Higher Education Review of Askham Bryan College

February 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Askham Bryan College. The review took place from 4 to 6 February 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mrs Emma Hedges (student reviewer)
- Professor Debbie Lockton
- Mr Philip Price.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Askham Bryan College and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)[1] setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing Askham Bryan College, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The themes for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Askham Bryan College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Askham Bryan College.

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

Good practice

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

- The significant involvement of employers in curriculum design, development and approval processes (Expectations A4, B1, B8).
- The effective use of bridging programmes to facilitate student progression from level 5 to 6 (Expectation B4, Enhancement).
- The range of specialist student support and expertise provided by the College from application through to graduation (Expectation B4).
- The integration of academic and pastoral support for students provided by course managers and support staff, and aided by specialist software (Expectation B4).
- The extensive mechanisms to engage and respond to the student voice at all levels (Expectation B5, Enhancement).
- The proactive and systematic approach of staff across the College to the enhancement of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The piloting of text messaging software to address student concerns in respect of course management and organisation (Expectation B3).
- The provision of staff development to address inconsistency between annual course reports (Expectation B8).

Theme: Student Employability

The College has an Higher Education Careers Education, Guidance and Employability Policy that outlines the ways in which it aims to promote the employability of students. Due to the nature of most of the programmes, students are given a wealth of practical experience which they will be able to take into employment. Placement learning is embedded into a number of higher education programmes and students also have the opportunity to get involved in extracurricular activities that have an employability focus. The employability of students is further supported by the recent appointment of the Higher Education Careers and Progression Officer, a post that has already proved valuable to students.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining Higher Education Review.

About Askham Bryan College

Askham Bryan College was built in 1936 and opened in 1948 as the Yorkshire Agricultural Institute. It is a mixed economy College with higher education provision having been introduced in the early 1980s. The College became a voluntary subscriber to QAA in 2012. Its mission is 'to be the College of choice for land-based and land-related learning'.

The College has validated partnerships with Harper Adams University and the Royal Agricultural University, and a franchise agreement with the University of Huddersfield. All but three of its programmes are with Harper Adams University. The College also works with one professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB), the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

The College currently employs 512 staff (53 involved in the delivery of higher education provision) and has around 4,500 students, 416 of whom are on higher education programmes (368 full-time and 48 part-time). The number of higher education students has increased from 301 (208 full-time and 93 part-time) at the time of its last QAA review in 2009.

All but one of its higher education programmes are offered at its main site in York, the other being provided at its Guisborough centre. Five of the College's curriculum areas offer higher education provision: agricultural, animal management, equine management, horticulture, and veterinary nursing. The offer comprises five extended degree programmes, 12 foundation degree programmes, one three-year BSc (Hons) programme, and five top-up BSc (Hons) programmes.

The College has undergone a number of changes since its last review in 2009. There has been a planned growth in student volume and changes to the senior leadership team have reflected these plans. The key challenges faced by the College include responding strategically to both the ongoing funding changes in the sector and to the general economic uncertainty. It is due to revise its strategic plan to take account of the financial uncertainty. The widening participation agenda, while central to the College's ethos, poses its own challenges in terms of meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

The College has made good progress in addressing the recommendations from its Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2009.

Explanation of the findings about Askham Bryan College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

Explanation of the findings about Askham Bryan College

1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: The national level*

Findings

1.1   The College is responsible for designing the programmes offered through its partnerships with Harper Adams University (HAU) and the Royal Agricultural University (RAU). The awarding bodies then gain assurance through their own procedures to ensure that qualifications are allocated to the appropriate level in the FHEQ. The arrangement with the University of Huddersfield differs in that the College is validated as a delivery Centre for the Huddersfield Consortium for Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) and therefore has no direct responsibility for designing programme specifications. The College has established systems and practices for designing new programmes to ensure proposals put forward for validation meet the qualification descriptors on the FHEQ and ensure an adequate volume of study is provided to address the learning outcomes. Tasks undertaken by Section Leaders include taking key roles in the validation, re-validation or monitoring of existing programmes. The Training and Staff Development Policy includes the provision of timely and sufficient support to staff teams to meet their professional needs and includes a procedure for requesting support. The College's policies and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter A1: The national level* of the Quality Code.

1.2   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these policies, procedures and practices by looking at the minutes of meetings, validation and other reports, and by talking to academic staff, senior staff and employers.

1.3   The evidence reviewed shows the policies and procedures used by the College are effective in practice. Validation reports reveal that proposals made by the College to both HAU and RAU were well received and only minor modifications were required to meet their validation requirements. Validation reports confirmed relevant guidance being available to staff at the College regarding academic levels, and that the characteristics of programmes and learning outcomes for foundation degrees had been integrated into recent proposals and existing BSc and top-up degree programmes. The College's strong links with employers promotes security in the development and design of new programmes and the development of vocationally relevant learning outcomes, for examples through employer representation on the Corporation and Technical Advisory Groups, and the periodic review process.

1.4   As well as staff development events, academic staff also acknowledged the value of both formal and informal support offered by senior staff to assist them in writing programmes that align with the FHEQ. Examples include guidance materials on writing learning outcomes, individual support, and support materials on level descriptors. Academic staff confirmed their knowledge of academic levels and their significance for designing, implementing and assessing programmes.

1.5   Overall, the College effectively carries out its responsibilities, within its partnership agreements, for allocating qualifications to the appropriate level in the FHEQ. The College provides academic staff with appropriate training and guidance, both formal and informal, to assist with programme design and the understanding of academic levels. These processes

are backed up by having strong links with employers and awarding bodies. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A1: The national level* is met both in design and operation and the associated risk level is low.

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

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

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

Findings

1.6   The College's agreements with HAU and RAU include clearly outlined responsibilities for designing and maintaining validated programmes with learning outcomes that are referenced to subject benchmark statements and which meet relevant PSRB requirements. For the programmes that the College delivers on behalf of the University of Huddersfield, the learning outcomes and subject benchmark statements are taken into account by the awarding body.

1.7   The College's approach to programme development and maintenance is to construct vocationally relevant programmes for its five areas of higher education provision. Both HAU and RAU have monitoring procedures, including external examiners' reports, that check the use of subject benchmark statements and PSRB requirements. The FdSc Veterinary Nursing programme is mapped to the LANTRA National Occupational Standards for Veterinary Nursing and Auxiliary Services and thereby accredited by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. The College's programme design and monitoring practices include scrutiny by employers to establish and maintain currency of programme content and processes for responding to guidance offered by a broad range of influential professional bodies and agencies. The College's procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level* of the Quality Code.

1.8   The review team tested the College's approach to programme development and the inclusion of subject and qualification benchmark statements by scrutinising recent documentation on developing provision, most notably the FdSc Equine Studies and the recent validation of FdSc Veterinary Nursing, programme handbooks, and in meetings with senior staff, academic staff, employers and students.

1.9   Validation proposals and reports show the College has effectively mapped programmes, where relevant, to PSRB requirements. Evidence from annual course monitoring review, validation and post-validation meetings processes show that the relationship between learning outcomes and subject benchmark statements, including PSRB requirements, are kept under regular review. The College consistently consults employers through a variety of mechanisms to ensure that PSRB and other requirements are considered in the design or redesign of modules and learning outcomes. The College's commitment to vocationally relevant programmes is further supported by its practice of using foundation degree qualification benchmarks and guidance provided by the relevant Sector Skills Council, LANTRA. The review team heard that senior members of staff provide valuable support to allow academic staff to effectively integrate subject benchmark statements and PSRB requirements into new programme proposals and revalidations.

1.10   Overall, the review team considered that the College carried out its responsibilities effectively to ensure that its programme design processes rigorously took account of relevant professional and subject benchmarkstatements. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level* of the Quality Code is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: The programme level*

Findings

1.11   For the HAU and RAU programmes, the College is responsible for producing and disseminating definitive information for its audiences on aims, intended learning outcomes and expected achievements. The College has templates for foundation degree programme handbooks and module handbooks for all programme leaders to use. Information about the University of Huddersfield's provision is produced by the University as part of its Consortium arrangements. The College's processes meet the Expectation in *Chapter A3: The programme level* of the Quality Code.

1.12   The review team read relevant documents including partnership agreements with awarding bodies, minutes of monitoring meetings, templates and handbooks, student surveys and results of surveys, and the College's prospectus and website. The team checked their understanding of these documents and their outputs by talking to senior staff, academic staff, students and employers.

1.13   The evidence showed that the programme handbooks themselves contain definitive programme information. The College has an effective approach to providing programme information to its stakeholders. Students whom the review team met confirmed that the way the College presents programme information, including programme specifications, is helpful. Employers also acknowledged that they had sufficient information about the core aims of the programmes.

1.14   The College's agreement with HAU includes annual reviews of the accessibility and nature of programme information for staff and students. The College also conducts its own annual internal check on the content of module handbooks. The College makes effective use of student induction and in-year surveys to check the suitability of information available to prospective and registered students. In-year survey results are benchmarked against National Student Survey (NSS) scores for comparative purposes to develop strategies and practices that enhance the student experience by, for example, enabling section leaders to establish plans to improve the provision of programme information.

1.15   The team regards the design and operation of the mechanisms used by the College for preparing, disseminating, monitoring and enhancing information on its programmes of study to be sound and aligned with *Chapter A3: The programme level* of the UK Quality code. The team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter A4: Approval and review

Findings

1.16   Both HAU and the RAU have clear procedures in place for programme development, approval and review. While the College follows these procedures, it also has its own College policy for new course approvals which is contained in its Quality Handbook. The policy details when proposals for new developments should be made known to the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Planning and presented for approval to the Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Committee (HECQC). If approved by the HECQC, the proposal is then presented to the Senior Management Team for approval to continue the development. If approval is granted, the programme development team continue to develop the programme according to the validating partners' processes. The College's policies are reviewed either annually or every two years and the policy on new course approvals meets the Expectation in *Chapter A4: Approval and review* of the Quality Code. In the case of periodic review, the College follows the partners' processes. In the case of both validation and periodic review, the College consults with employers.

1.17   The review team looked at the minutes of course team meetings, the minutes of HECQC, validation and revalidation reports, and talked to senior staff, academic staff and employers.

1.18   The evidence shows that the College has in place clear and effective processes, including the involvement of employers, for the validation, revalidation and periodic review of its programmes. These include involvement of staff in both curriculum design and as members of the programme team going through validation. The review team saw evidence that the conditions and recommendations arising from revalidation had been met. The significant involvement of employers in curriculum design, development and approval processes is regarded by the review team as a feature of **good practice** and is outlined more fully in paragraph 2.3.

1.19   Overall, the review team found that the evidence confirmed that the procedures work effectively. It is evident that there is externality within the programme development and approval processes, staff are aware of the relevant policy, and actions arising from the validation and revalidation meetings with partners are monitored and completed. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A4: Approval and review* is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality*

Findings

1.20   Both its awarding bodies have requirements that external expertise is used when developing and periodically reviewing programmes. External members, including, where appropriate, PSRB representation, are required to be part of the panels for validation, revalidation, and periodic review. The College's procedures meet the Expectation of *Chapter A5: Externality* of the Quality Code.

1.21   The review team met with staff, students and employers and looked at minutes of programme development meetings, critical appraisals as part of periodic review, validation reports, annual course reviews, and self-assessment reports (SARs).

1.22   The evidence shows that external advice is consistently sought and acted upon during programme and curriculum development. In one example, employers formed part of the programme team at the validation event. In addition, actions arising from external examiners' reports feed into both the annual course reviews' action plan and the Section and higher education SARs. All SARs are subsequently considered by a SAR panel which is chaired by the Principal and includes a member of the Corporation and a member from Landex (a membership organisation for land-based providers). The College then initiates a Quality Improvement Plan (QuIP).

1.23   The review team considered that the processes adopted by the College, over and above the requirements of its awarding bodies, ensured externality at all levels. Employers are closely involved in curriculum development, actions from external examiners' reports are acted upon and closely monitored, and there are also external members on the SAR panel. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A5: Externality* is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.24   While the College operates according to the assessment regulations of its awarding bodies, it also has its own Higher Education Assessment Policy and Procedures. The policy is very detailed and gives set templates for module and programme handbooks, and grading criteria for coursework, dissertations and placements. It is the responsibility of the relevant Higher Education Course Manager to produce the programme handbook and to check module handbooks. Details of all assessments, including learning outcomes and grading criteria, are in the module handbooks. Questions for both examinations and coursework are internally moderated before sent to the relevant external examiner. External examiners specifically comment on assessment.

1.25   Any revisions to the policy are approved by the Senior Management Team (SMT) and disseminated to staff through section leaders, fortnightly staff meetings, an annual standardisation event and the virtual learning environment (VLE). The strategy and content for assessment are considered during both validation and periodic review. The College's procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes* of the Quality Code.

1.26   The review team tested the policy by meeting with staff and students and reviewing a range of evidence including module and course handbooks, validation reports, and staff development events.

1.27   When preparing for validation and revalidation, staff are supported by the Higher Education Manager and Higher Education Development Co-ordinator. In particular, the College undertook 'Curriculum 2011' where staff were supported in writing assessments which were based on achievable learning outcomes at the appropriate level of the FHEQ. The College has also run staff development sessions on assessment in higher education and examination question writing. Students attended the latter event and the review team heard from both staff and students about the value of this event which, in some cases, led staff to revise their examination questions. In addition to the formal staff development events, the College provides staff with an aide memoire and the Higher Education Manager's induction of new staff includes a discussion about the Higher Education Assessment Policy and Procedures. The College also holds an annual standardisation event where all work is moderated to ensure that marking is appropriate. Any changes to the assessment policy are also reinforced at these events. Students whom the review team met confirmed that they are clear about what they have to do for assessments, how they can improve, and what the differences are between levels.

1.28   The review team saw evidence that, where an issue was raised by an external examiner in relation to assessment and its ability to prepare students for a professional body external examination, the programme team responded by introducing an additional module entitled Preparing for Professional Practice. The team also saw evidence of changes made to assessment whereby a programme team used their awarding body's procedure for invoking a change in a particular module.

1.29   Overall, the review team saw evidence that staff are well supported in relation to assessment. The Higher Education Assessment Policy and Procedures is very clear and leads to consistency in programme and module handbooks, ensuring students are given

accurate and relevant information. The staff development events take staff through the different levels of the FHEQ and allow them to practise setting coursework at the appropriate level and to discuss marking at the appropriate grade. Students are very clear in what they have to do to achieve a particular grade and external examiners confirm that marking is appropriate. The review team therefore concludes that the College's procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes* of the Quality Code and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.30   In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area were met and the associated levels of risk were low. There was one feature of good practice which is explained more fully under Expectation B1: the significant involvement of employers in curriculum design, development and approval processes. In all sections under academic standards, the College is also required to adhere to the procedures of its awarding bodies. The team identified no recommendations or affirmations for this judgement area. The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies at Askham Bryan College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 As noted in paragraph 1.1, the College is a franchised partner of the University of Huddersfield and therefore has no responsibility for the design and approval of its teacher training programmes. For the remainder of its higher education provision, the College follows the clear procedures for programme design and approval laid out by RAU and HAU. The College's policies and procedures for programme design and approval are described more fully in paragraph 1.16, and meet the Expectation in *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval* of the Quality Code.

2.2 The review team looked at the minutes of course team meetings, the minutes of HECQC, and a validation report, and talked to senior staff, academic staff and employers. The team also reviewed staff development events which supported staff preparing for validation.

2.3 The evidence shows that the College has in place clear and effective processes, including the involvement of employers, for the development of programmes for validation. This included involvement of staff in both curriculum design and as members of the programme team going through validation. The review team saw evidence that the conditions and recommendations arising from revalidation had been met. The review team considers the significant involvement of employers in curriculum design, development and approval processes to be a feature of **good practice**.

2.4 Meetings held with both senior and academic staff demonstrated awareness of the process of programme development and how to access the relevant policy. Furthermore, the team considers the staff development events to support preparation for validation to be particularly valuable in aiding understanding of the FHEQ and the Quality Code and the writing of appropriate learning outcomes. Part of the HECQC's remit is to ensure curriculum developments meet the requirements of the awarding bodies and the review team saw evidence from the minutes of meetings that the Committee does fulfil this role.

2.5 Overall, the review team concludes that the College's policy and procedures for programme design and approval, its support for staff undergoing validation, and the significant involvement of employers meet the Expectation in *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval* of the Quality Code. The associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions*

Findings

2.6   The College has a clear and comprehensive Admissions Policy. Most students are admitted through UCAS and it is the responsibility of course managers and the Student Records Office to determine the suitability of applicants. The College uses standardised guidance when interviewing applicants. Applicants unsuccessful at the interview stage are given guidance on alternative options. While the College has no higher education application appeals on record, the procedure for dealing with such appeals is described in the Admissions Policy. Information for applicants is available via the College's website. Students also have opportunities to visit on open days where the Higher Education Manager takes a lead role. Entry requirements are clearly detailed on the website and in the Admissions Policy.

2.7   Students are asked to fill in a 'Consent to process sensitive data' form which alerts the College to applicants with specific needs. Cases for applicants with complex needs such as disabilities or criminal records are discussed at an admissions panel. When additional support or learning needs are identified, the panel discusses the support needs of the applicant and whether any reasonable adjustments are required. The College provides extensive guidance for applicants with disabilities. Applicants with support needs are referred immediately to Student Services. The College's policies and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B2: Admissions* of the Quality Code.

2.8   The review team tested the operation of the admissions policies and procedures by talking to students and their representatives, and staff, and by scrutinising the guidance given to staff.

2.9   The evidence confirms that the admissions process is effective, fit for purpose and specifically considers the additional needs of applicants. Students whom the team met confirmed that they found the admissions process straightforward and the information to be clear and accurate. Students benefit from an induction programme when they arrive at the College, which includes information about their programmes' social activities and introductions to facilities such as the Learning Resource Centre (LRC) and Student Services, and the team saw evidence that induction surveys lead to improvements in subsequent years. The team also met with academic and support staff and it was clear in both meetings that staff had a clear understanding of admissions policies and processes.

2.10   The review team concludes that the College has clear and consistently applied admissions policies and procedures which are accessible to students and well understood by staff. Therefore, the Expectation in *Chapter B2: Admissions* of the Quality Code is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth, and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*

Findings

2.11   Learning and teaching is underpinned by a specific higher education Teaching and Learning Policy which is reviewed and overseen by the Assistant Principal and the Higher Education Manager. The policy includes the College's approach to staff development. Good practice in learning and teaching is identified and disseminated via the Learning Development Group (LDG) which is made up of teaching staff from each curriculum area. Teaching development is further supported by an Observation of Teaching and Learning (OTL) system and two days remission per annum for scholarly activity. The College's policies and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* of the Quality Code.

2.12   To determine whether this Expectation had been met in practise, the review team tested the evidence by speaking to senior staff, academic staff, and students and their representatives, and by scrutinising relevant policies, procedures and meeting minutes.

2.13   The College makes effective use of the LDG to identify and disseminate good practice in learning and teaching. Exceptional practitioners from across the College are nominated to join the group to share their expertise. The team heard that decisions made by the LDG are informed by various committees and also the process for teaching observations. Members of the LDG were able to describe actions which had come out of the group, such as the organisation of a teaching festival (TeachFest).

2.14   Although a relatively new introduction for observations specific to higher education staff, the OTL scheme is working effectively and staff spoke enthusiastically about its value for further improving standards of teaching. Consistency in the OTL process is enhanced in its first year by most observations being conducted by the Higher Education Development Coordinator. Staff are also provided with additional support in terms of e-learning. Subject areas nominate a VLE champion and there is a dedicated e-learning tutor to assist staff in using technology to aid the delivery of teaching. A demonstration given to the review team showed the VLE site for staff to have extensive information about development activities as well as clearly accessible policies.

2.15   The review team heard that teaching staff feel well supported in terms of continuous professional development. New staff are directed to complete teaching qualifications within five years of commencing service at the College and, to support them, the College provides remission and a subject specialist mentoring system. Staff are beginning to benefit from Higher Education Academy fellowships and some have successfully completed postgraduate qualifications.

2.16   The College has a range of effective processes in place to monitor student satisfaction of learning and teaching. Students complete module evaluations which feed into course SARs and Annual Course Reviews (ACRs), and also surveys such as the NSS, and internal course and student surveys. As a result of an internal course survey, the team saw evidence of a significant improvement in student satisfaction with regards to assessment feedback on the FdSc Veterinary Nursing programme. Students whom the review team met

confirmed that they find the teaching to be engaging and appreciated the range of methods used by staff to help them learn. However, students did suggest that course organisation had been inconsistent and this was reflected in the low NSS score for course organisation and management (54 per cent). The College has recognised the need for improved communication and has recently started piloting a new text messaging service. The review team therefore **affirms** the piloting of text messaging software to address student concerns in respect of course management and organisation.

2.17   The review team concluded that the College has effective policies and processes in place to deliver, monitor and enhance learning and teaching. This happens through effective systems of observation and support for staff development and a wide range of processes in place to monitor and act upon student feedback about the quality of learning and teaching. The College has recognised its weakness in course organisation and management and has started to take action to address it. Therefore, the Expectation in *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* of the Quality Code is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement*

Findings

2.18   The Deputy Principal for Finance and Resources, along with the SMT, are responsible for the strategic allocation of resources to support and enable students to develop their potential. The allocation and monitoring of resources are also considered at monthly managers' meetings and at course validation. Students have access to both group and individual tutorials with their Course Manager. The College offers a range of specialist support for students, including educational psychologists, and assisting students with applying for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), and there have been recent appointments of specialist leads on mental health, Autism, and dyslexia. Student ability is assessed at application and induction and students who may require support are referred immediately to the Learning Support Team and Student Services. Those with complex needs are referred to an Admissions Panel. The Learning Support Policy makes reference to the specific needs of higher education students. The College's policies and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement* of the Quality Code.

2.19   The review team tested the support and resourcing for students by meeting with senior, academic and support staff, and with students and their representatives, and by scrutinising the documents referenced in the previous paragraph.

2.20   Student transitions between levels are supported by 'bridging programmes'. These programmes are free to students and are designed to increase understanding of what is expected of them academically when progressing from level 5 to level 6. The review team met a number of students who confirmed that they had found the bridging programmes extremely useful, most notably as a way of understanding the amount of academic progression required and the changes in assessment criteria. These findings were supported by the learner induction survey. The review team therefore recognises the effective use of bridging programmes to facilitate student progression from level 5 to 6 as a feature of **good practice** (see also the section on Enhancement).

2.21   The review team found clear evidence of students receiving helpful and comprehensive support. Support staff were able to give numerous examples of the way the College had reacted to the support needs of students, including the introduction of a 'Fitness to study' policy in recognition that disciplinary procedures were sometimes inappropriate for students with additional needs. The support for students is continually monitored, for example through a focus group led by support managers, and internal surveys. The review team was particularly impressed with the early identification of support needs and the ongoing level of support for students throughout their time at the College. This included the specialist provision offered to higher education students, most notably the recent appointment of specialist leads for mental health, autism and dyslexia. As a result, the review team regard the range of specialist student support and expertise provided by the College from application through to graduation as a feature of **good practice**.

2.22   The review team heard from both staff and students about the value of group and individual tutorials. Both course managers and support staff are able to use specialist software to track and update student progress. The review team was able to see, via a demonstration, how the College is effectively using the system to make links between course managers and support staff to provide a triangulated approach to ongoing student

progression and development. The team therefore regard the integration of academic and pastoral support for students provided by course managers and support staff, and aided by specialist software, as being a feature of **good practice**.

2.23   The review team saw evidence that resources to support students are continually being developed, monitored, and reviewed. For example, the ongoing development of support services and learning resources is discussed within the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan (QuIP). Students benefit from a wide variety of specialist facilities which are required by the vocational nature of programmes offered by the College, and they are able to contribute their opinions on resources in a number of ways, including at course team meetings and though student representation on committees such as the LRC Users Group. The team heard about other developments including the recent provision of a dedicated area for higher education students in the LRC, changes to the College's online repository, and the College's capital development plans to accommodate the anticipated growth in numbers of higher education students in future. Students confirmed they were happy with the LRC and the IT infrastructure, including the VLE, and the team saw evidence of changes being made to the VLE and the LRC as a result of feedback from students.

2.24   The review team concludes that the College effectively allocates resources and supports students to reach their potential. The College responds to student feedback and features of good practice were identified in the areas of student transitions, and academic, pastoral and specialist support throughout the student's time at the College. The review team therefore concludes that this Expectation in *Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement* of the Quality Code is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student engagement*

Findings

2.25   The College has a Learner Voice Policy with an extensive section on engagement of higher education students in feedback and representation. Student representatives are elected by their peers at course level and attend course team meetings, curriculum section meetings, and various boards and committees, including the Board of Governors. The College has a Students' Union which is supported by a Student Experience Officer. The College uses a variety of methods to obtain feedback from students, including themed and programme and level-specific focus groups, as well as different surveys.

2.26   The review team tested the College's engagement of students by meeting with senior and support staff, and with students and their representatives, and by scrutinising the documents referenced in the previous paragraph.

2.27   Student representatives whom the team met confirmed that the College provides them with a Student Representative Handbook and that they are clear about their roles. Students and their representatives also confirmed that students are closely involved in the decision-making processes of the College. Students are involved in the validation and review of programmes and representatives attend a number of different boards and meetings. The College had recognised that further development of student representatives would be beneficial. As a result, 31 out of the 42 representatives have now received training as part of the collaboration with Higher York, and the College is planning to offer further development to existing representatives so they can provide peer support and training for representatives in lower years. All students whom the team met could identify their representatives and agreed that it was a useful and effective system.

2.28   The review team heard about the many other effective ways in which the student voice is captured at the College. Action plans are drawn up to address issues arising from internal surveys and students are also given the opportunity to provide feedback via a suggestion box. These have prompted several changes which are communicated to students through the 'you said, we did' system. In addition, the Learner Voice Committee, chaired by the Deputy Principal for Students and Standards, collects and analyses feedback from students thus ensuring the student voice is considered at a strategic level. Students are also invited to attend staff development events (see paragraph 1.27). On the basis of the evidence provided, the team believes that the extensive mechanisms to engage and respond to the student voice at all levels are a feature of **good practice** (see also the section on Enhancement).

2.29   The review team concludes that the College effectively engages students. Students are clear about how the representation system works and the College has identified any weaknesses in the system by, for example, providing enhanced training for representatives. The College's methods for engaging and responding to the student voice is regarded as a feature of good practice. The review team therefore concludes that this Expectation in *Chapter B5: Student engagement* of the Quality Code is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.30   For its teacher training provision, the College makes use of the University of Huddersfield's moderation processes. For the remainder of its provision, the awarding bodies set policies and procedures for validating assessment strategies, regulations and the recording and communicating of assessment decisions. The awarding bodies conduct Course Assessment Boards (CABs) that are attended by College staff. Decisions regarding academic misconduct are recorded at the CAB. The College manages its assessment processes within its Higher Education Assessment Policy and Procedures. The policy and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning* of the Quality Code.

2.31   The review team met with senior staff, academic staff, and students. The team also reviewed a validation report, module handbooks, external examiners' reports, programme handbooks, the Higher Education Assessment Policy and Procedures, minutes from student focus groups, and staff development events which had taken place to support staff engaged in higher education assessment.

2.32   The sample validation report seen by the review team showed a clear discussion of assessment strategies and their appropriateness for that programme. Module handbooks give assessment deadlines, set out the tasks and state which learning outcomes are being assessed. In addition, programme specifications are included in programme handbooks. Both coursework and examinations are marked anonymously. Students receive feedback on their examinations and, for coursework, there is a clear feedback sheet and grading criteria. Students are clear about what they have to do to achieve a particular grade and what they have to do to improve. External examiners also praise the quality of feedback given to students.

2.33   The College provides good support for staff involved in assessment (see also paragraph 1.27). In addition, the College has a number of staff development events planned for the academic year 2013-14, including preparation for examination boards, examination procedures and what works in higher education assessment. Examination and coursework questions are internally moderated before being sent to the relevant external examiner who then comments specifically on assessment in their report.

2.34   The team saw evidence that monitoring of assessment practices is effective and that action is taken to improve areas of weakness. For example, it became evident from student focus groups held in 2012-13 that some staff were not using grades appropriately and the College noted it as an area for development. As a result, an interactive staff development event was held in September 2013 on assessment grading.

2.35   Overall, the review team concludes that the College's approach to assessment is robust. Grading criteria is clearly articulated and communicated to students, both external examiners and students commented on the high quality feedback and it is evident that moderation takes place of both questions and marked examinations and coursework before confirmation by external examiners. Support for staff involved in higher education assessment is appropriate and focused. Therefore, the College's policy and procedures

meet the Expectation in *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning* of the Quality Code and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External examining*

Findings

2.36   External examiners are nominated by the College and are appointed by the awarding bodies. The role of the College in relation to external examiners is to provide an outline of the College structure, the academic cycle and the external examiner's role in such, and to share key dates. Both validating partners have external examiner report templates and a serious concerns procedure. All examination papers with model answers are approved by external examiners. External examiners' report are sent to the validating partner who then sends them to the College's Higher Education Manager. The College then has its own processes for monitoring actions arising out of external examiners' reports. The College's procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code.

2.37   In testing the College's procedures, the review team met with senior and academic staff and students, looked at external examiners' reports, and reviewed the minutes of course team meetings, HECQC, and SMT Curriculum and Quality Committee minutes.

2.38   Senior and academic staff confirmed that the College Higher Education Manager disseminates external examiners' reports to section leaders and course managers. Course managers compile the annual course review and have responsibility for liaising with external examiners. Annual course reviews include a section on external examiners and a detachable sheet which is the programme team's response to any issues raised and which is then sent to the external examiner. Course team meetings monitor actions taken in response to external examiners' reports. The HECQC then receives the College higher education SAR which includes an overview of external reports.

2.39   Students whom the team met confirmed that they had opportunities to meet external examiners at mid and end-of-cycle visits. In addition, student representatives attend annual course review evaluation meetings which include discussion of external examiners' comments. Students confirmed that the College puts annual course reviews and external examiners' reports onto the VLE.

2.40   Overall, the review team considered the College's processes to be robust for actioning and monitoring issues from external examiners' reports and having oversight of such issues in senior committees. The students can identify their external examiner and are aware of discussions around the issues raised in these reports. In addition, all the students met by the review team were aware of the existence of external examiners' reports on the VLE and knew how to access them. The team therefore concludes that the College's processes meet the Expectation in *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.41   The annual review of programmes is conducted in line with the processes established by the validating partners. The College has processes which feed into the partners' procedures and which are reviewed as part of the College's quality cycle for policies and procedures. The College's Quality Assurance Handbook gives guidance on what is required and where responsibility lies. The processes meet the Expectation in *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* of the Quality Code.

2.42   In testing the College's processes, the review team met with senior staff, academic staff and students. In addition, it reviewed the processes in the College's Quality Assurance Handbook, and looked at minutes from course team meetings, Higher Education Managers' meetings, meetings of HECQC, and minutes of SMT Curriculum and Quality Committee.

2.43   The members of staff whom the review team met showed a clear understanding of the processes involved in annual monitoring. Senior staff gave a detailed explanation of the relationship between annual course reviews and Section SARs and how these feed into an overall College SAR and a College higher education SAR, and subsequently Quality Improvement Plans (QuIPs). The team saw evidence that reports and action plans are effectively monitored by a SAR panel, section leaders and relevant committees. The review team saw evidence of discussions of action plans and QuIPs at programme level and in HECQC meetings. The SED acknowledges that the production of reports on higher education provision is an area for further development to ensure consistency across curriculum areas. The team agrees and therefore **affirms** the College's provision of staff development to address inconsistency between annual course reports.

2.44   Overall, the review team saw clear lines of responsibility and timescales for completing annual monitoring, clear templates as to what such reports should contain, and clear monitoring of action plans at all levels, including student representation at programme level. The team therefore concludes that the College processes meet the Expectation in *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* of the Quality Code and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.45   The College provides students with a range of information about how to make academic complaints and appeals. For complaints, this includes the College website and the Customer Service Policy and Complaints Procedure. The College makes this policy available to students through the intranet, as a hard copy on request, and by signposting it in programme handbooks. The College operates a separate complaints procedure on student admissions. The procedures for making academic appeals are outlined in programme handbooks, in line with the College template for handbooks. The College's awarding bodies are ultimately responsible for academic standards and students are directed to use their procedures if issues cannot be resolved appropriately within the College. The University of Huddersfield's procedures for complaints and appeals are included in its Network and Consortium Handbook and are readily available to students. The College's policies and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals* of the Quality Code.

2.46   In order to test the effectiveness of the College's procedures, the review team scrutinised the Customer Service Policy and Complaints Procedure, agreements with awarding bodies, SMT meeting minutes and its Terms of Reference, and the Annual Complaints Report. The team also met with senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students.

2.47   The evidence confirmed that the College has an effective system for identifying, dealing with, and monitoring complaints. The team heard from academic staff that students are made aware of complaints and appeals procedures at induction, and also through their handbooks and the VLE. Students confirmed that they knew where to find the information should they need it. In addition, staff reported that students often ask tutors directly for guidance on how to make complaints. There is evidence that the College has suitable guidance on steps required to address issues, including appropriate timescales for resolution, and that the College uses information gathered about complaints and appeals to enhance provision. High level summaries of the College's analysis of complaints are reported at course managers' meetings and followed up with actions. Any issues not resolved at these meetings are referred to section leaders.

2.48   The College's relatively small higher education provision and its strong relationships with students and their representatives means that many issues are dealt with informally before they become formal complaints. The detailed Annual Complaints report showed that, in 2012-13, only four formal complaints were made about higher education provision. All formal complaints are registered with the Principal's Office and thereafter communicated to the appropriate section of the College for a response within published timescales. The annual report is produced by the Deputy Principal for Students and Standards and discussed at SMT Curriculum and Quality Committee and then the Finance & General Purpose Governing Committee.

2.49   Overall, the team found that the complaints and appeals systems operated by the College are effective and transparent and afforded significant opportunities for the College to enhance provision through its formal and informal processes. The team therefore concludes that the processes and procedures in operation at the College meet the Expectation in *Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals* of the Quality Code and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others*

Findings

2.50   The College has a range of responsibilities delegated by its awarding bodies for managing and delivering substantial elements of validated programmes. For the purposes of this Expectation, these include programmes which incorporate work experience and work placements and which address national expectations of providers of foundation degrees, and meet PSRB requirements. The College's approach to managing its responsibilities is located in its Higher Education Careers Education, Guidance and Employability policy which has been benchmarked against *Chapter B4: Student employability and achievement* of the Quality Code, and other relevant reference points. The Assistant Principal (College Development) has strategic responsibility for this policy and reports to the Corporation and SMT. The policy sets out expectations on ways to enhance employability and lists mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating its effectiveness. Students on foundation degree programmes have work placement modules and must satisfactorily complete requirements to gain academic credits. Students on other programmes, such as the three year BSc(Hons) Animal Management and Science programme, gain notional 'P' credits for work experience. The College's policies and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code.

2.51   The team reviewed a range of documents, including the HAU Annual Critical Appraisal Report (2011) (on the previous version of the Veterinary Nursing programme) which included an evaluation of placements and an overview of the College's account of how National Occupational Standards and RCVS requirements were met. The team also discussed these issues in meetings with students, staff, and employers.

2.52   The team found that the College fulfils its responsibilities for managing student work experience and placements and actively manages the oversight structures for placement learning. Health and safety issues are given priority on placements by liaison between programme leaders and the College Health and Safety Officer with clear accounts of the role and importance of this area outlined in course handbooks and the assessment of risks entailed in each placement. Placements cannot begin until health and safety procedures are completed and signed off. Reasonable adjustments in placement expectations are negotiated by College staff to meet, where possible, individual student needs. Students and employers whom the team met reported good support from the College in establishing and managing placements.

2.53   The team saw evidence that the College effectively integrates work experience into its programme design. The newly validated FdSc Veterinary Nursing programme also has PSRB requirements and National Occupational Standards mapped into its programme specifications to enhance the substantial placement period required by RCVS. To further support this programme, the College appoints a Placement Officer to oversee placements. This role is normally held by a veterinary nurse lecturer who must visit the placement a minimum of once each academic year. Students are further supported by a work-based nominated clinical tutor.

2.54   The review team found that personal development planning is embedded in vocational placement modules and that college-based learning is infused with practical

professional activities to enhance student employability. The College is strongly networked with external professional, commercial and employer bodies to maintain currency in updating curricula and enhancing opportunities for student placements and future employment.

2.55   The College has recently appointed a Higher Education Careers and Progression Officer who will enhance opportunities to identify and develop key transferability and employability skills. The College has plans to appoint designated guidance staff to undertake the work placement approval processes and opportunities will be sought to carry out spot-checks on placements.

2.56   Overall, the team found that the College has effective policies and procedures in place to manage work experience and work placements delivered through employers. Students and employers commented positively on the support they receive from the College and the team saw evidence that the College's quality assurance procedures for managing placements work effectively both in design and in practice. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research degrees*

Findings

2.57   The College does not offer research degrees.

Quality of learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.58   In reaching its commended judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area were met and the associated level of risk in each case was low. The provider has clear plans to further enhance quality. Student engagement in the management of this area is comprehensive and well supported, while managing the needs of students is a clear focus of the provider's strategies and policies.

2.59   There were five features of good practice: the significant involvement of employers in curriculum design, development and approval processes (Expectations B1 and B8); the integration of academic and pastoral support for students provided by course managers and support staff, and aided by specialist software (Expectation B4); the range of specialist student support and expertise provided by the College from application through to graduation (Expectation B4); the effective use of bridging programmes to facilitate student progression from level 5 to 6 (Expectation B4); and the extensive mechanisms to engage and respond to the student voice at all levels (Expectation B5). There were no recommendations in this area. In addition, the review team can affirm that the College is already taking appropriate action in two areas where it was recognised further work would enhance practice and contribute positively to the student experience: the provision of staff development to address inconsistency between annual course reports (Expectation B8); and the piloting of text messaging software to address student concerns in respect of course management and organisation (Expectation B3). The review team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at Askham Bryan College is **commended**.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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

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

Findings

3.1 The College has a Public Information Policy which has recently been reviewed. This policy sets out the College's guidelines for the information that it makes public about higher education provision and includes the revision and dissemination of policies and the management of data. This policy has been mapped against, and directly quotes, *Part C: Information about higher education provision* of the Quality Code. Data is reviewed annually as stated in the policy with quality oversight the responsibility of the Marketing Manager and the Higher Education Manager. There is a student charter which sets out minimum expectations in regards to the information about higher education provision that is given to applicants.

3.2 The three main channels of dissemination for information about higher education provision are via UCAS, the College's website and Prospectus. The website has a dedicated section for higher education, which includes information on programmes, the College, and information for applicants. Both the website and the VLE were recently reviewed and changes made. The Higher Education Manager has responsibility for uploading the Key Information Set (KIS) and ensuring that it is transparent and accessible via the College's website. A number of stakeholders across the College are involved in the development and production of the Prospectus, including support departments, students, course managers and awarding bodies. There is an annual review process for the Prospectus which is set out in the Public Information Policy. The process for checking course information involves course managers liaising with the marketing department. Awarding bodies also confirm the accuracy and branding of information for new programmes.

3.3 The content and format of course handbooks are the responsibility of course managers with overall quality being controlled by the Higher Education Manager and monitored by the awarding bodies. There are standard templates for both programme and module handbooks. Programme handbooks provide extensive information for students on a range of topics including assessments, complaints and appeals, student support and learning resources.

3.4 The review team tested that information was fit-for-purpose, trustworthy and accessible by speaking to students and staff, and by scrutinising the documents outlined above, and the relevant sections of the website and VLE.

3.5 Students whom the review team met confirmed that the information provided by the College prior to arrival was satisfactory and that they had been able to find out what they needed to know about the College via the website and by visiting the College. Evidence from the student submission, the induction survey and meetings with students also confirmed that programme handbooks and the website are fit-for-purpose and useful. It was apparent from meetings with staff that they adhere to the Public Information Policy and that they discharge their responsibilities for the upload and maintenance of information about higher education provision. Academic staff confirmed that programme handbooks go through a moderation

process to ensure accuracy. Students also confirmed that they knew where to find information regarding complaints and appeals in their programme handbooks.

3.6   The review team was able to check the quality, accuracy, and accessibility of the policies, course information, and external examiners' reports provided to students on the VLE. The College has invested in its IT infrastructure, including the VLE, and students commented that the new systems are much improved. Staff are encouraged to use the advanced features on the VLE and they are also able to access College policies, as well as those of the awarding bodies, via appropriate links. The College has provided further support for staff by appointing an e-learning tutor.

3.7   Support staff and student representatives confirmed that the College charter had been produced in consultation with the student body. The charter is extensive and provides a list of expectations as well as a dedicated section on higher education. New students are given a USB wristband, containing the charter, in a welcome pack which is issued during induction.

3.8   Overall, the College, in conjunction with its awarding bodies, has in place effective quality assurance policies and procedures for checking the accuracy of information about its higher education provision. Both staff and students confirmed that the main sources of information are fit-for-purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Part C: Information about higher education provision* of the Quality Code is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Information about higher education provision: Summary of findings

3.9   In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk was low. There were no recommendations, affirmations, or features of good practice. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information produced about its higher education provision **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College's inclusive approach to enhancement of student learning opportunities uses the skills and knowledge of a range of individuals and bodies, including staff, students, employers, and employer and commercial bodies. The College's approach to enhancement is outlined in its Quality Handbook. This document brings together a large number of policies and procedures for quality assurance and enhancement that are collectively known as the Quality Management System (QMS). The handbook sets out the ethos for quality improvement, containing a description of its purpose and general principles, key structures, services and activities and that progress is evaluated against quantitative and qualitative data. It identifies key roles and responsibilities for managing the system and that the Deputy Principal for Standards and Students oversees the system and identifies all staff as having a responsibility to enhance provision. It is updated on a biannual basis.

4.2 The team looked at how the College operates its stated approach to enhancement by reviewing a number of documents including SARs, QuIPs, committee minutes and reports, reviews and annual monitoring reports. The team also discussed enhancement in meetings with the Principal, senior and academic staff, employers, students, and student representatives.

4.3 The team found that the College was able to identify many examples of how it has taken deliberate steps to enhance its higher education provision and how staff have been encouraged to broaden their academic and professional experience, and use their own vocational expertise. There is extensive and systematic liaison between the College and significant employer and professional bodies, both regionally and nationally, such as Landex and Flamingo Land. These professional relationships enhance provision for student learning both in terms of practical vocational opportunities, such as placements, and by maintaining the currency of the curricula on offer to students. The team noted the high level interest given to vocational and academic enhancement through the appointment of lead governors with current professional and industrial leadership experience. The professional expertise of staff is developed further by opportunities to engage in vocationally relevant training and study up to and including PhD level, and academic staff were able to cite examples of how professional development opportunities had enhanced their practice.

4.4 The quality assurance and enhancement cycles operate efficiently with reports and data from programme teams and students being considered at a strategic level by the College's senior committees and actions subsequently taken to address and improve practical and strategic issues. Academic staff showed an awareness and understanding of the quality improvement cycle, and knew how to access policies and information as required, for example on good practice already in existence at the College. Course leaders reported how good practice was identified and disseminated by mechanisms such as the deliberation of findings from external examiners' reports, and discussions taking place at different levels, including by section leaders, course teams, and at course managers' meetings. The team noted the College's recent creation of a Governors' Quality and Standards Committee as another significant body to review quality enhancement arrangements. The team therefore concludes that the proactive and systematic approach of staff across the College to the enhancement of student learning opportunities is a feature of **good practice**.

4.5   Learning and teaching in higher education has been further enhanced by recent initiatives such as the Observation of Teaching and Learning (OTL) scheme, benchmarked against the UK Professional Standards Framework, subscription to the Higher Education Academy, and practical and strategic support derived from membership of the University of Huddersfield Consortium. Students whom the team met were complimentary about the learning and teaching at the College. The team was particularly impressed with the work carried out by the College to aid transitions for students between academic levels. The effective use of bridging programmes to facilitate student progression from level 5 to 6 has already been identified under Expectation B4 as a feature of **good practice**.

4.6   The strength of student representation has already been discussed in detail under Expectation B5. This is strongly related to enhancement as the College listens and responds to the student voice in numerous ways, including surveys, focus groups, and the formal student representation system. The team has already identified as a feature of **good practice** in Expectation B5 the extensive mechanisms to engage and respond to the student voice at all levels.

4.7   Overall, the design of the College's quality assurance and enhancement systems is comprehensive and its operation is effective. The College has multi-layered mechanisms for listening and responding to its key stakeholders and clearly takes deliberate steps at a strategic and programme level to enhance the student learning experience. There is a strong ethos of enhancement and examples of good practice are identified and disseminated effectively. The team identified three areas of good practice in this area and no recommendations or affirmations. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low. The team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at Askham Bryan College is **commended**.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.8   In reaching its commended judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk was low. The provider has clear plans to further enhance the quality of the student learning experience. Student engagement in the management of this area is widespread and well supported, while managing the needs of students is a clear focus of the provider's strategies and policies.

4.9   There were three features of good practice: the proactive and systematic approach of staff across the College to the enhancement of student learning opportunities; the effective use of bridging programmes to facilitate student progression from level 5 to 6 (see also Expectation B4); and the extensive mechanisms to engage and respond to the student voice at all levels (see also Expectation B5). There were no recommendations or affirmations in this area. The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of learning opportunities at Askham Bryan College is **commended**.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The College has a Higher Education Careers Education, Guidance and Employability Policy that outlines the ways in which it aims to promote the employability of students.

5.2   Due to the nature of most of the programmes, students are given a wealth of practical experience which they will be able to take into employment. This experience takes place both on campus, with its 'outdoor classrooms', and through links with employers when on placements. Placement learning is embedded into a number of higher education programmes and the team heard from both students and employers about the range of relevant and worthwhile placements. Some students have been employed as a result of being on placement. Employers whom the team met all agreed that they found students and graduates from the College to be work ready and employable. Students are also given the opportunity to get involved in extracurricular activities that have an employability focus, such as volunteering, support for which is provided by the Student Experience Officer.

5.3   The ongoing personal and professional development of students is supported by the tutorial programme, with progression featuring highly in the tutorial scheme of work, and by workshops on career development. Employability of students is further supported by the recent appointment of the Higher Education Careers and Progression Officer. Students spoke positively about the current and future value of this appointment. The College is funding this post holder to undertake CEIAG training.

5.4   The College tracks employability statistics by using the Destination of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) survey and through internal data collection, and monitors the data as part of the HE Careers Education, Guidance and Employability Policy. Graduate destination data forms part of the KIS and the College was able to provide graduate case study profiles of student employability.

5.5   The College sees itself as having an important role in promoting progression to employment, particularly in the agricultural and horticultural sectors where it recognises the 'ageing workforce'. The College is pushing nationally to raise the profile of these subjects by working closely with Harper Adams University. This shows a strategic lead in terms of promoting student careers as does the composition of the College Corporation, which includes industry leaders.

5.6   The team heard of numerous examples of employer engagement with the College. For instance, employers are engaged in curriculum design and review through the use of Technical Advisory Groups. The needs of employers are also considered at course validation and review. The significant involvement of employers in curriculum design, development and approval processes has already been highlighted as a feature of **good practice** (see also Expectations A4, B1 and B8).

5.7   Employers did, however, state that the meeting of employers at the review visit was the first time that many of them had met one another. They stated the value of this meeting and so the College might wish to consider their suggestion to hold an employer and placement provider networking event.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

Blended learning
Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

Credit(s)
A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

Degree-awarding body
A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning
A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'.
See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award
The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement
The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

Expectations
Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

Flexible and distributed learning A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.
See also **distance learning**.

Framework
A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

Framework for higher education qualifications
A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS).

Good practice
A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

Learning opportunities
The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcomes
What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Multiple awards
An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

Operational definition
A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

Programme (of study)
An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

Programme specifications
Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

Public information
Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code
Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Subject benchmark statement
A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard
The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **subject benchmark statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)
An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation
Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.