

Application for foundation degree awarding powers: Blackpool and The Fylde College

Scrutiny team report

May 2016

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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 Blackpool and The Fylde College for the power to award foundation degrees.

The application was considered under criteria approved by Government in 2010. 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 team members produced reports following each of the engagements undertaken. This final report reflects the team's findings and is structured around the four main criteria contained in the 2010 FDAP guidance,¹ 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.

¹ The FDAP criteria are available in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills guidance: *Applications for the grant of Foundation Degree awarding powers: Guidance and criteria for applicant further education institutions in England and Wales* (2010) at www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-for-foundation-degree-awarding-powers (England) and <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/foundationdegree/?lang=en> (Wales).

Executive summary

The Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP) considered the College's application for foundation degree awarding powers on 8 May 2014 when it agreed to proceed to a detailed scrutiny of the application. The detailed scrutiny began in August 2014 culminating in a report to the Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers in May 2016.

The College currently operates its higher education programmes in partnership with three awarding bodies (the universities of Lancaster, Salford and Liverpool John Moores) and two awarding organisations (Pearson Education and the Scottish Qualifications Authority - SQA). The College has a longstanding and mature relationship with Lancaster University, which is its main awarding body. It is designated as an Associate College of the University (one of two) and as such enjoys significant delegated responsibility for regulatory matters. The extent of delegation is more limited in respect of the University of Salford programmes, a more recent partnership, and with regard to a single programme with Liverpool John Moores University.

The term 'periodic review' is used throughout the report to ensure that a clear distinction is being made between annual monitoring and the longer term reflection looking at trends over time, often referred to as periodic review. The nomenclature may be ambiguous as the College's annual monitoring process at programme level is called 'Annual Programme Review'.

Governance and academic management

The College has a comprehensive, systematic approach to financial planning and management. A detailed financial planning cycle is in place, which is explicitly linked to the College's Strategic and Operational Plan and the Higher Education Strategy. Processes are framed by comprehensive and annually reviewed Financial Regulations and Financial Policies and Procedures. Observations of meetings confirmed that the senior management team (SMT) is effective in exercising its financial and strategic responsibilities.

Corporation Board, supported by Audit Committee, exercises effective oversight of strategic and financial management. It receives finance reports (including Skills Funding Agency - SFA Financial Health Assessments), benchmark information and regular updates on the Strategic and Operational Plan. It also approves major business and investment plans. Board members scrutinise College strategy and decision making, and promote consideration of risk. There are clear relationships between financial policy and the safeguarding of quality and standards.

However, the Board has limited expertise from the higher education sector. A new member who had worked in universities had been recruited for 2014-15. While this was a sensible step, the scrutiny team formed the view that extending the breadth of the Board's higher education experience would further strengthen expert oversight of higher education activities.

The scrutiny team was able to confirm that the College has effective means of developing, implementing and communicating its academic policies and systems in collaboration with higher education staff, students and external stakeholders.

The College has a sound academic and administrative infrastructure in place for the management of its provision. The College's own monitoring and review, coupled with the views of the three universities, would confirm that there is a robust set of mechanisms that secure the academic standards of foundation degrees.

The scrutiny team is of the view that there is a depth and strength of academic leadership in executive and deliberative management structures. Similarly, Board and its subcommittees maintain effective strategic oversight but would benefit from further expertise in higher education.

Academic standards and quality assurance

The College draws on a range of external advice and guidance in setting and then maintaining academic standards, including employers, Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), Sector Skills Councils and academic peers. Staff engaged in curriculum development and design are expected to consult employers, representatives of PSRBs and external academic peers. As the College's main validating partner does not require the presence of an academic external to the University to approve a partner college programme, the College includes an external subject specialist adviser at the second stage of its internal validation process.

While the scrutiny team considers that there is scope for the College to ensure a more consistent approach to securing employer and external academic input during the development and design phase for new programmes, the team formed the view that the College has in place appropriate arrangements to seek and act upon advice from academic peers, employers and PSRBs in setting and maintaining academic standards.

The Higher Education Directorate is responsible for ensuring that staff are provided with information and guidance about the College's and its partners' policies and procedures for programme design, monitoring and review. Observations of programme approval and revalidation events and College committees indicated that the policies and procedures are well understood by relevant staff. Although the scrutiny team considers some of the written guidance to be under-specified in places, the iterative nature of validation/revalidation and annual monitoring processes, and the support provided by the Higher Education Directorate and through peer review, ensures high quality outputs.

An aspect of the College's monitoring and review arrangements changed during the scrutiny as a result of a decision to remove the Lancaster University requirement for a separate periodic review document as part of the revalidation cycle. The College concluded that given the thoroughness of its annual monitoring and review processes, the expectation in *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) would be further enhanced by some adjustments to its revalidation document template. At the time of this report (March 2016), the team is not yet convinced that this is fully embedded and that requirements are clearly identified in guidance for staff. There is scope for the College to specify in more detail its approach to review, taking into account the distinction made between monitoring and review in *Chapter B8* of the Quality Code, and to ensure that its internal revalidation procedures adequately incorporate a self-critical reflection of trends over time.

The College's approach to work-based learning (WBL) is guided by its Higher Education Workplace Learning Policy. Observations of visits by College staff to students undertaking WBL confirm that the arrangements are robust and well managed. The scrutiny team confirms that the College's arrangements for ensuring the adequacy of learning opportunities for those studying at a distance and in work settings are robust and well managed.

The College seeks to promote high quality teaching through its academic staff recruitment and selection processes; the support provided to new and established staff; allocation of hours for scholarly activity; staff performance reviews; peer observation of teaching; and the activities of Senior Tutors. Effective assessment practices are assured through guidance to

staff; the use of standard assessment templates; the operation of robust verification, moderation and external examining procedures; and staff development events.

Although the scrutiny team was assured that all learning outcomes must be achieved for credit to be awarded, this is not explicitly stated in the relevant section of the Academic Regulations, nor was it evident from exam board practice. The scrutiny team confirms that assessment regimes do cover intended learning outcomes and that assessment tasks are varied and appropriate to qualification type and mode of delivery. However, the College will need to strengthen its assessment regulations to ensure that students achieve all intended learning outcomes.

The scrutiny team formed the view that the College has in readiness a regulatory framework appropriate for the grant of foundation degree awarding powers.

Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff

The College's concept of scholarship and its aspirations for staff go beyond that which is required for FDAP.

The College's Higher Education Strategy 2013-16 states the commitment to provide 'an outstanding experience for all higher education students, informed by scholarship and professional practice'. To deliver the higher education curricula, the College aims to attract and retain high calibre staff with the necessary skills and competencies. It acknowledges that staff with industrial or professional backgrounds bring practitioner skills and experience to enrich foundation degree delivery.

Overall, the College recruits high calibre staff, many with postgraduate qualifications, who also bring professional practitioner experience to the vocational higher education programmes they deliver. The College maintains careful oversight of staff competency and capability individually and as collective programme teams to ensure the currency and quality enhancement of the curriculum. It has effective mechanisms to identify and address any areas of weakness in staffing allocations to higher education programmes.

The College has its own definition for scholarly activity relevant to vocationally based higher education, which distinguishes it from continuous professional development (CPD). The College considers that scholarship is about staff maintaining an academic and professional understanding of current developments in their subject and also encompasses reflection, dissemination and incorporation of what has been learned into the curriculum to directly inform and enhance teaching. The College has established a scholarship framework to inform teaching and learning quality enhancement, which incorporates reading and research, action research, reflective teaching practice and the discovery and conception of new knowledge.

The College has a clear commitment in principle and practice to scholarly activity as part of the development of a higher education academic community. The College promotes and facilitates research and scholarship in a number of effective actions, which enables the curriculum to maintain currency and innovation relevant to foundation degree programmes.

In meetings, a number of staff reported their links with the wider academic and professional community to share practice, through professional bodies, as external examiners, attending conferences, and publishing papers.

The Corporation Quality and Standards Committee receives mid and end-of-year reports on the outcomes of lesson observations. The most recent annual report to the College Quality and Standards Committee in October 2015 indicated high quality learning and teaching in the higher education area.

The environment supporting the delivery of Foundation Degree programmes

The College demonstrates a strong commitment to equality of opportunity in all its activities. Its mission and strategic direction includes an assurance for fairness, empowering others, raising attainment, aspiration and progression for young people and adults in the region and to creating a socially inclusive learning environment for students and employees.

Early in the scrutiny (2014) the team raised a concern regarding a potentially misleading usage of the word 'university' in some advertising. The College has given an undertaking that it fully understands the concerns raised and the issue has now been resolved to the satisfaction of the scrutiny team, which is assured that the College was operating in good faith.

Students feel that the College addresses equal opportunities well through its policies and operations. They appreciate the respect shown for all sections of the community and noted the provision of a multi-faith contemplation room and the courtesy shown to international students. In all its activities the College strives to be fair to all and there are a number of examples of good practice.

Although students whom the team met were positive about the promptness of their feedback, the National Student Survey 2015 outcomes for assessment and feedback were below the College's expectations. The College has responded quickly in the light of negative comments about assessment in general and specifically about lack or lateness of feedback.

The team noted the emphasis placed by the College on excellence in learning and teaching, the organisational infrastructure, procedures and monitoring processes. The robust overview methods keeping all staff, managers and senior leaders aware of teaching quality and the encouragement for innovation is fit for purpose.

The efforts to obtain feedback and its use, particularly with respect to use of student opinion to bring about change, as well as the involvement of students in committees and quality assurance processes, is a strength of the College.

The College ensures that all students have appropriate resources, which enable them to meet their learning objectives and be equipped for employment by their familiarity with industry standard machines and software.

The College has the capacity to produce robust and useful data to support academic and non-academic needs. It is used extensively and effectively to inform planning and enhancement of the student experience. It is proactive in developing and investing new formal electronic resources to record and document essential information. This is a strength of the College.

The scrutiny team formed the view that the College has in readiness a regulatory framework appropriate for the grant of foundation degree awarding powers.

Privy Council's decision

The Privy Council's decision is to grant Blackpool and The Fylde College renewable foundation degree awarding powers for six years from 13 September 2016.

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 Blackpool and The Fylde College (the College)).

The application was considered by QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers in May 2014, when the Committee agreed to proceed to the detailed scrutiny of the application. The team appointed to conduct the detailed scrutiny comprised Dr Neil Casey, Mrs Patricia Millner and Mrs Sarah Riches (scrutiny team members) and Ms Diane Rainsbury (secretary). The detailed scrutiny was managed on behalf of QAA by Mr Derek Greenaway, Assistant Director.

The detailed scrutiny began in August 2014, culminating in a report to the Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers in May 2016. In the course of the scrutiny, the team read a wide range of documents presented as part of the evidence in support of the application. The team also spoke to a range of the institution's stakeholders and observed meetings and events pertinent to the application.

The report also includes commentary on the applicant's progression arrangements.

Key information about Blackpool and The Fylde College

Blackpool and The Fylde College was formally founded in 1952 but has its roots in the School for Fishermen in Fleetwood in 1892. Higher education provision started in the College in 1988.

Staffing (as of February 2016)

In terms of the wider College there are 264 full-time permanent academic staff, 106 part-time permanent academic staff, and 217 part-time hourly paid staff. With regard to the College's higher education provision only, there are 92 full-time permanent academic staff, 35 part-time permanent academic staff, and 31 part-time hourly paid staff.

The College also employs approximately 495 business support staff, which includes staff undertaking various roles.

Blackpool and The Fylde College's Mission is:

Blackpool and The Fylde College serves individuals, communities and employers by providing excellent learning opportunities that enhance social development and contribute to economic success. Our College transforms lives by inspiring learners to achieve their potential in a supportive learning environment; we seek to add value to the social, economic and physical well-being of the community we serve. The College mission clearly recognises the focus on employability skills to drive economic growth and firmly locates higher education at the core of its mission, which aims to provide: 'Leadership in learning; excellence at work'.

Statement on progression arrangements

The College is working with its awarding body partners to finalise arrangements for progression post successful award of FDAP. Discussions with Lancaster University are currently focusing on the establishment of models of operation which will facilitate the

validation of honours top-up awards to College foundation degrees within a specific strategic partnership arrangement that goes beyond current arrangements. This is currently the preferred approach for both the College and the University.

The team found understanding of College progression expectations is apparent across routine quality assurance activities, including approval and revalidation events, where panels and proposing teams are clear about the process. Similarly, there is clarity of purpose and understanding at module, progression and award boards.

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.

1 The College has a comprehensive, systematic approach to financial planning and management. A detailed financial planning cycle is in place, which is explicitly linked to the College's Strategic and Operational Plan and the Higher Education Strategy. Processes are framed by comprehensive and annually reviewed Financial Regulations and Financial Policies and Procedures.

2 Observations of meetings confirmed that the SMT is effective in exercising its financial and strategic responsibilities. The Executive, comprising the Principal, Deputy Principal, Vice Principal Finance and Planning, and Executive Director of Commercial Development, maintains close scrutiny of business planning, disseminates priorities to SMT and liaises with Corporation Board.

3 Corporation Board, supported by Audit Committee, exercises effective oversight of strategic and financial management. It receives finance reports (including Skills Funding Agency - SFA Financial Health Assessments), benchmark information and regular updates on the Strategic and Operational Plan. It also approves major business and investment plans. Board members scrutinise College strategy and decision making, and promote consideration of risk.

4 There is a comprehensive business planning cycle. Budgets are organised via seven Schools, which have an overall resource for higher and further education, managed by Heads of School. The Higher Education Directorate does not have a separate budget but may submit bids to SMT as necessary, for example, for the introduction of the Higher Education Academic Registrar post. The Director of Higher Education attends quarterly SMT performance management meetings.

5 The annual Business Planning process requires Schools to supply curriculum and recruitment plans for review by Executive and SMT. Resources are then allocated based on formula calculations for teaching and additional amounts for capital requests. These allocations are then fine-tuned in SMT performance monitoring meetings (see below), which frame the iterative business planning process. Once finalised the College budget goes to Corporation Board for approval.

6 Quarterly SMT performance monitoring meetings interrogate student recruitment and funding data, quality indicators (including attendance, retention and incidence of teaching observations), and financial performance. The meeting, as a prelude to School

and service area meetings, also considers respective performance across Schools and services, allocating a 'traffic light system' (red, amber, green - RAG) rating against criteria. Higher education is covered across most of the criteria but there is also a separate higher education heading to allow reporting of developments such as programme approvals.

7 SMT performance monitoring is followed by quarterly School Planning meetings between Executive and each of the School budget holders. Service areas go through an equivalent process twice a year. Reports measure annual performance against the College budget and include a detailed commentary on income and expenditure, pay and non-pay costs, capital bids, quality, and performance against key performance indicators (KPIs), student satisfaction, and business risks. The meetings aim to ensure that planning and resources are aligned, but also to challenge Schools to meet 'stretch targets' and improve, while simultaneously offering support. The planning process operates effectively to ensure that financial targets are met, expenditure is controlled and quality measures are monitored and acted upon (see also paragraphs 23-29). The process is well understood by all involved.

8 One of the six Strategic Goals introduced in the new Strategic and Operational Plan, 2014-17 is 'to maintain financial stability to support learning and future growth.' While the FDAP scrutiny took place against the backdrop of a challenging external financial environment for further education, the College has maintained a healthy financial position. For the year ending July 2014, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) categorised the financial health of the group as 'outstanding'. In autumn 2014, the rating went down to 'good' but this was planned by the College in the context of surplus resource being used to help finance the Property Strategy. In September 2015, the College was planning to request a return to an 'outstanding' rating in the light of a continuing surplus and progress with the capital build programme.

9 For the year ended July 2015, total forecast income for the College was just over £52 million against a planned total expenditure of just over £49 million. The actual surplus achieved was £3.59 million, 6 per cent of income. Spending on the Property Strategy since 2010 had also increased to £15.2 million. This is in line with financial performance in the years leading up to the scrutiny. 2015-16 began with SMT responding to recently announced changes to government funding of further education colleges, with planned cuts to budgets, continuing scrutiny of costs, and a reiteration of aims to improve business growth. A revised budget was accepted by Board in September 2015.

10 The Property Strategy has enabled consistent improvement to the estate. It saw £16.7 million invested to 2013 with plans for a further £42.7 million to 2020. Investment in resources for higher education provision includes the development of the University Centre in Blackpool, the Advanced Technology Centre at Bispham and nautical simulators at the Fleetwood campus. A Capital Projects Executive Group (CPEG) exercises strengthened responsibility for the implementation of the Property Strategy and capital projects. It ensures that the Corporation Board is kept informed and that Board approval for capital spend is in place, as well as working to identify external funding.

11 Higher education student recruitment had been of some concern going into 2014-15 as applications had been lower than forecast. However, eventual recruitment saw the College achieve 99 per cent of its full-time Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) target (2767 of 2800 students) and 91 per cent of its part-time target (755 of 830 students). Early intelligence for 2015-16 enrolment indicated that the College had already achieved 96.4 per cent of its total higher education target.

12 Financial planning and quality assurance policies are coherent and maintain an appropriate separation between business and academic development. There is also scope

for 'fast track' development, demonstrating the capacity of the College to develop swiftly a new programme to meet the needs of an employer without compromising quality.

13 The College's financial planning, quality assurance and resource allocation policies are coherent and effective. The College's financial position appears to be robustly managed by Executive and the SMT and is effectively overseen by the Corporation Board and its subcommittees.

14 There is historic evidence of the College's effective alignment with QAA external reference points. Effective use of the Quality Code has been strengthened as the College has applied for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers. ASDC, acting on behalf of Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB), has formal responsibility for aligning College policy to the Quality Code. In practice, this is driven by the Higher Education Directorate. ASDC, and HEAB via minutes, receive regular reports on alignment of College quality procedures.

15 During 2014-15, published policy and guidance on quality and standards was explicitly organised around, and referenced to, sections of the Quality Code. Notably, the Taught Award Regulations and guidance on Assessment, Boards of Examiners, and External Examining, all of which will be important if the College is to confer its own awards, are carefully mapped. The College's annual Higher Education Self Evaluation Document (SED) is also structured around the Quality Code.

16 Comprehensive alignment with *Chapter B8* of the Quality Code, on Programme Monitoring and Review, is less evident. The Annual Programme Review (APR) process itself is robust but there is scope to develop supporting guidance, extending discussions begun at ASDC. Similarly, in the light of some uncertainty around the means by which the College periodically reviews its higher education provision, policy and procedures could be strengthened to ensure effective alignment (see also paragraphs 84-88).

17 Procedures in operation largely reflect the College's documented guidance and commitment to using the Quality Code to frame management of quality and standards. However, it was noted that in some validation and revalidation events consideration of subject benchmarks and qualification benchmarks could be more explicit in documentation and meetings. Staff met in the course of the scrutiny and those observed in meetings showed an awareness and understanding of relevant aspects of the Quality Code.

18 While the scrutiny team concludes that there is scope for the College to strengthen its alignment it could nevertheless confirm that its higher education policies, documentation and operations take comprehensive account of the Quality Code and associated guidance.

19 The College's foundation degrees are informed by the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* (FDQB). Guidance on the College's three stages of design, development and approval of programmes references the FDQB and requires that foundation degrees must be 'designed to meet in full' the expectations of the Benchmark. Beyond this there are no specific criteria set out for foundation degrees other than those for all College higher education provision.

20 Scrutiny of validation and revalidation documents and events revealed that consideration of the FDQB is not always explicit. Nevertheless, it was equally evident that foundation degrees are developed in association with employers, incorporate work-based learning, are guided by the Workplace Learning Policy, and provide opportunities to progress to honours degrees. This approach was being strengthened as all programmes moved to a generic, Level 5 Work Based and Placement Learning module. Further, external programme consultants have commented on well integrated workplace learning and the strong links with employers.

21 The Higher Education Directorate provides advice and promotes consideration of the FDQB. A Higher Education Workplace Learning Manager was appointed in 2014, initially for one year, to provide central coordination of work-based learning and placements, to improve operational procedures, and to identify and disseminate good practice in employer engagement. This post has now been made permanent. ASDC has reviewed the revised *Foundation Degree Qualification Characteristics Statement* to consider any implications.

22 The scrutiny team concludes that while guidance on the FDQB could be made more explicit, the College takes account of the FDQB and programmes, by incorporating work-based learning modules, having placements and by engaging effectively with employers, are consistent with the Benchmark.

23 The College Mission - 'Inspirational learning creating outstanding futures' - is accompanied by a set of values and strategic goals. The latter emphasise commitment to: responding to local, regional and national priorities; working in partnership with employers, industries and organisations to drive economic growth; achieving in terms of success, customer satisfaction, progression and destination for further and higher education; enabling young people and adults to secure sustained employment opportunities; creating an inspirational learning environment; and maintaining financial stability to support learning and future growth.

24 The Strategic Goals frame the Strategic and Operational Plan, 2014-17. SMT worked with Corporation Board to review strategic priorities in the context of regional social and economic needs, and funding patterns. Staff were involved in the Plan's development via consultations at staff fora and meetings. SMT reviews progress against operational targets on a monthly basis and via performance monitoring of Schools and service areas. It provides reports to Corporation Board, which is given an aide memoire to the Strategic and Operational Plan to promote effective scrutiny of the College's progress.

25 The Higher Education Strategy 2013-16 reflects the overall College Strategic Plan in focusing on providing an 'outstanding higher education experience', preparing students for employment, developing relationships with industry and employers, widening participation, and working in partnership with students and staff. At its core is the application for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers.

26 The Mission, the Strategic and Operational Plan and the Higher Education Strategy are displayed on the College website and publicised on College premises. Strategic updates and policy developments are shared with staff.

27 Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB) is ultimately responsible for assuring, maintaining and enhancing Higher Education strategies and policies. The Higher Education Directorate plays a significant role in developing, reviewing and disseminating higher education policies and systems. The College's strategic objectives for higher education are well considered in stages of approval and revalidation processes.

28 Students are made aware of the higher education Strategy and relevant policies, which are published on the higher education webpages or in programme handbooks. Representation on deliberative committees and various forms of student engagement also help to raise knowledge of relevant policies and procedures. Students whom the assessors met had been made aware of and supported the College's FDAP application.

29 The scrutiny team is of the view that the College's higher education Mission, Strategy, and associated policies are well understood and are used consistently by both staff and students.

30 The College does not have a discrete higher education division. Rather, higher education programmes are distributed across seven Schools, all of which deliver further and higher education. However, there is a dedicated Higher Education Directorate (HED) which plays a fundamental role in developing, reviewing and disseminating higher education policies and systems. The HED comprises the Director of Higher Education, the Head of Higher Education Development, the Higher Education Learning and Scholarship Manager, the Higher Education Development Officer and the Higher Education Academic Registrar, a post introduced in the context of the FDAP application. The revised post of Higher Education Workplace Learning and Employability Manager is also now permanent. The work of the HED is supported by Director of Quality and Standards, who leads strategy for quality improvement and quality assurance across all of the College's provision.

31 Deliberative oversight of higher education lies with Higher education academic board (HEAB), which is chaired by the Principal and which is responsible for the Higher Education Strategy, approving academic policies, and oversight of academic standards and quality. Membership includes Heads of Schools, professional services managers, nominated staff representatives and a student representative. In the earlier stages of the scrutiny HEAB was the focus for deliberation and approval of the College's emerging academic regulations, but in January 2015 the Academic Regulations Advisory Group (ARAG) was developed, to enable the work to be expedited (see paragraphs 67-68). However, final approval still rests with HEAB.

32 There is a clear understanding of responsibilities and function at deliberative higher education committees: the Learning, Teaching and Scholarship Committee (LTSC) responsible for the enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment, and for the development of scholarship; and ASDC, which has delegated responsibility for academic standards and quality including with respect to programme development and withdrawal, annual programme reviews, and external examiners. Meetings are firmly led, business is conducted professionally, and members, including the student representative, are well engaged. HEAB exercises firm and productive oversight and the subcommittees fulfil their respective responsibilities for academic standards and quality, and enhancement.

33 Understanding of College expectations is also apparent across routine quality assurance activities, including approval and revalidation events, where panels and proposing teams are clear about the process. Similarly, there is clarity of purpose and understanding at module, progression and award boards.

34 Executive is described as being 'responsible for providing strategic leadership and management and to ensure that the Corporation Board, HEAB and SMT are supported in decision making in line with the Business Plan and agreed strategies and policies'. In practice, meetings tend to be operational in nature, with senior managers sharing information on various activities, including higher education.

35 SMT's attention is more systematic, with a rolling agenda specifying six-weekly higher education reports. It receives HEAB minutes and regular updates from the Director of Higher Education, for example on National Student Survey (NSS) results, curriculum development, and partnership management. It also oversees the monitoring of School performance in quality, recruitment and finance across all provision, including higher education. Its work driving strategic higher education priorities complements the work of the deliberative committees.

36 Academic Management Team (AMT), a cross-College group of Heads of School and academic services, and Cross-College Management Team (CCMT), bringing together

Directors and Heads of corporate service departments both act as effective venues for the dissemination of information, reminding Heads of School and Service of responsibilities.

37 Schools lead curriculum development, recruitment and scholarly activity, and coordinate teaching and learning. Executive management is via essentially operational School management meetings. Deliberative oversight is through Quality Assurance Meetings (QAMs), which are responsible for managing the quality of all the School's programmes, and Programme Quality Meetings (PQMs), which manage standards and quality on specific programmes. Scrutiny confirmed that the College has a clear and well understood system for managing quality at programme and School level.

38 Corporation Board effectively scrutinises the College's Higher Education Strategy and activities. Senior managers, including members of the Higher Education Directorate, are in attendance to explain developments and field queries. While it was evident that independent governors play a critically productive role in the business of the Board, staff, and particularly students, were less involved. A new member with higher education experience had been recruited to the Board for 2014-15, although it was notable that only two members have direct experience of higher education (see paragraph 41). Two of the Board's subcommittees are involved in the oversight of aspects of higher education provision. Audit Committee's role is to advise on the adequacy and effectiveness of all College systems of internal control, risk management, effectiveness, governance and financial management. The Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) plays a significant role in scrutinising performance and standards; monitoring student achievement, retention, progression, attendance and destinations data; scrutinising the annual higher education SED; receiving reports on strategic curriculum issues; and reviewing relevant quality systems and policies. Members of the Committee demonstrated their role in monitoring performance and challenging the management team where appropriate. The scrutiny team was of the view that Corporate Board and its subcommittees operate effectively, although there is scope to strengthen staff and student participation, and to broaden experience of higher education. There is clarity of governance and management functions, financial management is sound and there is effective risk management.

39 More generally, there is clarity of function and responsibility in relation to governance structures and deliberative and executive systems for managing the College's higher education provision.

40 Under the decisive direction of the Principal and Deputy Principal, the College has developed its higher education activities, and maintained a healthy financial position. Members of the Executive and SMT provide strategic leadership, driving College priorities, while maintaining effective relationships with Corporation Board. Key projects, such as a development to set up the National College for Onshore Oil and Gas (NC OOG), are carefully managed with attention to key stakeholders, risk and financial prudence.

41 Corporation Board provides effective leadership in partnership with the College senior managers, scrutinising policy and executive decisions which are, on occasion, appropriately challenged. Board members are, for the most part, drawn from the ranks of senior professionals in the leisure industry, finance, public services, commerce, and related roles, and they collectively provide strong leadership. A new member who had worked in universities had been recruited for 2014-15 to replace an outgoing member who formally held the post of academic registrar in a university. While this was a sensible step, the scrutiny team is of the view that extending the breadth of the Board's higher education experience would further strengthen expert oversight of higher education activities.

42 The Higher Education Directorate exhibits a common purpose in developing and revising higher education regulations and procedures, promoting adherence to College expectations, and building a culture of scholarship. The group is effective in managing the College's higher education provision and relationships with awarding bodies. The Director of Quality and Standards, whose role within SMT is cross-College and who has a formal link to the governing body's QSC, plays a valuable role in supporting the Higher Education Directorate's quality assurance work and maintaining focus on strategic priorities.

43 The strength and depth of the Directorate's academic leadership is evident in the work of HEAB, ASDC and ARAG. However, it is also evident in routine quality assurance activities such as validations and revalidations, and examination boards, as well as in regular gatherings of the Higher Education Senior Tutors, who promote the sharing of effective pedagogic practice across the College, and in events such as the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Conference. The scrutiny team concludes that the Higher Education Directorate effectively discharges its responsibilities and provides proactive leadership.

44 Academic management and leadership is also evident at School and programme level. Heads of School and Curriculum Managers, responsible for managing staff and quality across a number of programmes, are engaged and knowledgeable in relevant committees. The grasp of Directorate members in validations is mirrored across the table, where Heads of School and colleagues exhibit a sound understanding of process and of academic matters. At examination boards, Heads of School and most programme teams demonstrated appropriate knowledge of assessment regulations. Observation of QAMs and School management meetings demonstrated forward planning, sharing of information, and business planning.

45 The scrutiny team is of the view that there is a depth and strength of academic leadership in executive and deliberative management structures. Similarly, Board and its subcommittees maintain effective strategic oversight but would benefit from further expertise in higher education.

46 Executive and deliberative structures ensure that key academic and professional post-holders are kept abreast of higher education policies and systems. HEAB, but particularly ASDC and LTSC, provide fora in which policies and procedures are framed and reviewed. Observations of SMT demonstrated that upward and downward lines of communication work effectively. Both AMT and CCMT provide arenas in which policy developments can be disseminated and discussed. The College has moved to publishing its Academic Regulations and related procedures systematically. Newsletters are published on the College website and the Principal holds regular open meetings.

47 College staff demonstrated an awareness of relevant quality assurance procedures, such as validation and Annual Programme Review, and of the wider learning and teaching context.

48 Executive members, and particularly the Principal, engage assiduously with those responsible for the delivery of higher education programmes and other stakeholders, including employers and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), for example in securing funding for capital developments.

49 A core group of students is involved in helping to develop and implement policy. A Students' Union officer has membership of HEAB, ASDC and AMT. Students are kept informed of College policies and procedures through Programme Handbooks, a College news page, and Student Fora, which are attended by the Deputy Principal. For 2015-16, the College

instigated a separate Higher Education Student Forum, the first one of which discussed induction, and the Higher Education Careers and Industry Week.

50 The scrutiny team was able to confirm that the College has effective means of developing, implementing and communicating its academic policies and systems in collaboration with higher education staff, students and external stakeholders.

51 The College's previous QAA engagement, a Review of College Higher Education (RCHE) in 2013, commended its enhancement of learning opportunities and, amongst 11 features of good practice, cited 'the embedded culture of enhancement, as exemplified by the strategic leadership provided by the Higher Education Directorate'. One of the Higher Education Strategy's six strategic aims is to 'continue to provide and enhance high quality, flexible higher education learning opportunities and support environments to facilitate student success.'

52 An overarching Quality Management Policy frames the approach to self-evaluation and continuous improvement, and assigns specific responsibility to the Director of Quality and Standards for ensuring that the policy is adhered to and for providing reports on its effectiveness to Board. Observations of QSC and SMT, where there is monthly analysis of key indicators, demonstrated the pervasive extent of review. SMT performance monitoring uses an array of student data to understand trends, identify issues, and prompt and monitor remedies.

53 HEAB and ASDC, driven by the Higher Education Directorate, play key roles in reviewing, monitoring and updating higher education academic policies and regulations. A 'Policy Control sheet' lists the bulk of the College's policy, procedures and guidance documents with publication and review dates. For higher education, HEAB has a rolling schedule of business that lists reviews of processes such as boards of examiners, appeals and complaints. Individual policies and procedures have review dates, although the initial date may be only a year after the policy's introduction and in some cases, during the scrutiny, review was overdue. The College therefore could be more attentive to its schedule of review to ensure that policies critical to the award of FDAP are current.

54 The College's overall approach to quality assurance facilitates appropriate and timely action where issues are identified. From the production and analysis of Annual Programme Reviews and their consideration at ASDC, to Quality Assurance Meetings, through the production of School, Service and College SEDs received at HEAB and QSC respectively, there is a culture of criticality and enhancement. In turn, outcomes from annual monitoring shape the agenda of HEAB and ASDC, for example in prompting reconsideration of responses to external examiners or evaluation of annual review. As noted in the sections on criteria B2 and B3, there is scope for the College to strengthen its approach to periodic review.

55 The scrutiny team was able to confirm the findings of the RCHE report, in that the College has an effective system for monitoring and review of academic systems and activities, and is diligent in identifying and remedying deficiencies. However, it might need to strengthen its oversight of the schedule for policy review.

56 The Risk Management Policy sets out the College's underlying approach to risk management and documents responsibilities of Corporation Board, Audit Committee, and the Risk Management Group (formed from Executive and SMT members). Board has oversight of risk management within the College, approving the Risk Management Policy and the annual Risk Register. Board is supported by Audit Committee, which considers the Risk Register and approves a programme of audit reports based on assessment of key risks. Executive and the SMT are responsible for managing risk and implementing policies as

approved by the Board, and for providing regular risk reports to Board. The Risk Register runs to the same timeline as the relevant Strategic and Operational Plan.

57 The approach to risk management was reviewed during 2014-15 at the instigation of the Executive. The revised Risk Register, judged to be clearer and more accessible and endorsed by Board, describes the risk, sets a score and a RAG rating, lists actions required to mitigate the risk, allocates operational and Executive ownership of the risk, and finishes with a mitigated risk score. There were, at time of writing, 13 risks, of which three were high, eight medium and two low. At the start of 2015-16, and following assessment of mitigated risk, two remained high. Both related to external factors: 'funding cuts and changes to funding methodologies', and 'the impact of changes in Government policy'. Otherwise, risks were generally adjudged to be low following mitigation.

58 Awareness and analysis of risk pervades all levels of management and operations. Executive and SMT regularly review the Risk Register, with the latter taking a more extensive evaluation at its annual Planning Day. There is evidence of vigilant evaluation, management and mitigation of risk attaching to major projects. Analysis of risk is paramount in SMT performance monitoring and School planning meetings.

59 At CCMT, Heads of Services are asked to review the Risk Register in the context of their areas. Members of ASDC and HEAB are required to note any risk implications in presented papers. The revised approach now requires all Schools and service areas to produce and manage their own risk registers.

60 The Board is of the view that the College has a sensibly cautious approach to risk and in April 2015 stated that the College 'takes a prudent stance on its finances (and) carefully protects its reputation'. This prudence, however, has not inhibited the College from embarking on a number of significant developments, each of which has been rigorously assessed for risk.

61 The scrutiny team confirms that the College has in place an effective approach to the management of risk and organisational change.

62 Confidence in the College's capacity to ensure that academic standards of foundation degrees are secure is enhanced by the institution's successful track record of working with its three awarding universities, and by outcomes of QAA review.

63 The College has a sound academic and administrative infrastructure in place for the management of its provision. Higher education deliberative committees are well run and facilitate the successful monitoring and review of academic standards and quality. The College currently uses its own policies and procedures, with delegated authority from the three universities, and awarding body regulations, for example in respect to the appointment of external examiners and the operation of boards of examiners. The College's own monitoring and review, coupled with the views of the three universities, would confirm that there is a robust set of mechanisms that secure the academic standards of foundation degrees.

64 The College had adopted a cautious approach to the application for FDAPs, with SMT and Corporation Board seeing a successful QAA Review as a necessary prerequisite. The three degree-awarding universities have all been supportive of the College's application for degree awarding powers. University representatives described increasing delegation of responsibility to the College, as well as a growing maturity and the development of a higher education ethos, which have resulted in strengthened policies and procedures. The universities are aware that the College intends to use degree awarding powers for its

foundation degrees on a niche basis, and they expect their respective partnerships to continue should the College's application be successful.

65 Over the course of the scrutiny, the College has been augmenting existing policies and procedures with the development of an academic regulatory framework of its own, which is now published. There are completed sections of regulations and procedures relating to matters of direct consequence to the awarding of foundation degrees, such as external examining and Boards of Examiners. The scrutiny team is of the view that the College has well established procedures in place for external examining and that it makes scrupulous use of examiners' reports. Observation of boards of examiners provided assurance that the College has the capability to operate assessment processes, such as marking, internal and external moderation, and consideration of academic regulations, in the context of its own foundation degrees.

66 The management and governance structures in place would suggest that the College has the capability to manage the additional responsibilities associated with Foundation Degree Awarding Powers. Its financial management is consistently sound, and there are clear relationships between financial policy and the safeguarding of quality and standards.

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.

67 The College's regulatory framework comprises the regulations of its awarding body/organisations combined with its own regulations, policies and procedures. As an Associate College of Lancaster University it enjoys significant delegated responsibility for regulatory matters. These include the initial stages of programme approval, the annual and periodic programme review process, admissions, assessment and the operation of examination boards, complaints and appeals. The extent of delegation is more limited in respect of the University of Salford programmes, a more recent partnership, and the single programme with Liverpool John Moores University.

68 The Universities' and College's regulations and associated policies and procedures are made available to staff and students via the website. Academic policies are reviewed on a regular basis, with each policy and procedure having a specified review date. The College established an Academic Regulations Advisory Group (ARAG) to facilitate the structured review and updating of the regulatory framework, ensuring alignment with external reference points such as the Quality Code. Scrutiny of the regulatory framework and observations of academic processes, such as validation events, annual monitoring, examination boards, and deliberative committees and groups, confirmed that the College has a regulatory framework that is appropriate to its current status; meets relevant expectations of the Quality Code; is implemented fully and consistently; and is reviewed and updated at regular intervals (see also paragraphs 69-71 and 75-78).

69 The College has developed a regulatory framework to govern its awards, should its application for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers be successful. The terms of reference of the Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB) include approving the College's Academic Regulations, including policies and procedures for assessment and examination of the

academic performance of students, and monitoring the compliance of Schools with the requirements of the College's regulatory and quality assurance frameworks. The regulations themselves contain clear statements on the authority of HEAB and its subcommittees to update and amend the framework. HEAB exercised firm control over the development of the regulatory framework, ensuring thorough scrutiny. Students were involved through their representation at relevant deliberative committees and attendance at ARAG.

70 The College's regulatory framework is divided into two sections: Section A comprising the Regulations for Taught Awards and Section B the operational policies and procedures. The framework is referenced to external reference points such as the FHEQ and the Quality Code (see also paragraphs 67-68 and 75-78). Section B is not a comprehensive compendium of all policies and procedures; however, notable omissions, for example the procedures for annual programme monitoring and for review and revalidation, are available elsewhere.

71 The scrutiny team considers that the College has in place an appropriate regulatory framework to govern the award of its higher education qualifications.

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.

72 The College offers higher education programmes at Levels 4 to 6 of the FHEQ. The College complies with the requirements of its awarding bodies/organisations in terms of the structure and credit requirements for the award of specific qualifications. The College's own regulatory framework, and associated guidance, makes appropriate reference to the FHEQ. Alignment with the FHEQ was demonstrated through the internal and external stages of the validation/revalidation processes. Programme specifications, which are approved at the time of validation, are clearly referenced against the FHEQ. All programme handbooks contain a clear explanation for students of how their programme aligns with the FHEQ.

73 Continuing adherence to the FHEQ is ensured through annual monitoring processes, which draw on reports from external examiners and programme consultants (Lancaster University programmes only). Observations of validation events and Higher Education Academic Standards and Development Committee (ASDC) confirm that programme proposers and internal scrutiny panels have a good understanding of the requirements of different higher education levels. External examiners report that the standards set for programmes and their component modules are aligned with the FHEQ.

74 From evidence provided by the College and from observations, the scrutiny team is able to confirm that the awards delivered by the College correspond to the relevant levels of the FHEQ.

75 ASDC is responsible for ensuring that the College takes account of external reference points and their implications for the regulatory framework, while ARAG is charged with ensuring that the College's regulatory framework is consistent with national expectations. The Review of College Higher Education (RCHE) team concluded in 2013 that the College met UK expectations in respect of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Its arrangements for public information and enhancement were commended. The College's current and prospective regulatory framework is referenced to the expectations of the Quality Code (see also paragraphs 67-71). The College's document management site, which provides guidance on quality assurance and

enhancement, is designed around the chapters of the Quality Code, providing an immediate reference point for staff. The scrutiny team confirms that the College makes good use of the Quality Code in the management of its higher education provision.

76 The College's processes for programme approval/re-approval ensure that Qualification and Subject Benchmark Statements are used to inform curriculum design. Foundation degree programmes are developed in conjunction with employers; they incorporate work-based learning and work experience; and progression opportunities to top up honours degrees are usually approved at the same time. Opportunities for professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) recognition or accreditation are considered, and their requirements taken into account during programme development and approval.

77 Programme and module specifications are considered and approved during the validation/revalidation process. Together, they meet Expectation A2.2 of the Quality Code in respect of the maintenance of a definitive record of study.

78 The scrutiny team concludes that the College takes account of the Quality Code and other external reference points in the management of its higher education provision.

79 The College draws on a range of external advice and guidance in setting and then maintaining academic standards, including employers, PSRBs, Sector Skills Councils and academic peers. Staff engaged in curriculum development and design are expected to consult employers, representatives of PSRBs and external academic peers. Although the scrutiny team found evidence of such consultation taking place, there was some variability in the breadth of engagement with employers and external academic peers outside of the validating University. As the College's main validating partner, Lancaster University, does not require the presence of an academic external to the University to approve a partner college programme, the College includes an external subject specialist advisor at the second stage of its internal validation process. The role of the external advisor and criteria for appointment are clearly defined in the Academic Regulations. Nominations are subject to rigorous scrutiny and approval by ASDC.

80 The College's awarding bodies/organisations are responsible for the appointment of external examiners. The College is proactive in sourcing potential examiners. Nominations are considered and approved by ASDC before submission to the validating University. ASDC monitors the terms of office of external examiners and ensures that replacements are secured in good time. The College makes effective use of external examiner reports in its annual monitoring procedures to assure itself that academic standards have been set and maintained appropriately. Their reports, and the response thereto, form a key element of Annual Programme Reports (APRs), School Self-Evaluation Documents (SEDs) and Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs). ASDC receives an annual summary report of external examiner reports, providing assurance at institutional level that standards are appropriate for the qualifications and consistent with comparable programmes.

81 The College benefits from the advice provided by university programme consultants (Lancaster) and link tutors (Salford and Liverpool John Moores). Their reports are considered in a similar way to external examiner reports during the annual monitoring process. External engagement is reinforced further through cross-membership of committees: representatives of partner universities are members of ASDC and senior College staff are members of relevant partner university committees.

82 Programme teams engage with employers to secure work placements and to provide students with work-related learning opportunities. In some instances, programmes are devised to meet the training and development needs of specific employers and

industries. Close working relationships are fostered through membership of local branches of professional bodies, employer fora and formal steering groups.

83 While the scrutiny team considers that there is some scope for the College to ensure more explicit employer and external academic input during the development and design phase for new programmes, the team concludes that the College has in place appropriate arrangements to seek and act upon advice from academic peers, employers and PSRBs in setting and maintaining academic standards.

84 The College's internal programme approval processes involve four elements. The process can take 18 months but there is provision for a more condensed timetable if necessary. Programmes are approved for a maximum of five years; the revalidation process is similar to initial validation. A cross-College APR event has several commendable features; the active participation of students and the bringing together of programmes from different subjects.

85 However, observations by the scrutiny team raised uncertainties about its effectiveness as a forum for disseminating and building on good practice. For example, good practice identified is often limited to an increase in recruitment without being explained why that might be and there was no discussion between staff on how other programmes would be influenced.

86 Up to and including the 2013-14 academic year, revalidation of Lancaster University programmes included a separate review document. During 2014-15 Lancaster University decided that this document was no longer fit for purpose and that partner colleges could decide how they could meet the requirements through internal processes. The College concluded that given the thoroughness of its annual monitoring and review processes, the expectation in *Chapter B8* of the Quality Code could be met by some adjustments to the revalidation document template. It has not been possible to observe a full review/revalidation cycle since April 2015. The scrutiny team acknowledges that the revalidation process involves an element of periodic review. At the time of writing, the team is not yet convinced that the processes of periodic review (as opposed to annual monitoring) are set out clearly in guidance for staff and are implemented robustly and consistently (see also paragraphs 14-18). The College's approach could be more effective, regular and systematic; however, there is nothing to suggest that the College is unable to address this.

87 The scrutiny team concludes that the College's arrangements for programme approval and annual monitoring are robust, applied consistently and incorporate externality.

88 There is scope for the College to specify in more detail its approach to review, taking into account the distinction made between monitoring and review in *Chapter B8* of the Quality Code, and to ensure that its internal revalidation procedures adequately incorporate a self-critical reflection of trends over time.

89 The College currently delivers three programmes where students also study outside the College's main premises as part of their blended learning: the FD/BSc in Project Management in collaboration with BAE Systems and Rolls Royce at a small number of off-campus sites; an HNC Engineering at Heysham Power station; and an HNC in Nautical Science. The College has procedures to ensure that the premises used for off-site delivery meet its requirements. In every other respect, the College's usual quality assurance mechanisms apply. All assessment of students is carried out by College staff. The scrutiny team considers that the arrangements for ensuring the academic standards and quality of off-site provision are appropriate and effective.

90 The College's strong financial position has enabled it to undertake significant investment in its infrastructure. Systematic resource planning is evident at all levels of the College. The framework is set by the Strategic and Operational Plan. The Capital Projects Executive Group is instrumental in identifying potential projects, drawing on intelligence from academic staff of possible academic developments to meet local/regional skills needs, and sources of funding. Annual budgets are set following a planning round. Heads of School are budget holders and have responsibility for the financial management of their Schools. The Director of Higher Education also has a general budget for higher education, and is additionally able to submit bids for specific resources. School performance reviews take place quarterly; mid-year meetings are the fora for initial business planning discussions. Resources are considered throughout the year at programme and School level.

91 Observations of validation/revalidation events confirm that due consideration is given to the adequacy and appropriateness of staffing, specialist facilities and equipment, and library stock. There is ongoing monitoring of resources, taking into account student feedback, at School performance review meetings, PQMs and QAMs.

92 The RCHE team found the College's anticipatory approach to the consideration of, and investment in, learning resources to be a feature of good practice. The scrutiny team concurs; there is compelling evidence of a close relationship between academic planning and resource allocation.

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.

93 The College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy sets out how its approach to teaching, learning and assessment contributes to the fulfilment of its overarching strategic aims. The key principles of the strategy, intended operational outcomes and responsibility for delivery are specified clearly. The new strategy has been disseminated to staff with the assistance of Senior Tutors. The College has an additional e-learning strategy, the implementation of which is monitored by the Learning, Teaching and Scholarship Committee.

94 Learning, teaching and assessment strategies and their relationship to intended aims and learning outcomes at module and programme level are given thorough consideration during the validation/revalidation process. The College has developed standard modules for its foundation degree programmes to ensure a consistent approach to the development of academic and digital literacies and work-based learning. The development of a standard dissertation module is also under consideration. Learning, teaching and assessment strategies are described in programme and module specifications.

95 The College seeks to promote high quality teaching through its academic staff recruitment and selection processes; the support provided to new and established staff; allocation of hours for scholarly activity; staff performance reviews; peer observation of teaching; and the activities of Senior Tutors (see further Criterion C). Effective assessment practices are assured through guidance to staff; the use of standard assessment templates; the operation of robust verification, moderation and external examining procedures; and staff development events.

96 Learning, teaching and assessment strategies are monitored through the APR process. As noted at paragraphs 79-83, the arrangements for periodic review of

programmes are less robust; consequently, the analyses of the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment strategies at programme level are weaker.

97 The scrutiny team concludes that the College's strategies for teaching, learning and assessment are consistent with its academic objectives and intended outcomes.

98 The Higher Education Directorate is responsible for ensuring that staff are provided with information and guidance about the College's and its partners' policies and procedures for programme design, monitoring and review. They are set out in the Academic Regulations (available on the website) and in documents collated on the Higher Education Directorate's document management site, which is organised according to the Quality Code. Observations of programme approval, as well as revalidation events and College committees, indicated that the policies and procedures are well understood by relevant staff. Although the scrutiny team considers some of the written guidance to be under-specified, the iterative nature of validation/revalidation and annual monitoring processes, and the support provided to members of the Higher Education Directorate and through peer review, ensures high quality outputs.

99 The scrutiny team therefore concludes that relevant staff are informed of, and provided with, guidance on programme design, approval and monitoring.

100 Module and programme reviews are the stimuli for changes to programmes during their validation period. There are established procedures for making major and minor amendments to currently validated programmes. Minor modifications are approved by ASDC. Major modifications must be approved initially by ASDC before consideration by an internal panel, and then by the validating university. The views of external examiners and programme consultants must be obtained as part of the process. The procedures require that definitive course documentation is updated and approved.

101 The scrutiny team confirms that processes for amending and improving programmes are clearly defined, with responsibilities appropriately assigned, and implemented consistently.

102 Although the College originally stated that it did not offer or intend to offer programmes with multiple award pathways, in January 2015 the College received approval for an Fd/BEng Automotive Engineering programme with alternate pathways leading to different award title. The rationale, market and curriculum design were explored thoroughly with students, employer representatives and College staff at both the internal and university events.

103 The scrutiny team confirms that the College's programme approval and monitoring processes ensure that programmes with alternate pathways are coherent.

104 The College's planning activities incorporate consideration of the support services required for new programmes. The Learning Resources Manager is a member of internal validation panels and may join academic staff teams at university validation/revalidation events. The APR template includes a section on additional academic support, requiring programme teams to reflect on the impact of learning support on student achievement.

105 Student support managers and staff are represented at the College's deliberative committees. Support services produce an annual SED, which is considered by HEAB. Observations of PQMs and QAMS confirm that learning support issues raised by staff and students are discussed and pursued proactively by programme teams.

106 During the scrutiny period the College launched a major initiative, Partners for Success, to ensure that students receive a highly quality integrated individualised support service from pre-entry to post graduation. Under the framework, personal tutors have the prime responsibility for the coordination of the delivery of student support services to students. The support services partnership includes the Loop, iKnow, Higher Education Senior Tutors, Students' Union and the Higher Education Learning Mentors (HELMS)/Learning Support (see also paragraphs 189-196).

107 The scrutiny team concludes that the College has in place effective arrangements to plan, deliver, monitor and review the learning support services required to enable student success.

108 The College currently delivers a small number of programmes off campus (see paragraphs 90-92). Although the College has not developed its own guidance on flexible and distributed learning, it makes use of the guidance provided by Lancaster University. Consideration is given to the adequacy of learning opportunities, including access to learning support services, at the time of validation/revalidation and through the annual monitoring process.

109 The College's approach to work-based learning (WBL) is guided by its Higher Education Workplace Learning Policy, which is supplemented by a set of operational procedures. The College has developed a standard Work Based and Placement Learning module for its Foundation Degrees. Observations of visits by College staff to students undertaking work-based learning confirm that the arrangements are robust and well managed. Although the prime responsibility for the delivery of work-based learning rests with the programme team, central support is available. The roles of all concerned, staff, students and employers are set out clearly in a WBL Handbook. Programme teams maintain good contact with potential placement providers and the availability of, and preparation for, work-based learning is actively discussed at PQMs.

110 The scrutiny team confirms that the College's arrangements for ensuring the adequacy of learning opportunities for those studying at a distance and in work settings are robust and well managed.

111 Those engaged in programme design and development are guided by external reference points such as the FHEQ, qualification benchmarks and Subject Benchmark Statements, PSRB requirements, the validating bodies' requirements and the College's Regulations, policies and procedures. Validation/revalidation processes include consideration of programme learning outcomes, the appropriateness of module learning outcomes for different levels, assessment tasks and the volume of assessment. There are assessment norms expressed in terms of word count and, in the case of Lancaster University awards, expectations in terms of an examined element. The College has in place academic regulations, policies and procedures, which address assessment matters including pass marks, number of attempts, grading and classification of awards, academic misconduct, consideration of mitigating circumstances and verification and moderation of assessment tasks and outcomes. There is also a Higher Education Examinations Policy governing the planning, organisation and management of exams, which is reviewed annually.

112 The APR template invites programme teams to reflect on assessment practices, student achievement and external and programme consultant reports. They are assisted in their analyses by a data set provided by the Registry, which includes entry profiles, retention and achievement both in year and over time. However, there is insufficient evidence to confirm whether academic standards are reviewed robustly under the College's current approach to periodic review.

113 Examination Boards operate to standard agendas and are provided with good statistical information to support decision making. The College's student record system (EBS) is capable of supporting a number of different regulatory regimes.

114 External examiners and Lancaster University programme consultants consistently confirm their satisfaction with academic standards. As would be expected, their reports contain constructive suggestions for enhancing assessment practices.

115 The scrutiny team confirms that the College has in place robust arrangements to define and monitor academic standards.

116 The developmental approach to validation/revalidation ensures that assessment regimes at programme and module level are given due consideration by approval panels. Assessment strategies are summarised in the programme specification and developed in more detail in programme handbooks, both of which are available to both current and prospective students via the website. The general assessment criteria are included in programme handbooks. Module-level information is provided in module handbooks, which are available via the virtual learning environment (VLE). The College employs standard templates for assessment to promote consistency. Students confirmed that assessment briefs are clear and explained fully, as are the learning outcomes and assessment criteria; they understand grade boundaries and how their awards will be classified. The majority of assessments are submitted online through the VLE, which includes a link to the College's chosen plagiarism detection software. Feedback and marks are also provided electronically. The College's Academic Regulations are available on the website, with links to the regulations of validating universities and related pro formas for mitigating circumstances and appeals. A Guide to Assessment and Feedback for students has been developed in conjunction with the Students' Union.

117 Information for staff about assessment is contained on the document management site. This includes guidance on marking and moderation, examinations, recognition of prior learning, academic malpractice, mitigating circumstances and assessment recording. Written guidance is supplemented by sessions at induction for new staff and ongoing staff development and training.

118 The scrutiny team confirms that assessment criteria and practices are communicated effectively to both staff and students.

119 The assessment of intended learning outcomes at programme and module level is scrutinised and approved at validation/revalidation. The use of standardised assessment and feedback templates and robust internal verification procedures ensures that the learning outcomes to be assessed are clearly identified and that students receive feedback against each of the outcomes.

120 The College's Assessment Regulations do not specify the means by which a module mark is calculated and whether a minimum mark must be achieved in component elements to achieve a pass overall. The College's regulations, reflecting Lancaster University practice, allows for 20 credits to be condoned at each level. Although the scrutiny team was assured that all learning outcomes must be achieved for credit to be awarded, this is not explicitly stated in the relevant section of the Academic Regulations, nor was it evident from exam board practice. A university validation panel also raised whether there were certain 'core' modules which must be passed in order to progress; the programme team's response was equivocal.

121 The scrutiny team confirms that assessment regimes cover intended learning outcomes and that assessment tasks are varied and appropriate to qualification type and mode of delivery. However, the College will need to strengthen its assessment regulations to ensure that students achieve all intended learning outcomes.

122 The College's awarding body/organisations are responsible for the appointment of external examiners. The College is responsible for nominating potential external examiners for approval by Lancaster University and the University of Salford. Nominations are considered initially by programme teams, before scrutiny by ASDC. Observations of ASDC noted the desire to source external examiners with high academic qualifications, a record of scholarly activity and research, and with relevant industrial experience. Mentoring arrangements are considered for potential examiners with little or no experience. New external examiners are inducted into their role by the validating university, supplemented by a briefing from the programme team.

123 The current cohort of external examiners is drawn from a range of institutions including universities, further education colleges and one overseas institution. Scrutiny of external examiners for Lancaster and Salford awards, where the College is instrumental in sourcing nominations, indicates that a majority of external examiners are affiliated to post-1992 institutions; 45 per cent hold professorial titles or are qualified to doctoral level; and a third come from North West institutions.

124 Scrutiny of external examiner and programme consultant reports and how they are considered within the College demonstrate that the College makes scrupulous use of suitably qualified peers to assure academic standards and to enhance its provision.

125 The College has developed its own regulations governing the appointment, role, rights and responsibilities of external examiners should its FDAP application be successful. The regulations are supplemented by working documents.

126 The College's assessment procedures are set out in the regulations, policies and procedures of its validating universities and its own regulatory framework. These include procedures relating to moderation and verification of assessment tasks and outcomes; the detection of and penalties for academic misconduct; consideration of mitigating circumstances; academic appeals; and the operation of examination boards. Consistent implementation is assured through the use of guidance and staff development, standardised documentation, the involvement of peers external to the College, and robust annual monitoring. Decision making at examination boards is enabled by the provision of detailed assessment data for each student and good statistical information. Assessment procedures are kept under review by the College's deliberative committees.

127 The process of closing a programme involves the completion of a Programme Closure Report, which is approved internally by ASDC before it is forwarded to the validating university. The interests of current and prospective students are secured by ensuring appropriate arrangements for 'teach out' and the development of replacement programmes where appropriate. Revalidation events consider the implications for continuing students of changes in the curriculum, for example when dealing with foundation degree top-up arrangements and full-time and part-time student cohorts.

128 The scrutiny team confirms that the College has in place mechanisms for closing programmes that ensure that the interests of students are safeguarded.

129 The scrutiny team considers that the College consistently meets its stated learning objectives and achieves its intended outcomes through the consistent application of robust approval and monitoring procedures, which make effective use of external expertise. However, the College will need to make more explicit in its prospective regulations its expectation that all learning outcomes must be achieved and strengthen its approach to periodic review.

Criterion B4

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

130 A culture of self-reflection is evident at all levels of the College, from the Corporation Board and senior managers to programme teams. Its governance and management structures are mature, operate effectively and are well understood by all involved. Staff and student representatives are drawn appropriately into the operation of deliberative committees and working groups.

131 The arrangements for validation/revalidation ensure that proposals are scrutinised and challenged at key stages of their development. Teams are required to address concerns before moving to the next stage. Annual monitoring processes are thorough and incorporate critical challenge at all stages. Module reviews are initially presented at Module Assessment Boards, providing an opportunity for external examiners and university representatives to contribute. Draft APRs and SEDs are peer reviewed by colleagues. APRs are presented to an extraordinary meeting of ASDC, where the focus is on identifying good practice and opportunities for enhancement in a particular themed area. School SEDs are similarly subject to review by a panel on behalf of Higher Education Academic Board. The annual monitoring process culminates in a College SED, which is reviewed by Higher Education Academic Board and presented to the Corporation's Quality and Standards Committee. Detailed Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) are produced at each level and monitored rigorously by the designated committee.

132 The scrutiny team concludes that critical self-assessment is evident at all levels; the College is responsive to internal and external monitoring and review.

133 Learning objectives and intended outcomes at module and programme level are scrutinised and approved during the validation/revalidation process and reviewed on a regular basis through annual programme monitoring. Responsibility for taking actions is captured in detailed and comprehensive QIPs. If changes to agreed learning outcomes are identified through annual monitoring, these can be instigated through the major or minor modification procedures (see paragraphs 100-101). The responsibilities of programme teams, Schools, the Higher Education Directorate, the Executive team and deliberative committees such as ASDC are set out in the College's regulatory framework and guidance documents, and are well understood by all concerned. Programmes are validated for five years and are then subject to revalidation.

134 The scrutiny team confirms that the responsibility for taking action in response to monitoring and review of agreed learning objectives and outcomes is clearly ascribed.

135 The College's Higher Education Strategy 2013-16 articulates the role of the College in providing accessible vocational higher education to meet the needs of Blackpool, the Fylde and the North West region as well as the wider economy. The College ensures that it is aware of, and responsive to, employer needs through participation of employers as members of the College Corporation; staff membership of the LEP committee and sector

groups; a steering group to manage the relationship with a key employer (BAE Systems); staff involvement in PSRBs and sector bodies; the use of fractional appointments to enable staff to combine employment and their professional practice with teaching; and employer fora.

136 The College's Curriculum Development and Approval Procedures require programmes team to engage with employers, initially to establish potential demand, and subsequently to contribute to the design and delivery of the programme, for example through the provision of work placement opportunities. Observations of validation/revalidation events confirmed the involvement of employers in programme development and design, but the scrutiny team noted variability in the breadth of engagement.

137 The scrutiny team confirms that the College makes use of ideas and expertise outside of the institution to inform programme development, approval, monitoring and review, but that there is scope for a more consistent approach to engagement of employers and academic peers in its arrangements.

138 The College's commitment to the continuous improvement of its higher education provision is set out clearly in its Higher Education Strategy 2013-2016. The College was commended by the RCHE team in 2013 for the enhancement of learning opportunities. The team noted that a culture of enhancement was embedded throughout the College; it was embodied in a strategic approach to continuous quality improvement and excellence in the provision of student learning opportunities; and permeated the College infrastructure. Factors contributing to the judgement included the Corporation Board's focus on the enhancement of higher education; longstanding relationships with its awarding bodies, resulting in significant devolved responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement; an outward-facing senior management team with an excellent awareness of national higher education issues; an estates strategy which has ensured an appropriate environment for the delivery of higher education; a strong commitment to inclusivity; an effective student engagement strategy, which ensures that students are actively involved as partners in enhancement initiatives; and the inculcation of an ethos of continuous improvement through staff induction, performance reviews, professional development and support for scholarly activity.

139 The College's quality assurance processes incorporate critical analysis and reflection, peer challenge and external perspectives and result in well-developed quality improvement plans which are monitored robustly at all levels. These processes are supported by the timely provision of high quality data and the use of benchmarking information. The College's deliberative committees and management groups have a clear improvement agenda, are focused on enhancing the student experience and have academic excellence at their heart. Opportunities to identify and share good practice include the cross-College APR event, the meetings of the SMT and Senior Tutors, ARAG and the Ethics Committee. Interaction with the College's validating universities and sister associate college also provide opportunities to exchange good practice. The scrutiny team concurs with the view of the RCHE team that the Higher Education Directorate provides effective leadership of higher education, creating a dynamic ethos of enhancement.

140 From scrutiny of evidence, observations and meetings with staff, the scrutiny team concludes that the College takes effective action to promote strengths and address identified weaknesses.

C Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff

Criterion C1

The staff of 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.

141 The College's higher education Strategy 2013-2016 states the commitment to provide 'an outstanding experience for all higher education students, informed by scholarship and professional practice'. To deliver the higher education curricula, the College aims to attract and retain high calibre staff with the necessary skills and competencies. It acknowledges that staff with industrial or professional backgrounds bring practitioner skills and experience to enrich foundation degree delivery.

142 In practice, the College ensures that staff are appropriately qualified to teach on foundation degree programmes and that programme teams have a good balance of academic and professional and/or industry experience. In general, it is expected that staff be qualified to a level above that on which they teach, and industrial or practitioner experience is particularly valued. New staff without a teaching qualification are expected to achieve one within two years of joining the College. The College maintains records and ongoing oversight of academic currency and professional expertise by monitoring updated CVs at Staff Performance Reviews.

143 In the September 2015 Staffing Profile, there were a total of 155 staff, of whom 14 (nine per cent) did not have a degree. There were no staff without a professional or teaching qualification. Seventy-six staff of 155 (49 per cent) who teach Level 6 modules have an ordinary bachelor's or honours degree, master's degree or doctorate. Thirty-eight of 155 (25 per cent) staff held a relevant professional qualification. The data demonstrates clearly a highly qualified team of staff. In addition, the detail provided about the professional backgrounds and qualifications of staff supports the College's assertion that higher education staff have appropriate vocational experience to deliver foundation degrees.

144 Some programmes had an over-reliance on a few members of staff to deliver all the modules and/or deliver Level 6 modules. To mitigate these issues the College is using expert consultants and will also use Specialist Practitioners (SP) to bring niche academic input and professional expertise to enhance the curriculum. The College has a pool of fractional staff to cover vacancies and short-term needs.

145 Overall the College recruits high calibre staff, many with postgraduate qualifications, who also bring professional practitioner experience to the vocational higher education programmes they deliver. The College maintains careful oversight of staff competency and capability, individually and as collective programme teams, to ensure the currency and quality enhancement of the curriculum. It has effective mechanisms to identify and address any areas of weakness in staffing allocations to higher education programmes.

146 The College encourages staff to engage with peer networks and professional organisations associated with their area of teaching. Membership of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) is particularly promoted to staff in order to gain professional recognition for the quality of their teaching and learning practice. The College promotes the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) for academic staff involved with higher education delivery and uses these criteria in observations and higher education Curriculum Review to provide

points for discussion about pedagogy. The Staff Performance Review (the appraisal system) explores the link between UKPSF and staff development opportunities, which staff can take up to enhance their teaching and learning methods.

147 The March 2014 Staffing Profile shows five staff, four of whom are academic leaders, who are HEA fellows. By September 2015, the number had risen to seven, with three additional staff having gained HEA recognition. The higher education Senior Tutors have a performance target to gain HEA membership. A small amount of funding is available for this.

148 The higher education staff CVs are notable in terms of the number and range of learned societies and organisations to which staff belong, which enables them to maintain contact with new developments in their subject and engage in networking opportunities. Some examples of such societies and institutes are The Chartered Management Institute, British Computer Society, International Association of Maritime Institutes and the British Association of Sport and Exercise Scientists.

149 The College is keen to ensure that good and interesting pedagogic practice is disseminated and provides a number of in-house staff development events to support ongoing pedagogical development of staff.

150 The higher education Strategy 2013-2016 has a strategic aim 'to provide an outstanding experience for all higher education students, informed by scholarship and professional practice.' Blackpool and The Fylde College has its own definition for scholarly activity relevant to vocationally based higher education, which distinguishes it from continuous professional development (CPD). The College considers that scholarship is about staff maintaining an academic and professional understanding of current developments in their subject and also encompasses reflection, dissemination and incorporation of what has been learned into the curriculum to directly inform and enhance teaching.

151 The College is part of a national Scholarship Project, managed by the Association of Colleges, which aims to develop and embed distinct forms of scholarship relevant to technical and professional curricula. This will enhance the learning experience for higher education students in college-based higher education.

152 The College clearly sets out for staff the types of activity that can be classed as scholarship and for which they can apply for funding from the Scholarship and Research Development Scheme (SRDS). In operation for eight years, it has provided funding for more than 50 projects to date. The College acknowledges that staff are at very different levels in terms of their experience of research and seeks to support the staff's development in building their research capacity.

153 There is ample evidence of staff undertaking higher degree and scholarship activity, which has direct benefit to the students' learning experience. At meetings with the scrutiny team, staff gave a number of examples of the College funding support to undertake higher qualifications, for example master's programmes and projects through SRDS. Staff have a balanced annual workload which can include up to 50 hours each year for specific scholarly activity. They have to evidence this at Performance Review and articulate its impact on teaching and learning or curriculum development.

154 The College has developed a bespoke online system to track the ongoing staff academic and professional expertise for their area of teaching (Scholarnet). It is a comprehensive social scholarship tool which introduces staff to research and scholarship and encourages reflection on academic, professional practice and their vocational currency,

mapped against the UK PSF. It is also used to describe and share impacts on student experience. SMT receives regular updates from the Higher Education Directorate, which closely monitors the number of staff recording their respective activities and engagement with other staff. The data shows a high level of interaction with Scholarnet.

155 The College has a clear commitment in principle and practice to scholarly activity as part of the development of a higher education academic community. It considers that it is central to the effective provision of high quality and engaging learning opportunities. The College promotes and facilitates research and scholarship in a number of effective actions, which enable the curriculum to maintain currency and innovation relevant to foundation degree programmes.

156 The College's concept of scholarship and its aspirations for staff go beyond that which is required for FDAP.

157 The College is committed to the development of vocational higher education. Work placement and work-related learning play a significant part in higher education programmes along with the development of employability skills. In view of these undertakings the College recognises the importance of higher education staff having relevant professional experience. It considers that staff with industrial or professional practice backgrounds bring valuable up-to-date understanding of the vocational area in which they teach. It seeks to recruit tutors who can contribute necessary knowledge, understanding and experience to balanced programme teams. In order to maintain vocational relevance to professional practice, practitioners are often recruited on a part-time basis to enable them to continue to practice while teaching.

158 Students are enthusiastic about the professional expertise of their teaching staff. They acknowledged the 'real life' examples and experiences staff bring to their learning. The relationships which staff have built with employers through local networks, employer fora and work placement arrangements enable them to gain information and knowledge about work practices.

159 The College has a comprehensive Professional Development Policy, which applies to all staff. The Policy aims to provide a framework that supports and encourages the development of all staff in line with the College's strategic aims and their professional career aspirations. There is evidence of a dynamic approach to identification of staff development priorities, which draws on various sources, for example external examiner and course consultant reports, APRs, SEDs and teaching observations.

160 The College is concerned to ensure that staff development benefits learning; staff performance review templates contain criteria that include evaluation of scholarly activity undertaken and its contribution to teaching, and staff are able to demonstrate this. Staff development opportunities and funding are available to all staff including those employed on a fractional basis.

161 Staff whom the scrutiny team met felt well supported and positively encouraged to develop their professional skills and engage in scholarship. At meetings with the team, they gave a number of examples of their use of SRDS to undertake higher qualifications, for example master's degrees and projects. Staff gave examples of how their scholarly activity and research had been presented to colleagues (for example, the Research Symposium) and the influence that it had had on their teaching (for example in using emerging technologies).

162 Academic staff are well versed in higher education curriculum development, having designed and delivered a wide range of degree-level programmes and Higher National

qualifications. The College has a valued and valuable longstanding relationship of over 20 years with Lancaster University. The partnerships with the University of Salford and Liverpool John Moores University are more recent. Working effectively with a range of awarding bodies has provided staff with a wide range of experiences of different academic models for curriculum development. In all cases, the universities validate and support all levels of higher education programmes that the College staff have developed, written and subsequently delivered. Staff knowledge of academic structures and expertise in curriculum development is recent, as in the past three years the College has validated or revalidated 53 higher education programmes and undertaken 24 major or minor amendments.

163 In September 2015, the total number of higher education staff with development experience was 91, of whom 48 (53 per cent) were academic leaders.

164 External examiners have commented on the relevance of curriculum design of foundation degrees as having a very strong vocational element. They also noted the appropriateness of assessments and module learning outcomes, which are clearly defined and which provide opportunities for students to develop professional and industry skills while being challenging and innovative. Students are also very positive about the relevance of their curriculum and gave many examples.

165 The College encourages higher education staff to become external examiners and engage with other providers. Permitted leave of absence is granted for such activities, as 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.

166 Detailed scrutiny of staff with external examiner engagement showed a range of institutions with which staff had worked, such as universities, further education colleges and further education colleges with university centres, which provides a wide scope of collective experience. At a meeting with staff it was commented that it is difficult to secure such appointments, though the College supports and encourages these types of activity. Scrutiny of staff CVs provides evidence of significant past and current external examining experience.

167 The Staff Profiles for March 2014 and September 2015 indicate a high level of activity by academic leaders in participation in external networks or other similar external activities. Some staff are engaged with a number of different networks and activities.

168 In meetings, a number of staff reported their links with the wider academic and professional community to share practice, through professional bodies, as external examiners, attending conferences, and publishing papers. In addition, College staff belong to academic networks such as the Mixed Economy Group for further education colleges providing higher education, the 157 Group and the Association of Colleges Policy Network. The active engagement with the further and higher education networks and the ability to analyse and interpret current sector information leads to education development within the College.

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.

169 The overarching Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy sets out in detail the high standards that the College expects from all staff, to ensure LTA of the highest quality. The College is proactive in the ongoing development of learning, teaching and assessment. The LTA Strategy has been reviewed recently with reference to the Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*. As a result, two new strands have been added to the Strategy: student engagement and technology enhanced learning are not new areas but formal inclusion in the Strategy will ensure closer monitoring and analysis for impact. The UK Quality Code Expectation and Indicators of Sound Practice for *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching* are available to staff on the staff intranet. The Learning, Teaching and Scholarship Committee (LTSC) effectively ensures the enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment informed by scholarship and the capture, debate and dissemination of good practice. It reports to the Higher Education Academic Board, and there is wide-ranging membership from across the College and from all levels, as well as student representation.

170 The higher education Curriculum Review, which includes lesson observation, is the primary means by which the College assesses the quality of higher education learning and teaching. The College uses graded observation across all programmes and the process for higher education observations now also addresses the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) rather than Ofsted criteria. The higher education Curriculum Review is a thorough process which is carried out by Curriculum Managers twice each year for higher education academic staff. Along with a lesson observation, broader aspects of the curriculum, such as the assessment process, accuracy and completeness of learning, teaching and assessment information and use of research, scholarly or professional activity to support learning, are considered. Each School has a set target number of observations to carry out in each semester. The College carefully monitors the numbers of observations completed, for example at QAMs, Senior Tutors meetings, School Management team meetings, and SMT meetings. Curriculum Reviews form part of annual programme monitoring, which contributes to the School SED and College SED.

171 The collated higher education curriculum reviews lead to action plans in the form of QIPs and are actively monitored at programme (PQMs) and School level (QAMs). The outcomes of observations are collected and mid-year and annual reports are presented to the Quality and Standards Committee. The Corporation Quality and Standards Committee also receives mid and end-of-year reports on the outcomes of lesson observations. The report provides data on observations carried out and draws out strengths as well as areas for improvement. The most recent annual report to the College Quality and Standards Committee, in October 2015, indicated high quality learning and teaching in the higher education area. It showed that of 160 higher education observations, 94 per cent were good or better, and 49 per cent were graded outstanding; 6 per cent were below the College's expectation of good or outstanding. The process continues to be enhanced with plans for 2015-16, which include the moderation of lesson observation forms to ensure that they are completed fully and that judgements are sound and reliable. The College also employs a series of themed Learning Walks, a professional development strategy that allows teachers to observe other teachers in action during a brief visit to a classroom, which are planned and

which provide further information to the College about the quality of learning and teaching. For 2015-16, joint Learning Walks will take place, involving Heads and managers of School with Quality and Standards staff. Learning Walks and higher education Curriculum Reviews provide opportunities to collate good practice and to identify themes around which enhancement activities can be planned. For example, the use of higher education formative assessment is now extensive and has become a strength.

172 To monitor learning and teaching, the College also uses student feedback in module evaluation questionnaires (MEQs) and surveys, which feed into the programme APRs and School SEDs, which are, in turn, monitored centrally by Quality and Standards and the higher education Directorate. Quality Improvement Plans address issues and are monitored throughout the year. At verification and moderation, the assessment tasks are scrutinised to ensure that they cover the intended learning outcomes and that they enable all the students involved to achieve them. The College places importance on the NSS outcomes to provide information on student opinion of learning and teaching. Disappointing scores for NSS 2015 resulted in a NSS Improvement Plan 2015-16, with a target of 90 per cent satisfaction for the 'teaching on my course', an increase of five per cent from 2015. Appropriately robust actions have been put in place to achieve this. Student achievement data and comments from external examiners and university partners are noted to inform the College about its higher education teaching and learning. Information on student attainment and comparative analysis with previous years is used in APRs and reported on in various committees up to Corporation Board level. Action plans address issues and set an agenda for enhancement. External examiners often comment on the high standard of student work, which is at the appropriate level, reflecting the quality of teaching and support provided by staff. This was reiterated by a representative of one university partner, who added that student results are good. Although NSS scores for 2015 were lower than expected, analysis showed that there was no correlation with student achievements.

173 The College fully supports new staff or those new to higher education teaching to understand the College expectations and the standards and quality assurance requirements pertaining to higher education. The dedicated Learning and Teaching Centre, based at the Bispham campus, delivers a number of in-house CPD events, such as the 'Effective Learning Model' five-day programme and the 'Teaching Innovations Programme'. SMT receives regular updates on development activities undertaken by higher education staff in the Higher Education Directorate departmental reports. These show high levels of engagement by staff in learning and teaching-related training events.

174 The team noted the emphasis placed by the College on excellence in learning and teaching, the organisational infrastructure, procedures and monitoring processes. The robust overview methods keeping all staff, managers and senior leaders aware of teaching quality and the encouragement for innovation is fit for purpose.

175 There is a thorough cross-College Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy, which identifies seven key areas linked to the College's values and strategic aims, assessment being one of these. There are very clear principles and expectations clearly set out for staff. The Strategy indicates that 'feedback must be provided in a timely manner and will normally be within 15 working days of the submission deadline' so that students can use feedback to improve their next pieces of assessed work. The Strategy is available to staff both in hard copy and electronically and is particularly useful for new staff to inform them of the College's expectations. All staff delivering any aspect of learning, teaching and assessment have a responsibility to engage with the Strategy in order to achieve the operational outcomes that are identified for each key area.

176 The College has a higher education Programme Assessment Schedule template, which teaching staff complete to show students, at the beginning of the academic year, the deadlines for all pieces of work in all modules. This is to identify where there may be potential problems with 'bunching' and to allow students to plan their work. This is good practice. Assessment and scheduling is an agenda item on School Quality Assurance Meetings, which check that schedules have been produced. The team met a wide range of students at different campuses. Overwhelmingly, the students agreed that they received feedback promptly and within the deadline. Most were aware that it was a provisional grade until moderation and examination boards have been completed. Programme Leaders are responsible for monitoring that assessed work is returned to students promptly and within the College's expected timescale, with further oversight from Curriculum Managers and Heads of School.

177 Although students that the team met were positive about the promptness of their feedback, the NSS 2015 outcomes for assessment and feedback were below the College's expectations. The College has responded quickly in the light of negative comments in the NSS 2015 about assessment in general and specifically about lack or lateness of feedback. The College takes student feedback seriously and has acted promptly. Each question area has been tracked down to programme level, and data disaggregated to identify specific problem areas. There is an appropriate action plan to address assessment and feedback issues using the higher education Curriculum Reviews more effectively and sharing good practice from the higher scoring programmes. Those programmes with lowest scores are being reviewed by the Deputy Principal, Director of Quality and Standards and Director of Higher Education in addition to student focus groups. The NSS Improvement Plan 2015-16 identifies the need to explore the potential to monitor deadline dates electronically. Good progress is being made on this and the electronic submission system now records the return date. A systematic approach to monitoring assessment return dates will need to be operated to gain a clear College overview of the timeliness of student feedback across all higher education programmes.

178 The College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy clearly sets out the approaches to assessment feedback expected from academic staff. The College firmly emphasises that effective feedback is at the core of learning and underpins academic progression. The College has recently produced a notable publication for staff entitled Assessment Feedback - Staff Guide to Effective Professional Practice, available in hard copy and on the VLE. This uses up-to-date theory to inform staff of the purposes and good practice in providing feedback to support students' learning. It is comprehensive and detailed. It is particularly helpful for staff new to higher education teaching and assessment. Ongoing development events focusing on assessment ensure that staff continue to be aware of the importance of effective assessment practices. The College is proactive in carrying out evaluation of higher education assessment and places importance on ensuring that it continues to be current and enhances student experience and achievements. A thorough review was undertaken in 2014 in order to refresh the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. Priority areas for 2014-2015 identified for action were formative assessment and student engagement in their own learning. The report to LTS Committee 8 May 2015 indicated that there had been improvements in these areas.

179 Students are assisted in understanding how to use feedback constructively to support future assessment in an informative Student Guide to Assessment and Feedback, available in hard copy and on the VLE. It is an attractive publication which helpfully informs students of the number of different methods by which feedback is given and how they can make the most of feedback, and it emphasises that students should be proactive, taking responsibility for seeking and using feedback. The Guide provides an action plan template

for students to use with each piece of assessment feedback to identify positive areas and those on which they need to focus to improve grades.

180 Students reported that assignment briefs are clearly written down and explained verbally. The learning outcomes to be achieved and the assessment criteria are also fully outlined and understood by students. They were very positive in their comments that formative assessment and summative feedback is useful, detailed and constructive and helps them to improve.

181 There is strong evidence from external examiners' consistently positive comments that good feedback practice is employed in higher education programmes. They emphasise particularly the constructive and developmental feedback provided for students on their performance.

182 The College is fully committed to continuous improvement and, as such, it welcomes and seeks feedback from a range of stakeholders. Feedback from students and other stakeholders feeds into strategic planning. The Student Engagement Strategy (SES) has been carefully mapped to the Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*. It sets out the College's commitment to seeking and responding to students' views, and states the intention to work with students to involve them in quality enhancement and key decision-making processes. Student Engagement was the subject of a thematic review that Lancaster University carried out with its partner colleges to compare the colleges' practices with *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*. Blackpool and The Fylde College showed a high level of agreement. Students were actively involved in the development and recent updating of the SES. The College sees the strong Students' Union as the key driver of the SES. The higher education Students' Union President meets with the Director of Higher Education at least once each month. The SES is promoted widely across the College to staff and students through induction, tutorials, programme handbooks, posters and electronic displays. The high level of belief in student involvement in College matters is demonstrated in the College's activity in national projects such as The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP) and the QAA-funded Annual Quality Report (AQR).

183 There is a wide range of structural and informal opportunities for students to voice their opinion. Formally, the College has student representation on College committees such as the Board of Governors (the higher education Student Governor), higher education Academic Board, LTS Committee, Equality, Diversity and Wellbeing Committee, and higher education Academic Standards and Development Committee. The Students' Union Sabbatical Officer who attends these meetings is a fully integrated member of the group and makes valuable contributions. For example, at an EDW Committee meeting the student presented a project on care leavers and at an Academic Managers' Team meeting a high quality, creative video about the NSS, which the Students' Union Sabbatical Officer had helped to produce to encourage students to take part, was presented for discussion. Each higher education programme group elects one or two student representatives, who receive training and a comprehensive Student Representative Handbook to understand their role and responsibilities in relation to their peers and the College. They put forward views of their group at PQMs and School QAMs. Students' opinions and student input is an important part of programme Annual Performance Review. Students contribute fully at the higher education APR event, where groups of programmes and the APR evaluation panel meet to share information and good practice. The representative from Lancaster University described the student engagement at the College, particularly the membership on committees, as 'really good'.

184 The College actively seeks feedback from students in a number of other ways. Student feedback through the online Module Evaluation Questionnaires are widely promoted to students by tutors and through the use of marketing postcards. The questionnaires are used to inform curriculum development and planning. The outcomes from MEQs are fed into PQMs and QAMs and discussed with student representatives, who report back to their student group (sometimes in tutorial). Because groups are small in number students can usually use informal talks with tutors to get changes/improvements. Students whom the team met felt that tutors are very approachable and accessible. MEQs are also analysed to be used in programme APRs, to evaluate the quality of provision.

185 There are other internal surveys such as the post-induction and on-programme surveys. Student for a, held across Schools, are attended by School Student Representatives, Students' Union Executive Committee, senior College Management and Heads of corporate services. Any other student can observe the meeting, which addresses Students' Union business and the Student Voice. Student Fora within Schools allow student representatives from each programme group to discuss specific issues with the School's senior managers. For 2015-16 the College decided to separate higher education and higher education student fora. Rebranded as the higher education Big Student Meeting and promoted by social media, it successfully attracted 55 students from across the higher education programmes. The Students' Union Sabbatical Officer is working with curriculum areas where there was little or no participation. Students on Maritime Studies at the Fleetwood campus have a separate campus higher education forum. The outcomes were reported back to the Academic Management Team meeting. Students are satisfied that the College responds to their inputs and gave examples of where changes had been brought about.

186 The College places importance on the NSS results, and the data and analyses of NSS are thoroughly discussed at committees and within Schools and programmes.

187 At strategic level the College gains feedback information from employers through the variety of local, regional and national boards that senior staff attend. For example, the Principal is a member of the Local Enterprise Partnership Skills and Employment Board (LEP) and Blackpool Business Leaders' Group among a number of others. Specific employer feedback is at School level, where staff have many links with businesses and companies through external activity such as with the Maritime Industry Training Board, the Children's Trust Board and Early Years Forum. Direct contact with employers offering students work placements provides opportunities to gain feedback from mentors and supervisors to inform the curriculum. In addition, staff who have been or who are currently professional practitioners have many contacts within the areas of their work to gain further insights into employment opportunities and employability skills for students' benefit. The Employer Responsive Strategic Group is a meeting of the Academic Management Team (AMT), which focuses on market intelligence, commercial projects and employer opinion feedback. Schools are clearly working hard to form and maintain links with employers. They hold well attended Employer Fora, which are supported by the Higher Education Workplace Learning and Employability Manager. The guest speakers, both employers and students, spoke very positively about the value they had found in placement. Employers feed back that employability, entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial skills are very important attributes looked for in potential employees. In the Maritime Operations Employer Forum the focus of the meeting was on development of curricula that were relevant to the industry and satisfied the employers' needs for suitably trained personnel.

188 The efforts to obtain feedback and its use, particularly with respect to use of student opinion to bring about change, and the involvement of students in committees and quality assurance processes, is a strength of the College.

189 The College provides comprehensive services to students in terms of pre-entry guidance, admissions, induction and support for individual students' learning and welfare needs, which reflect closely the indicators of the Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*. The College informs students of all student support, guidance and wellbeing services by a range of accessible media. Students are signposted to services by information in the Student Guide, Programme Handbooks, on the VLE, at induction, from tutorials and on posters around the College.

190 Higher Education Open Days allow prospective applicants to view the College campuses, meet programme staff and discuss academic and pastoral support available with staff from the Student Support and Wellbeing Services. The College provides sessions to support the wide diversity of prospective recruits and current students. For students progressing from Level 3 programmes to higher education there are transition support events. The Flying Start programme is a well-attended summer school focusing on students with additional support needs. Flying Further is a half-day event in areas such as research and critical thinking for students progressing between higher education levels, to prepare them for the academic demands of the next academic year. The College follows up those who attend these events to evaluate their impact and to inform future events. Students reported that they had found these sessions very helpful and, in particular, mature students said that it had helped them feel more confident about starting their course.

191 There is a College Admissions Policy which commits the College to fair and transparent processes to enrol students to programmes for which they have the skills, academic aptitude and motivation to succeed. It aligns with the Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*. An Admissions report is made to Higher Education Academic Board and Academic Management Team, which analyses patterns of recruitment and attendance at summer schools.

192 Students receive a thorough introduction to their higher education programme, and induction to Levels 5 and 6 is also provided for returning students. It covers generic College and more detailed programme-specific information. Students are introduced to the College's Partners for Success framework, which is a holistic approach whereby sections of the College work collaboratively and with students as equal participants. The College has documented case study examples of successful activities through collaborative work (see also paragraphs 104-7).

193 The Student Support and Wellbeing Service offers a comprehensive range of support for students with additional needs. There are a number of opportunities for students to identify their needs: at pre-entry, on application, at interview and induction or while on course. The College carries out audits of its additional support facilities. Governors are concerned to ensure continued support for students with disabilities and to put in place resources to replace the former funding DSA stream.

194 The College provides a number of ways to support the development of students' academic skills. Most programmes have an Academic and Digital Literacy Skills module, which has been very successful and which will be included in all new or revalidated higher education programmes. Study skills sessions are provided by the LRC (the Loop), at induction or by Higher Education Learning Mentors (HELMs), to students on a one-to-one basis or to groups and within class sessions. HELMs support students at all campuses and those studying at a distance, including when students on nautical programmes are at sea. Students are very enthusiastic about the help provided by HELMs in supporting them in preparing for assessment and developing transferable study skills. They appreciate the support that they receive from all staff. The representative from the University of Salford considers that the College has a strong approach to personal tutoring.

195 The College SMT maintains regular oversight of Student Services. The SMT receives regular departmental reports from the Higher Education Directorate, which include a section on Student Support and Wellbeing. The reports provide data about additional learning provision, for example for disabled students, and usage of other services, for example counselling. They also update SMT on changes to funding (DSA) and data collection and provide information on College activities such as induction and usage of the HELMs service. Student Services area produces a thorough annual Self-Evaluation Document and Quality Improvement Plan, which is compiled from SEDs for the individual section of the service, such as Learning Support, Counselling, iKnow and School Liaison Teams, Welfare and Finance and Disability and Specialist Support. It uses quantitative data on uptake of services analysed from EDI factors, as well as feedback from students and staff to evaluate the provision and develop enhancement activities.

196 The College's provision of services for information, advice and guidance, admissions, induction, additional and study skills, personal support, and academic progression are extensive, high quality and much appreciated by students. The College is concerned for students' wellbeing and provides activities to support mental health, for example in the Mindfulness initiative.

197 The College has a commitment to resourcing higher education development. At validation events the adequacy of learning resources and specialist equipment to enable students to achieve the learning outcomes for each programme is checked. The College carries out ongoing monitoring and review of resources to ensure their currency, quality and sufficiency through business planning, performance reviews, student feedback analysis, such as NSS and MEQs, and self-evaluation reports. Learning resources is an agenda item at programme, School and Management meetings throughout the year. There is a capital bid process for large items, such as IT requirements or the new library management system, and a contingency fund for learning resource needs identified during the year. The scrutiny team found that resourcing appears adequate across all delivery sites and that facilities are available to all students irrespective of location or mode of study.

198 The LRC Manager carries out reports on aspects of library usage, which aids stock management, and a students' survey every two years. To evaluate the appropriateness of its service, the library benchmarks its work with other mixed economy colleges. In addition, staff join library networks to identify trends in operations of services in other establishments. For example, they looked at the number of study spaces and the policy for library fines to amend their own practices. In line with most other educational institutions, library loans have decreased in volume as the use of e-books and online texts and e-journals are provided. The College's libraries are using new software for compiling and updating module reading lists. They will no longer be included in Programme Handbooks as they will be electronically available through a portal on the VLE. Blackpool and The Fylde College is the first college in the further education sector to use this software. Students spoke positively about learning resources, and perceive services to be responsive to student needs, for example in arranging interlibrary loans.

199 The eLearning Strategy 2013-2016 has been derived from the College's Strategic Plan 2011-16 to support and enhance student achievements. The e-learning drive includes face-to-face learning supported by online material, blended learning where part of a programme is delivered online, and whole programme delivery. The College is clear that considerations of pedagogy drive development in e-learning; it is not led by the technology. The increasing innovative use of the VLE for learning materials for modules and interactive activities is well developed and appreciated by students, who are able to access information at all times and when engaged in distance learning. The online material includes general

information, academic regulations, LRC access and study skills assistance, which facilitate opportunities for students to achieve their learning objectives.

200 There is a target for 15 per cent of all modules to be supported by blended learning using the VLE. Staff defined this as incorporating online activities and discussion along with audio visual materials. The College encourages consistency and supports staff to develop materials. The VLE storyboards are constructed by IT staff based on content provided by teaching staff and are quality checked before being uploaded. At Fleetwood staff produce video and audio clips that show how to read nautical charts. These are uploaded to the VLE so that students can access them while away from the College. Most ships have internet access but for those that do not, students are able to download all materials they need on to a memory stick or laptop. Students feel that the VLE and learning materials that they can access are excellent. They find library staff helpful and noted that they will order texts from other sources if not available at the College. In Engineering, the Curriculum Manager has set up a modelling package for generic learning skills on the VLE.

201 The College is forward-looking and proactive in developing its awareness of the cutting-edge technological possibilities for learning and teaching. A presentation on The Future of Learning at a Learning, Teaching and Scholarship Committee evoked a lively discussion on the next generation of technology-enhanced learning. The College is embracing these new developments but is taking a measured approach to be sure that the grounds for incorporating any such innovations are pedagogically sound.

202 Students feel that the College's facilities and equipment are good. They enjoy using laptops provided by the College for in-classroom research activities. Students on nautical programmes at the Fleetwood campus appreciate the up-to-date bridge and engine room simulators, which replicate those on board ship so that they are able to apply the principles to any situations they may find when at sea. There are specialist laboratory facilities and classrooms for Marine Biology and Coastal Zone Management programmes. Computing students are pleased with the new provision of dual monitors and appropriate current software to support their studies. For Sports Studies students there is a range of equipment which is well maintained and up to date and which includes a Sports laboratory at the University Centre and sporting facilities at the Bispham campus.

203 Programme consultants have remarked on the appropriateness of learning resources and the improving and expanding e-resources. The College ensures that all students have appropriate resources that enable them to meet their learning objectives and be equipped for employment by their familiarity with industry-standard machines and software.

204 The College has a comprehensive range of advisory services, which can be accessed by all higher education students. 'iKnow' is the College's Student Recruitment, Support and Guidance service for students. Students are helpfully informed of the range of support services that the College offers in the comprehensive higher education Student Guide, on the website, VLE, in programme handbooks, and a useful iKnow publication that explains the range of information it provides. The iKnow team is well qualified and provides pre-entry, on-course and post-completion (up to three years after graduation) advice and guidance, career and employability help, welfare, counselling, accommodation, funding and budgeting information.

205 The iKnow service helps students with UCAS applications, job applications, CV preparation, interview techniques and information about further education and training pathways. The College's commitment to providing quality information, advice and guidance (IAG) services to students was recognised by the successful re-accreditation of the iKnow

service through the national Matrix quality standard for IAG in 2013. The Matrix report described the feedback given by students, which confirmed that they valued highly the significant contribution that the service makes to the success of their personal and professional development to prepare for post-College life. This was followed up with a positive interim check in November 2014.

206 There are two College Counsellors who are well qualified and BACP accredited and who have regular supervision sessions as required by the accreditation. Students may self-refer or be signposted to the service by progress tutors or Higher Education Learning Mentors (HELMs). Students may be pointed to external agencies if necessary. The College Counselling Service is not used by staff. The Counselling service is monitored along with the other Student Support and Wellbeing Services in the Support Service SED and higher education QAMS.

207 Support for staff is mostly provided through the Human Resources department. It is mainly concerned with staff professional development and nurturing talent to deliver the College's Strategic Plan. There are few references to staff wellbeing. There has been a pilot study using Mindfulness as a proactive wellbeing strategy for both staff and students. This was successful and continues with external guest speakers and some external funding to enable development of skills in mindfulness and wellbeing. The advisory and counselling services for students are comprehensive, high quality and monitored regularly and effectively.

208 The clear division of functions and close working relationships between the Higher Education Directorate and central College departments ensures that there are successful administration systems to collate and monitor student progress, run detailed and accurate reports and ensure careful analysis to inform formal data returns and College committee discussions. The Vice Principal Resources and Planning, through the Student Administration, Management Information and Funding, Finance and Estates departments, has overall responsibility. The liaison between these areas and the Higher Education Directorate, and the effective organisational and committee structures, ensure that higher education is fully integrated in the College. There has been additional investment in the higher education administrative infrastructure, notably the appointment of a Higher Education Academic Registrar to enable higher education development in the College. The Higher Education Directorate personnel, including the Director, the Head of Higher Education Development, the Higher Education Academic Registrar, the Higher Education Learning and Scholarship Manager, the Higher Education Workplace Learning and Employability Manager and the Higher Education Development Officer, who each have defined roles, interact effectively with the central teams. The Head of Higher Education Development and Higher Education Academic Registrar deal with external examiners and the organisation, scheduling and preparation of Examinations Boards and validations.

209 Staff whom the team met felt that the management information systems (MIS) software used is fit for purpose and provides accurate and complete information to enable reports to be produced easily in response to internal and external demands. Programme Leaders, administration and MIS staff work together to check and validate information on recruitment, retention and achievement. Appropriate training is provided for curriculum leaders and relevant staff when new functions are added to the software.

210 The College uses a comprehensive student records system, Electronic Business System (EBS), and various validation reports are used to verify configuration of programmes and that students undertake accepted combinations of modules for a given award, in line with awarding body regulations agreed at programme validation events. This system also enables staff to pull down reports on student profiles, including information on students

getting additional support, for example for dyslexia or use of Higher Education Learning Mentors. Other reports on attendance by individual students, by cohort and trends over time can be obtained as well as equality and diversity information can be stored and used to inform committee discussions leading to enhancements for students.

211 Student-related performance data is considered on a regular basis at different levels in the College, and there are ongoing efforts to enhance the quality, accessibility and timeliness of data to assist with planning and decision making.

212 At module boards teaching staff are able to check that marks are entered accurately. The Higher Education Directorate is responsible for ensuring and authorising the quality and accuracy of this data. Student administration and examinations teams are part of central resources although there are higher education 'specialists' within these teams. For examination boards, MIS and the Higher Education Registrar work together so that individual student information regarding modules, marks, progression and classifications are accurate. The Student Administration runs the transcript reports and sends them to students after ratification by the external examiner and awarding body.

213 The team observed a number of strategic committees and deliberative meetings where detailed quantitative and qualitative data was provided to inform discussions. For example, the Corporation Quality and Standards Committee demonstrated the ability of the College to produce meaningful data for performance monitoring, and in the School of Society, Health and Childhood Studies management meeting all key data had been carefully prepared prior to the meeting. In SMT Performance Management meetings papers used showed that College systems are able to monitor student progression and achievement. At Examinations Boards for the University of Salford and Lancaster University, the team observed fit-for-purpose and robust administrative systems in place to generate data for the purpose of progressing student results. They were able to take into account the different regulatory regimes for each University.

214 The College is developing a Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) and is in the early stages of the project but intends to be able to issue the first HEARs for graduating and progressing students in July 2016. Further evidence of the College's proactivity in developing formal systems is the acquisition of technical resources to initiate a project for recording curriculum approval and validations.

215 The College has the capacity to produce robust and useful data to support academic and non-academic needs. It is used extensively and effectively in College committees and meetings to inform planning and enhancement of the student experience. It is proactive in developing and investing new formal electronic resources to record and document essential information. This is a strength of the College.

216 The College's Complaints Policy/Procedure produced in April 2012 has recently been updated. The new Compliments, Complaints and Feedback Policy and Procedure was approved by SMT in September 2015. The policy makes clear the College's openness to feedback from stakeholders, students, former students, employers and members of the public in order to improve continuously the services it offers. The College undertakes to keep the process confidential and will seek permission for this if information needs to be shared. The policy and its associated procedure is sufficiently clear and appropriately detailed to deal effectively with complaints on non-academic matters and on academic matters that are about the provision of study or related academic service provided by the College. There is a separate Appeals Against Assessment Decisions (Higher Education) Policy for student dissatisfaction with assessment decisions. The College has recently undertaken a review of the alignment of its academic appeals and complaints procedures against that of their

awarding bodies. In response to the findings, the College has further refined the delineation of its roles and responsibilities and that of its awarding bodies and organisations to ensure full compliance with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's expectations.

217 In reviewing the complaints procedure the Academic Standards and Development Committee (ASDC) received a paper from the Students' Union's Sabbatical Officer about the accessibility and availability of the College's Appeals and Complaints procedures. As a result, ways to make the policies more prominent will be investigated. Students whom the team met have a clear awareness of the College's Complaints Policy and Procedure and know that they can obtain the relevant information on the VLE. Students are informed of the formal complaint process at induction and it is discussed in tutorials. The students whom the team met had not had any experience of the use of the procedures and feel that the positive relationships with staff enable them to address issues with tutors if they have any concerns.

218 The Director of Quality and Standards presents an annual report on higher education student Complaints and Appeals to the higher education Academic Board. The report for 2013-14 showed a reduction in complaints from 44 in 2012-13 to 17 in 2013-14. This was attributed to a greater focus by academic and support staff on resolving complaints at the informal stage. The data is presented by complaints per month and complaints by category. The largest number of complaints by higher education students in 2013-14 was about assessment and achievement (six complaints). Only one complaint progressed to stage 3 and no complaints were escalated to Independent Review. The 2014-15 annual report showed a further reduction in stage 2 complaints from the previous year. Again, however, achievement and assessment was in the top two highest numbers of complaints with two. The College takes action on the emergent themes in that Quality Improvement Bulletins were produced by the Quality and Standards department providing guidance to staff to address the issues raised. The Corporation Board is keen to gain a better understanding of the nature of complaints made by students and their incidence in the College. The Board receives a comprehensive report on complaints and compliments at the end of each academic year.

219 The comprehensive policy and robust procedures for managing and monitoring complaints is effective and confidential. The College uses the issues raised to take continuous quality improvement actions.

220 The College has a strong commitment to staff development for all employees and facilitates staff training with appropriate policies, procedures and opportunities. The College's Professional Development Policy sets out its commitment to ensuring that all staff have opportunities to learn and develop within their current role and for future career development. The Performance Review Scheme Policy and Procedures document covers all employees, excluding senior post holders (whose conditions of service are specifically determined by the Corporation and to whom a separate agreement applies). The Scheme aims to support staff to develop their potential and to contribute to the enhancement of the College's performance in delivering the Strategic Plan, improving quality and creating a culture of performance management. The Director of People and Organisational Development is responsible for ensuring the implementation of the Scheme and its review and updating.

221 A formal appraisal scheme is well established and operates for all staff. It is the main vehicle for identifying staff development and updating needs. The Performance Review Scheme involves an annual meeting between the member of staff and line manager (or alternative reviewer) to evaluate performance against the previous year's targets, set new targets linked to College objectives and professional aspirations of the reviewee, and development of a Continuous Development Plan (CPD). The plan covers mandatory training

such as Health and Safety, Equality and Diversity and Safeguarding, and individual staff development directly referenced to the duties and responsibilities of the job role and career aspirations.

222 The College runs staff development days throughout the year for cross-College training on, for example, skills for using the VLE and usage of the new Wi-Fi system, as well as departmental training. The College provides funding for staff who wish to attend external events, including fractional staff. Support staff provided many examples of staff development that they had undertaken, supported by the College. Staff are clear about the purposes of the Performance Review and were appreciative of what they considered to be 'ample' support for staff development.

223 The infrastructure for identifying development needs and the College's encouragement, support and funding for staff to progress their professional skills supports the claim to a high level of commitment for CPD.

224 The College produces a thorough cross-College Public Information Schedule to manage the accuracy, completeness and fitness for purpose of its information about higher education. This includes all public information on the College's website, promotional materials and prospectus, College governance, management, strategies and policies, legally required information such as key information sets (KIS), freedom of information and data protection management. The Schedule also covers information for students and staff, including programme specifications, handbooks, learner support and resources, policies, the Higher Education Strategy and external examiner reports. It follows closely the guidelines and expectations of the Quality Code Part C: Information about higher education provision. There is an allocated person with responsibility for each information item and for each category of information there is a named person with coordinating responsibility. In the case of information for the public and prospective students this is the Director of Marketing and Communications; for current students, and for staff with responsibility for quality and standards, this is the Director of Quality and Standards; and for students on completion of their studies this is the Higher Education Registrar. The flow diagrams showing development and iterations for checking and validation of the higher education prospectus, College website, UCAS, KIS and marketing and admissions data collection are detailed, comprehensive, clear and well understood by staff.

225 The website was reviewed in 2012 and is attractive, clear and easy to navigate. The content is comprehensive and informative. The website Higher Education Public Information page provides a range of useful information for all stakeholders including a section for the Wider Information Set, which satisfies HEFCE requirements. The Higher Education Prospectus is available in hard copy and in alternative formats. The College does not directly advertise those foundation degrees for which it delivers the 'top-up' degree. Instead, bachelor's degrees and their awarding universities are publicised and listed in the higher education prospectus, where it is explained that applicants should complete a UCAS form for a foundation degree and then progress to the top-up degree on successful achievement of the foundation degree. The prospectus is thoroughly reviewed on a biannual basis using feedback from student feedback groups. The prospectus and website information is based on one dataset for consistency and is put together by the marketing department to publish. Draft information is proofread by curriculum teams and final drafts are rechecked and signed off by the Head of School. The website is checked periodically for operation and accuracy by course teams, which are monitored in manager meetings within the School.

226 At the first visit of the FDAP scrutiny process, the scrutiny team raised concerns with the senior management team about the potentially misleading use of the word 'university'. The issue was resolved informally, with the College providing assurances that it

would make appropriate changes and ensure that where 'University Centre' was used, it would make clear that it is a further education college offering degrees that are awarded by its partner universities.

227 Marketing staff whom the team met did not consider that the expressions used were misleading. The terms were used because in focus groups held with the public the College found that higher education is less well understood than 'university'. The term was used deliberately to compensate for the lack of awareness amongst the local community regarding opportunities for degree-level study. However, the team considered that the College may be continuing to use terminology which had potential to mislead.

228 These issues have now been resolved to the satisfaction of the scrutiny team, which is assured that the College was operating in good faith. The prospectus had been approved by the validating university and information for students was passed with a high rating by external auditors in September 2015. The College has given an undertaking that it fully understands the concerns raised and will ensure that future publications comply with expected standards of propriety. The draft front covers of the new 2017 prospectus bear witness to this.

229 Students receive a wide range of information through the website, VLE and, in some cases, hardcopy. The College makes extensive use of electronic sources for provision of all information and communications with learners. Students were appreciative of the detailed information provided in the comprehensive programme module booklets, which cover all assessment information in detail, programme handbooks with a wider range of relevant information, and ease of access to information online. The programme handbooks are attractive and comprehensive. There is a standard template for generic and programme-specific information. The documents are collated by the Quality and Standards department from standard College information, regulations relevant to the programme, programme specifications and additions required by the programme team, ensuring consistency. They are reviewed annually and peer reviewed with the School to check for accuracy. Along with programme specifications they are available on the College website. This is good practice.

230 The College employs a number of procedures to ensure the accuracy and completeness of information. Public information is an agenda item for discussion at programme-level meetings (PQMs), where programme leaders are actively involved in updating and enhancing public information. At School-level meetings (QAMs), the currency of handbooks is further checked and the development of e-communications with applicants is progressed. The School Self-Evaluation Documents (SEDs) must address public information, and assess the sources of information available and the approach to accuracy and completeness. The Director of Customer Engagement produces an annual report on public information, covering promotional activities and materials, and documents for students such as programme handbooks. In addition, governance may extend to the management of information; one of the College's commissioned audits through an external company had been on admissions and marketing.

231 The scrutiny team considers that the College now has sufficient and thorough controls to safeguard the accuracy, accessibility and appropriateness for audience of the public information about its higher education provision.

232 Blackpool and The Fylde College demonstrates a strong commitment to equality of opportunity in all its activities. Its mission and strategic direction includes an assurance for fairness, empowering others, raising attainment, aspiration and progression for young people and adults in the region, and to creating a socially inclusive learning environment for

students and employees. Staff are made aware of these principles in the staff guides and the ongoing monitoring of Equality and Diversity Impact Measures (EDIM) data at committees, staff meetings and staff development events. The purpose of the Staff Guide is to inform staff about the College's key targets. It includes overall Equality, Diversity and Safeguarding (EDS) targets, and for areas of activity such as recruitment, achievement, student support, accommodation, resources and staffing the particular significance of Equality and Diversity is highlighted. This is good practice. The College produces an attractive College Higher Education Student Guide and a Student Guide Card, which emphasise the College's Equality and Diversity Statement. These are available on the VLE and explain fully to students the College's commitment to promoting equality, fairness, and respecting differences between people.

233 The College's stated assurances about widening access and equality opportunity are reflected in a range of its strategies and policies. The Higher Education Strategic Plan 2013-16 deliberately responds to Government directives in its particular aim to 'build on outstanding success in widening participation, raising aspiration and access for those in work and from a range of backgrounds'. The Admissions Policy and Procedure for Higher Education echoes the College mission to 'provide access to higher education to all who may benefit from it' and to recruit students from under-represented groups. The policy is very thorough and aims to ensure that admissions procedures are transparent and fair to all applicants, irrespective of their personal circumstances.

234 In compliance with law, the College implements a Single Equality Scheme. The College's Single Equality Statement indicates that the Equality, Diversity and Wellbeing (EDW) Committee is responsible for ensuring that the College meets its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The Committee is chaired by the Head of Student Support and Wellbeing and reports to SMT. It meets six times each year and has a planned schedule of business for each meeting. Membership is comprehensive, with senior staff from all the corporate areas and academic Schools and student representation from the Students' Union Sabbatical Officer. The terms of reference clearly adhere to the College's legal responsibilities and demonstrate a proactive and comprehensive approach to EDW. However, the production of an annual report for public information is not explicitly stated. Although the College undertakes to publish data and its actions to address gaps in achievements between different groups of learners as part of its equality duty, and staff stated that an Equality Report is published, no annual Equality Reports were found on the website.

235 The EDW Committee Action Plan 2014-2015 sets a number of Key Performance Indicators, which are monitored during the year. By March 2015, all targets had made good progress except the review of Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process for College policies, and this is being addressed.

236 An Equality and Diversity staff training and development programme includes activity for EIA training in the light of new external resources and the legal duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty. Written guidance and an EIA standard template is available for staff on the VLE to assist in completing the essential documentation for every policy. Staff access other Equality and Diversity staff training offers by self-selection when opportunities arise at cross-College staff development days, or if identified at Performance Review, and a CPD target is set.

237 The College monitors staff applications and appointments by gender, disability, age and ethnicity, and produces quantifiable data to identify where there may be areas for action. The Director of People and Organisational development presents an annual Human Resources staffing data paper to the EDW Committee to provide monitoring information about the College's workforce profile. Data is provided for gender, gender and work role,

age, disability and ethnicity. The College has not historically collated religion or sexual orientation but will be reviewing this in the future. The College provides a supportive environment for staff and students who wish to declare that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual (LGBT). LGBT issues are included in mandatory Equality and Diversity training for staff.

238 The College is committed to embedding equality and diversity in learning, teaching and assessment. A key function of the EDW Committee is to ensure that equality and diversity is integrated into all College activities. Staff are made aware of this emphasis via the Staff Guide 2013-14 and are expected to consider Equality and Diversity in Schemes of Work; the impact of this is measured as part of the lesson observation process. The progress in embedding equality and diversity into the curriculum is monitored in each semester at identified meetings, where a report is presented by the Learning and Quality Manager.

239 The College is committed to widening participation. In particular, it has responded positively to the data showing high proportions of care leavers in the region and put in place a range of support structures. For example, the College's Bursary and the Access Scholarship is available to care leavers and they are helped and monitored via Higher Education Learning Mentors in liaison with higher education Senior Tutors. The Higher Education Care Leavers Co-ordinator, with the Students' Union Sabbatical Officer, have carried out a project investigating the uptake of higher education by this group and the support provided to them. This work was recognised by the award of a Buttle Quality Mark for Care Leavers in 2011-12, and more recent reviews acknowledge the excellent practice of the College. Blackpool and The Fylde College is just one of a few colleges that have been awarded the Association of Colleges (AoC) Beacon Award for Equality and Diversity. The College also has the Two Ticks Positive About Disabled People award.

240 Students feel that the College addresses equal opportunities well through its policies and operations. They appreciate the respect shown for all sections of the community and noted the provision of a multi-faith contemplation room and the courtesy shown to international students. Female cadets on nautical programmes reported no negative experiences in the male-dominated environment. The College hosts a Women at Sea forum, which is a network for females who work on ships to exchange information and provide support. The College holds events each year to celebrate diversity and raise awareness of staff and students. For example, an Equality Week had been held in spring 2015, which would be followed up with further EDW training for staff, and with safeguarding and support for students with disabilities modules placed on the VLE. The materials are also intended for use with students in tutorials. Schools can also ask for bespoke training from the Equality and Diversity Coordinator.

241 In all its activities the College strives to be fair to all and there are a number of examples of good practice. It is proactive in promoting positive equality messages and supporting students from all backgrounds. The College will wish to review the website access to the Equality Statement and associated reports for the public domain.

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