediate referral of failed assessments, and that permit a longer registration period than other University students have been formally approved as non-standard regulations. These better meet the needs of marine-based distance learning, with Hydrography programmes delivered via blended learning, students who spend much of their life at sea, frequently without access to the internet and direct communications with the College.

79 Programmes are developed, conducted, managed, taught and assessed by the College, and the University assures its ultimate responsibilities for academic standards by applying its academic governance and quality procedures within its arrangements with the College. A detailed validation process is employed to scrutinise and approve programme proposals. The University appoints independent external examiners to oversee academic performance, conducts assessment panels and boards at which student outcomes are considered, and regularly convenes Academic Partnership Planning and Review and Joint Board of Studies meetings to reflect on partnership and programme matters.

80 The College's current active provision comprises distance-learning programmes, with Hydrography programmes delivered via blended learning, with a target audience in the maritime industries. It has no programmes in which partners are

engaged to teach, support or assess students, although the academic co-operation agreement permits the College to engage with staff in other organisations to assist in programme delivery if required.

81 The College thus has in place a clear and comprehensive partnership agreement which requires the use of regulations and policies from the University, and which are sufficient to ensure that the standards of the awards it delivers through its partnership are credible and secure.

82 The University states that the College's engagements with the University's frameworks for managing academic partnerships are implemented effectively and in a timely manner. Examples include the assurance of standards through seeking approval of newly appointed academic staff, proactive contributions to academic governance in the Joint Board of Studies and the Annual Planning and Review process, successful validation of new programmes and appropriate amendments to existing provision, the maintenance of accurate student records, and detailed engagement with external examiners.

83 The team concludes that the timely and effective procedures which the College has developed in order to engage with the University's academic governance framework demonstrate that it has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for securing standards in its partnership with the University.

84 External examiners report satisfaction with standards defined within the College programmes, with assessment instruments used, and with assessment outcomes. They furthermore consider that standards achieved are comparable with similar programmes elsewhere in the sector and confirm that the College properly engages with the University's assessment procedures. The University's annual review of the College is also informed by the external examiners' reports and finds that standards are secure. The team thus concludes that external examiners confirm that the College properly applies the arrangements underpinning academic standards in its partnership with the University, and that academic standards are credible and secure.

85 The review team was able to explore records of assessment boards, and subsequent correspondence between the College and the external examiners. The College's responses to external examiner reports and minutes of the Joint Board of Studies demonstrate that points raised were properly addressed by the College.

86 In a meeting with staff from a national government shipping agency, the team heard that the College had been working in collaboration with them for a number of years, and that staff and professional mariners routinely registered on College postgraduate programmes as a required element of their continuing professional development. The standards achieved were well-respected in the industry, and the assessment processes considered credible. The views of employers of graduates from a range of marine industries offered confirmation of the well-respected standard of the College awards delivered in partnership with the University.

87 College senior staff credibly articulated, and gave confidence to the team, that they understand their responsibilities to the University within the Academic agreement and governance framework, stating that the University has overall responsibility for the setting and maintenance of standards. The Senior Administrator and Academic Partnerships Manager job profile states that this position is responsible for the management of the College's academic partnerships with the University. This position reports to the Head, Academic Quality and Standards and works with all staff to ensure the appropriate aspects of the College and University partnership administration, ensuring that the College

is compliant with the operational requirements of a University Academic Partner as stated in the Academic Co-operation Agreements and the University governance framework. The Senior Administrator and Academic Partnerships Manager clearly articulated in a meeting with the team the delineation of responsibilities of the University and College. Members of Academic Board, staff responsible for programme development and associate tutors who met the team articulated their responsibilities and how this is implemented and monitored in practice. University staff who met the team advised that all partners go through a periodic review every six years, covering all aspects of the partnership and academic programmes. The periodic review for the College falls due in 2021. University staff informed the team of the training offered to the College through Partner forums held three times per year to share good practices and highlight opportunities available to partners, for example, amendments to policies and procedures or changes to resources in the teaching and learning handbook. The Joint Board of Studies and Annual Programme Review meetings are held annually. MLA itself conducts an additional interim review mid-cycle. Subject Assessment Panels and Assessment Award Boards are scheduled three times a year at which both the College and University attend to support the delivery model. University staff considered that the College works well within the University's frameworks and procedures, and College staff have a good understanding of the various elements of the partnership arrangements. The team's discussions with staff confirmed the view that staff from both the College and the University understand their respective responsibilities for academic standards.

## **Conclusions**

88 As described above, the review team considered all of the evidence submitted to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing, the review team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other reviews and remained outcomes focused. Its conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

89 The review team concludes that where the College works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them. By adhering to the Academic Co-operation Agreement with the University, and by embedding the University's academic regulations and policies within its operational procedures, the College has developed arrangements to ensure the standards of awards it delivers on behalf of the University are credible and secure. It implements these with vigilance through its robust processes of internal moderation, its engagement with external examiners and its engagement with the regulations of the University. The review team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.

90 The evidence underpinning this judgement reflects all of the evidence described in the QSR evidence matrix. Therefore, the review team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.



## **S4 The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent**

91 This Core practice expects that the provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.

92 The QAA review team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

### **The evidence the team considered**

93 The QAA review team assessed the evidence presented to it, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The review team utilised that matrix to ensure that the evidence it considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other reviews and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

- a College Academic Strategy
- b College Governance and management Structure Revised 25\_02\_20
- c College Programme approval policy
- d Academic Board Minutes
- e Joint Board of Studies (JBS) Minutes
- f Sustainable Maritime Operations Subject External Examiner Reports
- g Student\_Handbook\_2019\_2020
- h University Student Perception Questionnaire College 2019
- i College responsibilities checklist
- j Subject Assessment Panel Meeting Agenda 2019-20 (3) pdf
- k University Academic Regulations 2019-20
- l June 2020 Interim Review Hydrography Suite Programme Action Plan
- m College Assessments Committee
- n PGCert Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Quality Handbook
- o PGDip Hydrography Operations Programme Quality Handbook
- p PGDip Advanced Hydrography Assessment Brief
- q MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Quality Handbook
- r MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations Assessment Project Handbook
- s MSc Engineering Operations Programme Quality Handbook
- t MSc Engineering Assessment Project Handbook
- u MSc Adv Hydro Operations Programme Quality Handbook
- v MSc Advanced Hydrography Assessment Project Handbook
- w University External Examiners Policies and Procedures for Taught Programmes
- x Confirmed Report Hydro Academy approval 09 01 13 (2)
- y Email message for Stage 2 Report Sustainable Maritime Operations
- z Sustainable Maritime Operations amended comments on V3
- aa Sustainable Maritime Operations Amended College aims and Programme Learning Outcomes
- bb Stage 2 Report Sustainable Maritime Operations
- cc QSR Request for additional evidence College Response V2 160920

dd	Sustainable Maritime Operations External Examiner Report and Responses
ee	Award External Examiner Report and Response 11 Dec 2018_v2
ff	Hydrography External Examiner Report and Response 11 Dec 201
gg	Award External Examiner Report Dec2019 Response
hh	Award Assessment External Examiner Response 2018_19
ff	HA External Examiner June 2018_2019
jj	Sustainable Maritime Operations External Examiner June 2018_2019
kk	HA Annual Subject Report 2019 (2)
ll	Engineering Annual Subject Report 2019 (3)
mm	Sustainable Maritime Operations Annual Subject Report 2019 (4)
nn	Joint Board of Studies Minutes
oo	College Award Assessment Board Minutes June 2019 Final
pp	Academic Partnerships Annual Review – Programme Plan Operational Guidance
qq	University Academic Partnerships Annual Programme Review Guidance
rr	Marking and Moderation Policy
ss	Academic Partnerships Student Perception Questionnaire ALL (1)
tt	BSc Outcome Record_DeskbasedSt2
uu	Update on conditions College BSc Global Sustainable Development
vv	Assessed student work and feedback:
ww	Assessment briefs
xx	Project handbooks
yy	Internal moderation reports
zz	External examiner work examples
aaa	Assessment panel consideration
bbb	Meeting with Senior staff
ccc	Meeting with staff from the University
ddd	Meeting with members of Academic Board
eee	Meeting with staff responsible for programme development
fff	Meeting with Associate tutors
ggg	Meeting with Students

94 Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the review team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this review are outlined below:

- third party endorsements as none are available for the provision on offer at the College.

### **How any samples of evidence were constructed**

95 To assess the reliability, fairness and transparency of assessment and classification processes, the team considered examples of approved course documentation (programme quality handbooks, including module records and programme specifications).

96 The sample drew from all FHEQ levels delivered (5, 6 and 7) over the last three years, and because only small numbers of students were registered, work was scrutinised from every candidate, thus embracing the full range of grades awarded. In total, 105 pieces of assessed work were sampled (some 33% of the work available), including work marked by a number of different members of staff. There were, in addition, a further 10 examples of formative and summative assessment provided prior to the review visit. Each sample included pieces of assessed work, the assignment brief, assessment and marking criteria, marked work and the feedback provided to the student, outcomes of internal and external moderation, and records of the relevant assessment

panel.

97 To interrogate the use of external examiners or verifiers and that the College considers and respond to externals' reports regarding standards appropriately, the team scrutinised external examiner reports for the last two academic years, together with the responses made to the externals by the College.

98 To identify externals' views about reliability, fairness and transparency of assessment and classification processes, the team considered a representative sample of 17 external examiner reports reflecting the full range of the College's provision.

### **Why and how the team considered this evidence**

99 As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the Provider was considered by the review team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the review team to make its judgement regarding the providers ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision-making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the review team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below.

100 To identify how external experts are used in setting and maintaining academic standards, and how the College's assessment and classification processes operate, the team considered the College responsibilities checklist, the University External Examiners Policies and Procedures for Taught Programmes, the College Governance and Management structure, College Academic Strategy, College Academic Board Minutes, College Student Handbook 2019/20, University Academic Regulations 2019-20, College Assessments Committee, QSR Request for additional evidence College Response V2 160920, and the Marking and Moderation Policy.

101 To assess whether plans for using external expertise in setting and maintaining academic standards and plans for assessment and classification processes are credible, robust and evidence-based, the team considered the College Governance and Management Structure Revised, College responsibilities checklist, University External Examiners Policies and Procedures for Taught Programmes, June 2020 Interim Review Hydrography Suite Programme Action Plan, Minutes of academic governance meetings, External examiner reports, Internal moderation reports, Programme Quality Handbooks, Assessment briefs, Assessed student work and feedback, Project handbooks, PGDip SMO705 Final Coursework, PGDip SMO705 Feedback, BSc SMOM603 Sample Final Submission with feedback, BSc Sustainable Maritime Operations sample coursework message, MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations Feedback Thesis-Pres, MSc SMO712 Project proposal with Supervisor comments, MSc SMO712 Project Proposal Feedback, MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations Dissertation with Supervisor margin notes, MSc Engineering 717 Thesis, MSc Engineering Thesis Feedback, Update on conditions BSc Global Sustainable Development.

102 To test that external experts are used according to the College's regulations or policies, the team considered College Programme Approval Policy, Joint Board of Studies Minutes, College responsibilities checklist, University Academic Regulations 2019-20, Confirmed Report Hydro Academy approval, Final HA Approval Document, Email message for Stage 2 Report Sustainable Maritime Operations, Sustainable Maritime Operations amended comments, Sustainable Maritime Operations Amended College aims and Programme Learning Outcomes, Stage 2 Report Sustainable Maritime

Operations, Academic Partnerships Annual Review – Programme Plan Operational Guidance, University Academic Partnerships Annual Programme Review Guidance, BSc Outcome Record DeskbasedSt2.

103 To test that staff understand the requirements for the use of external expertise, and the College's assessment and classification processes, the team reviewed evidence of external examiner scrutiny and met with senior staff, members of Academic Board; staff responsible for programme development and associate tutors.

104 To identify how students regard the reliability, fairness and transparency of assessment and classification processes, the team met four students enrolled on MSc programmes of study and reviewed data collected in student feedback questionnaires.

105 To identify external experts' views about the reliability, fairness and transparency of assessment and classification processes, the team considered Joint Board of Studies Minutes, Sustainable Maritime Operations Subject External Examiner Reports, Sustainable Maritime Operations Subject External Examiner Reports and Responses, Hydrography External Examiner Report and Response, Award External Examiner Report response, HA External Examiner Report, HA Annual Subject Report, Engineering Annual Subject Report 2019 (3), Sustainable Maritime Operations Annual Subject Report.

### **What the evidence shows**

106 The review team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

107 The College has clear and comprehensive regulations describing its requirements for using external expertise in setting and maintaining academic standards. The use of external expertise in maintaining academic standards is a shared function between the College and the University governed by the University's Academic Regulations which set out a well-defined requirement for using external expertise for all programmes leading to a University award, including those delivered at a partner institution. These plans are credible and robust because the University's External Examiners Policies and Procedures for Taught Programmes contain clear protocols for the process for appointment of external examiners, roles, powers and responsibilities of subject and award external examiners, reporting requirements and the process for consideration and response of reports, approach to student engagement with external examiners and the process for termination of appointment.

108 The College nominates external examiners who are approved and employed by the University. This was confirmed in the meeting with staff from the University and there is evidence of this with programme approval documentation. For example, in the Update on conditions BSc Global Sustainable Development it is confirmed that the nominations for external examiners have been received by the University and approved.

109 As detailed in the University's External Examiners Policies and Procedures for Taught Programmes the University has two categories of external examiner - subject and award. Subject external examiners are appointed for each subject area and are primarily responsible for the standards of assessment in a specific group of modules irrespective of the programmes or award to which they are attached. They are members of the Subject Assessment Panel which confirms or modifies module marks and ensure that the students are being assessed in accordance with the assessment programme and the intended learning outcomes for the subject modules. Subject external examiners do not attend Award Assessment Boards except, by prior agreement by the External Examiners Sub-Committee, the subject external examiners may rotate the role of award external examiner. The award external examiner is responsible for ensuring that decisions on

progression or awards for students are made in accordance with the assessment regulations, 'and that justice is done to the individual student, taking account of any recommendations resulting from prior consideration of extenuating circumstances or assessment offences'. Award external examiners are members of appropriate Award Assessment Boards which make decisions on progression and awards based on module marks confirmed by Subject Assessment Panels and they have a responsibility to ensure that the University's regulations are being implemented consistently, fairly and in line with national standards and expectations for such processes. The minutes from Subject and Award Assessment Boards confirm that the College are operating in accordance with this approach.

110 Plans for using external expertise in setting and maintaining academic standards are credible, robust and evidence-based because the evidence shows that the College is considering and responding to external examiners reports in line with the University's External Examiners Policies and Procedures for Taught Programmes. External examiner reports and the College's response to them confirm the use of external expertise and that the College gives that expertise due consideration. The response to external examiners is incorporated into the external examiners reporting form. Subject external examiners and award external examiner's report forms confirm that the College provides responses to external examiners reports and that external examiners are satisfied with the responses received. This is because the College provides a response to each external examiner and ensures that the Chair of the Award Assessment Board responds directly to issues raised by the award external examiner, whether these are programme specific or related to wider matters. The sample of minutes from the Joint Board of Studies, Award and Subject Assessment Panels and the Programme Action Plans confirm that these reports are considered and responded to appropriately and contain examples of the external examiner feedback being used to inform the subsequent review of practice. For example, College Joint Board of Studies minutes show that external examiner comments about marking criteria were considered and that the College now has an assessment task panel to support tutors in reviewing the marking criteria and implementing a revised rubric to replace the existing University criteria and rubric. This was also confirmed in the meeting with staff responsible for programme development.

111 External examiners comments in the Programme Action Plans are considered by the College Academic Board as outlined in the College Governance and Management structure. The College makes copies of these Programme Action Plans available to relevant colleagues, including senior management teams, staff teaching on modules and programmes and copy award external examiners' reports to relevant subject external examiners, and vice versa, for information. For example, the Subject Assessment Panel meeting agenda shows that consideration of external examiner reports is a standing item on the Subject Assessment Panel agendas and the Subject Panel and Award Assessment Board minutes show that these were considered.

112 The College shares external examiners reports with students through the University Student Portal, which is signposted and linked in the College Student Handbook, and appropriate student and staff committee structures to strengthen student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement. The use of external expertise is clearly articulated to students on page 12 of the College Student Handbook 2019/20.

113 The College conducts annual programme review in line with the University's process and the Joint Board of Studies considers Programme Plans which require reflection and commentary on external examiner comments. This is evidenced in the sample of minutes provided from the Joint Board of Studies in January 2020 and February 2019.

114 External examiner reports and College responses are considered by the relevant programme committees as part of the evidence base for annual programme review. For example, consideration of external examiners is included in the terms of reference for the College Academic Board and there is evidence of external examiner feedback being considered in the Programme Committees Interim review of the 2019-20 Programme Action Plans at the August Academic Board meeting and in the June 2020 Interim Review Hydrography Suite Programme Action Plan. The College sends external examiners follow-up action plans and subsequent updates, when appropriate. Ongoing engagement and consultation with the external examiner are evidenced in the external examiners reports.

115 Records of course approval and review confirm that external expertise is used according to the University's academic regulations. This is because the College Programme Approval Policy states that the programme design process is expected to be a collaborative exercise with input from relevant external stakeholders and external academic advisers. It is expected that membership of validation panels would typically comprise at least one academic subject expert, proposed in liaison with the University, and one employer representative. The policy outlines in detail the criteria for the appointment of external panel members. The evidence provided demonstrates that externals were involved in programme approval processes. This is because the Confirmed Report Hydro Academy, Stage 2 Report Sustainable Maritime Operations and BSc Outcome Record\_ DeskbasedSt2 show that, in line with the Programme Approval Policy, external advisers were present as panel members at the Learning and Teaching Committee for the Programme Approval of the DipHE Hydrography for Professionals, Postgraduate Diploma Advanced Hydrography for Professionals, BSc/BSc (Hons) Sustainable Maritime Operations (Level 6 top-up) PGCert/PGDip/MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations, and contributed to the discussions and programme approval process for Stage 2 Report Sustainable Maritime Operation, Sustainable Maritime Operations amended comments on V3, Sustainable Maritime Operations Amended aims and Programme Learning Outcomes. The Final HA Approval Document refers to qualitative and quantitative feedback from a range of external stakeholders as part of the programme development for the DipHE Hydrography for Professionals. External stakeholders for the Postgraduate Diploma Advanced Hydrography for Professionals included higher education STEM's South West Spoke's External Advisory Group, which included representatives from the Engineering Employers' Federation, JISC, a large local engineering employer and a member of HEFCE's Exchange Group.

116 In meetings with senior staff, staff responsible for programme development and meeting with associate tutors the value of engagement with industry and professional perspectives in the development and delivery of curriculum was reinforced, with the close links with Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST) and the professional experience and expertise of associate tutors being emphasised.

117 The College's approach for using external expertise in both setting and maintaining academic standards and assessment and classification are robust and credible because the external examiner reports identify the views of external experts about the reliability, fairness and transparency of assessment and classification processes and demonstrate that external examiners and external experts involved in programme approval understand their role.

118 The Teaching and Learning Handbook provides a link to the information provided to all external examiners by the University and the subject and programme-level briefing information which provides a well-defined checklist of what items should be sent to external examiners, including module handbooks, assessment briefs, assessment criteria, moderation samples and evidence of moderation as per the Marking and

Moderation Policy. There is evidence of internal moderation which demonstrates that marking is being reviewed as part of the moderation process and communications with external examiners demonstrate that external expertise is used in setting and maintaining academic standards.

119 Approved course documentation, including the University's Assessment Policy, Programme Quality Handbooks, assessment briefs and project handbooks, show that assessment and classification processes are reliable, fair and transparent. This is because the module records as contained within Programme Quality Handbooks clearly set out the assessment methods for each module detailing the component tasks and the percentage weightings of each assessment component. The plans for assessment and classification processes are robust because external examiners' reports confirm that the College's assessment and classification processes are reliable, fair and transparent. Programme quality handbooks, project handbooks and assessment briefs provide comprehensive information to students about assessment strategies and methods and marking criteria.

120 Samples of assessed student work and feedback and internal moderation reports confirm that assessment and classification are carried out in a fair and transparent way in line with the College's requirements.

121 The results from the student perception questionnaire show that the majority of respondents agree that the criteria used in marking have been clear in advance (75%) and that marking and assessment have been fair (70.1%). Students who met the review team confirmed that they are satisfied the College's assessment and classification processes are reliable, fair and transparent and that they were able to seek guidance and support if they have any concerns or queries.

122 The College Assessments Committee has oversight for the reliability, fairness and transparency of assessment and classification processes and this is a standing agenda item on Academic Board. The University's Assessment Policy outlines the principles underpinning assessment and what students can expect. The University Academic Regulations also articulate the threshold requirement to pass a level of study and individual module. The requirement to pass a module is set at 40% for undergraduate modules and 50% for master's programmes. Students in Hydrography programmes must pass all modules and no compensation in individual modules is permitted to ensure that professional body requirements are met in full. Classification processes detailing requirements for fail, pass, merit and distinction are set out in the University's Regulations. This is clear and comprehensive because it provides unambiguous information about the processes for passing modules and levels in a programme.

## **Conclusions**

123 As described above, the review team considered all of the evidence submitted to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing, the review team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other reviews and remained outcomes focused. Its conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

124 The review team concludes that the College uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent. This is because the College has comprehensive regulations and policies describing its requirements for using external expertise in setting and maintaining academic standards and these requirements are delivering the stated objectives. The processes for assessment and classification are

clear and transparent and approved course documentation demonstrates they are being implemented effectively. The College's plans for using external expertise in both setting and maintaining academic standards and assessment and classification are robust and credible because there is evidence of engaging appropriate external expertise in programme approval and annual programme review as per the stated policies. Evidence from samples of student work, external examiner reports and ongoing review of these processes by the University through the Joint Board of Studies, confirm the effectiveness of the College's approach to the use of external expertise and the reliability, fairness and transparency of assessment and classification process. Staff understand the requirements for the use of external expertise and assessment and classification processes in all aspects of delivering high-quality academic experiences. The review team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.

125 The evidence underpinning this judgement reflects all of the evidence described in the QSR evidence matrix. Therefore, the review team have a high degree of confidence in this judgement.



## Q1 The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system

126 This Core practice expects that the provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.

127 The QAA review team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

### The evidence the team considered

128 The QAA review team assessed the evidence presented to it, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The review team utilised that matrix to ensure that the evidence it considered was assessed in away that is clear and consistent with all other reviews and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

- a Course information website at [www.mla-uk.com](http://www.mla-uk.com) accessed 23 October 2020
- b Programme Approval Policy
- c Interim Review Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Action Plan
- d Survey Questions for New Students
- e Infographic New Starter
- f Academic Co-operation Agreement and Amendment with University
- g College Admissions Statement June 2020
- h College Access and Participation Statement 2020 Final
- i College Complaint Procedure Statement June 2020
- j Programme Quality Handbooks
- k Academic Regulations
- l College Admissions Committee
- m Course Information
- n College Admissions Records
- o Job Profile College Recruitment and Admissions Officer
- p FINAL HA DipHE Programme Specification
- q FINAL HA PG Dip Programme Specification
- r 2018\_2019 Student Admissions
- s 2019\_2020 Student Admissions
- t Request for Additional Evidence MLA Response 051020 final
- u Meeting with Senior staff
- v Meeting with University of Plymouth staff
- w Meeting with Members of Academic Board
- x Meeting with Professional support staff
- y Meeting with Students
- z Final meeting with Senior staff

129 Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the review team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this review are outlined below:

- arrangements with recruitment agents because the College reported that it does not use recruitment agents.

### **How any samples of evidence were constructed**

130 To test whether admissions requirements for courses sampled reflect the College's overall regulations and policy and provide reliable, fair and inclusive admissions decisions, the team considered approved course documentation for four sampled programmes representative of the College's provision. These were: BSc Sustainable Maritime Operations, Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma Sustainable Maritime Operations; MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations. These four programmes comprised 157 students, which is 54% of the College's total higher education provision.

131 In order to assess whether the admissions criteria were consistently applied and met, the team randomly sampled admissions records provided by the College in summary format for 27 students from a total enrolment in 2018-19 of 187 students. Of these, 12 records were for applications to the suite of awards in Sustainable Maritime Operations; three from each of the PG Certificate and PG Diploma awards in Sustainable Maritime Operations, and three from each of the BSc and MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations degrees.

### **Why and how the team considered this evidence**

132 As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the Provider was considered by the review team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the review team to make its judgement regarding the providers ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision-making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the review team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below.

133 To identify institutional policy relating to the recruitment, selection and admission of students; the roles and responsibilities of staff involved in the admissions process; support for applicants; how the College verifies applicants' entry qualifications; how the College facilitates an inclusive admissions system; and how it handles complaints and appeals, the team considered the Academic Co-operation Agreement with the University and an Amendment, Academic Regulations, the College's Admissions Statement, Access and Participation Statement, and Complaints Procedure. The team also met students to ascertain their views and used the final meeting with senior staff of the College to confirm aspects of the policies. The job profile for the Recruitment and Admissions Officer was examined to understand the allocation of responsibility for recruitment and admissions, and student-facing documentation available at the application stage was reviewed to determine the information upon which prospective students might base their decision.

134 To assess whether the College has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for ensuring that admissions systems are reliable, fair and inclusive, the team scrutinised a summary of admission records for 27 applicants and course information for four courses: the PG Certificate, PG Diploma, BSc and MSc in Sustainable Maritime Operations. The College response to a request for additional evidence was scrutinised to elicit further information regarding admissions records and equality and diversity considerations, and summary admissions data for 2019 and 2020 were analysed to support statements by the College. The team reviewed the Admissions Statement and the Access and Participation Statement to understand the College's approach to admissions.

135 To test whether the information given to applicants is transparent, inclusive and fit for purpose, the team considered course documentation from four programmes: Postgraduate Certificate in Sustainable Maritime Operations; Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainable Maritime Operations; BSc in Sustainable Maritime Operations; and the MSc in Sustainable Maritime Operations, along with admission records for three applications for both the PG Certificate and the PG Diploma in Sustainable Maritime Operations, and four from each of the BSc and MSc in Sustainable Maritime Operations. The team also considered information available to applicants on the Course information website at [www.mla-uk.com](http://www.mla-uk.com) (accessed 23 October 2020).

136 To test whether admissions requirements for courses sampled reflect the College's overall regulations and/or policy, the team considered course information from four programmes and admissions decisions, and compared them against the College's Admissions Statement and Access and Participation Statement. The team also reviewed the Programme Approval Policy and Programme Specifications which form part of the validation process.

137 To assess whether reliable, fair and inclusive admissions decisions were made for the applicants sampled, the team compared admissions records to the course information for four programmes of study and considered the admissions data available.

138 To test whether staff understand their responsibilities, are appropriately skilled and supported and can articulate how the College's approach to inclusivity is manifest in the admissions process, the team spoke with the Recruitment and Admissions Officer, senior staff and members of Academic Board to discuss the various roles involved with the admissions process.

139 To assess students' views about the admissions process, the team analysed data from the Survey Questions for New Students and the Infographic for New Starter. The team also met students.

### **What the evidence shows**

140 The review team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

141 The College has a formal partnership with the University through the Academic Co-operation Agreement (ACA) and an Amendment Agreement to ACA which delegates to the College the University's requirements and compliance in relation to admissions. Both documents confirm that College programmes and students are subject to the University's regulations and policies for Admissions. The Academic Regulations state that admissions to all programmes of study are managed under the University's admissions policy. The University's admissions policy makes reference to related policy, including students with disabilities, Complaints and Appeals, English requirements, Fee Assessment Framework and Widening participation.

142 The College's Admissions Statement and Access and Participation Statement contextualises the admissions policy for College applicants and describes the admission process that applies to all applicants for entry to the College and outlines the principles of diversity, inclusion and widening participation upon which the policies are based. The College's Admissions Statement confirms that the College conducts its admission procedures in alignment with the University's policy, procedures and principles for admissions. Approved course documentation clearly set out the admissions requirements for each programme, including academic entry requirements, relevant experience and/or other specific requirements such as a personal statement, submission of a portfolio and English language.

143 The College applicant and student profile are mature age, mainly employed and seeking to study part-time by distance and blended learning. The College's provision is therefore focused on learners wishing to secure careers and career progression within the maritime and marine sectors. The admissions data is limited to gender, age and nationality and evidenced in the admissions records for 2019 and 2020 and therefore no consideration could be made by the team of the full range of inclusivity issues within the admissions process. The College is aware that its data collection with respect to equality and diversity is underdeveloped, and thus analysis to monitor diversity and inclusivity is very limited. The College is working to implement a more comprehensive IT- based system for record keeping which should enable a more targeted and focused approach to identifying under-represented groups and widening participation. This was corroborated by the University staff who met the team and, when asked about the student record system issues, confirmed that a joint working party was meeting to develop a means of capturing a broader range of student demographic data.

144 The College Admissions Committee has oversight of the admission process and ensures that the College conducts admissions in line with the Admissions Statement. The Committee also ensures that programme admissions requirements are reviewed and updated regularly and available to potential applicants on the College website. However, the team noted that responsibility for inclusivity and diversity was not specifically stated as part of the Terms of Reference of the Admissions Committee. The Committee has an appropriate membership, including the Head of Academic Operations and the Recruitment and Admissions Officer. The Admissions Committee is a standing agenda item for Academic Board that is considered quarterly as a minimum.

145 Entry criteria for programmes delivered by the College are agreed as part of the programme validation process with the University. The entry criteria for each programme is unambiguously set out in terms of traditional entry by approved qualifications and non-traditional entry by previous experience, as well as English language requirements for applicants for whom English is not their first language.

146 Details of the course information and admissions requirements for individual programmes is clearly signposted on the College website at [www.mla-uk.com](http://www.mla-uk.com) (accessed 23 October 2020) under Courses. Course information includes an introduction to the College, its purpose, locations, course delivery, programmes offered, fees, and how to apply by completing a form and application requirements that must also be submitted. The College considers applications on the basis of academic, professional, experiential and personal experience and because of the professional marine and maritime focus of programmes providing a platform for career development, the College offers a personalised approach to recruitment from enquiry to application through one-to-one conversation with a staff member.

147 The Admissions Officer and Programme Managers check all applications and may arrange an interview with applicants (usually by telephone or videoconferencing) in order to assess their suitability for study as well as commitment and motivation to study to establish whether the applicant has the potential to benefit from the programme and graduate successfully. Offers of places are based on the information provided in the application documents and interview (where appropriate). In some instances, a portfolio of evidence of experiential learning may be required, taking into account skills, experience and abilities. The College's Admissions Statement states that the College also considers entry based on any previous experience under accreditation of prior learning (APL) or accreditation of experiential learning (APEL) in line with the University policy.

148 The University holds a Tier 4 licence to sponsor international students to study in the UK. The process for the registration and enrolment of international students is stated in the Academic Regulations and entry requirements for international students, including English language competency, is flagged on the College website [www.mla-uk.com](http://www.mla-uk.com). College programmes are designed with consideration of relevant professional registration requirements and internationally recognised qualifications with the Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST). Therefore, international students apply directly to the College, removing the need for the College to partner with recruitment agents, although its relationship with its awarding body would permit such arrangements.

149 The Head of Academic Operations working with programme managers and the Admissions Officer are responsible for the management of student recruitment activities, including enquiries, converting these into registrations and developing marketing activities. Students confirmed to the team that they found the course information available to them to be accessible and fit for purpose and confirmed to the team that the academic staff and Admissions Officer was helpful and supportive, answering questions and offering advice pre-enrolment.

150 The review team formed the view that admissions information for students is transparent as it is clear about entry requirements and how to apply; inclusive, as it encourages students from all backgrounds and circumstances through its Admissions Statement and Access and Participation Statement to apply; and the information is easy to access, and fit for purpose because students were positive about the information provided and their experience of the admissions process. Overall, the review team found that the College's plans are robust and credible as admissions decisions are based on a selection process using published criteria.

151 The College Admissions Committee considers any complaints and appeals against application and admissions decisions. The Admissions Statement incorporates and clarifies the principles for complaints and appeals against admissions decisions and applications. The Admissions Statement indicates that an admission complaint relates to the operation of the College's admission and application process and/or its outcome, or the actions or behaviour of a member of staff involved in the admissions process; and that an appeal should relate to the process of decision-making rather than the decision itself, which is a question of academic judgement. For complaints and appeals, applicants are advised to submit in writing to the College. Responses can be expected within 10 working days after receipt. Should a complainant remain unsatisfied, the matter can be reviewed again by the Head of Academic Quality and Standards and the Student Support Officer. There is no automatic right of appeal against a decision on whether to offer a place; however, if an appellant remains unsatisfied, they may write to the Rector to investigate and respond within 10 working days. The Admissions Statement states that the 'College reserves the right to exclude an applicant who is considered, on justifiable grounds, to be unsuitable for a place on a particular programme according to individual circumstances.' University staff, Members of Academic Board and Professional support staff who met the team corroborated that, to date, no admissions complaints or appeals have been received by the College or University.

152 The College shares the responsibility for student records with the University. Data collection and analysis of admissions and applications data between the College and University have been problematic due to the incompatibility of IT systems. Currently, admissions data on diversity is limited to male/female ratios and therefore no consideration could be made by the team of the full range of diversity issues within the admissions process. The College senior staff acknowledges this and has stated that a joint working party with the University was meeting to develop a means of capturing a broader range of student demographic data to address this weakness. This was

corroborated by the University staff who met the team. The team is of the opinion that while the College may decide within its own context the data collected through the admissions process, in this instance the lack of quantitative data encumbers the monitoring and evaluation of admissions.

153 The effectiveness of the admissions procedure was tested by reviewing a representative sample of 27 admissions records from 2019 and 2020 and course information available to prospective students and comparing this to admissions decisions. The information on admissions criteria was well-defined, appropriate and reflected the College's Admissions Statement and Access and Participation Statement. This was supported by reviewing the admissions decision for 27 students, including four rejection/declines. The records were detailed and justified the admissions decisions made are reliable and fair according to the published criteria.

154 In meetings with the team, staff involved in admissions, including the Head of Academic Operations, Head of Academic Quality and Standards, the Recruitment and Admissions Officer and Student Support Officer explained the process for student applications and admissions. These staff also explained the oversight and monitoring role of the Admissions Committee and its quarterly reporting to Academic Board. Staff involved in admissions also discussed their understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the team is satisfied that the process described in the Admissions Statement and described by staff was being implemented. Training for staff involved in admissions was discussed as well as the responsibilities of both the College and University in ensuring a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions process. Training and development of staff engaged in admissions is undertaken by experienced staff from the College and University. Programme Managers and the Head of Academic Operations are fully trained in admissions, with other academic staff provided with an overview of the enquiry through to enrolment processes. The team found the staff involved with the admissions process to be knowledgeable about their responsibilities. They could articulate relevant training and development, including workshops and forums hosted by the University and through NARIC. The team was satisfied that all staff were fully aware of their role in ensuring a fair and inclusive admissions process. Therefore, the team concludes that staff involved in admissions understand their role and are appropriately skilled and trained.

155 Data from the College's New Student Survey suggest that students generally are highly satisfied with the admissions process. There was 100% agreement that they were well informed about the admissions process and all other areas of admissions, expectations as a student; financing their studies; contact from the College had scores in excess of 90% in all areas. The area that received less than this, at 81%, was the sufficiency of technical support when required. This has been addressed by the College recruiting a second IT officer to support the Production Manager who currently is the only source of technical support for students.

156 Students whom the team met expressed satisfaction with the admissions process, drawing attention to the fairness and inclusivity of the system in that the process and criteria for decisions were well-defined in the course information and accessible to them prior to applying for their programme of study. The students confirmed that tutors provided helpful advice on the admissions process, on the content of courses, and on where and how to access programme information. The students met agreed that the information given to applicants in written format and through one-to-one conversations with staff was excellent and supported them to make an informed decision to apply. Therefore, the team concludes that students tend to agree that the admissions system is reliable, fair and inclusive.

## Conclusions

157 As described above, the review team considered all of the evidence submitted to form a judgement as to whether the meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing, the review team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other reviews and remained outcomes focused. Its conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

158 The team concludes that the College has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system. This is because the College has a credible and robust approach through its policies and plans and follows the University's academic regulations for the recruitment and admissions of students that demonstrate reliability, fairness and inclusivity. The information given to applicants is transparent and fit for purpose, and students tend to agree that the information and process are helpful, supportive and implemented fairly. Entry requirements are aligned with the overall regulations and policies of the College and the University, and admissions decisions reflect the published entry requirements agreed with the University through the programme validation process. Admissions records demonstrate that the College's policies are implemented in practice and that admissions decisions are reliable, fair and inclusive. Data collection with respect to equality and diversity is under-developed, and thus analysis to monitor diversity and inclusivity is very limited and analysis of admissions and applications data between the College and University has been problematic due to the incompatibility of IT systems. However, on balance, the review team concludes that the Core practice is met.

159 The evidence underpinning this judgement reflects the evidence described in the QSR evidence matrix for this Core practice. However, the lack of evidence regarding equality and diversity data that would allow the College to judge that its system is fully inclusive leads the team to have moderate confidence in its judgement.

## Q2 The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses

160 This Core practice expects that the provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.

161 The QAA review team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

### The evidence the team considered

162 The QAA review team assessed the evidence presented to it, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The review team utilised that matrix to ensure that the evidence it considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other reviews and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

- a Marine Industry in the 21st Century module MLA601
- b Marine Science and Engineering Management module MLA701
- c Designing programmes and modules
- d College privacy document
- e Academic Partnerships website
- f College governance and management structure  
Programme approval policy
- h Partner Subject Review January 2020
- i Interim programme action plan
- j College student surveys
- k Academic Co-operation Agreement with the University
- l External examiner reports
- m Student handbook
- n Subject Assessment Panel Meeting Agenda 2019-20 (3)
- o Award Assessment Board Meeting Agenda 2019-20
- p College Award Assessment Board Minutes 30062020 Approved
- q DipHE Hydrography Programme Quality Handbook
- r Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Quality Handbooks
- s University of Plymouth Academic Regulations 2019-20
- t Academic Partnerships Quality Assurance Meetings Terms of Reference
- u PG Dip Hydrography Programme Quality Handbook
- v MSc Engineering Programme Quality Handbook
- w MSc Hydrography Programme Quality Handbook
- x New student induction email
- y Progressing student induction email
- z You said, We did
- aa College Staff Handbook May 20
- bb Teaching staff role descriptors and CVs
- cc Confirmed Report Hydro Academy approval 09 01 13 (2)
- dd FINAL HA Approval Document
- ee 2015 MLA Sustainable Maritime Operations Approval Document Stage 2
- ff Email message for Stage 2 Report SMO



gg Sustainable Maritime Operations amended comments on V3  
 hh Sustainable Maritime Operations Amended MLA aims and PLOs cm  
 ii Stage 2 Report Sustainable Maritime Operations  
 jj College Annual Performance and Development Review template  
 kk QSR Response to request for additional evidence  
 ll College Induction Policy  
 mm Sustainable Maritime Operations External Examiner Report and Response 11 Dec2018\_v2  
 nn Award External Examiner Report and Response 11 Dec 2018\_v2  
 oo Hydrography External Examiner Report and Response 11 Dec 2018  
 pp Award External Examiner Report\_Dec2019 response  
 qq Award Assessment External Examiner Response 2018\_19 pdf  
 oo HA External Examiner June 2018\_2019 2  
 ss External Examiner Sustainable Maritime Operations June 2018\_2019  
 tt HA Annual Subject Report 2019 (2)  
 uu Engineering Annual Subject Report 2019 (3)  
 vv Joint Board of Studies Minutes  
 ww College Subject Assessment Panel Minutes June 2019 Final  
 xx QSR request for additional evidence MLA Response  
 yy Work-based Learning for Marine Professionals (Mentors) module MLA709 (1)  
 zz Work-based Learning for Marine Professionals (Mentees) MLA709 (2)  
 aaa Annual Review - Programme Plan Operational Guidance  
 bbb University of Plymouth AP Annual Programme Review – Guidance  
 ccc MLA 604\_assessment  
 ddd MLA 702\_assessment  
 eee MLA 601\_assessment  
 fff MLA 703\_assessment  
 ggg MSc\_Project\_Handbook\_Jan2020\_Engineering  
 hhh MLA705\_assessment  
 iii BSc Project Handbook  
 jjj MLA501\_assessment  
 kkk College Academic Calendar 19-20  
 ll College Proposal for Administration June 2020  
 mmm Agreed support staffing  
 nnn BSc Outcome Record\_DeskBasedSt2  
 ooo College Module Records BSc Global Sustainable Development  
 ppp Update on Conditions MLA BSc Global Sustainable Development (1)  
 qq University of Plymouth email re Global Sustainable Development  
 rrr QSR visit meetings - Points of clarification - Facilitator email  
 sss Meeting with Senior staff  
 ttt Meeting with staff from the University of Plymouth  
 uuu Meeting with members of Academic Board  
 vvv Meeting with staff responsible for programme development  
 www Meeting with staff responsible for managing the Student forum  
 xxx Meeting with Associate tutors  
 yyy Meeting with Professional support staff  
 zzz Meeting with Students  
 aaaa Meeting with Students from the Hong Kong Marine Department  
 bbbb Meeting with Employers  
 cccc Meeting with staff from the Hong Kong Marine Department  
 dddd Meeting with staff responsible for developing and maintaining the learning platform  
 eeee Meeting with Senior staff

163 Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the review team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this review are outlined below:

- third party endorsements as none are available for the provision on offer at the College.

### **How any samples of evidence were constructed**

164 To test that all elements of programmes are high quality and that the teaching, learning and assessment design will enable students to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes, the review team scrutinised eight Programme Quality Handbooks (the approved course documentation for the respective awards). This represents a random and representative sample comprising 57% of the 14 active award-bearing programmes offered by the College.

165 To explore external examiners' view about the quality of programmes, the team considered a representative sample of 17 external examiner reports, reflecting the full range of the College's provision.

### **Why and how the team considered this evidence**

166 As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the Provider was considered by the review team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the review team to make its judgement regarding the s ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision-making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the review team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below.

167 To identify the College's approach to designing and delivering high-quality courses, the team scrutinised the academic co-operation agreement between the College and the University, explored the academic regulations, policies and procedures of the University that relate to partnership working, and programme approval, Academic Partnerships Quality Assurance Meetings Terms of Reference; met staff from the University and the College in order to clarify aspects of policy and procedures; and interrogated the College Academic Calendar.

168 To assess whether the College has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for designing and delivering high-quality courses, the team scrutinised records of, and explored the College's approaches and internal procedures for, implementing the University's procedures for partnership working, including the College governance and managements structures; its programme approval policy; a range of programme quality handbooks; the staff handbook; teaching staff job profiles and CVs; records of programme validation events; the template used for staff development and review; the College's induction policy; its recently revised administrative arrangements; and points of clarification made by the College.

169 To test that all elements, curriculum design, content and organisation; learning, teaching and assessment approaches, of the courses sampled are high quality, and that the teaching, learning and assessment design will enable students to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes, the review team scrutinised eight Programme Quality Handbooks, the approved course documentation for the respective awards embracing both postgraduate and undergraduate levels. In addition, the team also sampled a number of detailed assessment briefings as part of its scrutiny of student work.

170 To identify students' views about the quality of the courses sampled, the team met four students enrolled on MSc programmes of study and one student taking a work-related learning module at the Hong Kong Marine Department. The team also scrutinised annual programme review reports, student survey results and communications with students following the launch of College surveys.

171 To identify third parties' views about the quality of the courses, the team met a number of employers of graduates.

172 To assess how academic and support staff ensure courses are high quality, the review team met senior staff, members of Academic Board, staff responsible for programme development, associate tutors and professional support staff from the College. The team also met staff from the University in order to clarify aspects of policy and procedures.

173 To test whether course delivery is high quality, the team sampled the student learning experience by accessing four active Total Learning Package (TLP) modules, namely Marine Industry in the 21st Century module MLA601, Marine Science and Engineering Management module MLA701, Work-based Learning for Marine Professionals (Mentors) module MLA709 and Work-based Learning for Marine Professionals (Mentees) MLA709 (2).

### **What the evidence shows**

174 The review team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

175 The College operates within the University's Academic Co-operation Agreement and the University's academic regulations. Programmes are thus developed, conducted, managed, taught and assessed by the College, under its delegated day-to-day responsibilities for the quality of programmes, working more closely with the University for programme approvals, annual monitoring, review and other key matters.

176 The College adopted the University's academic and regulatory frameworks on formation, although as it develops new provision within its niche distance and blended learning market it has found the need to introduce a number of its own internal approaches, strategies, policies and procedures, including its own Programme Approval Policy which augments and contextualises the University's guidance for programme development teams and is actively developing its own academic framework, academic handbook, teaching and learning strategy.

177 The Programme Approval Policy demonstrates that robust and credible plans are in place for designing and delivering high-quality courses. It explains in detail the process for initiating programme design and sets out appropriate timescales for programme development. It requires that the market be properly identified that the business case be approved by Directors and the initial academic proposal and programme outcomes be agreed by the Academic Board. The policy commits to allocating sufficient resources to the design to ensure the development of a high quality, coherent, contemporary programme that optimises student engagement. An Independent Advisory Panel is currently being established to inform strategic development, drawing from the prospective programme team, professional services support, employers, external expert advisers, and taking feedback from the appropriate student representative.

178 Proposals for new programmes are considered through the University's detailed validation process. A validating panel including University staff and external experts is

convened to consider all aspects of the proposal with College staff. This includes its relationship to the FHEQ and UK Quality Code for Higher Education, using external expertise to focus upon the curriculum, staff scholarship, professional and research activity, academic and professional outcomes and relevance to employment. The scrutiny also addresses the approach to teaching and learning as well as the curriculum and details of individual modules and their assessment.

179 The University affirms that an appropriate level of detail is provided for validation panels to make a judgement about the quality of a programme and its alignment with professional standards. Records of validation events show that panels confirm that programme outcomes are set at the appropriate level of the FHEQ, and that the College's approach to teaching and learning will provide a high- quality student academic experience.

180 The arrangements for delivery, teaching, administration, management and assessment of validated programmes are agreed at approval and captured in programme specifications and module records. The College is also required to seek advance approval for staff it appoints to teach on validated programmes.

181 Once approved by the University, programmes remain in continuous approval, reviewed within the University's annual planning and review process, and modified as necessary using its programme modification procedures.

182 The review team thus considers that the College has in place clear and comprehensive regulations and policies from the University, augmented by its own procedures for programme development, which facilitate the design, approval and delivery of high-quality programmes.

183 The College describes curriculum delivery in its Programme Quality Handbooks, providing a comprehensive and detailed description of the approach to teaching, learning and assessment used to assure delivery of the programme learning outcomes. Senior staff described the College's approach to providing high quality provision as holding students at the centre of activity, always listening to the student; ensuring a trouble-free student experience, providing support at the appropriate time to enable successful completion of programmes, providing qualifications that are fit for purpose and add value in the workplace, and providing a reliable infrastructure to support students and staff.

184 The approved Programme Quality Handbooks also form a detailed guide for students. They contain the programme specification which specifies entry requirements; arrangements for programme management, quality assurance and student feedback; the programme teaching, learning and assessment strategy; programme learning outcomes and definitive module records. They also introduce students to the Total Learning Package (TLP) and the Student forum, which are the platforms through which students will access their detailed learning materials and gain immediate support. Programme Quality Handbooks also include an overview of the modules, including the learning outcomes, the curriculum and clear details of how students will be assessed. The relationship between the College and the University is explained, and the various student support services are signposted. The team considers that the approved course documentation shows that the teaching, learning and assessment design will enable students to meet and demonstrate the programme learning outcomes.

185 Staff responsible for programme development and associate tutors share the leadership team's view of the College's approach to providing high quality programmes. They have strong professional ties to industry that brings currency to their teaching. Staff responsible for programme development and associate tutors told the review team that

the TLP 'took the classroom to the individual student', yet still built a 'community of learning' through the online Student forum. Staff responsible for programme development and associate tutors stated that the TLP brings resilience to the student learning experience, since it contains all the learning resources necessary to follow the curriculum through to completion. The team concludes that staff are able to articulate what 'high quality' means in the context of the College, and to show how the provision meets that definition.

186 The technical production team coordinates the development of the TLP for each module, working with the Programme Manager and associate tutor authoring the module content to optimally embed it within the package to support student learning. The TLPs and the Student forum are hosted on offsite servers with regular backups to provide resilience, and the production team also provides a helpdesk service for students who may experience technical difficulties. The production manager also gives a detailed TLP induction for new teaching staff.

187 Since students engage with the curriculum through the TLP in their own time, it was not possible for the review team to observe formal classes. Thus, as a proxy for teaching observation the team accessed four active module TLPs: Marine Industry in the 21st Century module MLA601, Marine Science and Engineering Management module MLA701, Work-based Learning for Marine Professionals (Mentors) module MLA709 and Work-based Learning for Marine Professionals (Mentees) MLA709 (2).

188 The team found that each TLP may be accessed online, or may be installed on the student's personal computer from a USB or download, following which access to the internet is only required for assignment submission, online tutorials, and supplementary broadening reading through the validating University's online library.

189 Introductory videos explain the structure of the TLP and how to access the online library, the module handbook, and technical IT advice; College and tutor contact details are also readily available.

190 Lectures are pre-recorded, some as videos, others as narrated presentations. A full transcript of each is available. The lectures are high quality, as is the wealth of stand-alone supporting material that includes further reading, professional standards, journal articles, links to online library supplementary reading, and study skill support material. Guidance regarding academic malpractice is signposted, and the students are able to access plagiarism-detection software both for formal assignment submission, and also for formative development.

191 Formative exercises are embedded within the package, and elements of the summative assessment may be submitted for formative feedback. The summative assessment briefings are detailed, unambiguous and include explicit grading criteria.

192 The team considers that the TLP employs a logical pedagogic approach, excellent delivery and appropriate content. Its resource-rich content is a valuable reusable source which enables the student to revisit material, and thus particularly suits the distance learner who is able to further engage through the Student forum and other online activities. It is augmented by tutors who convene a student learning community to provide peer and tutor support. The TLP provides clear objectives, good planning and organisation, a sound method or approach, good delivery, appropriate content, effective use of resources and student engagement.

193 The College solicits formal feedback from students, and through assessment boards, the Joint Board of Studies, Academic Board and its subcommittees reflects on the

College's provision in advance of the University's annual review process. The University confirms that the College proactively engages with the annual review process, stating that, where appropriate, the College makes the necessary programme modifications. Students stated that the College takes rapid action as issues relating to learning, teaching and the learning platform emerge either through the Student forum, or through direct student contact with their tutors. This was confirmed in discussions with staff during a demonstration of the online Student forum.

194 External examiners report satisfaction with the quality of student learning materials and the proactive support provided by tutors. They report that the approach to teaching, learning and assessment is imaginative, varied and supportive for the distance and blended learning environment. One external examiner, who had met students during a summer residential school, comments specifically on students' positive reports regarding their learning experiences. The University's annual review of College provision is informed by the external examiners' reports and confirms that quality of the student learning experience is high.

195 The team met a number of employer representatives, all of whom had current or recent students on their staff. A number of employers observed that the high-quality programme had prepared their staff sufficiently well to secure promotion and further career success. Others noted that their leadership team considered the College postgraduate programmes to be of such high quality that they had been embedded as an integral element of their continuing professional development programmes for senior staff. The views of employers provide confirmation that the College awards delivered in partnership with the University are high quality.

196 Students consider their programmes to be of extremely high quality. They regard the quality of the distance learning and support materials as excellent, online access to the library invaluable, and that their learning experience exceeded that in previous face-to-face programmes they had taken with other providers. They commended on the ready support and rapid response times from personal and academic tutors or other staff. Students consider that they received a high level of attention and support through the application and recruitment process, and that the College took care to ensure that the intended programme was right to meet their professional career development needs. The online Student forums were cited as good practice by the students, enabling academic queries to be swiftly addressed.

197 Students reported that issues raised in the student survey are addressed rapidly at Academic Board; for example, commenting that changes to study patterns were swiftly made after student feedback had identified concerns. Both the team's meetings with students and survey outcomes show that satisfaction with their courses and learning experiences is high.

## **Conclusions**

198 As described above, the review team considered all of the evidence submitted to form a judgement as to whether the Provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing, the review team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other reviews and remained outcomes focused. Its conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

199 The review team concludes that the College designs and delivers high quality courses. This is because the College has in place credible processes for the design and delivery of high-quality programmes. Approved programme documentation indicates that

the teaching, learning and assessment design enables students to meet and demonstrate module and programme learning outcomes. External examiner reports and information from employers confirm that the courses are of a high quality. Feedback from students confirms that they regard their courses as being of high quality. Staff are able to articulate what 'high quality' means in the context of the College and demonstrate how the provision meets that definition. The Total Learning Packages demonstrate good planning and organisation, a sound approach, strong delivery, appropriate content, effective use of resources and student engagement. The design and presentation of the learning materials facilitates learning at the time and place the student finds most beneficial. The review team concludes, therefore, that the College has in place credible, robust and evidence-based arrangements to design and deliver high quality academic programmes and that the Core practice is met.

200 The evidence underpinning this judgement reflects all of the evidence described in the QSR evidence matrix. Therefore, the review team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

### **Q3 The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience**

201 This Core practice expects that the provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

202 The QAA review team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

#### **The evidence the team considered**

203 The QAA review team assessed the evidence presented to it, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The review team utilised that matrix to ensure that the evidence it considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other reviews and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

- a College Programmes and Student Numbers
- b College Organisation Structure Sept 2020
- c Staff handbook
- d Associate tutor role profile
- e Assoc-Lecturer-profile
- f Associate Tutor 1 CV
- g Associate Tutor 2 CV
- h Associate Tutor 3 CV
- i Rector job profile
- j Rector CV
- k Head of Academic Operations job profile
- l Head of Academic Operations CV
- m Senior Academic Programme Manager job profile
- n Senior Academic CV
- o Head of Academic Quality and Standards job profile
- p Head of Academic Quality CV 2020
- q Senior Administrator and Academic Partnerships Manager
- r Recruitment and Admissions Officer job profile
- s Student Support Officer job profile
- t Request for additional evidence
- u Induction policy
- v New starter process
- w Comments on additional request for evidence
- x Meeting with members of Academic Board
- y Meeting staff responsible for programme development
- z Meeting with Professional support staff
- aa Meeting with Associate Lecturers and Personal tutors
- bb Final meeting with Senior staff



204 Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the review team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this review are outlined below:

- third party endorsements as none are available for the provision on offer at the College.

### **How any samples of evidence were constructed**

205 To assess whether staff are appropriately qualified and skilled to perform their roles effectively, the review team considered a representative sample of nine job profiles and accompanying CVs for current staff working at the College, including associate tutors/lecturers, the Rector, Head of Academic Operations, a senior academic, Head of Academic Quality and Standards, the Student Support Officer, Senior Administrator and Academic Partnerships Manager and Recruitment and Admissions Officer job profile.

### **Why and how the team considered this evidence**

206 As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider was considered by the review team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the review team to make its judgement regarding the providers ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision-making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the review team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below.

207 To identify how the College recruits, appoints, inducts and supports staff, the team considered the Academic Co-operation Agreement with the University, the College Staff Handbook, the induction policy and new starter process, and staff CVs. The team discussed these matters with University partnership staff, staff responsible for programme development and professional support staff.

208 To assess whether the College has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for ensuring that they have sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high- quality learning experience, the team considered the Strategic Plan, Academic Strategy and minutes of the Academic Board. The team also discussed these matters with the College's senior leadership.

209 To identify the roles the College has to deliver a high-quality learning experience and assess whether they are sufficient, the team considered the College's organisational structure, its programmes and student numbers and additional information on plans provided to the review team. The team also discussed these matters with the College's senior leadership team.

210 To identify students' views about sufficiency, qualifications and skills of staff, the team met four students from the MSc programmes of study with the College, reflecting the distance and blended learning mode of delivery of provision. The review team also considered the results of a student survey.

211 The team also discussed the College's approach to recruitment, induction and staff support with staff responsible for programme development, professional support staff and associate tutors.

212 To test whether academic staff deliver a high-quality learning experience, the team reviewed the content of two modules: Maritime Industry in the 21st Century and

Marine Science and Engineering Management, including pre-recorded lecture content. College staff (Head of Academic Operations and Digital Production Manager) also demonstrated to the team the standard content components of a TLP.

### **What the evidence shows**

213 The review team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

214 The College's Strategic Plan includes a commitment to having an engaged and effective workforce. A comprehensive set of 27 College employment-related policies are consolidated into a detailed staff handbook covering all areas of the recruitment, appointment, induction, and support of staff. Responsibility for the recruitment and appointment of appropriately qualified and skilled staff rests with the College, but appointments made to teaching positions are also subject to the approval of the University. Following appointment with the College, new staff undergo a thorough new-starter process leading to a probationary review after three months of starting. These processes are followed for all substantive staff positions within the College, which include senior leadership positions, professional support staff and academics involved in programme management and delivery. Additionally, the College recruits self-employed associate tutors to support the delivery of modules and the tutoring of students. Associate tutors must hold a first degree and have sufficient breadth or depth of specialist knowledge. They are mentored by senior academics or the Head of Academic Operations.

215 Support and training needs are identified through an individual's annual Professional Development Review, including providing access to training courses, secondments, on-the-job experience, coaching and mentoring. Professional support staff identified meetings and workshops organised through the Partner forum with the University as being particularly useful. University staff informed the team of the training offered to the College through Partner forums organised three times per year to share good practices and highlight opportunities available to partners, for example, amendments to policies and procedures or changes to resources in the teaching and learning handbook. Professional support staff also emphasised the benefit of peer support, teamwork and open plan working. A new academic noted that they had felt well supported by the induction process and ongoing mentoring by the Head of Academic Operations. The College is an associate member of Advance HE and supports teaching staff to gain recognition as a Fellow of the HEA, and currently four staff have achieved this and/or a recognised higher education teaching qualification. A relevant teaching qualification for higher education is considered desirable for associate tutors.

216 The College indicates that it appoints up to 30 associate tutors at any one time in order to meet demand determined by the number of students studying on any given module; 18 were in post as of September 2020. The College does not account for associates by full-time equivalent (FTE), so an indicative staff-student ratio is not available. The number of associate tutors appointed is linked to the number of students studying on any given module and College senior leadership keep this under active review. However, associate tutors are usually allocated up to six students to supervise/mentor, with programme leaders and academics also allocated students. Given the number of programmes taught and the number of students currently enrolled (11 programmes, 269 part-time students as of July 2020), the review team considered that teaching staff resource was sufficient.

217 Following changes to the College's company structure in July 2019, a review of, and then changes to, the College staffing structure was undertaken, resulting in the establishment of new senior roles (Rector, Head of Academic Operations and Head of Academic Quality and Standards). A subsequent review of administrative staff led to

changes in line management, job titles and job profiles. Development of the BSc in Global Sustainable Development and MBA have resulted in two new permanent academics being appointed during 2019-20, in line with the College's Strategic Plan. Matters concerned with recruitment and staffing related to delivery and future development of programmes are discussed at Academic Board attended by the College's Senior staff and this provides evidence of forward planning. The review team therefore took the view that the College has robust and credible plans for the recruitment and appointment of sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff.

218 Teaching and programme management staff include one academic (one FTE), four senior academics (four FTE) and 18 associate lecturers/tutors reporting to the Head of Academic Operations (one FTE). As of September 2020, the College employed eight professional support staff (6.8 FTE), including three digital production staff involved in development and design of the Total Learning Package (TLP), a Student Support Officer and a Student Recruitment and Admissions Officer who report to the Head of Academic Quality and Standards (0.8 FTE). Student-facing support roles are limited to a single student support officer (0.8 FTE) who works four days a week. This person acts as a point of direct contact for student enquiries received by email and telephone and liaises with teaching and senior staff as appropriate to enable a timely response. Senior staff recognise that growth of provision and student numbers may necessitate further expansion in staffing, particularly in student support and teaching.

219 The review team concluded that there are sufficient roles and posts in place to deliver a high-quality learning experience in the context of the current number of programmes, the nature of the delivery model and the number of students enrolled.

220 The review team considered the job profile and staff members' CVs for nine posts at the College, including associate tutors/lecturers, the Rector, Head of Academic Quality and Standards, Recruitment and Admissions Officer, Senior Administrator and Academic Partnership Manager, Head of Academic Operations, a senior academic and the Student Support Officer. Job profiles clearly describe the job purpose, key responsibilities, and person criteria, including knowledge, experience, and skills. The CVs of staff appointed to these roles demonstrate a good match to the person criteria. Staff assigned to academic, senior management or associate tutor roles typically had considerable prior experience in academia and/or related industry. Different members of staff including those responsible for programme development, associate tutors and professional support staff described their experience of the appointment and induction process and this appeared consistent with the requirements set out in the staff handbook. The review team took the view that staff were appropriately qualified and skilled and had been recruited according to the College's procedure.

221 In-person observation of teaching was not possible because core lecture content is pre-recorded and delivered through the TLP course delivery system. The DipHE Hydrography for Professionals programme includes a small residential field element, but this did not coincide with the review visit. Therefore, instead of direct observation of real-time teaching the team reviewed recorded content on the TLP of two modules: MLA601 Maritime Industry in the 21st Century and MLA701 Marine Science and Engineering Management. College staff (Head of Academic Operations and Digital Production Manager) also demonstrated to the team the standard content components of a TLP. Observations of lectures, some recorded as live presentations, others as screencasts of PowerPoint slides or similar, were clearly presented and demonstrated that the tutor was a good communicator and knowledgeable. Supporting learning materials had evidently been produced to a presentational and academic standard. The team concludes, based on observations of the TLP teaching and learning, that teaching staff are appropriately qualified and skilled.

222 There was limited opportunity for the team to meet students because all students currently enrolled on College programmes are learning at a distance, with Hydrography programmes delivered via blended learning, usually in employment in the maritime sector and sometimes out at sea. The review team met four students enrolled on MSc programmes of study and one student taking a work-related learning module at the Hong Kong Marine Department. These students praised their tutors for being experienced and professional and on a level with lecturers they had experienced in universities. Students also commented on the easy access to staff for support, the quality of the learning materials in the TLP and the useful videos of lecturers explaining aspects of study advice, including good academic practice and time management. While the College does not currently engage with the National Student Survey (NSS), the University does and the questionnaires from the College and University replicate the questions. The end-of-module feedback surveys indicate strong satisfaction with staff, particularly in terms of the level of academic advice and support they provide. Taking account of the views of the small number of students available to meet the team, the team concluded that students agree that there are sufficient appropriately skilled and qualified staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

## **Conclusions**

223 As described above, the review team considered all of the evidence submitted to form a judgement as to whether the Provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing, the review team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other reviews and remained outcomes focused. Its conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

224 The review team concludes that the College has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience. This is because the number of staff currently employed at the College, including academics and associate lecturers and tutors directly involved in programme delivery, is proportionate to the number of programmes delivered and the number of students enrolled. Staff CVs demonstrate that those employed in key roles are well qualified and skilled. Students express satisfaction with the skills of teaching staff and with the support that they provide. Observations of pre-recorded content delivered in the total learning package indicates that teaching staff are appropriately skilled. Staff feel well supported by the College in terms of induction and opportunities for staff development. The team, therefore, concludes that the Core practice is met.

225 The evidence underpinning this judgement reflects all evidence described in the QSR evidence matrix and leads the team to have a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

## **Q4 The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience**

226 This Core practice expects that the provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

227 The QAA review team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

### **The evidence the team considered**

228 The QAA review team assessed the evidence presented to it, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The review team utilised that matrix to ensure that the evidence it considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other reviews and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

- a Total Learning Package for module MLA601 Maritime Industry in the 21st Century
- b Total Learning Package for module MLA701 Marine Science and Engineering Management
- c Embedded video about the Total Learning Package (viewed 20 September 2020)
- d New Starter Survey
- e End of Module Survey
- f Minutes of Academic Boards
- g Joint Board of Studies Minutes
- h Student Handbook
- i Programme Quality Handbooks
- j College Organisation Structure September 2020
- k Student Support Example
- l Total Learning Package Email
- m Feedback
- n Student interactions via the Student Forum
- o Student Technical Interaction
- p Associate tutor role profile
- q Associate Lecturer role profile and CV
- r Rector job profile and CV
- s Head of Academic Operations job profile and CV
- t Senior Academic Programme Manager job profile and CV
- u Head of Academic Quality and Standards job profile and CV
- v Senior Administrator and Academic Partnerships job profile
- w Recruitment and Admissions Officer job profile
- x Student Support Officer job profile
- y Request for Additional Evidence MLA Response 051020 final
- z Meeting with Senior staff

aa	Meeting with members of Academic Board
bb	Demonstration of the Online Student Forum
cc	Meeting with Professional support staff
dd	Meeting with Associate Tutors
ee	Meeting with Employer
ff	University Student Handbook (accessed 23 August 2020)
gg	University Student Services website (accessed 23 August 2020)
hh	Academic Partnerships (accessed 16 October 2020).
ii	Academic Partnerships (accessed 25 August 2020).

229 Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the review team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this review are outlined below:

- third party endorsements as none are available for the provision on offer at the College.

### **How any samples of evidence were constructed**

230 To test whether staff are appropriately qualified and skilled, and understand their roles and responsibilities, the team considered a representative sample of nine job profiles (covering senior leadership, professional support, academic and associate tutor roles) and accompanying CVs for current staff working at the College.

### **Why and how the team considered this evidence**

231 As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the Provider was considered by the review team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the review team to make its judgement regarding the providers ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the review team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below.

232 To identify how the College's facilities, learning resources and student support services contribute to delivering a high-quality academic experience, the team considered the Academic Co-operation Agreement, Academic regulations, College Student Handbook, University Student Handbook and Programme Quality Handbooks. The team also scrutinised the minutes of Academic Board and Joint Board of Studies.

233 To assess whether the College has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for ensuring that it has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience, the team accessed the Total Learning Package (TLP) the College's distance learning platform and reviewed the content of two current modules: Total Learning Package for module MLA601 Maritime Industry in the 21st and Total Learning Package for module MLA701 Marine Science and Engineering Management.

234 To identify the College's facilities, learning resources and student support services, the team accessed the TLP for two modules: Total Learning Package for module MLA601 Maritime Industry in the 21st accessed 22 August 2020 and Total Learning Package for module MLA701 Marine Science and Engineering Management, the Student Handbook and, through links in this, the services offered to students by the University of Plymouth on its website.

235 To determine whether the roles are consistent with the delivery of a high-quality learning experience, the team examined the staffing structure of the College and the job descriptions of senior leadership, professional support, academic and associate tutor roles and accompanying CVs for current staff working at the College.

236 To test whether staff are appropriately qualified and skilled, and understand their roles and responsibilities, the team met senior staff, academic and professional support staff.

237 To identify and assess students' views about facilities, learning resources and support services, the team met students and reviewed the New Starter Survey, End of Module Survey and Student interactions via the Student forum. The College demonstrated the online Student forum to the team.

238 To test that the facilities, resources or services under assessment deliver a high-quality academic experience, the team watched a video on the TLP and reviewed the content of two modules: Academic Partnerships, Total Learning Package for module MLA601 Maritime Industry in the 21st, Total Learning Package for module MLA701 Marine Science and Engineering Management.

### **What the evidence shows**

239 The review team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

240 An Academic Co-operation Agreement exists between the College and the University and articulates the responsibilities of the College and University regarding students' access to resources and services such as the University's premises, facilities or learning resources, including access to the physical and online library and open study and social spaces. In line with the Academic Co-operation Agreement, the College follows the University's Academic regulations which comprise comprehensive and clear detail about reasonable and practical support for students, such as application and admission and academic considerations where students' circumstances impact on their academic experience, for example extenuating circumstances and appeals.

241 The College's affiliation with BAU Global provides opportunities for growth in new subject areas. In anticipation of future growth in provision and student numbers, the College has recently relocated their operations to an office block in the centre of Plymouth which will better facilitate student attendance for practical sessions which are currently offered on Hydrography programmes only. Senior staff explained that the College has an option to lease further space at this location should it need to expand its facilities.

242 The College procedure for the development and approval of new higher education modules outlines the academic learning resources and other support services, such as appropriate staffing and resourcing, including relevant and up-to-date reading lists and use of technology-enhanced learning. Programme proposals are discussed at Programme Committee, Academic Board and Joint Board of Studies meetings before final approval is considered. The minutes of Academic Board meetings evidences consideration of learning resources and support for students during the programme development and approval phase. Members of the Academic Board and Professional support staff whom the team met corroborated the process and purpose of these committees in considering and discussing resourcing and support for students.

243 Learning resources and other support services are discussed at the Joint Board of Studies, Programme Committee and Academic Board Meetings, including thorough consideration of students' views. The student experience, including the outcomes of student surveys, are considered with actions taken as a result of any concerns raised.

244 The minutes of the Joint Board of Studies show that the low rate of satisfaction with the online library service consistently flagged by students in the end-of-module surveys was discussed in February 2019. Reasons for this put forward by the College include intermittent internet connection by students who may spend long periods at sea without strong internet access, confusing signposting and technical difficulties. Although the College acknowledged that students have consistently rated the online library service as poor, and College staff are unaware why this is, they have adopted a watch and monitor strategy as they have noted that student outcomes do not appear to have suffered as a consequence and they are still managing to access resources. The team considered that while this approach is not helpful to students attempting to access the online library, it did not impact the provision of a high-quality academic experience.

245 The team are of the opinion that there is sufficient evidence that the College's strategies or plans for facilities, learning resources and student support services are credible, realistic and demonstrably linked to the delivery of successful academic and professional outcomes for students.

246 Student support services are provided jointly by the College and the University, though the College has its own bursary scheme to assist students with financial issues. A part-time Student Support Officer role has been introduced which adds an additional layer of support and guidance for all students and which is separate to academic support. As part of the role, the Student Support Officer is a point of contact with personal tutors for students in need of pastoral support or for policy matters relating to students' academic studies. The Student Support Officer will signpost students to services and services available within the College or University. This Officer collates feedback from student surveys and presents this to Academic Board for consideration and appropriate action.

247 All programmes are validated by the University and are delivered by distance, with Hydrography programmes delivered via blended learning through the Total Learning Package (TLP), the College's distance learning platform. The TLP is a template that is used for each of the modules on every programme of study and is representative of the learning experience offered to all students. Each TLP module is accessed online and may be installed on the student's personal computer from a USB or download, following which access to the internet is only required for assignment submission, online tutorials, and supplementary reading through the University's online library.

248 Introductory videos explain the structure of the TLP and how to access the online library, the module handbook, and technical IT advice. The team viewed an introductory video which provides an overview of the key features and functions of the TLP for new students. The team also viewed the TLPs for two modules: MLA601 Maritime Industry in the 21st century and MLA701 Marine Science and Engineering Management.

249 Lectures are pre-recorded, some as videos, others as narrated presentations. A full transcript of each is available. The lectures are high quality, as is the wealth of stand-alone supporting material that includes further reading, professional standards, journal articles, links to online library supplementary reading, and study skill support material. Guidance regarding academic misconduct is signposted, and the students are able to access plagiarism-detection software both for formal assignment submission, and also for



formative development.

250 The team's assessment of the TLPs are that in terms of production and content, they provide clear and comprehensive information, facilities and learning resources to provide a high-quality academic experience for students.

251 The technical production team coordinates the development of the TLP for each module, working with the lead tutor authoring the module content to optimally embed it within the package to support student learning. The production team provides a helpdesk service for students who may experience technical difficulties. The production manager also gives a detailed TLP induction for new teaching staff. The team noted that technical assistance provided by the College is detailed and appropriate.

252 The TLP also contains study support help through guides, for example, Effective Reading and How to Reference. The production and content of the resources in the TLP is of a high standard and easily accessible by students. Additional topic support materials and resources are provided on a module-by-module basis through the inclusion of articles and suggested further reading. Within each TLP there is also an email link to the College Student Support Officer who triages pastoral and academic student concerns. College and tutor contact details are also readily available via links in the TLP.

253 Students can also access learning support services through the TLP, and other services such as Counselling or Disability Support services through the University website. Links are provided to University services through the Student Handbook and the Student Study File on the TLP. The range of services is commensurate with study at the levels offered by the College and are comprehensive and well managed.

254 The College Student Handbook outlines the facilities, resources and student support services provided by the University and College. Approved course documentation provide students with both programme-related and support services information on issues such as finance, study support and wellbeing. The University Student Handbook and Guide to Services provides the general and important information which signposts students to information about University life, policies, and procedures and the services available. The information is in plain English, with diagrams for ease of understanding. The College also offers various channels for students to access support, including through the Student forum, or by directly contacting the Student Representative and Student/Tutor interactions. Similarly, the team noted the interaction between students and their tutors was supportive and cooperative.

255 The team considered the role of the personal tutor by reviewing the job profiles for Associate Tutor and Associate Lecturer, as both positions can be assigned personal tutor roles. These were found to be relevant to the role, outlining the academic responsibilities to support student learning and the ancillary actions required to ensure student progress and success. Each student is assigned a personal tutor while enrolled on a programme/module. The personal tutor, who acts as the first point of contact for issues and concerns, ensures that any student queries or requests for support specific to the programme/module are dealt with within 48 hours of receipt and will provide a 'friendly face'. Video calls are used where possible and if a student does not have access to this medium on a daily basis then it is used during on-shore periods (for those students who are employed in sea-going settings) to build on the tutor/student interaction.

256 The team considered the CVs for senior leadership, professional support, academic and associate tutor alongside the role descriptors, for each of the relevant roles and found the staff to be well-qualified for each of their roles according to the criteria listed in the job profiles. The job profile was considered appropriate for the role of Student

Support Officer. Staff were able to confidently articulate their roles and responsibilities, and all were enthusiastic about supporting students to achieve successful learning outcomes. Academic staff articulated their responsibilities in engaging and supporting students through their studies and were aware of how to signpost students to learning and other support services provided by the University. Thus, the team concludes that staff at College understand their roles and responsibilities in delivering a high-quality academic experience for their students.

257 The team considered evidence from the New Starter and End of Module Surveys and their infographics to gauge whether students found the resources sufficient and of high quality. Responses were favourable, with a few concerns around access to the University's online library.

258 In the meeting with students, access to, and use of, the TLP, its study support materials, Student forum interactions and other support services were discussed, and the students all stated that they felt the quality and availability of resources and support was excellent. They were satisfied with the quality and sufficiency of resources. Further, they were content to discuss issues they had raised and how the College had responded positively to suggestions, for example posting links to policy documents within each TLP, access and use of Turnitin which was raised by students and responded to by tutors in the Student forum. Students could readily articulate instances of where their input into changes was positively received by the College, including changes to communication methods from the College to students and the timing of terms. Therefore, the team is confident that students tend to regard facilities, learning resources and student support services as sufficient and appropriate, and facilitating a high-quality academic experience.

## **Conclusions**

259 As described above, the review team considered all of the evidence submitted to form a judgement as to whether the Provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing, the review team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other reviews and remained outcomes focused. Its conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

260 The College has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience. This is because the strategies for facilities, learning resources and student support services are credible, realistic and demonstrably linked to the delivery of successful academic and professional outcomes for students. Evidence from students, and from the review team's direct assessment, indicates that facilities, learning resources and student support services are sufficient and appropriate. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities in using resources to provide a high-quality academic experience to students. The review team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.

261 The evidence underpinning this judgement reflects the evidence described in the QSR evidence matrix. Therefore, the team has high confidence in this judgement.

## Q5 The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience

262 This Core practice expects that the provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.

263 The QAA review team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

### The evidence the team considered

264 The QAA review team assessed the evidence presented to it, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The review team utilised that matrix to ensure that the evidence it considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other reviews and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

- a Governance and management Structure Revised 25\_02\_20
- b Programme approval policy
- c Sustainable Maritime Operations Academic Partnership Annual Review
- d Interim Review Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Action Plan
- e Survey Questions for New Starters
- f Survey Questions for end of module
- g Infographic End of Module
- h Infographic New Starter
- i Academic Board Minutes
- j Joint Board of Studies Minutes
- k Access and Participation Statement 2020 final
- l Student Handbook\_2019\_2020
- m University Student Perception Questionnaire College 2019
- n University Student Perception Questionnaire College Open Questions 2020 version 2
- o College Open Comments Student Perception Questionnaire 2019
- p Interim Review College Hydrography Suite Programme Action Plan
- q College Academic Board Meetings
- r Programme Quality Handbooks
- s New student induction email
- t Progressing student induction email
- u You said, We did (1)
- v Student voice website
- w Feedback
- x Student-tutor interaction
- y Associate tutor role profile
- z Student Support Officer job profile
- aa Academic Partnership Annual Review – Programme Plan Operational Guidance
- bb University Academic Partnership Annual Programme Review Guidance
- cc MSc Project Handbook Jan2020 Engineering

dd	Samples of assessed student work and feedback based on engagement with the forum
ee	Student Services
ff	Teaching and Learning Handbook
gg	2020 Academic Partnership Student Perception Questionnaire MLA All (1)
hh	College Personal tutor Statement June 2020
ii	Academic Board Meeting Agendas
jj	QSR Visit meetings – points of clarification -facilitator email
kk	Meeting with Senior staff
ll	Meeting with staff from the University of Plymouth
mm	Meeting with members of Academic Board
nn	Meeting with staff responsible for programme development
oo	Meeting with responsible for managing the Student forum
pp	Meeting with Professional support staff
qq	Meeting with Associate tutors
rr	Meeting with Students
ss	Meeting with staff responsible for developing and maintaining the learning platform
tt	Meeting with Senior staff

### **How any samples of evidence were constructed**

265 Sampling was carried out as per the 'How the review was conducted' section of the report, above.

266 To identify students' views about student engagement in the quality of their educational experience, the team considered a sample of student surveys and evaluation results relating to their student experience.

267 To assess whether students consider they are engaged in the quality of their educational experience, the team considered samples of assessed student work and feedback based on engagement with the Student forum.

### **Why and how the team considered this evidence**

268 As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the Provider was considered by the review team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the review team to make its judgement regarding the College's ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision-making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the review team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Provider's. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below.

269 To assess whether students consider they are engaged in the quality of their educational experience, the review team met four students enrolled on MSc programmes of study and one student taking a work-related learning module at the Hong Kong Marine Department.

270 To identify how the College actively engages students in the quality of their educational experience, the team examined the College Governance and Management Structure Revised 25\_02\_20, Programme approval policy, Survey Questions for New Starters, Survey Questions for end of module, Infographic End of Module, Infographic New Starter, Access and Participation Statement 2020 final, Student Handbook 2019\_2020, Interim Review Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Action Plan,

University Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ) College 2019, University Student Perception Questionnaire College Open Questions 2020 version 2, Open Comments SPQ 2019, Feedback, New student induction email, Progressing student induction email , You said, We Did (1), Student – tutor interaction\_1, student representative communications, Student-student interaction, student-technical interaction\_1, Associate tutor job profile, Student Support Officer job profile, MSc Project Handbook for Engineering, Teaching and Learning Handbook, 2020 Academic Partnership Student Perception Questionnaire All (1), College Personal tutor Statement June 2020.

271 To assess whether the College has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for engaging students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience, the team reviewed Sustainable Maritime Operations Academic Partnerships Annual Review, Interim Review Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Action Plan, College Access and Participation Statement 2020 final, student representative communications on Student forum and responses, Programme quality handbooks, met senior staff, staff from the University, members of Academic Board, staff responsible for programme development, staff responsible for managing the Student forum, professional support staff, students and staff responsible for developing and maintaining the learning platform.

272 To illustrate the impact of the College's approach, the team considered You said, We did (1), Infographic End of Module, Infographic New Starter met senior staff, staff from the University, members of Academic Board, staff responsible for programme development, staff responsible for managing the Student forum, professional support staff, and staff responsible for developing and maintaining the learning platform. The team also met four students enrolled on MSc programmes of study and one student taking a work-related learning module at the Hong Kong Marine Department.

273 To identify students' views and assess whether students consider they are engaged in the quality of their educational experience, the review team considered the 2020 Academic Partnership Student Perception Questionnaire. The team met four students enrolled on MSc programmes of study and one student taking a work-related learning module at the Hong Kong Marine Department.

### **What the evidence shows**

274 The review team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

275 The College seeks to actively engage students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience, using both formal and informal approaches. The College Student Handbook promotes this to students in a section entitled Student Voice, Enhancement, Liaison, Evaluation, Representation and Feedback that provides students with a definition of student engagement and information about the ways in which the College actively engages students in the quality of their educational experience. The section on Student voice links to the University's resource page for student voice, which outlines that course representatives, University of Plymouth Student Union (UPSU), Student voice pages, end-of-module questionnaires and Personal tutorials are the ways in which students can give feedback. The College Student Handbook provides further information on the electronic Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ), and the NSS. While the College does not currently engage with the NSS, the University does and the questionnaires from the College and University replicate the questions in the SPQ.

276 Programme Quality Handbooks clearly acknowledge the challenge of traditional forms of student representation, given the distance/blended learning nature of the programmes, and provides students with details of additional ways that they are able to provide feedback. These include regular staff and student meetings via phone, email or Skype and explicit encouragement from staff to students to provide feedback on their course. Feedback from students is considered as part of programme monitoring and review and Student voice is a standing item on the Academic Board Meeting Agenda. Programme Quality Handbooks inform students of the role of student feedback in review processes and that module leaders have responsibility for reviewing their feedback.

277 These approaches for student feedback were confirmed in meetings with students and staff. Students who met the team confirmed that they were satisfied with the opportunities that they had to provide feedback and valued the various mechanisms available to them. In particular, they highlighted the responsiveness of College staff to any issues raised.

278 Academic and professional support staff who met the review team were able to articulate the different channels for student feedback and confirmed that they had regular communication with students and that modes and times of communication were flexible to meet the needs of the distance/blended learning model and the challenges that students may face in accessing communication channels – for example when they are offshore.

279 Student surveys are a central mechanism for actively engaging the Student voice for the College. While the College has a number of surveys in operation, student engagement with surveys is low. For example, the Partner Subject Review Template from 23 January 2020 notes a response rate of 11.8% for all programmes in the subject area and no analysis or commentary is provided as a result. The Interim Review Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Action Plan also notes a low response rate of 11.82% of the 110 students on the Undergraduate Sustainable Maritime Operations programmes but provides detail of student feedback from the Programme committee following the May 2018 residential modules. Reference is made to major improvements to the residential component of modules being implemented after the 2017 modules and an increase in student satisfaction with the 2018 residential. The College has processes in place to review the appropriateness of these mechanisms, for example the Joint Board of Studies minutes note that the SPQ process needs to be considered and to decide if this is still needed or valuable for collecting student feedback. This was confirmed in meetings with academic and professional support staff who articulated to the team that they were aware of the challenges of engaging students with certain mechanisms, for example surveys and student representation, but that they were considering how they might adapt or replace these mechanisms to achieve higher levels of student engagement.

280 As noted, levels of participation in the student questions are generally low. The participation rates in the 2020 Student Perception Questionnaire were slightly higher than 2019: 19 (30%) of the 63 students eligible to participate responded. These results confirmed that the majority of students who responded are satisfied (72.3%) with the opportunities for student voice at the College. Looking at the breakdown by questions within the student voice domain, just two areas achieved below 70% satisfaction. These were Question 25 - it is clear how students' feedback on the course have been acted on (63.1%) and Question 29 - the university, including its partner colleges/institutions listens to and responds to student feedback (58.7%). The College has taken steps to try and improve the way in which it closes the loop on student feedback and the recently appointed Student Support Officer with responsibility to liaise with the Digital production team to produce infographics that summarise student feedback to present to the students on the forum every six months.

281 There is evidence that the College has put in place mechanisms to promote and recognise the value of enhancements that have been made to the student experience at the College as a result of student feedback. The infographics provided to new starters and students at the end of modules and the 'You said, We did' materials are used to communicate with students how, when and where student feedback has been used and acted upon to change provision. Students confirmed that the College received and responded to both formal and informal feedback from students to enhance the student experience. In particular, the students highlighted two examples of providing feedback to the College which was then used to change aspects of their experience. Firstly, students stated that they had fed back to the College a concern about the length and timing of modules; they felt that they were unable to feed the learning from one module into another as the next module began before assessment feedback had been received. This was fed back to the College via the student representative and as a result the College implemented a change to the length and timing of modules. This was also confirmed in the meeting with Professional support staff. Secondly, the student representative had received feedback from other students that the emails and communications received would benefit from being more concise, providing students with a summary of key issue and links to more information. This was fed back to the College and students noted that this feedback was promptly responded to and communications were adapted.

282 In line with the University, the College has processes in place for student representation and had one student representative in place for 2019. The Interim Review Sustain Maritime Operations Programme Action Plan notes the appointment of a new student representative as the Student Voice in autumn 2019. The College Access and Participation Statement 2020 states that the student representative has 'taken responsibility to communicate College developments with the wider student body' and in meetings with students and staff it was confirmed that the student representative had engaged in a process of consultation with the student body in the development of the Access and Participation Statement.

283 Evidence of student representative communications demonstrate that the representative that was appointed for 2019 utilised the online Student forum to contact students and encourage collective engagement from the student body. The student representative is embedded within the College governance structures, for example College Governance and Management Structure Revised 25\_02\_20 outlines that the College Academic Board has responsibility for student representation and feedback and the student representative is listed as a member, to attend on a quarterly basis. There is evidence that the College continues to review the effectiveness of their approach to student representation, for example, the Interim Review Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Action Plan makes reference to the student representation system being under review to strengthen the student voice. A meeting with students confirmed this approach and students were satisfied that they had the opportunity to represent their views collectively through the student representative or individually through the other mechanisms available, such as their personal tutors and online Student forums.

284 As stated in the Access and Participation Statement 2020 final, recognising the challenge of engaging students using more traditional representation methods, the College has implemented a range of online student forums to engage students in their educational experience to support the existing mechanisms for engagement and feedback. This approach is credible and robust because the College has embedded information about the forums into communications with students, the revised Student Induction email promotes the Student forum and highlights to students that this is a forum for raising problems, giving feedback and collaborating with academic staff and students, and student induction emails also contains the link to the forum. In addition, the meeting with staff for the demonstration of the Student forum and evidence provided of different

interactions in the forums between students and staff and with the student representative demonstrated to the team that the forum is an effective approach for engaging students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.

285 Staff across the College were able to clearly articulate the importance of engaging students and obtaining their feedback and their approaches to facilitating this. In meeting with staff responsible for programme development and those responsible for managing the Student forum staff informed the team of additional mechanisms being trialled to stimulate student engagement in the forum and with each other, for example the MBA programme was planning online coffee morning zoom sessions for this academic year.

286 Furthermore, to increase familiarity with the forums and to encourage students to use the space as a means to discuss and provide feedback on their educational experiences, the College has embedded interaction on the forum into module design. For example, as outlined in the MSc Project Handbook for Engineering module MLA717, students are required to complete a forum task as part of their assessment and that other participants on the module are required to comment on a minimum of two other students posts within a defined period of time (weeks 6-12 of the module). These comments are reviewed and graded, representing 10% of the module mark. This approach was evident in the sample of assessment and feedback provided for module MLA717, the demonstration of the Student forum and was confirmed by students in the meeting with the team. Students whom the team met expressed satisfaction with this process as it encouraged engagement with the forum which not only increased familiarity with the space but helped to build a sense of community with other students on the programme. Students also spoke of how they valued the opportunity that the forum provided to get valuable input into their project ideas from others in the sector and make connections that they would not otherwise have done, given the distance nature of the provision.

287 The College's plans for engaging students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience are deemed to be credible and robust because they were being supported by appropriate resources, for example the appointment of the Student Support Officer who has responsibility for engaging with students to obtain feedback and for communicating to students the way in which their feedback have been taken on board and responded to. The Student Support Officer is also a member of Academic Board and has responsibility for Student Voice on the agenda. This was confirmed in meetings with staff and Academic Board minutes show that the College is reviewing its approaches to student engagement. For example, minutes from Academic Board 15 July 2020 show that the Academic Board have agreed that final year student surveys will use the NSS questions in order to allow comparison of the College results against national statistics.

## **Conclusions**

288 As described above, the review team considered all of the evidence submitted to form a judgement as to whether the College meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for College's and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing, the review team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other reviews and remained outcomes focused. Its conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

289 The College actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience. This is because staff understand the importance of the student voice and are committed to improving the student learning experience as a result of student engagement. The College acknowledges the challenges of engaging with



students, given the nature of the cohort and distance provision. It has implemented a number of different solutions to these challenges. The establishment of online forums, which are embedded into the learning experiences of students through their module assessments, coupled with a commitment to reflect on and respond to student feedback, gave the team confidence that the College has developed a clear and effective approach which provides appropriate mechanisms to facilitate students with opportunities to provide feedback, individually and collectively, on their experiences. The College's plans for the engagement of students are credible and robust because they are clearly understood by students and staff and are supported by appropriate resource and infrastructure. Students who met with the review team confirmed the impact of these approaches, reporting that they had a range of channels for providing feedback and provided examples where changes had been made to provision as a result of student engagement. The team concludes, therefore, that this Core practice is met.

290 The evidence underpinning this judgement reflects all of the evidence described in the QSR evidence matrix. Therefore, the review team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

## **Q6 The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students**

291 This Core practice expects that the provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.

292 The QAA review team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

### **The evidence the team considered**

293 The QAA review team assessed the evidence presented to it, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The review team utilised that matrix to ensure that the evidence it considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other reviews and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

- a College Academic Board Terms of Reference: College and Management Structure
- b College and University Academic Cooperation Agreement
- c Student Handbook
- d College Complaints Procedure Statement
- e Awards Assessment Board Standing Agenda
- f Minutes of the Awards Assessment Board
- g University Academic Regulations
- h Minutes of the Academic Board
- i Informal complaint
- j Informal complaint response
- k Complaint stages 1 and 2
- l College response
- m University Stage 2 response
- n Informal complaint letter
- o College response
- p New Student Induction email
- q College Response to additional evidence request
- r Meeting with University of Plymouth staff
- s Meeting with Professional support staff
- t Meeting with Students
- u University of Plymouth Student Complaints Procedure
- v University Procedures for Appeal against the decision of an Assessment Board

### **How any samples of evidence were constructed**

294 No sampling was necessary as four complaints were reviewed, which comprised the total number of student complaints received by the College since its establishment.

## **Why and how the team considered this evidence**

295 As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider was considered by the review team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the review team to make its judgement regarding the providers ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision-making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the review team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below.

296 To identify the College's processes for handling complaints and appeals and to confirm these processes are fair and transparent, the team scrutinised the Academic Cooperation Agreement and its amendment, the College Academic Board Terms of Reference, Awards Assessment Board Standing Agenda and Minutes, relevant Academic Regulations, the Student Handbook, the College Complaints Procedure Statement and the University Student Complaints Procedure.

297 To assess whether the College has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for developing and operating fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students, the team reviewed minutes of the Academic Board.

298 To identify levels of complaints and appeals overall and by course or type, which may identify issues for further investigation under other core practices, the team reviewed four complaints which comprised the total number of student complaints received by the College since its establishment. The team also evaluated a statement from the College in their response to a request for further information.

299 To test that complaints and appeals scrutinised were dealt with in a fair, transparent and timely manner, the team met professional support staff and staff from the University.

300 To identify students' views about the clarity and accessibility of the College's complaints and appeals procedures, the team reviewed the new student induction email and met four students enrolled on MSc programmes of study.

## **What the evidence shows**

301 The review team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

302 Responsibility for academic appeals and complaints are set out in the partnership agreement and University Academic Regulations.

303 The College follows the University's procedures for complaints, undertaking resolution at the informal stage and then signposting students to the University's formal complaint procedure if no resolution is reached. The Student Handbook outlines the College Complaint Procedure and includes a simple and clear flow diagram which outlines the process at Stage 1, 2 and 3 with supplementary notes and a University email address that students can use to contact the University or submit a complaint. The College Complaint Procedure also outlines the investigation process and what will happen after the complaint has been resolved and how to appeal a decision.

304 Students can access the University's Student Complaint Procedure through a link in the Student Handbook. This procedure outlines for students the criteria relating to what

would be considered under the complaint procedures and what would not, and how to make and submit a complaint. The student complaint procedure advises that students have the opportunity to raise complaints without the risk of disadvantage or recrimination and that each case will be treated on merit, constructively and promptly. Students are also advised that they can obtain independent advice about submitting a complaint from the [Students' Union Advice Centre](#).

305 The College is responsible for the Early Resolution Stage (Stage 1) and advises students considering raising a complaint to put their complaint in writing to the Head of Academic Operations who will acknowledge the complaint, investigate and respond on behalf of the College. Applicants should expect to have a response with a decision within 10 working days of receipt of the letter.

306 If the student is not satisfied following the Early Resolution Stage, a formal complaint (Stage 2) can be submitted to the University within 10 working days following a response to Stage 1, by completing the formal complaint form available within the Student Complaint Procedure. If a student remains unsatisfied by the outcome of the Formal Complaint Stage (Stage 2), they may make a request for review (Stage 3) to the University's Complaints Office within 10 working days of the date of the Formal Complaint Stage response from the University.

307 The University has oversight of the Formal Complaint (Stage 2) and Review (Stage 3). For Stage 2, the University's Complaints Office liaises with the College and advises of possible solutions to address the complaint. Stage 3 requires the College, separate to the student, to submit to the University's Complaints Office a written submission in relation to the complaint for consideration by the Complaint Review Panel. The University's Complaints Office will inform both the College and the student of the outcome of this stage. Following the outcome of Stage 3, should a student remain unsatisfied by the outcome, they are advised that the next step is to contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

308 The team found the Complaints procedure to be fair and transparent because there is a simple and clear flow diagram which outlines the process at Stage 1, 2 and 3 with supplementary notes and contact information. The procedure is accessible because students can access the information from the Student Handbook, complaint procedure and University website.

309 In its response to the request for additional evidence, the College states that it has only received four complaints, one of which was directed to the University as a Stage 2 complaint as the informal process was not resolved to the student's satisfaction. In a meeting with the team, University staff confirmed that there has only been one complaint which has escalated to the University since the College was established. Staff from the University attributed the close relationship between students and personal tutors at the College and the College's approach of attempting to resolve issues at an informal level, to one complaint in six years being escalated to a formal complaint. This was supported by questioning of professional services staff.

310 To date, no complaint has been upheld and the records of these four complaints seen by the team indicate that complaints are investigated, and decisions communicated in detail. The team evaluated correspondence concerning these four complaints and considered that the complaints have been dealt with according to the College's procedure and have been fairly investigated. The outcomes had been communicated to the students in a clear and detailed manner. The College Complaint Procedure states that students can receive a response to a complaint within 10 days. However, it was not possible to conclude from the documentation provided that complaints were processed and resolved

within 10 days as stated in the procedure.

311 The complaints seen do not indicate any systemic issues or otherwise obvious themes. However, the team notes that there is no data relating to issues raised by students as a complaint with their personal tutors or other staff and resolved informally. At a meeting with professional support staff, the team was assured that causes of concern raised with personal tutors were investigated and, if required, action plans put in place to address any shortcomings. While it is commendable that complaints are generally resolved before they become formal complaints, the team has minor concerns that the nature of these informal complaints is not being captured, so any remedial actions or improvements arising would be ad hoc and reactive, and the College may be missing opportunities to make systemic changes which would benefit the programmes and the students.

312 Notwithstanding the reservations over capturing data and information on complaints raised by students, the team considers that the College operate credible, fair and accessible complaints procedures. With a lack of data or other evidence to use as a basis for development, the team could not judge whether or not any plans would be robust.

313 From the Student Handbook students can access the University's Procedures for appealing against the decision of an Assessment Board (Academic Appeals). This appeal procedure is concerned only with formal progression or award decisions and the assessment processes which give rise to these. They are not to be used in cases where students have a grievance or complaint against the College which is not related to the assessment process or the decision of the Assessment Board. Before submitting an academic appeal, students are encouraged to have a thorough read of the Academic Regulations and seek independent advice from the Students' Union Advice Centre.

314 The College follows the procedure as set out by the University Academic Regulation. Any appeal is first dealt with on an informal basis by the Head of Academic Operations. In the event that there are grounds to review the marks awarded, the student's work will be sent out to be blind marked by an independent academic. On completion of the blind marking the appellant is written to with the decision.

315 Following completion of the College's internal appeals procedure, a student who remains dissatisfied with the outcome may make an appeal to the University. Appeals are submitted to the University's Complaint and Appeals Manager to either recognise or refuse, based on the grounds of the application in accordance with the Academic Appeals procedure. The Complaints and Appeals Manager has discretion regarding any appeal due to personal circumstances as well as the ability to refuse an appeal submitted outside of published timeframes.

316 Once accepted by the University, an academic appeal proceeds to a formal stage of investigation by the University's Complaints and Appeals Office. Where a student remains dissatisfied with the decision of the formal stage, they may apply for their case to be considered at a Review Stage by an Appeal Panel. If a student remains unsatisfied by the outcome of their appeal at the Review stage, they can refer to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

317 The Academic Appeals procedure comprises a simple and clear flow diagram which outlines the process, including initial, formal and review stages with supplementary notes and timeframes. There is also a University email address that students can use to contact the University or submit an appeal. This procedure has an Appeal Proforma for Students to submit their appeal within 10 working days of the publication of the official

results.

318 The College Academic Board Terms of Reference state that Academic Board shall be responsible for the academic experience of students, including appeals and complaints. The Award Assessment Board is a joint committee of the University and College which makes decisions on progression and awards for students according to the terms of reference. This Board also receives reports on any decision made on progression and awards as a result of the outcome of an appeal. The Minutes from meetings of Academic Board and Award Assessment Board reviewed by the team confirm complaints and appeals as standing agenda items. However, no matters have been raised for discussion. To date, no academic appeals have been escalated to the formal process carried out by the University.

319 The team met four students. They confidently spoke about minor issues they had raised and how these were simply resolved through the personal tutor system. The students were asked their views on the clarity and accessibility of the College's complaints and appeals procedures. They stated that, although they had not used either of the procedures, they are made aware in the student induction email that the Student Handbook contains important information regarding the learning environment as well as University policies and procedures. The students were confident that information on how to use the processes was easily accessible either through a document linked to the Total Learning Package, the Student Handbook or by contacting their lecturer or personal tutor. The team concludes that students can find and understand those procedures quickly and easily. Students were also confident that there were sufficient ways, for example the Student forum, to let the College know if they had concerns or suggestions for changes to the programmes, policies or systems and processes. Students did not raise any serious concerns about the fairness, transparency or accessibility of the procedures or the way they are applied.

## **Conclusions**

320 As described above, the review team considered all of the evidence submitted to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing, the review team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other reviews and remained outcomes focused. Its conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

321 The team concludes that the College has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to students. The College has developed robust and credible procedures to handle complaints raised by students. Examples of complaints reviewed by the team were dealt with according to College and University procedures. Complaints by students are handled by the College fairly and investigated in a timely manner. Responses are detailed and clearly communicated. Any deviations from the procedures relate to minor differences in response times which do not harm the integrity of the procedure or the interests of the students.

322 The College follows the University's procedures for complaints, undertaking resolution at the informal stage and then signposting students to the University's formal complaint procedure. Staff at the University confirm that there have been no appeals submitted by College students either via the College or directly to the University. The team reviewed the University procedures via links from the Student Handbook and considered them to be accessible, with College students able to access them quickly and easily.

323 The review team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.

324 The evidence underpinning this judgement reflects all of the evidence described in the QSR evidence matrix. Therefore, the review team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

## **Q8 Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them**

325 This Core practice expects that where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.

326 The QAA review team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

### **The evidence the team considered**

327 The QAA review team assessed the evidence presented to it, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The review team utilised that matrix to ensure that the evidence it considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other reviews and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

- a Marine Industry in the 21st Century module MLA601
- b Marine Science and Engineering Management module MLA701
- c Academic Partnerships
- d College Governance and management Structure
- e College programme approval policy
- f Partner Subject Review January 2020
- g Interim programme action plan
- h Academic Board Minutes
- i Academic Co-operation Agreement with the University
- j Amendment to Academic Co-operation Agreement with the University January 2020
- k Joint Board of Studies minutes January 2020
- l External examiner reports
- m Programme approval policy
- n College responsibilities checklist
- o Academic Partnerships Changes to Existing Programmes Process 2019-20
- p June 2020 Interim Review MLA Hydrography Suite Programme Action Plan
- q DipHE Programme Quality Handbook 2019\_20
- r BSc (Hons) Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Quality Handbook 2019\_20
- s Academic Partnerships Quality Assurance Meetings Terms of Reference
- t Academic Board Meeting
- u MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Quality Handbook
- v New student induction email
- w Progressing student induction email
- x HKMD Work-based Learning Handbook
- y MLA079 Assessment September 2020



z	QSR Request for additional evidence
aa	MLA709 and the Hong Kong Marine Department Professional Training Standard
bb	MA709 Professional Training Standard AMO
cc	Sustainable Maritime Operations External Examiner Report and Response
dd	Award External Examiner Report and Response
ee	Hydrography External Examiner Report and Response
ff	Award External Examiner Report_Dec2019 response
gg	Award Assessment External Examiner Response
ee	HA External Examiner June 2018_2019 2
ii	External Examiner Sustainable Maritime Operations June 2018_2019
jj	HA Annual Subject Report 2019 (2)
kk	Engineering Annual Subject Report 2019 (3)
ll	Sustainable Maritime Operations Annual Subject Report 2019 (4)
mm	Joint Board of Studies Minutes
nn	Subject Assessment Panel Minutes June 2019 Final
oo	Award Assessment Board Minutes June 2020 Approved (1)
pp	Subject Assessment Panel Minutes June 2020 Approved
qq	QSR request for additional evidence MLA Response
rr	Work-based Learning for Marine Professionals (Mentors) module MLA709 (1)
ss	Work-based Learning for Marine Professionals (Mentees) module MLA709 (2)
tt	Annual Review - Programme Plan Operational Guidance
uu	University Academic Partnerships Annual Programme Review – Guidance
vv	College Academic Calendar 19-20
ww	Academic Board Meeting Agendas 2019_2020
xx	College Proposal for Administration June 2020
yy	Agreed support staffing
zz	QSR visit meetings - Points of clarification - Facilitator email
aaa	Meeting with Senior staff
bbb	Meeting with staff from the University
ccc	Meeting with members of Academic Board
ddd	Meeting with staff responsible for programme development
eee	Meeting with staff who support the Student forum
fff	Meeting with Professional support staff
ggg	Meeting with Associate tutors
hhh	Meetings with Students
iii	Meeting with Employers
jjj	Meeting with staff from the Hong Kong Marine Department
kkk	Meeting with staff responsible for developing and maintaining the learning platform
lll	Meeting with Senior staff

328 Some of the key pieces of evidence, outlined in Annex 4, were not considered by the review team. These pieces of evidence and the reason why they were not considered during this review are outlined below:

- third party endorsements as none are available for the provision on offer at the College.

### **How any samples of evidence were constructed**

329 To test that external examiners consider that courses delivered in partnership were of high quality, the team considered a representative sample of 17 external examiner reports reflecting the full range of the College's provision.

## **Why and how the team considered this evidence**

330 As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the College was considered by the review team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the review team to make its judgement regarding the College's ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision-making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the review team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below.

331 To assess how the College ensures courses are high quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them, the review team scrutinised the Academic Co-operation Agreement between the College and the University, explored the academic regulations, policies and procedures of the validating body that relate to the quality of partnership working, met staff from the University and the College in order to clarify aspects of policy and procedures, and interrogated the College Academic Calendar.

332 To assess whether the College has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for ensuring a high-quality academic experience in partnership work, the review team scrutinised the Academic Co-operation Agreement between the College and the University and met staff from both the University and the College in order to clarify aspects of policy and procedures. The team also scrutinised records of, and explored the College's approaches and internal procedures for implementing, the University's academic regulations for partnership working, programme specifications, governance committee meeting minutes, outcomes of internal moderation and staff roles and responsibilities.

333 In order to take a view on the quality of teaching, the team explored the distance learning platform for three active modules Marine Industry in the 21st Century module MLA601, Marine Science and Engineering Management module MLA701, Work-based Learning for Marine Professionals (Mentors) module MLA709 (1) and Work-based Learning for Marine Professionals (Mentees) module MLA709 (2).

334 To assess students' views about quality of courses delivered in partnership, the team met four students enrolled on MSc programmes of study one student taking a work-related learning module at the Hong Kong Marine Department and both College academic and support staff responsible for engaging with students. The team also scrutinised annual programme review reports, student survey results and communications with students following the launch of College surveys.

335 To test the basis for the maintenance of high quality within specific partnerships, and that those arrangements are in line with the College's regulations or policies, the review team scrutinised the Academic Co-operation Agreement between the University and the College and associated responsibilities checklist. Arrangements for one module in which students reflect on their workplace experiences were explored through programme documentation, Work-based Learning for Marine Professionals (Mentees) module MLA709 (2); discussions with College staff, University staff and industrial mentors; and by reading the appropriate national professional standards framework.

336 By exploring the records of associated assessment panels and boards, and the ensuing annual reports, the team was able to appreciate the effectiveness of the underpinning arrangements.

337 To assess how other organisations regard the quality of courses delivered in partnership, the team met professional staff from a number of worldwide marine-based organisations, and associate tutors who work for the majority of their time in the marine sector, and a number of whom hold positions within the principal UK marine professional body.

### **What the evidence shows**

338 The review team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

339 The College and the University hold a formal Academic Co-operation Agreement within which the College is permitted to develop and deliver University-validated higher education programmes. The agreement requires the College to align with University policies, and to adhere to its academic regulations and procedures.

340 Programmes are developed, conducted, managed, taught and assessed by the College, and the University has delegated day-to-day responsibilities for the quality of programmes to the College. A formal process is in place to both approve the institutional-level partnership and re-approve it on a periodic basis.

341 Validated programmes remain in continuous approval, although staff from the University and senior staff informed the team the College is expected to maintain the currency of provision and appropriateness of its approach to teaching and learning through the University's procedures for programme modification. The University regularly convenes Academic Partnership Planning and Review and Joint Board of Studies meetings to reflect on partnership and programme matters.

342 The Academic Co-operation Agreement notes that the University expects the College to seek advance approval for staff it intends to employ teaching on validated programmes. This process was also confirmed by University staff who met the team.

343 The College's current active provision comprises distance learning programmes, with Hydrography programmes delivered via blended learning, with a target audience in the maritime industries. While the College offers one module which draws on work-related student reflection, and plans to introduce another in a new programme, it has no programmes in which partners are engaged to teach, support or assess students, although the Academic Co-operation Agreement permits the College to engage with staff in other organisations to assist in programme delivery, if required. The College would take the lead in any such arrangements, ensuring that the academic experience is high quality.

344 While the College adopted the University's academic and regulatory frameworks on formation, as it develops new provision within its niche distance learning market it has found the need to introduce a number of its own internal approaches, strategies, policies and procedures to help manage the partnership in respect to quality. For example, it has its own Programme Approval Policy and is in the process of developing a Teaching and Learning Strategy. It has also been granted approval for three minor procedural non-standard regulations that increase the window within which extenuating circumstances can be claimed, that permit internal interim assessment boards to grant immediate referral of failed assessments, and that permit a longer registration period than other University students. These better meet the needs of marine-based distance learning students who spend much of their life at sea, frequently without access to the internet and direct communications with the College.

345 Arrangements for teaching, delivery, administration, management and assessment of the College programmes are agreed at programme approval and captured in programme and module descriptions. The Academic Co-operation Agreement states that the College is to seek advance approval from the University for staff it intends to employ teaching on validated programmes. University staff responsible for partnership management met by the team also confirmed this process.

346 The College's academic calendar summarises the timely and effective procedures which the College has developed in order to engage with the University's academic governance framework. The University confirms that the College's engagements with the University's frameworks for managing the quality of academic partnerships are implemented effectively and in a timely manner. College membership of the University's Academic Partnerships Forum provides opportunities for both sharing College practice and learning from other partners of the University. Examples of recent engagement include seeking approval of newly appointed academic staff, proactive contributions to the consideration of academic quality in the Joint Board of Studies and the Annual Planning and Review process, and successful validation of new programmes and appropriate amendments to existing provision. Meetings with both University and College staff confirm that both partners understand their respective responsibilities in ensuring a high- quality academic experience.

347 The team thus concludes that the College makes good use of both the University's and its own frameworks, policies and procedures for partnership working to ensure that its programmes are high quality. In addition, the team believes that these form credible, robust and evidence-based plans for ensuring high quality student academic experiences in its partnership with the University.

348 Students told the team that they consider their programmes to be of extremely high quality. They regard online access to the University library invaluable, the quality of the distance learning and support materials as excellent. They commended the ready support and rapid response times from personal and academic tutors or other staff. Students consider that they received a high level of attention and support from both the College and, where necessary, the University. The team heard that student handbooks and the online materials signposted both College and University resources and assistance as required.

349 External examiners report satisfaction with the quality of student learning materials, the proactive support provided by tutors, the arrangements made for external examining, and the conduct and appropriateness of decisions made in assessment boards and panels. External examiners' reports inform the University's annual review of College provision, which affirm the effectiveness of the underpinning partnership arrangements.

350 Employers and professional staff from a range of marine industries spoke highly of arrangements for student learning and provide confirmation of the esteem in which the College courses delivered in partnership with the University are held.

## **Conclusions**

351 As described above, the review team considered all of the evidence submitted to form a judgement as to whether the provider meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing, the review team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other reviews and remained outcomes focused. Its conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

352 The team concludes that where the College works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements and credible, robust and evidence-based plans to ensure that the academic experience is high quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them. Both University and College staff understand their roles in the partnership arrangements. The University's regulations are applied effectively by the College. External examiners agree with students' views that the programmes are effective and high quality, and also confirm that the University's procedures are properly applied. The team's analysis of the evidence demonstrates that the College has developed effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience on its programmes it operates in partnership with its awarding body is of high quality. The review team concludes, therefore, that the Core practice is met.

353 The evidence underpinning this judgement reflects all the evidence described in the QSR evidence matrix for this Core practice. Therefore, the team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

## Q9 The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes

354 This Core practice expects that the provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.

355 The QAA review team completed an assessment of this Core practice in line with the principles and outcomes that are detailed in the [Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students: Guidance for Providers](#) (March 2019).

### The evidence the team considered

356 The QAA review team assessed the evidence presented to it, both prior to and at the visit, to determine if the provider could meet this Core practice at a threshold level. The Quality and Standards Review Guidance for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students includes a matrix (Annex 4) which identifies key pieces of evidence that a provider may present and which the team should consider when making a judgement against this Core practice to ensure that the relevant outcomes are being delivered. The review team utilised that matrix to ensure that the evidence it considered was assessed in a way that is clear and consistent with all other reviews and focused on relevant outcomes. A list of the key pieces of evidence seen by the team is below:

- a College Academic Strategy
- b Academic Co-operation Agreement with University
- c Student Handbook
- d Programme quality handbooks
- e Assessment briefs
- f Project handbooks
- g Assessed student work and feedback
- h Student Support Example
- i Associate tutor Role Profile
- j Student Support Officer Job Profile
- k Modules and Student assessments
- l Student Services
- m Sustainable Maritime Operations Student Perception Questionnaire
- n College Personal tutor Statement June 2020
- o College Proposal for Administration June 2020
- p Agreed Support Staffing
- q Programme Spec BSc Global Sustainable Development
- r Toolkit briefing note
- s Formative questions example document
- t Copyright free images
- u Developing Learning Outcomes
- v College PowerPoint bad good slide
- w Joint Board of Studies Minutes
- x Academic Board Minutes
- y College Programme Committee
- z Programme action plans
- aa Academic Partnership Annual Review – Programme Plan Operational Guidance
- bb University Academic Partnership Annual Programme Review Guidance
- cc Meeting with Senior staff
- dd Meeting with staff from the University of Plymouth

ee	Meeting with members of Academic Board
ff	Meeting with staff responsible for programme development
gg	Meeting with staff responsible for managing the Student forum
hh	Meeting with Professional support staff
ii	Meeting with Associate tutors
jj	Meeting with Students
kk	Meeting with Employers
ll	Meeting with staff responsible for developing and maintaining the learning platform
mm	Meeting with Senior staff
nn	University of Plymouth Student Handbook
oo	University of Plymouth Student Hub Page
pp	Study help materials on the TLP

### **How any samples of evidence were constructed**

357 To test whether students are given comprehensive, helpful and timely feedback, the team viewed a random and representative sample of assessed student work from eight of the College's 37 active modules.

358 The sample drew from all FHEQ levels delivered (5, 6 and 7) over the last three years, and because only small numbers of students were registered, work was scrutinised from every candidate, thus embracing the full range of grades awarded. In total, 105 pieces of assessed work were sampled (some 33% of the work available), including work marked by a number of different members of staff. There were, in addition, a further 10 examples of formative and summative assessment provided prior to the review visit. Each sample included pieces of assessed work, the assignment brief, assessment and marking criteria, marked work and the feedback provided to the student, outcomes of internal and external moderation, and records of the relevant assessment panel.

### **Why and how the team considered this evidence**

359 As highlighted, all of the evidence submitted by the provider was considered by the review team either prior to the visit, or at the visit itself. As such, several pieces of evidence will have been considered to allow the review team to make its judgement regarding the providers ability to meet this Core practice. To ensure consistency in decision-making and to ensure that those decisions focused on outcomes, the review team considered the key pieces of evidence outlined in Annex 4 of the Guidance for Providers. These key pieces of evidence and the reason for scrutinising them are outlined below.

360 To identify the College's approach to student support, including how it identifies and monitors the needs of individual students, the review team considered the Student Handbook, The College Associate Tutor Role, Student Support Example, Student Support Officer job Profile, Student Services, College Personal tutor Statement June 2020, College Proposal for Administration June 2020, Agreed Support Staffing, University Student Handbook and the University Student Hub Page.

361 To assess whether the College has credible, robust and evidence-based plans for ensuring that all students are supported to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes, the team considered the College Academic Strategy, Academic Co-operation Agreement, Sustainable Maritime Operations Academic Partnership Annual Review, Interim Review Sustainable Maritime Operations Programme Action Plan, Joint

Board of Studies 2019-20 minutes, College Programme Committee Terms of Reference, the Student Support Example, Academic Partnership Annual Review - Programme Plan Operational Guidance, University Academic Partnership Annual Programme Review – Guidance, Assessment briefs and Project handbooks, Programme quality handbooks, Assessed student work and feedback, Joint Board of Studies Minutes, Academic Board Minutes, College Programme Committee, Programme action plans, Academic Partnerships Annual Review – Programme Plan Operational Guidance and University Academic Partnership Annual Programme Review Guidance.

362 To identify and assess students' views about student support mechanisms and whether students who have made particular use of student support services regard those services as accessible and effective, the team considered the 2020 Academic Partnership Sustainable Maritime Operations Student Perception Questionnaire and met students.

363 To test whether staff understand their responsibilities and are appropriately skilled and supported, the team considered the associate tutor role profile, Student Support Officer job profile, Student Services, College Personal Tutor Statement June 2020, College Proposal for Administration June 2020, Agreed Support Staffing, Toolkit briefing note, Formative questions example document, copyright free images, Developing Learning Outcomes, College PowerPoint bad good slide and met senior staff, staff from the University, members of Academic Board, staff responsible for programme development, professional support staff, associate tutors and staff responsible for developing and maintaining the Total Learning Platform (TLP).

### **What the evidence shows**

364 The review team's analysis of the evidence led to the following observations.

365 The College provides students with access to a wide range of student support mechanisms to support them in achieving academic and professional outcomes. These include access to designated staff, such as personal tutors, associate tutors and the Student Support Officer, academic skills learning support through the TLP, study help and wider student support services provided by the University, including counselling, disability access services, the University Careers and Employability Service, Chaplaincy, healthcare services, Students' Union support and advice centre, recreation and student gateway to online course resources. The sources of support and requirements for engagement are well-defined and identified to students in the College Student Handbook and in Programme Quality Handbooks. The College Student Handbook has a section that details the learning and support and wellbeing services that offer support and guidance to students on student issues and university work. Students are referred to the University Student Handbook for details of student support services (academic and pastoral) that are available through a link in the College Student Handbook. From the University Student Handbook, students are able to access the Student Hub page which provides an overview of the services and support available. In the meeting with staff from the University it was confirmed that College students have access to all of the online support at the University.

366 While support to physical resources, for example one-to-one in person careers advice and physical access to library facilities was available, staff from the University confirmed that, as per the Academic Co-operation Agreement between the University and the College, a service-level agreement would need to be negotiated and agreed if demand for access to physical resources were to increase. University staff also confirmed that they work closely with the College to ensure that students are made aware of the support available to them through the University. For example, the Student Support Officer, recognising the challenge of engaging with distance learning students, produces a 'one-stop' document which pulls together all of the student support service resources in



one place for distributing to students.

367 All students are assigned a personal tutor for the duration of their study at the College who provides pastoral support and guidance and academic advice, for example on study skills and assessment techniques. The College Personal Tutor Statement June 2020 articulates the duties of personal tutors and the centrality of the personal tutor role in supporting students to achieve successful outcomes. Personal tutors formally liaise with students at regular intervals during modules and aim to respond to requests within 24 hours during the working week. Tutors are responsible for supporting students to engage with their modules/programme and are expected to identify students who are not engaging and refer them to programme managers and/or the Student Support Officer for appropriate investigation and follow-up actions.

368 This approach is credible and robust because senior staff, staff from the University, members of Academic Board, staff responsible for programme development, professional support staff and associate tutors confirmed this approach to the team. In particular, the centrality of the personal tutor role to monitoring student progress and identifying any need for potential intervention or support was emphasised and seen as an effective and responsive way to support students, given the nature of the provision (distance/blended learning) and student cohort. Associate tutors with personal tutor responsibility were able to articulate their role in supporting students and the processes for referring students who may need additional support. They confirmed that the requirements of personal tutoring were explained to them as part of the induction process and that they felt fully supported in their role by the senior team and student support officer.

369 The Student Support Officer explained in detail how monitoring of students occurs and the process for following up on any referrals from personal tutors. Within the first two weeks of the 13-week module period, personal tutors will confirm to the Student Support Officer details of any students who have not responded to meeting requests or emails. The Student Support Officer then contacts the student to see if there are any problems and outline the different support available to them. The Student Support Officer confirmed that the majority of students respond at this point and an appropriate plan for re-engagement is put in place in conjunction with the programme manager and the personal tutor. There was evidence of this approach in the student support example provided. This was also confirmed in the meeting with associate tutors. If students do not respond after this communication, then a formal communication is sent that informs students that the College will employ the Instant Interruption Policy and students will be compulsorily interrupted or withdrawn from the programme. Interruptions have academic and financial consequences for students, and these are unambiguously outlined in the College Student Handbook.

370 The sample of assignment briefs assessed student work and feedback indicates that assessment at the College supports student learning. Programmes have formative activities and assessment embedded within modules and staff are provided with guidance to support the development of their material for the TLP, in particular examples of formative questions or activities that they can build into materials to support student learning.

371 Feedback on student work is comprehensive and timely. It is timely because it is in line with the University's Assessment Policy in that student feedback is returned within 20 working days. In reviewing the sample of assessed student work there is evidence of comprehensive feedback that helps students to understand how they can improve or maintain performance levels, although feedback is not consistently explicitly related to assessment criteria.

372 Students are able to submit their assignments to Turnitin prior to final submission to guide them in their academic referencing practice and tutors will provide comment on a full draft once before final submission, and details of this process are provided to students in project handbooks and assessment briefs. Staff responsible for programme development and those involved in developing the TLP were able to explain to the review team the approach to formative assessment and feedback that is a key part of the learning experience. Students who met the review team confirmed this approach.

373 Work-based or work-related learning is a central feature of the provision at the College and this is evident in programme quality handbooks where graduate attributes and skills are articulated in relation to programme delivery methods and learning outcomes. This is reflected in the College's strategic objectives in relation to student outcomes, which states that 'Our graduates will have enhanced employment and career opportunities' with an associated Key Performance Indicator of 80% graduate employment. The College notes that, given the nature of the student body, the majority are mature students in employment, and to date it has been challenging for the College to gather data about professional outcomes. In meetings, staff indicated that a large proportion of students go on to achieve professional registration with the Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST) following completing of the master's programme. However, the College does not collect data to formally record this.

374 The review team has some concern about the appropriateness of the structures for supporting professional outcomes for different types of students, for example, undergraduate students on the new BSc in Global Sustainable Development. This is because, as stated in the College Access and Participation Plan, the majority of students to date have been mature-age learners in employment rather than more traditional full-time undergraduate cohorts who may need different forms and levels of support to help them achieve professional outcomes that the College has not had to offer to date. For example, more structured careers advice and guidance support. However, senior staff whom the review team met confidently articulated an awareness of the different needs and how they might be supported going forward.

375 In meeting with the review team, associate tutors articulated the role they play in supporting students with the IMarEST professional registration process, enhanced by their own professional expertise and the strong links they and the College has with IMarEST. This was also confirmed in meetings with students, who reported that the College had supported those who wished to, in achieving professional registration. Students highlighted the support received for their professional and career development from College staff, often in the form of preparing for professional registration with IMarEST. They also highlighted how the Colleges close links with industry and professional bodies was embedded in the programme content, design and delivery.

376 Senior staff confidently articulated how support for professional outcomes will evolve at the College as it grows and diversifies its portfolio of programmes. Preparing students for professional programmes is considered in the development of new programmes and evident in the programme specifications for the recently approved BSc (Hons) Global Sustainable Development.

377 When meeting the review team, students highlighted the support received for their professional and career development from College staff, often in the form of preparing for professional registration with IMarEST. They also highlighted how the College's close links with industry and professional bodies was embedded in the programme content, design and delivery.

378 Employers also reported that the programme was valuable for career development of participants because there were examples of previous participants in their organisations who had progressed in their careers following completion of their programme with the College. Employers highlighted how engaging with the programme had developed participants' strategic thinking and leadership skills.

379 Students expressed satisfaction with the support mechanisms available, drawing attention to the responsiveness of College staff at all levels of the organisation, in particular personal tutors. The results from the University Academic Partnerships 2020 Student Perception Questionnaire for the College further confirm that the majority of students who responded are satisfied with the academic support that they receive (81.3%). These results also indicated that the majority of respondents were satisfied that feedback on work was timely (78.8%) and that they received helpful comments on their work (67.8%). Students also confirmed that they were satisfied with the feedback that they received, indicating that tutors had provided helpful advice for feeding forward into future assignments. They valued, in particular, the one-to-one individualised feedback opportunities on assessment drafts and the clear guidance provided in the programme handbooks and wider learning materials.

380 When meeting the team, academic and professional support staff spoke passionately about their role in facilitating all students, regardless of background and characteristics, to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes. All staff groups had a clear understanding of their role in supporting achievement, academically and professionally, and were able to explain the mechanisms in place to monitor student engagement with and learning on programmes. Academic staff explained how the Student Support Officer is accessible to all students and how they are responsible for guiding students with wellbeing issues and learning support needs. If cases arise, staff were able to confidently articulate how they would make reasonable adjustments to accommodate students with a disability and will accommodate and assist students with learning support needs. It was noted however, that very few requests for academic or pastoral support are received at application or during studies. Meeting with staff from across the College demonstrates that staff are appropriately skilled and supported to provide academic and non-academic support. For example, associate tutors confirmed that they were provided with in-depth one-to-one induction on commencing their post, which emphasised their role in supporting students and the mechanism and processes to achieve this. Professional support staff told the team that they engaged with the University Partnership Managers and the University Global Partners Forum which kept them up to date with the support services that College students are able to access through the University. Staff confirmed that they understand their roles in supporting students and the various approaches to individual, cohort and peer support that the College uses.

381 The College has a number of internal reporting mechanisms and structures that enable it to formally monitor and evaluate student academic achievement. These are credible and robust because the annual programme review process requires programme teams to produce plans that evaluate students' achievement and progression. These plans are considered by the College Programme Committee, Academic Board and the Joint Board of Studies.

382 The College has restructured the professional support services and are committed to further investment in the professional services infrastructure to reflect the stage of their development as a College. Staff confidently articulated intentions to develop more formalised and structured systems for monitoring, review and intervention that would be more appropriate as the student cohort changes in size and composition.

## Conclusions

383 As described above, the review team considered all of the evidence submitted to form a judgement as to whether the College meets this Core practice. In making this judgement the team followed the process set out in Guidance for Providers and took account of the key statements outlined in Annex 5. In so doing, the review team ensured that its judgement was consistent with all other reviews and remained outcomes focused. Its conclusions, based on the evidence considered, are detailed below.

384 The review team concludes that the College supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes. The College has policies, processes and infrastructure in place to facilitate successful academic and professional outcomes. These are comprehensive, robust and credible in that they are detailed, realistic and appropriate and the support infrastructure is in place with clearly articulated plans for how this will develop as the College grows and needs change. There is evidence of timely and comprehensive feedback that helps students to understand how they can improve or maintain performance levels. Academic and support staff understand their roles in supporting student achievement and the various approaches used for this. They are fully committed to delivering successful academic and professional outcomes for their students. Students reported that they were satisfied with the support mechanisms available, in particular personal tutors, and that they received comprehensive, helpful and timely feedback. The review team therefore concludes that the College supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes and that the Core practice is met.

385 The evidence underpinning this judgement reflects all of the evidence described in the QSR evidence matrix for this Core practice. Therefore, the review team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.

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