



# Application for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers: Askham Bryan College

## Scrutiny team report

October 2019

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## About this report

This report reflects the findings of a team appointed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to conduct a detailed scrutiny of an application from Askham Bryan College for the power to award foundation degrees.

The application was considered under criteria approved by Government in 2015. In advising on applications, QAA is guided by the relevant criteria and the associated evidence requirements. QAA's work in this area is overseen by its Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP), a subcommittee of the QAA Board.

ACDAP's initial consideration of applications establishes whether an applicant has made a case to proceed to detailed scrutiny of the application and the evidence on which it is based. If satisfied on this matter, ACDAP agrees that a team may be appointed to conduct the scrutiny and prepare a report, enabling ACDAP to determine the nature of the recommendation it will make to the QAA Board.

Scrutiny teams produce reports following each of the engagements undertaken. The final report reflects the team's findings and is structured around the four main criteria contained in the 2015FDAP criteria,<sup>1</sup> namely:

- governance and academic management
- academic standards and quality assurance
- scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff
- the environment supporting the delivery of foundation degree programmes.

Subject to the approval of the Board, QAA's advice is communicated to the appropriate minister. This advice is provided in confidence. The minister determines whether it should be disclosed to the applicant. A final decision on an application, and the notification of that decision, is a matter for the Privy Council.

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<sup>1</sup> The FDAP criteria are available in Annex A of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills guidance: *Foundation Degree Awarding Powers: Guidance for Further Education Institutions in England: Criteria and Process for applying for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers* (October 2015) at [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/526812/BIS-15-532-foundation-degree-awarding-powers-october-2015.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/526812/BIS-15-532-foundation-degree-awarding-powers-october-2015.pdf) (PDF, 430KB).

## Executive summary

### Governance and academic management

The College management responsibilities and roles are widely understood and underpin the College's approach to governance. Formal meetings are managed effectively, and risks and mitigation plans in respect of the Higher Education Strategy are monitored on a regular basis. The College takes appropriate account of Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and Office for Students (OfS) regulation and guidance, together with higher education sector developments and advice from land-based industrial sectors. The College's Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP) plan has been overseen by the Director of Higher Education in order to ensure that the necessary academic preparations have been well managed. The College's university validation partners are supportive of the College's FDAP application.

The College Corporation Board and its subcommittees discharge corporate governance responsibilities effectively. In particular, the Finance and General Purposes and Audit Committees keep attentive oversight of both the financial plans and the risks faced by the College. This enables the Corporation to provide challenge to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the Senior Management Team (SMT). The Finance Director is responsible for the budget which is managed rigorously and is underpinned by clear financial procedures. The budget allocation process links effectively with the Higher Education Strategy.

The College's developing academic quality assurance arrangements have been determined under the guidance of its validating universities, which has given the College significant experience in meeting the requirements of a foundation degree-awarding institution. The Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB), chaired by the Campus Principal and Executive Director of Higher Education, is fit for purpose and reflective in outlook, ensuring that the policies and procedures for validation and review meet the awarding bodies' requirements. The developing Higher Education Quality Manual will ensure that the College's regulations and procedures are similarly fit for purpose in exercising FDAP. Academic governance arrangements are effective.

The Director of Higher Education has overall responsibility for higher education and provides stable and strong academic leadership within the College. Members of the Higher Education Team, including the two Academic Leaders and the Head of Higher Education Operations and Quality, have a clear understanding of the external higher education environment for land-based studies and are able to provide supportive leadership for the exercise of FDAP.

The key challenge for the College is the urgent need to ensure that its short, medium and long-term future is financially viable and sustainable. The Further Education Commissioner's team found that the College's SMT and Governors have the capacity, capability and determination to deliver the required financial improvements, but also noted a degree of uncertainty as the College will be operating with an Acting CEO until January 2020. Similarly, it is premature for the scrutiny team to judge the effectiveness of the appointment process or the planned financial improvements to ensure College sustainability.

On the basis of these findings ACDAP concludes that Askham Bryan College meets Criterion A.

## **Academic standards and quality assurance**

The College has offered higher education provision since 1972 and has developed extensive experience of operating higher education quality assurance procedures. The College's current partners delegate responsibility for some aspects of their quality frameworks and these responsibilities are being exercised diligently. Despite one example where staff involved in programme approval were not fully familiar with one validating partner's regulations, the scrutiny provided evidence that awarding body regulations and procedures are understood and consistently applied. Implementation of processes is well supported through the central Higher Education Team, and the higher education academic committee structure enables effective oversight of quality and standards, with regular reporting upwards through the wider College committees.

The College has developed and further refined a comprehensive draft regulatory framework to be used in the event of FDAP being awarded. This framework aligns with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and builds on established practices, although some minor shortcomings were observed in the College's course development process. Two of the College's foundation degrees currently have no formal progression routes.

Extensive use is made of externality in the design, delivery and assessment of programmes through extensive employer engagement and an external dimension is embedded within core quality assurance processes. External examining is used effectively and reports confirm that academic standards are appropriately maintained and are broadly comparable with standards at other higher education providers.

Effective mechanisms are in place to encourage the continuous improvement of the quality of provision and student achievement. The College has put in place a number of measures to improve the retention/continuation rates of its undergraduate students although this continues to be a challenge.

On the basis of these findings ACDAP concludes that Askham Bryan College meets Criterion B.

## **Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff**

The academic, professional and pedagogical expertise of the teaching staff at the College is appropriate for programme delivery and is both recognised and appreciated by students. Staff demonstrate good engagement in their subject areas and hold appropriate academic and professional qualifications, with support provided for ongoing pedagogical development and the dissemination of developments and advances in their field. While there was evidence of some teaching staff who were less assured about the detail of curriculum development and assessment design as part of validation processes, key programme staff are competent in this area.

The College is developing its portfolio of research and scholarly activity, supported by institutional commitments in its overall and higher education strategies. The recent introduction of a higher education workload allocation model provides an allowance for curriculum development activities, research and scholarship. Staff engagement with opportunities to undertake College-funded research has been variable.

Staff have opportunities to update their professional practice through the College's extensive interaction with employers. Employers are widely involved in the design of programmes, ensuring that students and staff benefit from current industry expertise.

A comprehensive programme of continuing professional development is offered to all teaching staff, and staff are encouraged to seek fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The College operates a coherent appraisal system that has been subject to recent review and improvement, although the scrutiny team was unable to confirm the impact of the resulting changes in supporting staff development. The scrutiny team found minor discrepancies in the College's data monitoring of its performance against benchmarks with respect to the external activities of academic staff.

On the basis of these findings ACDAP concludes that Askham Bryan College meets Criterion C.

### **The environment supporting the delivery of foundation degree programmes**

The College has an effective learning and teaching infrastructure which is monitored through its committee system and ensures students are well supported throughout the course of the student lifecycle.

Key strengths include the College's close links with employers, which have a highly positive impact on student learning, most notably in relation to dissertation projects and careers and employability support, and the close and personal relationship students have with their course managers. Students spoke consistently of the high level of support their course manager provides in relation to academic and pastoral issues, both in tutorials and outside class hours. Observations of Higher Education Team meetings and Curriculum Planning Days evidenced this relationship particularly well, with staff demonstrating that they knew their students and understood their learning needs.

Student engagement has been an area of improvement during the course of the scrutiny, with student representatives now regularly attending and contributing to committee meetings. Steps taken to improve student engagement, most notably the student voice paper written jointly by the chair of the relevant committee and the student representative, have proven effective in ensuring the student voice is heard and meaningfully engaged with across the College's committee structure. The team noted that there was often limited engagement by student representatives beyond the presentation of reports, but overall the evidence demonstrates that the College has taken appropriate steps to improve student engagement.

Important steps have been taken to improve the learning resources available for students in the context of the College's financial constraints, such as increased study space within the Learning Resource Centre (LRC), and students feel such changes have impacted positively on their learning. The College has also continued to build upon the mental health support it offers students and has taken steps to further embed equality, diversity and inclusion into its work.

The team identified some shortcomings relating to the accuracy of information in cases of programme closure or suspension. These included misleading information being present on the College's website, not least the advertisement of a programme which had been suspended. This is an area of risk for the College given that it has historically run programmes with low student numbers which are more prone to suspension or closure than programmes with viable student numbers. In recognition of this risk, the College has recently created a new policy and process to better manage information in cases of course suspension or closure.

On the basis of these findings ACDAP concludes that Askham Bryan College meets Criterion D.

## **Privy Council's decision**

The Privy Council's decision is to grant Askham Bryan College renewable foundation degree awarding powers for a fixed six-year term beginning on 1 February 2022 and expiring on 31 January 2028.

## Introduction

This report provides a summary of the work and findings of the scrutiny team (the team) appointed by QAA to review in detail the evidence submitted in support of an application for foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP) by Askham Bryan College.

The application was considered by QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP) in November 2017, when the Committee agreed to proceed to the detailed scrutiny of the application. The team appointed to conduct the detailed scrutiny comprised Ms Alyson Bird, Professor Mark Hunt, Dr Matthew Kearns and Professor Diane Meehan (scrutiny team members) and Ms Carole Reid (secretary). The detailed scrutiny was managed on behalf of QAA by Professor Derrik Ferney.

The detailed scrutiny began in January 2018, culminating in a report to ACDAP in November 2019. In the course of the scrutiny, the team read a wide range of documents presented in support of the application. The team also spoke to a range of stakeholders and observed meetings and events pertinent to the application.

### Key information about Askham Bryan College

Askham Bryan College is a specialist land-based college with roots dating back to 1936. The College estate and facilities extend through Yorkshire, Cumbria and the northeast of England, with the York campus hosting the majority of higher education provision. The development of the College's curriculum is closely linked to the strategic priorities of the five different Local Enterprise Partnership regions within which it sits. The College currently has partnerships with Harper Adams University which validates the majority of its higher education provision, the Royal Agricultural University and Leeds Trinity University. The College's partnership with Teesside University ended in 2018.

The College's Strategic Plan (2017-20) is complemented by a Higher Education Strategic Plan (2018-21) which states that the College's vision is 'to add academic scholarship, social value and employability to its higher education students'.

There are currently 41 full and part-time staff delivering higher education programmes. While 13 of these staff teach a mixture of higher and further education in small or specialist departments, the remainder teach exclusively on higher education programmes. Two-thirds of staff hold a qualification at level 7 or above, and a number of staff are registered for a Level I or 8 qualification. The College has established a staff development programme to encourage staff to gain HEA fellowship appropriate to their role and expertise.

In 2018-19, there were 545 students enrolled on higher education programmes at the College, of whom 62 per cent were registered for foundation degree awards, 30 per cent for BSc awards and 8 per cent for Higher Apprenticeships.

The College has undergone a period of significant change in leadership during 2018-19, with a new Chair of Corporation and also a change of CEO. In response to recent financial pressures, the College has developed a five-year plan to ensure its financial stability.

### Statement on progression arrangements

The College currently offers a range of BSc (top-up) programmes that offer clear progression routes for students studying on most of its foundation degrees. The majority of the top-up programmes provided by the College are validated by Harper Adams University with one programme, the BSc/BSc (Hons) in Veterinary Nursing, being validated by the Royal Agricultural University. If the College is successful in achieving the award of FDAP, it plans

to continue to work with its validating universities to ensure that programmes validated by the College align with university-validated top-up programmes. The College currently does not offer a BSc (top-up) programme for progression from its FdSc Sport programmes validated by Leeds Trinity University and directs students wishing to progress towards appropriate provision at other local providers. The team noted the current lack of a formal progression agreement for sport programmes but found that progression arrangements are generally working effectively, with appropriate progression opportunities being identified, considered and confirmed through the programme validation process.



# Detailed scrutiny against foundation degree awarding powers criteria

## A Governance and academic management

### Criterion A1

A further education institution granted foundation degree awarding powers is governed, managed and administered effectively, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities. Its financial management is sound and a clear relationship exists between its financial policy and the safeguarding of the quality and standards of its higher education provision. As is generally the case for other organisations receiving degree awarding powers that are not primarily a higher education institution, its principal activities are compatible with the provision of higher education programmes and awards.

### Financial planning, quality assurance, and resource allocation policies are coherent and relate to the organisation's higher education mission, aims and objectives

1 The Higher Education Strategic Plan (2018-21) states that 'Askham Bryan College will add academic scholarship, social value and employability to its higher education students. Graduates of Askham Bryan College will leave with a desire to succeed, motivated and industry competent'.

2 The College's Strategic Plan for 2014-2018 included 'growth in Higher Education' and the achievement of 'Foundation Degree Awarding Powers' among the five key strategic priorities for this period. These ambitions were confirmed in the updated 2017-2020 College Strategy which aimed for modest growth through innovative curriculum change, and by its Higher Education Strategic Plan (2018-21) which envisaged the achievement of FDAP by 2020 and growth to 700 higher education students by 2021. The College intends to launch a new strategic plan in September 2020.

3 The College operates in accordance with ESFA assurance and accountability requirements for post-16 providers, including sixth-form and further education colleges, and has established financial regulations to support the strategic direction of the College.

4 The ESFA had rated the College's previous financial health as 'good', but the most recent assessment down-graded it to 'satisfactory'. A regular financial surplus had been achieved over recent years, but this situation changed for 2017-18 where a deficit was recorded.

5 During 2018-19 the scrutiny team observed through Corporation meetings that the Further Education Commissioner (FEC), acting on behalf of the ESFA, undertook three diagnostic assessments of the College in June 2018, November 2018 and March 2019. The College was assessed by the ESFA to be in early intervention for financial health and invited the FE Commissioner to undertake a diagnostic assessment to ensure that it had the right strategy in place to deliver quality provision while sustaining financial health. The most recent (March 2019) ESFA report noted the College deficit (£0.865M) and indicated that College cash and liquidity were poor (13 cash days). The College external auditors were unable to sign off the accounts for 2017-18 as they required committed banking facilities to be in place that provided sufficient funding for the 'going concern' assessment period. This was achieved at the end of May 2019. The March 2019 ESFA report made nine recommendations in the form of actions to strengthen and supplement existing College improvement plans. The FEC's team considered that the SMT and Governors have the

capacity, capability and determination to deliver the required improvements, but noted a degree of uncertainty insofar as the College will be operating with an acting CEO and interim Chief Operating Officer until January 2020. The FEC's team is supportive of the College's approach to financial and quality improvement, but still has concerns about the pace of delivering a sustainable financial position.

6 The CEO is the designated accounting officer. Approval limits are clearly defined in the Financial Regulations and there is an annual budgeting process overseen by the Director of Finance. The Academic Development Committee (ADC) makes recommendations for resources to the HEAB to support new programme approval. The Corporation has final responsibility for agreeing the College budget, and monitors income and expenditure via the Finance and General Purposes Committee (FGPC).

7 College finance procedures are generally well formulated, requiring governors' approval for major capital or project expenditure, as well as the overall College budget. The Corporation has brought a robust level of challenge to the senior team in budget formulation particularly in respect of the ESFA financial sustainability challenges noted above.

8 The annual budget process is well articulated, including a resource and developing workload allocation model at programme level. Investment in central administrative systems has been a challenge, particularly in respect of IT systems, which remain a major challenge to both resource and implementation within the current College financial plans for capital development.

9 The arrangements for academic governance are described clearly within the Higher Education Quality Manual. The scrutiny team found that the College committee structures and associated procedures for quality assurance of the academic provision are effective and fit for purpose.

### **Higher education activities take full account of the UK Quality Code and associated guidance**

10 The College higher education policies are published in its Higher Education Quality Manual and have been aligned to the current UK legal and regulatory higher education landscape. The College higher education procedures and policies relating to quality are proposed by the Academic Standards Committee (ASC) for approval by the HEAB.

11 The scrutiny team confirmed from their reading of minutes of key committees and validation reports, observations and meetings with academic and senior staff that College policies, procedures and practices operate effectively.

### **Makes reference to QAA's Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark Statement and its successor statement, Foundation Degree Characteristics which is part of the Quality Code**

12 The ASC has responsibility for ensuring that all higher education programme specifications include reference to Subject Benchmark Statements and the Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement.

13 The College agreements with its awarding institutions include responsibilities for designing and maintaining validated programmes with learning outcomes that are referenced to Subject Benchmark Statements and which meet professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements where relevant.

14 Overall the scrutiny team considered that the College carries out its responsibilities effectively in order to ensure that programme design processes take account of the

Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement, Subject Benchmark Statements and relevant professional body standards. However, the team did note issues with regard to progression arrangements for two of the College's foundation degrees (see paragraph 63).

**Higher education mission and associated policies and systems are understood and applied consistently both by those connected with the delivery of the organisation's higher education programmes and, where appropriate, by students**

15 The Strategic Plan and the Higher Education Strategy have been widely considered throughout the College at all levels. Responsibility for the delivery and monitoring of the strategic plan lies with the SMT and is overseen by the Corporation Board. The HEAB and its subcommittees and local course management teams develop and implement policies and strategies designed to provide learning and career opportunities for students that match the College's educational objectives. The College's overall strategy for higher education learning and teaching is articulated in the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy.

16 The scrutiny team observed the sharing of information by senior managers in a number of forums including the Corporation and Corporation Quality and Standards Committee (QSC), the SMT, and the HEAB and its subcommittees. Students are represented on key decision-making bodies including the Corporation and HEAB. The team met groups of students and staff who were clearly aware of the main elements of the Higher Education Strategy and the priorities against which it would be judged.

17 Staff were generally aware of the College's higher education strategic priorities, particularly the reasons for its application for FDAP and the further development of the academic curriculum. The Head of Higher Education Operations and Quality and the Academic Leaders support and advise staff on key academic policies and operational issues. Students met by the review team were familiar with FDAP and some of the processes involved. In meetings with the scrutiny team, staff and students spoke positively about the College achieving FDAP.

**There is a clarity of function and responsibility at all levels in the organisation in relation to its governance structures and systems for managing its higher education provision**

18 There are three inter-linked organisational systems operating in the College that provide clarity of function: the Board of Governors and its subcommittees; the CEO (Acting) and the SMT; and the HEAB and its subcommittees.

19 The Corporation has overall responsibility for ensuring that the College operates effectively and efficiently. Its responsibilities are set out in the Instrument and Articles of Government and it discharges its responsibilities through seven committees: Quality and Standards; Search and Governance; Finance and General Purposes; Remuneration; Audit; Appeals; and Special Cases. The current Chair of the Corporation's QSC is also its lead on higher education matters and has extensive sector experience. The FEC's report advised the College to continue its search to strengthen the Corporation's expertise in finance, and the team would endorse this recommendation.

20 The CEO is appointed by the Corporation, has responsibility for the day-to-day management of the College, and acts as the accounting officer. The Director of Finance is operationally responsible for the financial management of the College. The CEO is supported at executive level by the four Executive Directors.

21 The membership of SMT includes the four Curriculum Directors, the Director of Higher Education, and the Directors of Finance, Premises and Estates, Student Services, and Human Resources. The College operates two parallel SMT meetings, one for Business

and the other for Quality and Standards. The scrutiny team observed that the SMT meetings have very long agendas and the separation of issues between a 'business' or 'quality and standards' focused meeting did not always take place. In addition, action plans were long and cumbersome to resolve on occasion.

22 The HEAB oversees the operation of higher education at the College and reports to the QSC and SMT to ensure a distinct higher education reporting line separate from the College's further education provision. It is chaired by the Campus Principal and Executive Director of Higher Education and includes representation from the provider's awarding bodies and two student representatives. Three subcommittees report to HEAB: Academic Standards, Academic Development and Research and Scholarship.

23 Cross-membership on the HEAB and its subcommittees aids effective communication on higher education matters. For example, the Director of Higher Education is a member of the HEAB and all its subcommittees and also sits on the SMT. The Campus Principal and Executive Director of Higher Education chairs the HEAB and reports to the Corporation on higher education matters.

24 The management structure has undergone senior-level reorganisation during the scrutiny period. The CEO resigned in February 2019, and the Campus Principal and Executive Director of Higher Education was appointed to the role of Acting CEO in May 2019. The College has embarked on a search and recruitment campaign to appoint a permanent CEO by January 2020.

25 The scrutiny team observed that the Corporation held the executive to account at meetings. Members robustly questioned executive papers and reports, including those made by the College's internal and external auditors, and often requested more information on key performance measures, targets and risks. The distinction between governance and management was maintained, and the Clerk acted with objectivity in advising the Corporation on its membership and that of its committees, including vacancies and resignations. Following the election of a new Chair of the Corporation and the appointment of new board members, the scrutiny team observed an increased openness and greater degree of collaboration between board members and the executive in dealing effectively with a number of serious financial and strategic ESFA concerns.

26 The College's overall governance arrangements are clear and well understood. The scrutiny team noted that the Corporation received a range of detailed papers, and that minutes and action schedules were recorded clearly. The Corporation is supported by an experienced Clerk, the Acting CEO and the Director of Finance who provide clear advice on key risks and related mitigation controls. The Corporation is informed on academic matters through the receipt of detailed HEAB minutes and comprehensive written and oral reports from the Campus Principal and Executive Director of Higher Education.

27 Overall, the scrutiny team observed effective chairing, participation and rigour at higher education academic committee meetings. Staff and students whom the scrutiny team met were aware of the College's governance and academic structures and systems. Academic higher education staff were also aware of the roles performed by professional support departments in the human resources, IT, quality and student support areas and knew how to seek guidance as required to support their activities.

### **There is depth and strength of academic leadership across the whole of the organisation's higher education provision**

28 The Campus Principal and Executive Director of Higher Education manages the Director of Higher Education who in turn oversees and leads the management of higher education across all curriculum areas and campuses through the Higher Education

Management Group (HEMG). HEMG's membership includes the Head of Higher Education Operations and Quality and two Higher Education Academic Leaders. Higher education is further supported by a Higher Education Registry Coordinator and Higher Education Administrator.

29 The HEMG is also responsible for ensuring standardisation of quality matters across the higher education academic community, which it achieves via specific higher education staff development sessions. Monthly managers meetings (including professional support managers) are held, partly to address the challenges of dispersed sites.

30 The two Higher Education Academic Leaders have functional responsibility for Research and Scholarship and Curriculum and Students, respectively. They also manage curriculum areas and staff, reporting to the Director of Higher Education. Effective communication between the Academic Leaders and Further Education Section Leaders ensures standardisation of higher education processes and practices across all areas of the College, and supports staff who teach a combination of further and higher education.

31 All higher education programmes have course managers who are responsible for ensuring their courses operate in accordance with the College's (and validating universities') policies and practices. Course managers also lead on curriculum developments, including proposals for new programmes, revalidations and the organisation of work placements. Course managers write the Annual Course Reviews (ACRs) under the guidance of the Academic Leaders.

32 The scrutiny team considers that the College's higher education organisational structure provides sufficient depth and strength of academic leadership to manage its higher education provision effectively.

**The organisation develops, implements and communicates its academic policies and systems in collaboration with those responsible for the delivery of its higher education programmes, and with relevant stakeholders**

33 The College operates effective measures to ensure that its vision, policies and systems are developed and widely understood by its key stakeholders. The College higher education regulations, policies and guidelines for academic and non-academic processes are available on the college virtual learning environment (VLE). The higher education committee structure enables a wide consultative and inclusive approach to the development and implementation of higher education College policies which are embodied within the developing Higher Education Quality Manual.

34 Student involvement in policy and procedural matters is largely through student membership of the HEAB, course team meetings and Student Council meetings. Students also access key College policies via course handbooks and through tutorial engagement.

35 The College has close links with relevant land-based professional associations and industries, which enable the College to ensure the professional currency of its academic programmes.

**Academic policies, systems and activities are monitored and reviewed, and appropriate and timely action is taken when deficiencies are identified**

36 The College higher education procedures and policies relating to quality are proposed by the ASC for approval by the HEAB. The Head of Higher Education Operations and Quality has responsibility for ensuring that all higher education policies align to the Quality Code where appropriate, and the HEAB is responsible for ensuring that policies,

principles and procedures are in place to establish, monitor and review academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

37 During the 2018-19 academic year the College has been reviewing all academic policies incrementally in order to ensure that it is prepared for the award of FDAP should its application be successful. The scrutiny team observed that when deficiencies were identified, appropriate and timely action was taken at committee level.

### **Academic risk and change management strategies are effective**

38 Responsibility for risk and change management lies with the SMT and is managed through a set of higher education key performance indicators (KPIs) which are set at the start of the academic year. The KPIs are reported on a monthly basis at SMT meetings. All KPIs are shared with the HEAB, its subcommittees and the HEMG.

39 The SMT and Corporation analyse the risks associated with major projects and monitor both academic and student recruitment performance indicators, including student progression and graduation data at course and College levels. The HEAB regularly analyses application and enrolment data which informs future plans for admissions and marketing strategies. The College risk register is also reviewed and updated by the Risk Management Group which meets every three months.

40 The scrutiny team noted the care taken by both the Audit Committee and the Corporation Board in considering all elements of the risk register and in questioning the CEO, senior staff and the Chair of the Audit Committee regarding the likelihood and impact of key risks. Financial risk management is overseen by the Audit Committee and reports to the Corporation Board, and the ESFA provides assurance annually to the OfS about the financial sustainability risks of the College.

41 The Corporation appoints internal auditors on the recommendation of the Audit Committee to provide assurance on a range of internal control arrangements, and receives their reports which are acted upon by the College.

42 The scrutiny team observed discussions at the Corporation, Audit Committee and SMT which demonstrated a clear understanding of the methodology of risk and change management strategies, and detailed consideration of the actions planned and taken. In general, risk ownership was appropriately assigned and effectively monitored. The team observed detailed and robust discussions of the risk register at the Audit Committee under the guidance of an effective Chair. The HEAB also demonstrated that its oversight of academic risks had been developed against the expectations of the Quality Code and FDAP guidance and criteria.

### **Robust mechanisms are in place to ensure that the academic standards of the organisation's foundation degree awards are not put at risk**

43 The College's current validation partnerships are all governed by robust legal agreements. The College operates within the academic and regulatory frameworks of the awarding institutions, which have regularly commended the College on its quality assurance arrangements.

44 The scrutiny team observed the careful consideration and accurate and timely information prepared by the College registry systems for module and examination boards.

45 The team considered that the College's arrangements to ensure that academic standards are not placed at risk are based on robust systems for the design, approval, monitoring and review of courses within the regulatory procedures required by the College's

awarding institutions. External examiner reports have consistently concluded that the College's courses meet the designated academic standards.

**The organisation has the capability of managing successfully the additional responsibilities vested in it were foundation degree awarding powers granted**

46 The College's FDAP plan has been led and managed by the Campus Principal and Executive Director of Higher Education and Director of Higher Education and has been monitored and reviewed by the HEAB, with regular reports being submitted to the SMT and the Corporation.

47 The resignation of the CEO in February 2019 led to the Campus Principal and Executive Director of Higher Education assuming the role of Acting CEO. The Corporation has established a search process in the expectation that a permanent CEO will be in place by January 2020. The current Acting CEO arrangements have not led to any dilution in the College's approach to scrutiny or its ability to assume foundation degree awarding powers if granted.

48 In December 2018 the Chair of the Corporation resigned and a number of other changes to the Governing Body took place due to resignations or terms of office coming to a natural end. A new Chair of the Corporation was elected, and new board members joined. This has refreshed and strengthened the deliberative and decision-making processes at Board level. The most recent Governors Awayday enhanced the approach to governance and laid down the principles of a revised approach to strategic planning, improved communications and a robust approach to tackling the College's current financial challenges.

49 The experience of implementing the regulatory frameworks of its validating partners has ensured that the College has appropriate experience, expertise and staffing to assume the additional responsibilities that would accrue if FDAP were granted. The College will continue to have its course provision beyond foundation level validated by its existing validating partners, but has indicated its intention to apply for level 6 degree awarding powers.

50 The College has been successfully registered with the OfS, subject to some enhanced monitoring in areas that include public interest governance. The OfS requires the College to be financially viable and sustainable and have the necessary financial resources to fully deliver the higher education courses as advertised and contracted. The OfS will seek further information from the ESFA with regard to the College's financial performance, working capital, surplus and liquidity.

51 The scrutiny team noted positive letters of support from the College's awarding bodies, all of whom expressed confidence in the College being able to carry out effectively the responsibilities of awarding its own foundation degrees.

52 The team concludes that the College has the capability of managing successfully the additional responsibilities vested in it, were FDAP granted, provided the short, medium and long-term financial sustainability issues can be resolved to the satisfaction of the ESFA and the OfS.

## B Academic standards and quality assurance

### Criterion B1

A further education institution granted foundation degree awarding powers has in place an appropriate regulatory framework to govern the award of its higher education qualifications.

#### **The regulatory framework governing the organisation's higher education provision (covering, for example, student admissions, progress, assessment, appeals and complaints) is appropriate to its current status and is implemented fully and consistently**

53 The College has long-standing experience of offering higher education. Partnerships are appropriately governed by formal agreements and, for each course delivered, the College follows the relevant awarding body's regulatory framework.

54 The College's partnership with Harper Adams University is formally reviewed annually through a review meeting with the College Higher Education Team; the Royal Agricultural University conducts a periodic institutional review of the College, most recently in July 2018, when the partnership was approved for a further 3-year period. The College receives annual updates from its partners regarding any changes to regulations.

55 Agreements clearly set out the College and its partners' respective responsibilities. While differing in content, agreements delegate similar areas of responsibility to the College including the recruitment and admission of students, programme delivery (including provision of staff and physical resources), student support, collection of student feedback, setting of assessment tasks and marking, annual monitoring and initially dealing with student complaints. The College has actively sought some areas of commonality of process across its provision; for example in relation to coursework extensions. The College liaises closely with its partners through designated contacts.

56 Appropriate mechanisms are in place to assure the consistent implementation of policies and procedures. A course managers' handbook provides a full operational guide to higher education course management at the College.

57 Overall, the scrutiny team's observation of meetings and minutes and reports arising from processes such as programme development and approval, annual monitoring, assessment boards, and external examining demonstrate consistent implementation of the awarding bodies' regulations and procedures and College processes, although some minor shortcomings were noted in programme development and approval processes (see paragraphs 63, 67 and 68)

#### **The organisation has created in readiness a regulatory framework which will be appropriate for the granting of its own higher education awards**

58 While the College currently uses the regulations of its validating partners, it has developed an academic regulatory framework appropriate for the granting of its own higher education awards. Quality assurance processes, together with the College's proposed academic regulations, are contained in a comprehensive Higher Education Quality Manual.

59 During the course of the scrutiny the College has reviewed and refined its intended Academic Framework and further developed its infrastructure and systems, for example the ongoing development of its management information system and the creation and operation of its Programme Approval Committee (PAC). In addition to a number of policies relevant to



both further and higher education provision, the College has developed a number of its own higher education specific policies and procedures, for example in relation to admissions, assessment, academic appeals, academic misconduct, teaching observation and programme closure. These developments demonstrate the strengthening of policy and procedures, infrastructure and systems in areas of additional responsibility should FDAP be awarded.

### **Criterion B2**

A further education institution granted foundation degree awarding powers has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for defining and securing the academic standards of its higher education provision, wherever, however and by whomsoever it is offered.

### **Higher education awards are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the Qualification Frameworks**

60 Through its reading of documentary evidence and observations, the scrutiny team confirmed that the College's higher education awards are offered at levels corresponding to the relevant levels of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). This alignment is considered during the College's course development process and confirmed through the validating university's approval processes. External examiners comment on whether standards set are appropriate to the level of the award.

### **Management of its higher education provision takes appropriate account of the Quality Code, qualification and subject benchmark statements, as appropriate, and the requirements of any relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies**

61 Overall, appropriate account is taken of a range of relevant external reference points. The College's Strategic Plan 2017-20 notes that 'Quality will be underpinned by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education'. Where relevant, the terms of reference (ToR) of the subcommittees of HEAB are aligned with the Quality Code; terms of reference are reviewed annually.

62 Changes to the Quality Code during 2017-18 have been carefully monitored by the College, and staff kept up to date with these changes, through the higher education committee structure, with amendments made to ToR as appropriate, and a mapping of the College's policies and procedures against the revised Quality Code has also been undertaken.

63 Programme specifications make reference to appropriate external reference points including Subject Benchmark Statements and accreditation by PSRBs. Programme specifications also indicate the final award and level. As suggested by the Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement 2015 (and its predecessor the Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark Statement), the majority of students on foundation degrees are provided with appropriate progression opportunities in the form of top-up degrees at the College, validated by partner universities; exceptions are FdSc Sport (Coaching and Fitness) and FdSc Sport (Adventure and Outdoor Education) validated by Leeds Trinity University for which no formally agreed progression routes are in place. The team was informed that opportunities for student progression are available in other local universities with some students having successfully taken up these opportunities and that the College would be seeking to put in place a formal agreement during summer 2019 with a local provider.

**In establishing, and then maintaining, comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level programmes, the organisation explicitly seeks advice from and engagement with external peers and, where appropriate, professional and statutory bodies and relevant employers**

64 The College engages proactively with industry and local businesses through subject based Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs), comprising industry representatives, College staff and students as well as PSRBs and other external bodies such as Land Based Colleges Aspiring to Excellence (Landex), the Association of Colleges (AoC) and the Royal College of Veterinary Science (RCVS). The College has recently reflected on its engagement with industry and a report to the March 2019 meeting of ADC highlighted feedback from industry indicating areas where the College did particularly well in relation to industry engagement and where it could improve. The scrutiny team's observation of TAG meetings confirms that these meetings inform the College's course development processes effectively.

65 Programme approval panels include external representatives drawn from both academic and employer communities, and the membership of HEAB includes two representatives from the College's validating universities. The College intends that external academic, industry and PSRB representatives will be involved during its own course development and approval processes, should FDAP be awarded.

**Programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements are robust, applied consistently, have at all levels a broadly based external dimension and take appropriate account of the specific requirements of different levels of award and different modes of delivery**

66 Appropriate processes are in place for identifying course development opportunities and the College has recently reviewed its higher education portfolio, targeting potential areas of development that build on current areas of academic strength. The review included two curriculum development days involving all higher education staff. The College currently follows its validating partners' procedures for programme approval. During 2018-19 two validation/revalidation events took place: the College's first postgraduate courses, MSc Zoo Management and Conservation and MSc Applied Animal Behaviour and Welfare, were validated by Harper Adams University in May 2018; and two FdScs and a BSc top-up course in the area of Veterinary Nursing were revalidated by the Royal Agricultural University in November 2018. The FdSc Veterinary Nursing was also successfully reaccredited in November 2018.

67 Observation of the successful postgraduate courses approval event raised some issues including that the College team was not fully familiar with Harper Adams University's postgraduate regulations because at that stage the agreement with the university only covered undergraduate courses. The latter issue has been addressed and an additional Memorandum of Cooperation relating specifically to the delivery of postgraduate provision is now in place. Observation of the subsequent validation and reaccreditation of the Veterinary Nursing courses demonstrated that College staff were familiar with the process and relevant regulations and were able to present a robust account of their proposal during an intensive three-day event.

68 The College's process for programme approval, should FDAP be awarded, is set out in its Higher Education Quality Manual; elements of the process are already in operation. From October 2017 until December 2018 the College operated a Periodic Critical Review Panel (PCRP) with responsibility for reviewing 'Applications for Development Approval' submitted by course teams. Its initial meeting considered the proposals for the new postgraduate courses. A set of templates, closely mirroring those of the main validating university, support this process. PCRP's remit included reporting to ADC on the suitability

of proposals to proceed to validation, with ADC subsequently making a recommendation to HEAB which in turn recommended to the SMT whether the proposal should proceed to the validating university. The second meeting of PCRP in December 2018, considered course proposals for FdSc Policing and BA (Hons) top-up Policing and BSc (Hons) top-up Sports Studies. Following the submission of these proposals to an extraordinary meeting of ADC, also in December 2018, which initially supported the proposals to go forward to validation subject to certain actions being taken, the College decided that these proposals should not proceed to validation. Observation of the December 2018 meetings of PCRP and ADC showed that similar issues were raised in both meetings including, market intelligence, staff capacity/expertise, documentation and clarity around the status of the College of Policing framework, bringing into question the original ADC decision that these proposals should proceed to validation.

69 The College also originally noted its intention to introduce a PAC should FDAP be awarded, and confirmed in meetings with the scrutiny team that the two entities PCRP and PAC would be separate and distinct, the former reviewing existing programmes and the latter new programmes, with PCRP initially covering PAC's intended remit. The College is now operating its PAC, the first meeting of which took place in May 2019 when it considered proposals for six FdScs and one Certificate of Higher Education to be validated by the College, should FDAP be awarded, with an expected start date of September 2020.

70 The College follows the requirements of its validating partners in relation to annual course monitoring with its intended approach, should FDAP be awarded, being set out in its Higher Education Quality Manual. While there is some variation in process from partner to partner, course managers generally complete annual monitoring report forms, which are checked by the Head of Higher Education Operations and Quality prior to submission to partners.

71 Harper Adams University holds a series of Annual Course Review meetings with College course teams and students. Observation of these meetings demonstrated they were effectively chaired, that there was good participation by staff and students, and the University's process was consistently applied. The outcomes of annual monitoring are reported to ASC and subsequently HEAB, following which required actions are agreed and monitored.

72 The Director of Higher Education also compiles a comprehensive Higher Education Annual Report which reflects on all aspects of higher education at the College during the previous year (see paragraph 102).

73 Courses validated by Harper Adams University are periodically reviewed on a five-year cycle. A number of courses were successfully revalidated at the most recent of these events, in January 2017.

74 Notwithstanding the minor shortcomings noted above (paragraphs 63, 67 and 68) the team considers that arrangements for programme development, approval and periodic review are generally robust and consistently applied and incorporate an appropriate external dimension. The College monitors effectively the outcomes of annual programme monitoring and periodic review processes through its committee structures.

75 Where the organisation's programmes are delivered outside the College's own environment, appropriate and effective quality assurance mechanisms are used to ensure the maintenance of academic standards and quality.

76 The College does not currently deliver its higher education courses outside its own environment. It validated its first blended learning course, FdSc Sports Surface Management, in January 2017 which recruited very small student numbers in 2017-18 and

did not run in the academic year 2018-19. This course is subject to the same quality assurance mechanisms as other College higher education courses.

77 The College's Work Placement Policy and Work Placement Procedures, approved in Autumn 2018, provide a robust framework for the selection, management and monitoring of work placements; a separate Work Placement Procedures document exists in relation to Veterinary Nursing students. College procedures ensure that placement providers are approved prior to a student starting a placement. Students undertake work placement related modules and their progress is monitored through completion of a work placement log and individual scheduled sessions with module tutors; student achievement in relation to work-based learning modules is reported via assessment boards.

### **There is an explicit and close relationship between academic planning and decisions on resource allocation**

78 Budget planning occurs annually in consultation with budget-holders and is overseen by the Director of Finance. ADC makes recommendations to HEAB regarding higher education resource requirements including those relating to new courses. Resource managers are members of SMT and other key committees, attend course approval events and are members of PAC (and previously PCR), which ensures their involvement in decisions on resource needs and allocations.

79 The majority of higher education courses and associated resources are now located at the York Campus. Higher education specific study, IT and social spaces have been developed during the scrutiny as a result of student feedback and have been welcomed by students. Recent external examiners' reports have suggested the need for further investment in resources in one or two subject areas; these issues are being addressed through the annual monitoring process.

80 The scrutiny team confirms that arrangements in place for resource allocation are explicitly linked to planning and are undertaken appropriately, although the recent financial situation has placed some constraints on budgets.

#### **Criterion B3**

The education provision of a further education institution granted foundation degree awarding powers consistently meets its stated learning objectives and achieves its intended outcomes.

### **Strategies for learning and assessment are consistent with stated academic objectives and intended learning outcomes**

81 The Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, aligned with the College and higher education strategies, clearly sets out eight key themes in relation to teaching, learning and assessment, which are consistent with, and provide a framework for, the achievement of the College's stated aims. The Head of Higher Education Teaching and Learning is responsible for the management of the strategy, and progress is monitored by the Learning Teaching and Assessment Panel (LTAP). The strategy has been further reviewed and developed during the course of the academic year, and the revised strategy was approved by HEAB in July 2019.

82 The College achieved 'Bronze' in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in 2017-18. The College's Statement of Findings comments positively on course design, delivery and assessment but also notes that progression to highly skilled employment or further study is exceptionally low.

83 Assessment strategies are carefully considered at the development and approval stages of new courses and reviewed through the annual course monitoring process. Staff use a range of formative and summative assessment methods. Assessment is appropriately designed to demonstrate that learning outcomes are met and programme specifications include a mapping demonstrating in which modules generic and award-specific learning outcomes are developed and assessed.

**Relevant staff are informed of, and provided with guidance on, its policies and procedures for programme design, monitoring and review**

84 Policies and procedures, including those relating to programme design, monitoring and review, are communicated through the formal committee structure and made available to staff on the VLE; academic staff confirmed that appropriate support and guidance is available for those staff involved in course design, monitoring and review including through the central Higher Education Team and specific staff development events. Responsibility for amending or improving new programme proposals is clearly assigned and subsequent action is carefully monitored.

85 The College's course approval process clearly sets out the procedure to be followed prior to a proposal being sent to the validating university; the process to be followed, should FDAP be awarded, has also been defined by the College. Proposals are submitted to the PAC (previously PRCP) which provides feedback to course teams on required amendments/improvements; course teams are supported in this process by the central higher education team.

**Coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is secured and maintained**

86 Many of the courses validated by Harper Adams University share some common modules at each year of study; these are 'generic' modules which a typical undergraduate might be expected to study on an FdSc or BSc course. Elective modules are also offered to students, but all courses have a single award title.

**Close links are maintained between learning support services and the organisation's programme planning, approval, monitoring and review arrangements**

87 Effective processes are in place to ensure that close links are maintained between learning support services and course planning, approval, monitoring and review arrangements. Learning resources and student support are carefully considered as part of course development and approval processes, with staff from learning and student support areas being included in key committees and approval events. Reflection on learning resources and student support is included as part of the annual monitoring process, and areas for development are captured in action plans.

**Robust arrangements exist for ensuring that the learning opportunities provided to those students that may be studying at a distance from the organisation or in work-based settings are adequate**

88 The College's Work Placement Policy and Work Placement Procedures provide a robust framework for the selection, management and monitoring of work placements and set out roles and responsibilities clearly. While students are encouraged to find their own placements, the team heard in meetings that students are informed about what is an appropriate placement and, if necessary, provided with support to find one. College procedures ensure that health and safety and safeguarding checks are undertaken prior to a student starting a placement; a comprehensive set of pro formas accompanies the procedures document. Student progress is monitored through regular scheduled meetings with module

tutors and through work-placement logs; students who met the team clearly valued their work placement opportunities.

**Through its planning, approval, review and assessment practices, the organisation defines, monitors, reviews and maintains its academic standards**

89 Ultimate responsibility for higher education rests with the Corporation; operationally this responsibility is discharged through the SMT, chaired by the CEO. The College has a dedicated higher education committee structure with higher education matters being considered through HEAB and its subcommittees and panels. HEAB reports upwards through SMT Curriculum, Quality and Standards (SMT CQS) which in turn reports to the Corporation and its QSC. Observation of these committees by the team demonstrated that upwards reporting is regular and thorough and due consideration is given to the maintenance of academic standards.

90 HEAB has responsibility for 'establishing, monitoring and reviewing Higher Education Academic Standards, through the ASC, Annual Monitoring reports and external examiner reports'. Standards are defined through the course design and development processes and the maintenance of standards is confirmed through annual monitoring and external examiners' reports. External examiners' reports consistently confirm that the threshold standards set in relation to the FHEQ are appropriate and that these standards are being maintained and achieved.

**Assessment criteria and practices are communicated clearly to students and staff**

91 The College follows the academic regulations and assessment requirements of its awarding bodies. The College's Higher Education Assessment Policy and Higher Education Assessment Procedure clearly outline roles and responsibilities in relation to assessment and set out requirements and practices, including the internal moderation process. Staff are made aware of assessment procedures, policies and practices via the VLE and ongoing staff development and support. The team observed that staff attending internal assessment boards and validating partners' assessment and award boards demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of academic regulations and assessment policies and procedures.

92 Students are made aware of assessment procedures, policies and practice through the VLE and student and module handbooks; further support is made available to students through tutorials. Students confirmed that they receive sufficient information in relation to assessment, that assessment briefs and criteria are clear and that criteria relate to learning outcomes.

**Assessment practices fully cover all declared learning objectives, learning outcomes and modes of delivery**

93 As noted above (paragraph 83), assessment strategies, including types of assessment tasks, are carefully considered at the development and approval stages of new courses and reviewed through annual course monitoring. Courses are defined by a number of learning outcomes and comprise a set of modules; module learning outcomes are aligned to course outcomes. A range of assessment methods is used to support achievement of intended module learning outcomes, which in turn ensures that programme learning outcomes are met. External examiner reports comment on student achievement of learning outcomes.

**Appropriately qualified external peers are engaged in the organisation's assessment processes and consistency is maintained between internal and external examiners' marking**

94 Appropriately qualified external examiners are appointed by the validating universities following nomination by the College; examiners attend assessment boards and visit the College mid-year to meet students. The central Higher Education Team and course managers maintain direct links with external examiners. The College's draft regulatory framework, prepared in readiness should FDAP be awarded, contains its proposed procedures in relation to external examining, which are aligned with the Quality Code.

95 External examiners report directly to the validating partners using the relevant reporting templates prior to these being received by the College and receive formal responses directly from the validating partners. A summary of external examiner reports is presented annually to ASC.

96 External examiner reports reviewed by the team are generally favourable and make positive comments on areas such as the range of assessment methods, the robust internal moderation processes, the support available to students and placement opportunities. Reports confirm that the standard and consistency of marking is satisfactory; some issues have been raised in recent external examiners' reports in relation to the variability of assessment feedback, support for staff, and in some subject areas the need for further investment in physical resources. The team saw evidence that these issues had been addressed through annual monitoring.

**The reliability and validity of the organisation's assessment procedures are monitored and its assessment outcomes inform future programme and student planning**

97 Assessment boards are conducted in line with the requirements of the College's validating partners. Internal assessment boards are chaired by senior College staff prior to the validating university's assessment and award boards which are chaired by university representatives. The team's observations of assessment and award boards demonstrate that these operate effectively and that assessment regulations are consistently and appropriately applied.

98 Assessment is internally and, where appropriate, externally verified and moderated, and external examiners consistently express satisfaction with assessment processes and strategies.

**Clear mechanisms are in place for use when a decision is taken to close a programme or programme element, and in doing so, students' interests are safeguarded**

99 The College has recently developed a written policy and associated procedure for higher education course closure which aligns with its Student Protection Plan. Together, the policy and procedures provide clear mechanisms for the closure or suspension of a course. The Course Closure Policy states clearly that such a decision must take account of students' needs.

100 If a decision is made to cease recruitment to a course, the College ensures, in line with the requirements of its validating partners, that any enrolled students can complete their programme of study. If changes are made to courses, students are informed personally by the relevant course manager. The team saw evidence of effective 'teach out' of courses, closed as a result of the termination of a partnership or site closure.

**Criterion B4**

A further education institution granted foundation degree awarding powers takes effective action to promote strengths and respond to identified limitations.

**Critical self-assessment is integral to the operation of the organisation's higher education provision and action is taken in response to matters raised through internal or external monitoring and review**

101 The College operates a comprehensive process of self-assessment, which includes all curriculum and professional service areas that generate reports and quality improvement plans. This process culminates in a College self-assessment report and two Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs), the Post Inspection Action Plan/QIP focusing on key areas of improvement and the Cross-College QIP drawn together from departmental QIPs, which are presented to SMT and QSC and approved by Corporation; actions within the QIPs are followed up and monitored through SMT.

102 The Director of Higher Education produces an annual Higher Education Report that reflects on higher education activity and performance over the last academic year; this is presented to HEAB and its subcommittees and approved through SMT (CQS), QSC and Corporation. The report is a comprehensive document that analyses a range of data, including student recruitment, progression and achievement data, and reflects on student and external examiner feedback; the College is considering how it will incorporate quality measures within the report in the future.

103 Observation of committee and other meetings provided evidence of the College's ability to reflect critically on its strengths and weaknesses.

**Clear mechanisms exist for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny, monitoring and review of agreed learning objectives and intended outcomes**

104 Annual monitoring and self-assessment processes include the monitoring of student achievement against intended learning outcomes. Action plans arising from these processes are regularly and effectively monitored through the committee structure; ASC has responsibility for monitoring and improving quality and standards. Appropriate action is taken as a result of these processes to improve the student learning experience.

**Ideas and expertise from within and outside the organisation – particularly from relevant employers (for example on programme design and development, on teaching and on student learning and assessment) are drawn into its arrangements for programme design, approval and review**

105 The significant involvement of employers in curriculum design, development and approval processes was highlighted as a feature of good practice in the College's 2014 QAA Higher Education Review report, and the College's TEF Statement of Findings also noted its extensive links with employers in the land-based sector which help to inform teaching, learning and assessment. External expertise is embedded in teaching and learning through student placements, external visits, guest speakers, the Academic Fellow scheme designed to strengthen external engagement with industry through the establishment of professional links and through subject-based TAGs. Appropriate externality is used on approval and review panels and external members are drawn from both academic and employer communities.



## **Effective means exist for encouraging the continuous improvement of quality of provision and student achievement**

106 The College uses a number of effective mechanisms to reflect on the quality of its provision and student achievement including its self-assessment processes; Higher Education Annual Report; annual monitoring processes; a range of performance data including admission, progression, achievement and retention data; input from employers; external examiner feedback; and internal and external student survey feedback, including the outcomes from its module surveys and the National Student Survey (NSS). Overall responsibility for performance management lies with the SMT, managed through a set of KPIs which are set at the start of the academic year and diligently monitored through the committee structure; there is a distinct set of higher education KPIs.

107 From 2017-18 the College has also introduced Internal Quality Reviews (IQRs) overseen by LTAP and prioritised through 'a risk based analysis of student feedback, course retention, student achievement and success outcomes'. A pilot review of Veterinary Nursing was carried out in 2017-18 leading to a number of recommendations for improvement that were followed up through the annual monitoring process. A system of quarterly business reviews is also undertaken with all departments; the February 2019 review of the higher education department focused on finance, staffing, courses at risk and quality.

108 One area of ongoing concern for the College since 2014-15 has been the low retention and continuation rates of its undergraduate students. The College has taken a number of steps to address this issue, including raising the admission requirements for entry to level 4, introducing stricter attendance requirements, increasing tutorial time, improving advice, information and guidance, introducing specific activities aimed at improving aspirations and, from 2017-18, a semester-based delivery structure. Despite these steps, retention and continuation outcomes continue to be a challenge, as noted in the June 2018 TEF Statement of Findings (see paragraph 82), and form part of the enhanced monitoring requirements related to the College's OfS registration outcomes.

## C Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff

### Criterion C1

The staff teaching higher education at a further education institution granted powers to award foundation degrees will be competent to teach, facilitate learning and undertake assessment to the level of the qualifications being awarded.

### All higher education teaching staff have relevant academic and/or professional/vocational expertise

109 The People Strategy 2017-20 outlines the College's commitment to attracting, recruiting and retaining high quality staff. The College operates a formal approval procedure for the appointment of staff. There is a College expectation that the recruitment of staff will align closely with its higher education ambitions in terms of qualification, experience and skills. The guiding principle is that staff should be qualified to a level above that which they are teaching. Teaching staff without a teaching qualification are required to undertake a level 3 teaching qualification within a year of their appointment, and a level 4/5 qualification within the first three years. Funding is usually provided for this. The recruitment, retention and development of staff is recognised at the highest level of the College and is reflected as a high risk in the risk register. ACRs consider matters relating to changes in staff, staff development and research and scholarly activity.

110 Some 41 members of staff contribute to the delivery of higher education programmes at the College (17 full-time and 24 part-time). Of these staff 27 are qualified to level 6, 23 to level 7, and four to level 8. Six members of staff (2 FT, 4 PT) are currently studying for a level 7 qualification, with four members of staff registered for a level 8 qualification (2 FT, 2 PT). Specialist expertise and professional practice and experience are considered in the appointment process, with 21 members of staff holding professional qualifications, and 37 members of staff having a teaching qualification, four of which are specific to higher education.

111 The College subscribes to the HEA and encourages staff to gain HEA fellowship. The College regards HEA fellowship as one of its KPIs and an update provided for the ASC in June 2019 indicated that the College was six per cent below benchmark. The College currently has six fellows and two associate fellows; although there were four senior fellowship applications and one principal fellowship application in train at the end of the scrutiny period.

112 External scrutiny of staff profiles by the College's validating institutions confirms that programme teams have appropriate academic, professional or industrial experience. Appropriate scrutiny is also given to the capacity, experience and qualifications of academic staff as part of internal curriculum development considerations. The team observed the March 2019 meeting of the ADC at which a proposal for a new foundation degree was rejected for a number of reasons including constraints on staff capacity and expertise, and concluded that the internal scrutiny process was now working effectively. Similarly, the higher education department's Quarterly Business Reviews serve to alert ADC to the potential negative impact on the student learning experience and on NSS outcomes of gaps in staffing due to sickness absence, unfilled posts and staff movement. Updates on changes in academic personnel are shared at ADC, and the staffing requirements for each academic year are discussed at the HEAB.

113 Academic staff who met the scrutiny team demonstrated both subject expertise and engagement with the pedagogic development of their discipline. Students who met the team

agreed that academic staff are well qualified, with appropriate academic and professional experience.

114 On the basis of the evidence, the scrutiny team concludes that staff have relevant academic and/or professional/vocational expertise.

**All higher education teaching staff have relevant engagement with the pedagogic development of their discipline (through, for example, membership of subject associations, learned societies and professional bodies)**

115 Individual membership subscriptions to professional bodies are the responsibility of individual staff members. However, the College is a member of a wide range of national and regional bodies within the higher education sector, such as the Association of Colleges and the Mixed Economy Group, and of a number of specialist interest groups relevant to its curriculum areas, such as the British Society of Animal Science Academic Association, and Landex.

116 The Research and Scholarship Committee (RSC) provides a mechanism through which staff can bid for funds for small-scale teaching development research projects. The College has also had success in bidding for HEFCE catalyst funding to undertake an innovative project exploring student feedback on higher education learning and teaching. Teaching staff show a good grasp of relevant pedagogical developments and appropriate mechanisms are in place to allow curriculum teams to share the developments and advances in their field with one another.

117 Academic staff engage with a number of relevant professional bodies, subject associations and other relevant activity that enables them to keep up to date with pedagogic developments in their discipline.

118 The team saw evidence that these memberships provided a useful means of ensuring that key staff members are updated and informed on a range of current higher education issues, including local, regional and national updates.

119 On the basis of the evidence, and despite the recognised discrepancies in the data, the scrutiny team concludes that higher education teaching staff have relevant engagement with the pedagogic development of their discipline.

**All higher education teaching staff have relevant knowledge and understanding of current scholarly developments in their discipline area at a level appropriate to a foundation degree and that such knowledge and understanding directly inform and enhance their teaching**

120 The College's research agenda has gained momentum over recent years, driven in part by comments from external examiners and its validating institution in consideration of its proposed level 7 provision. The College's Higher Education Strategy, which is aligned to the overarching College Strategy, aims to deliver inspiring and outstanding learning, underpinned by scholarship and applied research. A reconstituted Academic Leader post, created in July 2018, places a clear focus on research and scholarship. The TEF Statement of Findings reflects the engagement of staff and students in vocationally applied research, scholarship and practice.

121 The College's Policy and Procedure for Training and Development establishes the framework through which higher education staff are given adequate opportunities for professional development. The Scholarly Activity and Research Policy allows staff to bid for research funding and support for undertaking scholarly activities. A bi-annual staff survey measures staff satisfaction with staff development (see paragraph 155).

122 Staff are required to engage in and keep a record of at least 30 hours of continuing professional development per year, which is accounted for within the Higher Education Workload Allocation Model. Staff are also entitled to two scholarly activity days per academic year which may include, for example, role-related visits to other colleges and institutions. A staff development fund managed by the Director of Human Resources supports staff in attaining higher level qualifications and eight members of staff received financial support in 2018-19.

123 The RSC has recognised the challenges and limitations of the College's current approach to tracking research and scholarly activities that are not funded by the committee itself. However, effective arrangements are in place for the consideration, approval and monitoring of funded research projects and scholarly activity at the College. The RSC oversees research activity and funding (currently £10,000 pa for internal research projects). All research proposals from 2019-20 are required to demonstrate student engagement, impact or engagement with the teaching, learning and assessment at the College and to outline their contribution to the College's Higher Education Strategy.

124 Engagement with RSC-funded projects has been variable, with the number of staff listed as contributors for projects seeking funding having declined over the last three years. It was not possible for the scrutiny team to confirm which bids had been approved for 2019-20, as many were subject to conditions following scrutiny at the RSC of June 2019. There is a clear expectation that proposals detail the expected outputs. While results are disseminated via the internal research journal 'ASK' and internal conferences, evidence of the wider dissemination to higher education staff of outputs not submitted for external publication was limited. The percentage of RSC-approved projects published in peer reviewed journals fell significantly below the College's KPI target. Currently, nine members of staff have a published journal article and 16 have presented at a conference.

125 An annual report monitors activity of the RSC and is received by the HEAB.

126 The College is home to one of the six Rural Business Research Units (RBRU), a national consortium of six universities and colleges undertaking research in specific regional studies and national data collection for a range of clients. This venture has led to collaborative research projects involving teaching staff and RBRU staff and teaching staff and students, and RBRU staff have also acted as dissertation supervisors. The scrutiny team read the regular updates provided by RBRU to the RSC and noted the benefits of RBRU's work both for the College and the wider sector. The College maintains other research relationships, often with sector leading organisations. Research outputs are disseminated through, for example, the Staff Research Conference and its proceedings.

127 Bespoke training and staff development events are provided to teaching staff to encourage research activity and its integration into the curriculum. Conference attendance planning is an integral part of the College's annual planning, with proposals considered on an annual basis by the RSC.

128 Staff feel well informed about the opportunities to engage with research and scholarly activity. They informed the scrutiny team that links with industry present ample opportunities for research activity and that such opportunities are effectively and regularly promoted by the College. Students confirmed that they felt the research and scholarly activities undertaken by staff could be seen in their teaching which often referenced their own research. Students are encouraged to engage with research opportunities at the College. The team observed a Higher Education Course Team meeting exemplifying such interaction and was told by students about projects undertaken with staff that led to a joint publication.

129 On the basis of the evidence, the scrutiny team concludes that higher education teaching staff have relevant knowledge and understanding of current scholarly developments in their discipline and that such knowledge and understanding directly inform and enhance their teaching.

**All higher education teaching staff have opportunities for accessing relevant employment experience and studying the implementation of relevant and up to date professional practice**

130 Extensive employer relationships are maintained and the majority of staff have relevant work or professional practice experience. Observation of TAG meetings confirms that they are working effectively to support access to relevant employment experience and professional practice.

131 An Academic Fellow Scheme has been introduced to strengthen external engagement with industry through establishment of professional links, although the scrutiny team did not see any evidence of this in practice.

132 Students are enthusiastic about the professional expertise of their teaching staff and the types of experience they bring to their teaching, particularly those which enable students to gain information and knowledge about work practices, helped, in part, by the relationships staff have built with employers through TAGs and work placement opportunities.

133 On the basis of the evidence, the scrutiny team concludes that higher education teaching staff have opportunities for accessing relevant employment experience and studying the implementation of relevant and up to date professional practice.

**All higher education teaching staff have staff development and appraisal opportunities aimed at enabling them to develop and enhance their professional competence and scholarship**

134 The College organises regular staff development weeks dedicated to higher education which all higher education staff are required to attend. The College also operates a comprehensive programme of staff development throughout the academic year. This activity is overseen by the LTAP which reports to the ASC. Observations of these meetings and scrutiny of their minutes demonstrated that they provide an effective mechanism for sharing information within curriculum teams.

135 The College's Observation of Teaching and Learning Policy is a key mechanism to support the professional development of staff in their teaching practice. Staff are regularly observed, with an action plan generated as a consequence of the observation identifying good practice to be shared and areas for reflection and improvement. The scrutiny team noted that the observation reports collated and reviewed by the LTAP inform staff development planning. The College also uses learning walks for a similar purpose and produces a cross-College report.

136 A Human Resources audit conducted in 2017, identified weaknesses in the operation of appraisals and a lack of oversight in the process by the Human Resources function at the College. An implementation plan designed to address the shortcomings identified has been routinely and effectively monitored by the Audit Committee. A new online system of appraisals has been created and implemented with a view to monitoring institutional performance levels and linking appraisal to staff development. Appraisals are linked to the UK Professional Standards Framework. Due to the recency of the new approach it was not possible for the scrutiny team to confirm its effectiveness.

137 Staff who met the scrutiny team confirmed that they were clear on how and where to apply for funding for professional development activities and spoke highly of the opportunities available to them at the College. Although the Higher Education Workload Allocation Model was at its early stages of implementation when the scrutiny team met with staff, staff were very positive about their extensive involvement in its development and optimistic about its use. The team saw evidence of the Higher Education Workload Allocation Model being revised following its first year of use.

138 On the basis of the evidence available, the team confirms that teaching staff have appropriate staff development and appraisal opportunities.

### **Staff with key programme management responsibilities have relevant experience of curriculum development and assessment design**

139 From an analysis of the staff profiles it is clear that most staff have experience of curriculum development and assessment design. Through experience of validating with a number of different university partners, academic and professional support staff have gained sufficient knowledge and practice of the Quality Code (including its recent revisions), the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements to discharge their responsibilities effectively. The team observed programme validation and PSRB accreditation events and, while there was evidence of a small minority of teaching staff who were less assured about the detail of curriculum development and assessment design, course managers involved in the process were fully briefed and knowledgeable.

140 The College provides appropriate staff development and training on curriculum development and assessment design, and the College's quality assurance arrangements in respect of these processes. The College's Higher Education Workload Allocation Model includes an allowance for curriculum development activities. All higher education staff have recently been involved in two curriculum development days designed to appraise the College of possible developments in the sector and College, building on its existing areas of curriculum strength.

141 On the basis of the evidence, the scrutiny team concludes that staff with key programme management responsibilities have relevant experience of curriculum development and assessment design.

### **Staff with key programme management responsibilities have relevant engagement with the activities of providers of higher education in other organisations (through, for example, involvement as external examiners, validation panel members, or external reviewers)**

142 The College encourages higher education staff to become external examiners and engage with other providers; this commitment is realised through an institution-wide KPI in this area, and the inclusion of such activities in the Higher Education Workload Allocation Model. The College recognises the positive effect of these external experiences on staff understanding of the wider higher education sector and the impact on learning and teaching.

143 Progress against KPIs is monitored within the College's deliberative committee structure. The scrutiny team noted that the June 2019 meeting of ASC received a KPI report indicating that 52 per cent of higher education staff at the College examine at other higher education institutions, two per cent above benchmark. This would equate to 21 members of staff. However, the staffing profiles provided by College indicate that only nine members of staff were current external examiners (22 per cent). The College explained to the scrutiny team that this discrepancy resulted from the 'external examining' KPI including not only the nine staff engaged as external examiners at other HEIs but also an additional 10 staff participating in external validation panels and three staff working as QAA reviewers.

144 The Director of Higher Education is required to sign off on external examiner appointments as part of the Higher Education Workload Allocation Model which provides an opportunity to monitor such external engagement. The Higher Education Office shares information on external examiner vacancies with teaching staff, as appropriate.

145 There are examples of staff belonging to PSRBs. Seven staff (16 per cent) are recorded as having participated in external events such as Lifelong Learning Networks or Regional Development Forums. The Director of Higher Education is a member of the Academic Board of a partner university. Members of staff in a position of leadership or management (or those aspiring to be) can apply for a mentor from another partner organisation, via the Yorkshire Accord Mentoring and Coaching partnership.

146 Updates on developments in the higher education sector are routinely reported within the College's deliberative committee structure and demonstrate the College's extensive engagement with such developments. For instance, the College has regularly responded to sector consultations and been represented at conferences and events and on policy groups, for example the Association of Colleges (AoC). The College actively participates in the AoC and is hosting its Annual Conference in 2020. College staff chair the Regional Yorkshire and Humber Higher Education in Further Education Network, and the Yorkshire and Humber Higher Level Apprenticeship Group.

147 On the basis of the evidence, the scrutiny team concludes that staff have relevant engagement with the activities of other providers of higher education.

## **D The environment supporting the delivery of foundation degree programmes**

### **Criterion D1**

The teaching and learning infrastructure of a further education institution granted foundation degree awarding powers, including its student support and administrative support arrangements, is effective and monitored.

### **The effectiveness of learning and teaching activities is monitored in relation to stated academic objectives and intended learning outcomes**

148 The effectiveness of learning and teaching activities is monitored through the College's quality assurance systems including Annual Course Review, programme development processes and the College's deliberative committee structure. Until recently, when a new programme was being developed, the PCRCP scrutinised the effectiveness of its proposed learning and teaching activities. The PAC has now taken over this function from PCRCP and will henceforth review new programme applications and recommend to HEAB whether they should progress to validation, while PCRCP will focus on the periodic review of current programmes. The effectiveness of learning and teaching activities for existing programmes is monitored through the ACR process and includes detailed consideration of external examiner reports, module evaluation reports and student feedback. HEAB and its subcommittees have oversight of learning and teaching activities through the consideration of ACRs and measurement against KPIs. The College also makes appropriate use of externality, with external examiner reports explicitly commenting on whether intended learning outcomes are demonstrated by students.

### **Students are informed of the outcomes of assessments in a timely manner**

149 The College operates effective arrangements to ensure the prompt return of assessment outcomes within four weeks of submission. Students affirmed that assessment feedback was returned to them in a timely fashion and within the College's stated timescale.

### **Constructive and developmental feedback is given to students on their performance**

150 The College operates effective processes to provide constructive feedback on student assessed work which are articulated in its Higher Education Quality Manual and Assessment Policy. The scrutiny team confirmed this by meeting with external examiners and reading their reports. Students told the team that they find the feedback they receive consistently helpful in supporting their learning.

151 The ACR process identifies if improvements are required to the feedback students receive and staff also receive appropriate development opportunities concerning assessment and feedback. These processes ensure that the feedback students receive is constructive and actively supports their learning.

### **Feedback from students, staff (and where relevant) employers and other institutional stakeholders is obtained and evaluated, and clear mechanisms exist to provide feedback to all such constituencies**

152 The College collects and evaluates feedback from students, staff and employers. Students have regular opportunities to provide feedback on the quality of their educational experience, with student representatives participating in Higher Education Team meetings and senior quality assurance committees including Corporation, QSC and HEAB. These student engagement processes are signposted to students through programme handbooks and during their induction.

153 The College has taken effective steps to improve student attendance at committee meetings. Student representatives receive remuneration for attending committee meetings and co-author a student voice paper with the chair of the relevant committee which is discussed as the first item of substantive business. The College has also made the President of the Students' Union a paid sabbatical position. These steps ensure that student feedback is considered effectively across the College's committee structure, although observation of senior committees revealed that there can be limited engagement by student representatives beyond the presentation of their report.

154 The College collects feedback concerning students' wider educational experience through the Student Council and course and module evaluation surveys. Strong links between students and their course managers create an ethos where students are confident in providing feedback through both formal and informal mechanisms and staff create an environment that actively welcomes their contributions.

155 The College collects feedback from staff through a bi-annual staff survey. The results of the 2018 survey identified a number of significant concerns including communication and pay. The College is currently implementing an action plan in response to the survey and has made a number of improvements such as the cascading of information down through Operational Manager meetings and Higher Education Team meetings.

156 TAGs collect feedback from employers on the College's curriculum to ensure its currency. Overall, the College operates effective processes to collect and consider feedback from students, staff and employers.



**Students are advised about, and inducted into, their study programmes in an effective way, and account is taken of different students' needs**

157 The College operates fair and transparent processes for the recruitment, admission and induction of students. The College provides information through its prospectus, website and open days to advise prospective students about its provision. Applications are submitted through UCAS and assessed by course managers with the Higher Education Registry Coordinator recording decisions made. Unsuccessful applicants can receive feedback by writing to the Student Records Team and the College has clear processes to manage admissions complaints and appeals.

158 The College actively encourages the early disclosure of additional learning needs through its admissions process and signposts students to the Higher Education Learning Support Coordinator who can advise students about support available. The College also provides support for students to claim Disabled Students Allowance.

159 Students receive an induction that includes an introduction to support services such as the LRC, academic study skills, and information on the student representation system, which effectively supports their transition to the College. Students told the scrutiny team that their induction was a positive experience that effectively prepared them for their programmes of study.

**Available learning support materials are adequate to support students in the achievement of the stated purposes of their study programmes**

160 The College has appropriate learning support materials to support student achievement. The College has recognised the need for greater study space capacity, for example creating a higher education study space within the LRC. Student feedback affirms that this has been effective at responding to pressures concerning study space and helped to facilitate the creation of a distinct higher education identity within the College.

161 The College's VLE platform contains course-specific information, with audits of this material being conducted by the Higher Education Registry Coordinator to ensure minimum content guidelines are adhered to. The College also offers effective employability and careers support for students, with a dedicated employability team operating across the College and a Higher Education Careers Adviser available two days a week. For the other three days a week a general careers adviser is available. The College's links with employers are a key strength and students appreciate its extensive industry links, which supports their learning, particularly in relation to dissertation projects.

**The effectiveness of any student and staff advisory and counselling services is monitored, and any resource needs arising are considered**

162 The College provides effective counselling and support services to all students. Course managers act as a first point of contact for students and students feel highly supported by their course manager in relation to both pastoral and academic concerns.

163 The College currently operates an internal student counselling service managed by the Mental Wellbeing Coordinator and students find this service effective in supporting mental health. The College also maintains a confidential helpline for staff experiencing personal or mental health difficulties. These services are evaluated through a series of KPIs monitored by the Head of Student Support.

164 The College is currently implementing a Mental Health Strategy. As part of this, the College is benchmarking itself against the AoC and Universities UK mental health framework to further improve its counselling and student support services. The College is also

participating in a mental health champions scheme and providing additional mental health training to staff in order to further enhance the support it offers to students.

**Administrative support systems are able to monitor student progression and performance accurately, and provide timely and accurate information to satisfy academic and non-academic management information needs**

165 The College has taken appropriate steps to adapt its administrative systems in readiness for assuming its own foundation degree awarding powers. It has undertaken a significant amount of work to ensure its administrative systems are fit for purpose, trialling the use of student information management software and mirroring this against its old student records system to successfully replicate the functions of its awarding bodies. The College is confident that this process has identified and corrected all possible errors and that its student records system can accurately monitor and record student progression and performance.

166 The Higher Education Registry Coordinator holds ultimate responsibility for managing the College's student records system. Adequate safeguards are in place in relation to processes such as minor changes to modules and the inputting of student grades with multiple sign-off points before the data is entered to ensure accuracy. However, at present the operation of the student records system is largely based on manual data-inputting by the Higher Education Registry Coordinator with the consequential risk of manual errors. The College is currently considering employing additional staff to manage the student records process to ensure it has adequate capacity if foundation degree awarding powers are granted.

167 HEAB and the SMT (CQS) regularly consider recruitment, retention and attainment data, and review it against internally agreed benchmarks. Scrutiny of committee meetings and examination boards demonstrates that the College operates administrative systems which produce timely and accurate information to satisfy academic and non-academic management information needs.

**Effective and confidential mechanisms are in place to deal with all complaints regarding academic and non-academic matters**

168 The College operates fair and confidential processes to manage complaints concerning academic and non-academic matters. These processes are documented within its Customer Service and Complaints Policy and its Academic Appeals Policy.

169 Students can submit a complaint in writing and expect a response within 10 working days. The Customer Service and Complaints Policy clearly informs students of their right to appeal to their validating university and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. Complaints received are tracked by the Personal Assistant to the Campus Principal, who records the nature of the complaint, the outcome of the investigation and the theme to which the complaint pertains. Scrutiny of this document illustrates that the College's complaints process operates effectively and to stated timescales.

170 The Academic Appeals Policy provides clear information to students about the grounds on which they can submit an academic appeal to their validating university and the timescales for the appeal process. The College has drafted its own Higher Education Academic Appeals Policy and Higher Education Academic Appeals Procedure in readiness for assuming foundation degree awarding powers.

171 Students who met the scrutiny team stated that if they wished to submit a complaint or academic appeal they would first approach their course manager for guidance. Although some students were unaware of the process for making a complaint or academic appeal

they were confident in seeking advice from their course manager and were aware that the relevant policies were accessible through the VLE.

### **Staff involved with supporting the delivery of the organisation's higher education provision are given adequate opportunities for professional development**

172 The College's Policy and Procedure for Training and Development establishes the framework through which higher education staff are given adequate opportunities for professional development. The College's 2018 Staff Survey identified that a significant number of staff felt that the College did not provide sufficient professional development opportunities. The College has responded to this by introducing four new development programmes leading to accredited management qualifications and the appointment of a Learning and Development Manager to support staff development.

173 The College operates a programme of staff development activity that includes two staff development weeks each year, and the scrutiny team noted high levels of staff engagement in the sessions observed. The College also operates an induction programme for new staff members and assigns them a mentor to support their professional development.

174 The College has introduced a new e-learning platform to provide ongoing professional development support to all staff. Previously, the College used multiple platforms to deliver mandatory training to staff with compliance rates tracked manually by Human Resources. The new software records compliance rates and is accessible to managers so they can plan the development needs of their staff. These systems ensure all staff engage with opportunities for professional development.

### **Information that the organisation produces concerning its higher education provision is accurate and complete**

175 Ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the information the College provides is accurate and complete lies with the CEO and cascades down the College's committee structure. The Head of Marketing provides a monthly update to SMT (Business) on marketing activities and sits on senior committees including the HEAB, ADC and SMT (Business) to ensure the accuracy of information about the College's provision.

176 The process for reviewing the College's prospectus is led by the Head of Marketing and Director of Higher Education, with information pertaining to each department sent for them to review and sign-off. The College's website is regularly updated by the Digital Marketing Officer to ensure its accuracy, and information is checked by course teams before publication. Information for current students is checked by the Higher Education Team, and programme handbooks are reviewed and approved at Higher Education Team meetings.

177 The College recognises the need to inform prospective students in a timely fashion when recruitment to a programme is closed or suspended. However, the scrutiny team found some evidence suggesting that the processes through which the College manages the accuracy of information in cases of programme closure or suspension were not wholly adequate. For example, the Foundation Degree in Countryside Management to which the College suspended recruitment in September 2018 was still listed on the College's website in January 2019. The College acknowledged this was an error and subsequently removed the misleading information from its website. The team also found that the College's website for its Newton Rigg campus contained programmes advertising 2017 entry. Apart from these examples, the information for prospective and current students was accurate, and students confirmed that the information the College provides to them prior to their enrolment is reflective of their educational experience.

178 The College has responded quickly to these oversights by introducing a policy on the Closure and Suspension of Higher Education programmes to ensure that course-specific information is quickly removed when recruitment to a programme is closed or suspended. This policy clearly states that the College will not normally close or suspend a programme if offers have been accepted, and that the decision to close or suspend a programme will normally take place 12 months before the expected enrolment date. The policy is accompanied by a procedural document which clarifies that it is HEAB's responsibility to confirm before the start of each recruitment cycle which programmes are 'open' and to inform the Marketing, Student Records and Finance departments of any programmes to be closed or suspended. The Marketing Department updates the website, as required, and the HEMG then conducts a complete compliance check on the accuracy of programme information immediately before the recruitment cycle begins. Because of its newness the scrutiny team was unable to check the effectiveness of the policy and associated procedure but took the view that they represented an appropriate response to the concerns identified above.

### **Equality of opportunity is sought and achieved in the organisation's activities**

179 The College actively promotes equality of opportunity across its provision. Its approach to achieving this is articulated in its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy.

180 The College operates an EDI Forum whose membership includes the Acting CEO, Director of Student Services and President of the Students' Union, demonstrating a shared ownership of equality and diversity issues. The College has also established an EDI Working Group, with the Forum responsible for strategic considerations and the Working Group being operationally focused. Consideration of equality issues at SMT is detailed and effective and all new staff complete mandatory equality and diversity training. Corporation also receives an annual report on EDI detailing progress made in relation to the College's Equality Action Plan.

181 Improving leadership on EDI issues has been a development area for the College. Recent steps taken include ensuring all meeting agendas include an EDI item, ensuring the EDI Forum actively monitors progress in relation to KPIs, and creating an EDI Strategy. These steps have been effective in embedding EDI considerations across the College, although the EDI Forum currently does not include a higher education member and consequently little focus is given specifically to higher education matters at its meetings.

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