

Higher Education Review of Hartpury College

July 2014

Contents

About this review	1
Key findings	2
QAA's judgements about Hartpury College.....	2
Good practice	2
Recommendations.....	2
Theme: Student Employability	2
About Hartpury College	3
Explanation of the findings about Hartpury College	4
1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards	5
2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities	13
3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision	31
4 Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities.....	34
5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability	37
Glossary	39

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Hartpury College. The review took place from 14-16 July 2014 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Dawn Edwards
- Mr Eric Macintyre
- Professor Diane Meehan
- Mr Neil Mackenzie (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Hartpury 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 4.

In reviewing Hartpury 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.

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/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Hartpury College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body **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 Hartpury College.

- The effective and widespread involvement of employers in curriculum design, development, approval and review processes (Expectations A5, B1, Enhancement).
- The varied and highly effective mechanisms used to engage students, individually and collectively, as partners (Expectations B3, B4, B5, B6, C, Enhancement).
- The extensive range of work placement and volunteering opportunities made available to students, which enhance employability skills and career prospects (Expectations B4, B10).
- The strategic approach to staff development and advancement, which is facilitated through the extensive range of opportunities offered (Expectations B3, Enhancement).
- The engagement of staff in research, scholarship and professional practice and the positive impact this has on the student experience (Expectations B3, Enhancement).
- The involvement of students in the design and development of published information for current and prospective students (Expectation C).
- The comprehensive range of support and resources provided to all students to enable them to develop personally, academically and professionally (Expectations B3, B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendation** to Hartpury College.

By 1 January 2015:

- report consistently and explicitly the recommendations from the Academic Standards and Quality Committee Curriculum Approval and Scrutiny Panel to Academic Standards and Quality Committee (Expectation A4).

Theme: Student Employability

The College's programmes are vocational and applied in nature. The College activities relating to employability focus on building employability skills into the curriculum, work-based learning and/or professional practice placements, field trips, visiting speakers from industry and volunteering opportunities. There is an extensive range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities offered to students to enhance their employability skills and prospects. There is also a varied range of opportunities for volunteering available to students, both on campus

and in other locations. Employers are actively engaged in programme approval and review. The Graduate achievement of College students is four per cent higher than the national average.

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

About Hartpury College

Hartpury College (the College) was established as an agricultural college in 1948. The College's mission is to '...provide relevant, effective and high quality education and training for land-based, sports and allied industries; locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.' In addition to the college-wide mission there is a higher education specific mission 'To provide outstanding learning opportunities and develop employment-ready graduates. Higher Education at Hartpury should free students to explore, to create, to challenge, and to lead.'

The first higher education programme was introduced in 1992, followed by an honours degree programme in 1994 and the first master's degree programme in 1999. Currently the College provides a range of level 2 to level 7 qualifications in the equine, animal, veterinary, land-based and sports sectors. In 2013-14 there are over 3,000 students enrolled, with 46 per cent (1,387) of these studying higher education programmes.

Higher education programmes centre on the sport, equine and animal subject areas, including veterinary nursing, and (to a lesser extent) agriculture and countryside applied in the context of science and or management. At the start of the academic year 2013-14, the College recruited to 25 undergraduate programmes and eight master's degree programmes. Higher education delivery is managed separately from the College's further education work and has a separate committee and management structure.

The College has had a long standing history of working with its sole awarding body, the University of the West of England, Bristol (the University), going back to 1997-98. In 1997, a 10 year Academic Agreement was signed confirming the College as an Associate Faculty of the University. The agreement was renewed for a further 10 years in 2009. Recognition as an Associate Faculty includes representation within the University's governance structure and varying levels of devolved responsibility. Many aspects of higher education activity within the College operate as any other Faculty within the University.

Structural links with the University provide for: access to the University's Careers and Employability Service; online advice and guidance available via the University's website and intranet; access to the MyUWE student portal; access to the University's Teaching and Learning Conference and scholarship networks for the College's academic staff; and participation in the University's student representative system.

A range of work has been conducted since the Integrated Quality Enhancement Review of the College in 2011 to increase the wider understanding of the need to enhance the higher education student experience. Key activities have focussed on the students' experience of a cohesive programme of study, associated academic support, investment in teaching and learning support for academic staff and the expansion and enhancement of physical resources.

The College has responded fully and effectively to the recommendations made in the Integrated Quality Enhancement Review report of October 2011.

Explanation of the findings about Hartpury 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.

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 an Associate Faculty of the University of the West of England, Bristol. The College Vice-Principal (Higher Education) is also the Dean of the Associate Faculty. The University holds ultimate responsibility for the setting and verification of the standard of all of the College's higher education awards through its Academic Regulatory Framework. The allocation of new programmes and modules to the appropriate level of the FHEQ is considered and approved by the College through the Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC) Curriculum Approval Scrutiny Panel before being formally approved by the University's Curriculum Approval Panel (CAP).

1.2 The team reviewed relevant College and University documentation, including quality assurance and curriculum approval documents, external examiner reports, programme specifications and assignment briefs. The team also met teaching staff to explore their use and understanding of the FHEQ as a reference point in the maintenance of academic standards.

1.3 Allocation of programmes to the appropriate level of the FHEQ is checked as part of curriculum development and approval in accordance with the University's Quality Management and Enhancement Framework (QMEF). Alignment of a programme with the FHEQ level is evidenced through the programme design and consultation form and Programme specification, both of which follow University templates. Alignment with the FHEQ was evident in Programme specifications but the review team did not see explicit reference to the FHEQ in programme design and consultation forms.

1.4 The ultimate responsibility for allocating each qualification to the appropriate level of the FHEQ rests with the University. The team concludes that the College is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities in meeting the expectation through close adherence to the awarding body's policies and programme specifications. Therefore, Expectation A1 is met both in design and operation and the associated level of risk 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

1.5 Consideration of the subject and qualification benchmark statements are made as part of the College's curriculum development and approval process prior to submission to the University for formal approval. A detailed description of how a programme takes into account the relevant subject benchmark statement is given in the programme design and consultation form and Programme specification. Programmes with professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements have this clearly stated on the first page of the Programme specification. Reference to qualification benchmark statements is contained in the programme design and consultation form and Programme specification for the College's foundation degree programmes.

1.6 The review team tested Expectation A2 through a review of curriculum approval documents, reports, annual programme reviews, annual monitoring reports and external examiner reports and programme specifications. The team also met with senior management and teaching staff.

1.7 Programme development teams consider and report on how programmes take account of the Quality Code and subject and qualification benchmark statements through completion of the programme design and consultation form and programme specification. Both of these documents are scrutinised by the ASQC Curriculum Approval Scrutiny Panel. The review team saw examples of programme design and consultation forms where subject benchmark statements are not only referenced but specific explanations provided as to how the programme has taken these into account. The level of detail demonstrates positive engagement of staff with these statements. Programme specifications explain how a programme is aligned with the Quality Code, subject benchmark statements and University policies and procedures, but it was noted by the review team that the extent to which these are taken into account is variable. The robustness of the College's consideration of subject benchmark statements was apparent in the minutes of the ASQC Curriculum Approval Scrutiny Panel. Instances were recorded where programme teams have been required to provide more detail on how a programme takes these into account in its development. The ASQC Curriculum Approval Scrutiny Panel also considers how programme teams take into account PSRB requirements.

1.8 Overall the review team considered that the College carries out its responsibilities effectively to ensure that programme design takes full account of relevant professional and subject benchmark statements. The team therefore concludes that Expectation A2 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

1.9 The Programme specification is the definitive programme record. The College is in the process of updating the format of its programme specifications following a change in guidance provided by the University. This change was made to ensure the specifications are aligned with the guidance in *Chapter A3: The programme level* of the Quality Code. The University template includes clear sections on programme aims and learning outcomes as well as details of assessment and an assessment map; a detailed description of the type of assessment the student will undertake and the weighting of its components. PSRB requirements are clearly stated on the front sheet of the Programme specification for those programmes with professional recognition.

1.10 The review team tested Expectation A3 by reviewing a range of programme specifications, as well as module guides and assessment briefs. The team also met with teaching staff and students to understand the impact of the Programme Specification content at programme level.

1.11 The College is updating the specifications for all of its programmes following a change to the University's credit framework. A review of curricula is also taking place, which will be completed by the end of the 2014-15 academic year. The review team noted the thoroughness with which the College is conducting this review. Programme specifications appear on the University and College websites and individual programme virtual learning environment (VLE) pages hosted by the University. The University and College websites contain a link to the specification for each programme.

1.12 The College's Programme specification, notably the inclusion of detailed information on assessment, has been commended by the University as an example of good practice. It noted the clarity, depth of information and transparency of the information provided. Students are informed of the specification for their programme as part of their induction. Information from the Programme specification is contextualised for students in the Programme Handbook and individual module guides. Where there are specific PSRB requirements these are clearly stated on the front sheet of the Programme specification. Students are clear about the PSRB requirements of their programme.

1.13 The review team concludes that the College makes available appropriate programme-level information. The information is clear, informative and accessible. The team therefore concludes that Expectation A3 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

1.14 The College follows University regulations on the approval and formal review of programmes. External input is an integral part of both processes with clear criteria for the nomination of external reviewers. Students are involved through their membership of the ASQC.

1.15 In testing the College's procedures, the review team met with senior and academic staff and examined College policies, examples of curriculum approval documentation and minutes of relevant committees.

1.16 A clear business case is developed for new programme proposals together with a market analysis. This is considered through College processes and forwarded to the University for consideration by the Portfolio Development Group. From 2014, the College requires that the market impact assessment is considered by the Higher Education Executive before being forwarded to the University. This is a thorough and robust process. Proposals are not forwarded to the University for consideration if the business case is not sufficient or if the proposed programme does not fit strategically with the academic portfolio of the College.

1.17 In accordance with the Academic Agreement with the University, the College has adopted a governance and committee structure with terms of reference that are closely modelled on those of other faculties within the University. This includes the ASQC whose terms of reference from 2013-14 have included 'to scrutinise all documentation relevant to programme and module approval and review and present recommendations to the Curriculum Approval Panel'. The Curriculum Approval Panel is the University's Curriculum Approval Panel, which is responsible to the University Academic Board for the approval of new programmes and modules and amendments to existing programmes and modules.

1.18 In response to this requirement and in light of the high volume of business to be undertaken by the ASQC during 2013-14, the College set up a sub group of ASQC, called the ASQC Curriculum Approval and Scrutiny Panel. The sub group's purpose was to scrutinise programme documentation on behalf of the ASQC. There are no formal terms of reference for this sub group. There is evidence to suggest that the sub group is helping to manage the increased volume of work efficiently and ensure that documentation presented to the Curriculum Approval Panel meets the University's requirements. However, reviewers found little evidence of formal and explicit reporting of the sub group to ASQC. As a result, the records of ASQC do not make explicit that the committee is fully discharging its responsibilities in line with its stated terms of reference. The team noted that the University had also recently drawn this concern to the attention of the College. The team was informed that the University had subsequently clarified and confirmed that the ASQC Curriculum Scrutiny Approval panel is able to scrutinise programme documentation on behalf of the ASQC and that further discussions are taking place to formalise its role. The team **recommends** that the College reports the recommendations from the ASQC Curriculum Approval and Scrutiny Panel to the ASQC consistently and explicitly.

1.19 Periodic review of programmes follows the University processes. The team saw examples of documentation associated with a number of reviews, for example, in sports

and in veterinary nursing and were able to confirm that the review process was rigorously conducted and comprehensive and effective reports produced. ASQC monitors all periodic review reports and the College has a clear timeline for the review of all programmes. The College has been commended by the University for the use of students in the feedback process. Matters raised through periodic review are detailed in an action plan which is monitored by ASQC.

1.20 A rigorous annual review process is undertaken at module, programme and departmental level. The reports are ultimately discussed and monitored at ASQC.

1.21 Overall, the review team found that the College's approach to approval and review is effective. The one recommendation in this area relates to an issue of record keeping rather than the rigour of the process of approval itself. The team therefore concludes that Expectation A4 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

1.22 The University has ultimate responsibility for ensuring external input into programme approval and review with an external reviewer being appointed for scrutiny of proposals. External reviewers are required to meet strict criteria and must be independent of the programme being proposed or reviewed. The comments of Curriculum Approval Panel members are carefully considered in the programme approval process. The process can also involve PSRB accreditation. Curriculum Approval Panels take particular note of external input and comments.

1.23 In testing the College's procedures, the review team met with senior and academic staff, and examined agreements with the degree-awarding body, College policies and examples of programme approval documentation.

1.24 Programmes in development or under review have a designated design team which is required to include subject external advisers. This is checked through the Programme Design and Consultation Document which contains a section on consultation with employer/industry experts. The College has also consulted with National Teaching Fellows and Learning and Teaching Fellows of the University in the design of programmes. College alumni may also be consulted. External examiners provide external input into programmes through their annual reports, making suggestions for programme development and possible amendment.

1.25 The College also uses Vocational Panels to inform curriculum development and review. The panels help to ensure the curriculum meets the needs of industry and/or employers (see paragraph 2.3 and associated good practice).

1.26 Overall, the College fulfils its responsibilities to its awarding body but also makes very good use of external reference points to inform its activities and further its employability agenda. The review team concludes that the Expectation 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

1.27 A framework for assessment at the College is provided in the University QMEF and University Academic Regulations and Principles. Specific guidance is provided in the UWE Hartpury Assessment Guidance 2013-14. This details what programme and module leaders should consider when designing assessment, including indicative assessment load based on the credit value of modules and types of assessment to consider. This guidance ensures the parity and consistency of assessment across the curriculum but also allows for flexibility of interpretation. Where programmes have a strong rationale for deviating from the guidance the matter is considered and approved by the Curriculum Approval Panel.

1.28 The review team tested the evidence by meeting with staff and students and reviewing a range of documents including regulations, approval and review documentation, external examiner reports, and module and course handbooks.

1.29 Detailed guidance on all aspects of the assessment process is provided in the College Higher Education Staff Handbook. In addition staff development sessions are held to support assessment practice. A template for assessment briefs ensures key information is considered when designing assessment and includes reference to the learning outcomes to be assessed.

1.30 Prior or experiential learning can be accredited for students and the process is devolved to the College by the University. There is a clear process for students to follow when making a claim and decisions are reached at the Accredited Learning Circumstances Panel. The process is clear, robust and fair to students.

1.31 The College has an effective system in place for the approval of assessments involving internal verification, checking by the subject manager and review by external examiners of assessment under controlled conditions. External examiners confirm the effectiveness and appropriateness of assessment as academically progressive in enabling students to achieve intended learning outcomes at the relevant level of the FHEQ. Students confirmed that they were clear about learning outcomes and credit values in assessment. They had been consulted about the recent change from a 15 to a 10 credit based system.

1.32 Overall the team concludes that the assessment processes and documentation are fit for purpose and effective. External examiners confirm that assessments are at the appropriate level. The review team therefore concludes that the College's procedures meet Expectation A6 and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.33 In reaching its 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. In all aspects of this judgement area the College complies with the requirements of its degree-awarding body. The team identified one recommendation only for this judgement area. The recommendation relates to a minor aspect of record keeping. The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body **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 The College follows the University's regulations in respect of curriculum design and approval as outlined in the University's QMEF. The processes are those set out in paragraphs 1.16-1.18.

2.2 The team reviewed the effectiveness of programme design and approval policies, procedures and practices by reading the minutes of meetings of the Higher Education Executive, the Associate Faculty Board (AFB), the ASQC, the ASQC Scrutiny and Approval Panel, the CAP, documentation submitted as part of the approval process, and by talking to academic staff, senior staff, support staff, students and employers.

2.3 There are clear processes in place for programme design and approval, which the College is generally operating effectively. External input is a requirement and well defined criteria are provided by the University in relation to the nomination of external reviewers. There is strong evidence of involvement from employers through Vocational Panels. The vocational relevance and currency demanded by employers is matched to programme aims. Vocational Panel comments are detailed in the programme design and consultation form and help ensure the curriculum meets the needs of industry and/or employers. The effective and widespread involvement of employers in curriculum design, development, approval and review processes is **good practice** (see also paragraph 4.6 and section 5).

2.4 Students and, where relevant, PSRBs, are also involved in programme design and development and meetings held with senior, academic and support staff, students and employers demonstrated awareness of the design and approval processes. The College provides a link to the University's approval guidelines in its Higher Education Staff Handbook. Staff confirmed that there was appropriate support and staff development in place in relation to processes and procedures, including through the Programme Managers Development Group (see also Expectation B8). The College, through membership of relevant University committees, is involved in the University's ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of the processes set out in the QMEF.

2.5 Overall, the review team concludes that the College's operationalisation of the University's procedures for programme design and approval and its support for staff undertaking programme design and approval are effective and meet the Expectation in *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval* of the Quality Code, and 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 policy and procedure for managing its responsibilities for fair admissions. These are consistently applied and are made explicit to students prior to application. The College has recently taken responsibility for the management of admissions from the University. The process has been well managed and has allowed the College to increase the volume and relevance of communication with students from enquiry to enrolment. Complaints and appeals procedures incorporate matters related to admissions, and these are also clearly available to prospective students.

2.7 The review team tested the operation of the admissions policies and procedures by scrutinising policy and operational documents and by talking to students, their representatives and staff.

2.8 Senior staff and support staff responsible for admissions at the College showed a detailed understanding of their responsibilities for admissions and reported that the move to take delegated responsibility for the management of admissions from the University had been smooth, eliminating areas of confusion that had been faced by students in previous years. Students confirmed they found the admissions process to be generally straightforward, easy to understand and fair. They also found the information they received directly from the College to be of a particularly high quality.

2.9 Data on applications and admissions is reviewed by the Widening Participation, Admissions and Access Committee. In addition, the College has voluntarily agreed to an independent review of its admissions procedures and processes by the organisation Supporting Professionalism in Admissions in order to assure themselves of their efficacy.

2.10 The review team concludes that the College has clear and consistently applied admissions policies and procedures which are accessible to students and staff. Therefore Expectation B2 is met and the associated 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 The College's approach to learning and teaching and the provision of learning resources is defined in its Teaching, Learning, Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy. This was developed with extensive involvement from teaching staff and is fully embedded across the institution. The responsibility for oversight and monitoring lies ultimately with the Associate Faculty Board, with further detailed work taking place through committees, in particular the ASQC. Teaching staff are very well qualified, both in terms of their subject-specific knowledge and their teaching qualifications. Ten staff have doctoral level qualifications, with further staff being supported through PhD study. There are extensive arrangements in place for the support and development of teaching staff. These are strategically led and positively influence the quality of teaching and the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2.12 To determine whether this expectation was met the review team tested the evidence through meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students, and by scrutinising relevant policies, procedures and records of teaching observations.

2.13 The College's new Teaching, Learning, Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy provides the framework for the effective management and delivery of learning and teaching at the institution. This strategy was developed through extensive consultation with staff and has been supported through a wide range of staff development opportunities and the development of a principle lecturer post in learning and teaching. A clear understanding of the College's approach was evident in all meetings with staff and students.

2.14 There is a high level of engagement in review and evaluation of teaching practice across the institution. Teaching observations are also used effectively across the College, and have a clear developmental focus. Furthermore, this results in the discussion, identification and dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching across the College.

2.15 The College also provides an extensive and strategically led staff development programme, which supports staff in the maintenance and enhancement of their knowledge and skills. The College also requires all new higher education teaching staff to undertake a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, within the first two years of their employment. The certificate is accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The College has 73 per cent of higher education teaching staff who have achieved HEA Fellow/Senior Fellow status. The strategic approach to staff development and advancement, which is facilitated through the extensive range of opportunities offered, is **good practice**.

2.16 Ten members of staff have doctoral qualifications and others are being supported to obtain qualifications at this level. This has resulted in a significant level of research activity amongst higher education teaching staff. There is a good level of support in place for scholarly activity with grants made available for research and other initiatives such as writing retreats in place. Student representatives sit on the group that allocates grants for research and scholarship. Students have evidenced the impact of both the educational and subject

specific research and scholarship as impacting positively on their experience at the College. In addition, staff and students regularly attend relevant conferences, with students encouraged and supported to attend and present with staff. The engagement in research, scholarship and professional practice and the positive impact this has on the student experience is **good practice** (see also paragraph 4.5).

2.17 There is a committee structure in place to monitor and evaluate teaching practice and the achievements of all students across the institution. This monitoring and evaluation has been effective in identifying potential areas for improvement, which has led to timely and effective changes, recognised and appreciated by students. The structures are also effective in disseminating good practice across the institution where it is identified.

2.18 The College provides very good learning resources to students, both physically and online. Significant investment has taken place in recent years to enhance the physical resources available and more is planned for the future. The VLE is used consistently by teaching staff across the institution, with effective monitoring of use taking place, which demonstrates that the interactive elements of the VLE are being utilised. Students reported having some issues around the use of the VLE in the past, with confusion regarding the specific purpose of the University and College systems. This feedback has been considered and actioned by the College with support in place for current students. There are plans to move to a single VLE in the near future.

2.19 The College has a clear strategic approach to learning and teaching which is positively impacting on the student learning experience. There are significant features of good practice in this area. The team conclude that the Expectation 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

2.20 There is a clear strategic commitment in the College to enabling the development and achievement of students. The Teaching, Learning, Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy, and the Higher Education Staff Handbook provide the framework and guidance for this work. There is an effective system of personal tutoring in place at the College, with a personal tutor provided to all students on all programmes at all levels. The role of personal tutors is clearly described within the Staff Handbook. Personal tutoring underpins the graduate development programme, which operates to support students in their development and professional progression. Students reported the ease with which they were able to access their tutors, both formally and informally. There is a minimum provision of meetings for all students with their tutor in order to ensure that all students engage with the support available. Students reported on the support available to them very positively.

2.21 There is a clear commitment to equality at the College, with significant services in place and oversight from committees. Disabled students are able to access personalised support following one-to-one meetings with learning support staff. The quality of this support has recently been affirmed by the College's achievement of The Equality Gold Standard awarded by Equality North East. International students are supported through a dedicated international centre and the global guides scheme.

2.22 The College produces a range of high quality publications and guides for students to inform and support them through their time at College. The students reported making regular use of the student survival guides and student diary in order to support their transition to study at a higher education level (see section 3). These publications make clear the opportunities available to students and encourage engagement with them throughout their time at the College.

2.23 Through the graduate development programme students are effectively supported through the transition into higher education and to develop professional skills that enhance their employability. There are numerous opportunities for students to engage in employability activities (see also Expectation B10 and section 5), including work placements and volunteering opportunities across all areas of the College's provision. These opportunities are highly valued by students and the effectiveness of the systems in place was emphasised in meetings with employers and students. The extensive range of work placement and volunteering opportunities made available to students, which enhance employability skills and career prospects, is **good practice**.

2.24 The extensive engagement with employers and specialists across the College's provision ensures that staff have relevant and up-to-date skills and knowledge to support student development, both personal and professional. Furthermore, the extensive and strategically led staff development programme supports staff in maintaining their skills and knowledge in this area.

2.25 The learning resources provided to students, which support both their academic and professional development, were felt by students to be good. Further investment in this area is planned and students have been involved in the development of these areas. The developments in learning resources are clearly linked to wider College strategies. All new programmes/modules are clearly communicated to staff responsible for the provision of

learning resources to ensure that adequate provision is in place for students. The comprehensive range of support and resources provided to all students to enable them to develop personally, academically and professionally is **good practice**.

2.26 The review team concludes that the College has a strategic commitment to enabling student development and achievement, which is effectively implemented. The expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student engagement

Findings

2.27 The College takes deliberate steps to engage students in both quality assurance and enhancement processes. Students are engaged at all levels of College decision-making, from course representatives through to membership of the governing body. Key developments at the institution are discussed with students and their feedback is carefully considered. Student feedback on learning and teaching is clearly taken into account, for example formative assessments now being introduced widely across the College's provision following student comments and a trial period.

2.28 The review team assessed the College's engagement of students by meeting students and their representatives, meeting senior staff, teaching staff and support staff, and by scrutinising a range of documentation including policies, strategies and survey reports.

2.29 There is a clear structure for student representation with students holding positions on all key decision-making bodies within the institution. Student representatives are supported to carry out their role by training from the University's Students' Union. There is some inconsistency in this support, although not to the extent that it has hampered representation taking place in practice. The College intends to address this through the creation of a new, independent, Students' Union in September 2014.

2.30 In meeting with students, senior staff, teaching staff and support staff it was clear that student feedback is consistently sought and acted upon at all levels of the institution. This commitment to listening to the student voice has acted to enhance the learning opportunities available to students and has impacted positively on learning and teaching practices. This was further evidenced by the production of an action plan by the College to address the issues raised within the student submission.

2.31 The team concludes that the College takes clear and deliberate steps to engage students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The College demonstrates that it is proactively engaging students through various mechanisms, its openness to comment and feedback from students, and the continual efforts to engage students in the design of services and their delivery. The varied and highly effective mechanisms used to engage students, individually and collectively as partners, is **good practice** (see also paragraphs 2.16, 2.37, 2.20, 2.21, 3.10 and 4.4).

2.32 The College engages students at all levels of the organisation and works proactively to ensure that students are involved as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their experience. The team concludes that the expectation is met and the 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

2.33 The College conducts assessment in accordance with the University's academic regulations and procedures. This includes meeting the University's requirements in relation to assessment and feedback, assessment offences and word count. In line with the University's regulations, the College uses the SEEC marking criteria. The College's Teaching, Learning, Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2014-2017 sets out the College's aims and enabling objectives in relation to assessment. The College's Higher Education Staff Handbook provides detailed information in relation to assessment. Assessment Guidance is written to support module and programme leaders during curriculum design and promote consistency, for example in relation to assessment loading, length and weighting. Field Boards and Award Boards, held at the College, are constituted according to University regulations, chaired by senior College staff and attended by external examiners. Assessment Offence investigations are conducted by the College in line with University Policy.

2.34 The review team met senior staff, academic staff, and students. The review team also looked at assessment documentation, including policies, procedures, strategies, information available to staff and students in relation to assessment, programme documentation, outcomes from programme approval meetings, external examiners' reports and minutes of Field and Award Boards and Accredited Learning Panel.

2.35 Assessment strategies are discussed and approved during programme approval and periodic review. Minutes of the CAP meetings and reports from periodic review events demonstrated clear discussion of assessment strategies and their appropriateness for a programme. External examiners are also required to comment on the effectiveness and appropriateness of assessment strategies. External examiners' reports noted that assessment criteria are clearly linked to learning outcomes and were supportive of the processes in place for the moderation of assignments and for internal verification of marking. Comments in external examiner reports in relation to assessment feedback were also positive.

2.36 Expected learner achievements are communicated within programme specifications. Programme handbooks contain assessment schedules, and module guides make students aware of expectations relating to assessment and include contextualised assessment guidelines as well as assessment briefs with hand in and return dates. There was some variability in students' views about assessment. The student submission noted that since 2011 student satisfaction with the criteria used in marking assessments has increased by 10 per cent in the National Student Survey (NSS), but also noted that marking criteria is still an area of concern to students, as is consistency of the marking process. However, students who met the team were clear about what was expected of them in relation to assessment and felt marking criteria were clearly articulated. Students also commented that they could seek formative feedback before final submission of an assignment and were appreciative of the wide range of practical and relevant assessment methods across subject areas. Students confirmed that they receive information about how to avoid plagiarism; this is contained in the Student Diary and Survival Guide and each assessment brief includes a statement about assessment offences. Appropriate adjustments

are made to assessments based on learning support requirements through the Learning Support Co-ordinator.

2.37 Consistent with University requirements, the College's target for feedback to students on assessed work is 20 working days and this is monitored by the College. The student submission noted that students are only moderately satisfied with assessment feedback as evidenced by the NSS, with considerable variation across programmes. Students who met with the team confirmed that they receive detailed and helpful feedback within the expected period and can request additional feedback sessions with tutors. The College also noted in its self-evaluation document that NSS feedback scores indicate that feedback remains an area where further enhancement activity is required, and in response launched a thematic review of feedback involving input from staff and students, which was ongoing at the time of the review.

2.38 Evidence showed that the College provides good support for staff involved in assessment and staff confirmed this in meetings. Guidance on providing feedback on student work is set out in the Higher Education Staff Handbook, and staff development sessions on feedback take place annually. There was also evidence of good practice in one subject area being adopted in another.

2.39 Overall, the review team concludes that the College's approach to assessment is robust. The College is receptive to and acts on feedback in this area. Expectations regarding assessment are clearly articulated and communicated to students and external examiners comment positively on the quality of feedback and the moderation process. Students are appreciative of the range of practical and relevant assessment tasks and the opportunity for formative feedback. Support for staff involved in higher education assessment is appropriate and focused. Applications for Accredited Learning and Accredited Experiential Learning are dealt with in a thorough and consistent manner. Therefore, the College's policy and procedures meet the Expectation 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

2.40 The College follows the University's procedures for the appointment and induction of external examiners. A Chief External Examiner is appointed by the University to the College's modular scheme. Field external examiners, with responsibility for subject-specific modules across both undergraduate and postgraduate provision, are nominated by the College through its ASQC which considers proposals for external examiners in line with the University's criteria for External Peer Review. Examiners are approved and appointed by the University. The College has one approved variation for its veterinary nursing provision where approval of the external examiner is completed in line with the requirements of both the University and the PSRB. Resources for external examiners are available on the University's website and external examiners are inducted through the University's processes. The University provides standard external examiner report templates and has in place a mechanism for raising serious concerns and for terminating appointments.

2.41 In testing the College's procedures, the review team met senior and academic staff and students. They read external examiners' reports and reviewed the minutes, reports and plans arising from the Higher Education Executive, the ASQC, Departmental Committee Meetings and Student Representative Staff Forums.

2.42 The review team confirmed that new external examiners receive relevant information from the University and the College. This includes, from the College, a module file containing all necessary information in relation to a module and its delivery. Attendance is required at the University's external examiner annual conference which staff from the College attend. There was evidence that external examiners approve all assessments taken under controlled conditions, including examination papers. The College has in place its own comprehensive internal verification system.

2.43 External examiner reports are submitted to the University and then referred to the College. Consideration of reports through the College's committee structure was demonstrated through the minutes of meetings. External examiners' reports were positive in relation to the College's provision. Departmental Committee Meetings formulate responses to the reports which are then approved for submission to the University by ASQC. The team saw evidence that Departmental Committee Meetings embed actions in relation to external examiner reports within their annual action plans (see also Expectation B8). These are also submitted to the University through the ASQC. ASQC minutes showed consideration of the University's overarching External Examiner Summary Report. The most recent report notes that external examiners agreed that the standards of provision delivered by the College are comparable to similar institutions and that learning outcomes are clearly mapped to assessments and are easily identifiable to students. The report also noted a number of areas of good practice and a small number of areas for concern and action, which the College was addressing.

2.44 Students confirmed that the College makes external examiners' reports available on the VLE and that they know where to find them.

2.45 Staff confirmed they are encouraged to act as external examiners at other institutions and that the College keeps a record of these appointments.

2.46 The review team considered the College's processes for actioning and monitoring issues arising from external examiners' reports to be robust, with oversight of such issues considered in senior College committees. All 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 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

2.47 The College follows the University's processes for annual monitoring and periodic review. The College utilises the University's standard templates and timeframes for the annual monitoring process, which involves the production of module, programme reports and departmental reports. Supporting data is made available by both the College and the University. Module reports are signed off by Subject Managers and Heads of Department. Programme Reports are written by Programme Managers and Annual Departmental Monitoring Reports, including action plans, are produced by Departmental Committee Meetings and approved and monitored by the ASQC.

2.48 The College follows the University's periodic review process, which involves the programme team meeting with a panel. Issues raised through periodic review are captured in an action plan monitored by ASQC. Changes to programmes or modules arising from periodic review must be approved through the Curriculum Approval Panel. Programme closure is first considered by the College's Higher Education Executive and then the AFB before being discussed with the University. The processes meet the Expectation in *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* of the Quality Code.

2.49 In testing the College's processes, the review team met senior staff, academic staff, support staff, students and employers. In addition, it looked at minutes from the Higher Education Executive, the AFB, and Departmental Committee Meetings; programme monitoring reports; departmental reports and action plans; and reports and action plans from periodic review.

2.50 Module reports follow a standard template and show discussion of academic performance, student feedback and good practice. The reports are made available to external examiners. Annual programme reports follow the University's template and guidance and make reference to a variety of sources of feedback including from students, external examiners and employers. Reports comment on actions from the previous year's report, the strategic direction of the programme, issues arising from the current year and associated actions, and identify good practice. The College has set out to enhance the production of annual programme reports, particularly in relation to the use and analysis of data, by setting up a Programme Managers Development Group and associated training. Annual Departmental Monitoring Reports, produced by Departmental Committee Meetings on the University's standard template, bring together evidence and action plans from annual module and programme reports. The team considered these to be thorough and reflective and they include an action plan with responsibilities for actions and timescales. Students are involved in annual monitoring processes through their representation on relevant committees and meetings.

2.51 The University reviewed its Periodic Curriculum Review process in 2011-12 and in 2013-14 the College's veterinary nursing and physiotherapy provision underwent periodic review using the new system; the report from this event included a number of commendations as well as conditions and recommendations, the latter being captured in an action plan monitored by the ASQC. In line with the University's procedures, the periodic review panel was chaired by a senior member of University staff and included academic and industrial external members, a recent graduate and members of staff from the College and University. The periodic review event included a meeting with students. The College

highlighted in its self-evaluation document that the University is considering the addition of a current student to the membership of periodic review panels from 2014-15.

2.52 Programme closure follows the University's process. The evidence read by the team demonstrated that the College has undertaken this process with due consideration to the quality of the student experience.

2.53 Members of staff whom the review team met had a clear understanding of the processes involved in annual monitoring and periodic review and confirmed that appropriate support and training is in place. The team saw evidence that reports and action plans arising from annual monitoring and periodic review are effectively monitored by Departmental Committee Meetings and the ASQC.

2.54 The review team concludes that the College's operation of the University's procedures for annual monitoring and periodic review and its support for staff undertaking these processes is effective and meets the Expectation. The associated 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

2.55 The College's process for handling complaints from students and applicants to the College is set out in its customer complaints procedure which is made available on its website; this includes information about the process for making a complaint and the timescales for resolution. If a complaint is not resolved through the College's procedures, students are directed to the formal complaints procedures of the University. Academic appeals also follow the University's procedures, which include information about timescales. Students are made aware of the complaints and appeals procedures and associated support in a number of ways including through the College website, the Student Charter, Programme Handbook, the Student Diary and Survival Guide and through signposting from the College website to the University's procedures. The policies and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals* of the Quality Code.

2.56 In order to test the effectiveness of the College's procedures, the review team scrutinised the Customer Complaints Procedure, the Student Charter, student support guides and Programme Handbooks and minutes of the AFB. The team also met with staff and students.

2.57 The evidence demonstrated that the College has suitable guidance on the steps required to address issues, and support is available to students making a complaint or appeal. While the guidance for students is currently distributed across a number of documents, students confirmed that they were clear about where to find the complaints and appeals procedures should they need them and were aware of the support available in relation to the processes, which included academic staff and Student Advisors. Staff are made aware through the Higher Education Staff Handbook of how to support students should they wish to make an appeal or complaint. A representative of the University Students' Union is based at the College three days per week and provides an independent source of information and advice for students.

2.58 The College's relatively small higher education provision and its strong relationships with students mean that many issues are dealt with informally before they get to a formal stage. The detailed complaints and appeals report, which was considered by the AFB in March 2014, showed that in 2012-13, only two formal complaints went to Stage 2 of the University's procedures, 18 academic appeals were made to the University by College students and there were no Office of the Independent Adjudicator investigations.

2.59 The team found that the complaints system operated by the College is appropriate with students referred to the University's systems for formal academic complaints which remain unresolved through the College's procedures, and for academic appeals. Students are aware of the systems for complaints and appeals and appropriate support is in place. The team therefore concludes that the processes and procedures in operation at the College meet the Expectation and the 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

2.60 In relation to this Expectation, and as outlined in the Academic Agreement, the College is responsible for the management of work experience and work placements in accordance with the requirements of the University's Work Based Learning Policy. The College views work placements as a core aspect of developing employability skills in its graduates and encourages all students to engage in work placements or volunteering. An enabling objective in its Teaching, Learning Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2014-2017 is to 'provide students with opportunities to learn through placements and/or volunteering and projects in a wide variety of different settings both in the UK and Internationally'. Credit bearing placements vary in length and may, for example, be of a few weeks duration or up to 60 weeks in length. Formal work placements are embedded within credit bearing modules. All foundation degrees contain a work placement opportunity and some honours degrees have a placement module or a sandwich year. For programmes where placements are not embedded, students are encouraged to engage in volunteering activities.

2.61 In order to assess the effectiveness of the College's procedures the team reviewed a range of information and resources regarding placements made available to students, staff and placement providers and also discussed these processes in meetings with students, staff, and employers.

2.62 The team found that the College fulfils its responsibilities for managing student work experience and placements effectively and that work experience is embedded into programme design and delivery. Support is provided by the Placement Coordinator and the Veterinary Nursing Placement Coordinator, as well as Placement Tutors. Placement Tutors are academic staff with responsibilities for supporting placements and are based within each Department. Information for staff acting as placement tutors is found in the Higher Education Staff Handbook. Students confirmed that they are given a Student Placements Handbook and that additional online guidance and support is provided. A Placement Provider Handbook, Module Guide and Placement Provider form is made available for Placement Providers and a process is in place for signing off a placement as suitable; if needed a site visit is undertaken. Staff confirmed that students can only start a placement if they have a Placement Approval Certificate, the Placement Provider form has been signed, they have completed the mandatory health and safety briefing and the Student Agreement form has been completed and signed. Placement tutors keep in touch with students through formal visits or other means of contact while they are on placement. Except in a small number of cases such as veterinary nursing, placement providers do not assess student work but complete forms at the end of placements which comment on various aspects of the student's conduct within the placement. In the case of veterinary nursing, placement providers undergo Clinical Coach Training, a requirement of the relevant PSRB.

2.63 Placement providers are asked to submit feedback on their experiences and this information is reported on annually in an overview report, which is submitted to the ASQC. Students and employers were positive about their experiences and reported good support from the College in establishing and managing placements. The College also offers students

a wide range of volunteering opportunities and these were highly valued by students (see also paragraph 2.23 and associated good practice).

2.64 The team concluded that the College has effective policies and procedures in place to manage 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 procedures for managing placements are working effectively. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation 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

2.65 The College does not offer research degrees.

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.66 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All applicable expectations have been met and risk is judged low in each case. No recommendations or affirmations were made in this judgement area. Six features of good practice were identified, covering six of the 10 applicable expectations in this judgement area. Student engagement in this area is widespread and supported. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities 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 Academic Agreement between the University and the College details respective roles and responsibilities for marketing and publicity. Approval of promotional material for programmes within the Associate Faculty modular scheme is the responsibility of both the University and the College. For the one programme outside this scheme (BSc Sports Therapy and Rehabilitation) only the University approves the promotional material. The College has a policy for the approval of public information that covers information published in electronic or written form in relation to academic programmes, services and corporate strategy and processes. Details of who in the College is responsible for the accuracy of information and its signing off is also included.

3.2 The review team tested that information was fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible by speaking to students and staff, and scrutinising documentation in printed format, on the website and the VLE.

3.3 A new College website, launched in 2013-14, was designed in consultation with students and the College's Executive Team and the College's Strategic Vision 2012-2015 is available on the website. The review team noted that there were two instances where wording of pages on the website might be ambiguous as it could imply the College is a University. The terminology is only cited on the title pages of the sections concerned. The detailed content of the pages is clear and has no such ambiguity. The College may wish to review the pages to satisfy itself that there is no potential for ambiguity or misunderstanding by those accessing the website.

3.4 The College provides information for prospective students through a number of mechanisms including its Higher Education Admissions Policy, Student Charter, Equine, Sport and Animal and Land prospectuses and course specific information, all of which are available on the website. The higher education prospectus has undergone significant development since the College's Integrated Quality Enhancement Review in 2011. In consultation with students it has been designed to give prospective students a clear picture of the student experience at the College, the programme content and what careers they can expect to be able to enter on completion of their studies. Case studies are provided by current and former students on how studying at the College has helped them achieve their career aspirations. The prospectus is supported by detailed information on the programme pages of the website, which includes entry requirements, course structure and fees. The review team noted substantial developments to the prospectus in recent years which has resulted in a suite of higher education prospectuses that are clear, extremely well designed and a valuable tool for prospective students.

3.5 The College maintains contact with applicants from offer to induction using a clearly developed timeline. This was verified by the review team in their meeting with students. The College informed the team about the challenge of managing the communications applicants receive from the University. This was confirmed by students in their meeting with the team and through student feedback at departmental meetings. As a result, and as an example of

the College's responsiveness to the student voice, all communication from application to registration is now managed by the College.

3.6 Information for current students is provided through a variety of mechanisms including programme handbooks, module guides, the VLE and the newly introduced Higher Education Student Newsletter. The Programme Handbook contextualises the Programme specification for students. As a result of student feedback the format of programme handbooks has been amended so that it focuses on programme specific information in order to enhance student engagement. The team noted that while the Programme Handbook introduced students to the programme, and outlines the programme experience, programme structure and modes of assessment, it does not provide specific details of the programme aims and learning outcomes, which are made available to students in Programme specifications published on the VLE. The College may therefore wish to consider the inclusion of these in the Programme Handbook or the insertion of a link to the relevant section of the Programme specification. Generic information that is applicable to all programmes is contained in the Student Diary and Survival Guide with the Study Skills Handbook providing key information on generic study skills. Students confirmed that they all receive these handbooks/guides during induction. Module guides contain the aims of modules. Of the two examples made available to the team one contained the module descriptor as required in the template, which includes the module learning outcomes, but one did not. Students noted that the module guides are extremely useful. The review team observed that they contain student-specific information that is written in clear and accessible language including the learning approach and detailed information on assessment.

3.7 Students have raised concerns over the communications they receive prior to returning each year. Communications come from both the University and the College, with the multiple sources causing confusion. As a result of concerns expressed by students the College, with effect from 2014, will be the sole source of communication for returning students. Information for returning students is also contained in the College's Higher Education Student Newsletter, a clear and notably student-friendly publication.

3.8 Responsibility for issuing students with the formal transcript of their studies and certificate resides with the University. Details are contained in the Student Diary and Survival Guide for students on how to access their mid-year marks and end-of-year transcript through the MyUWE portal. Following an Award Board, the College writes to any student who is eligible for an interim award if they are not to continue with their studies, asking them if they wish to accept this.

3.9 The Higher Education Staff Handbook provides information for those with responsibility for academic standards and quality and is a live document on the Higher Education Staff VLE that contains hyperlinks to supplementary information. Staff confirmed the usefulness of the Staff Handbook in guiding them to key policies and procedures with which they are required to be familiar.

3.10 The team were provided with a wide range of examples demonstrating student involvement in the design of published materials for prospective and current students. The team observed that the extent of student involvement in developing programme information has resulted in public information that is clear, accessible and student-focussed. The involvement of students in the design and development of published information for current and prospective students is **good practice**.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Quality of the information produced about its provision: Summary of findings

3.11 In reaching its 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. One feature of good practice was identified and there were no recommendations or affirmations. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information produced about its 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 There is a clear strategic approach to quality enhancement. Quality enhancement is defined in the Staff Handbook. All teaching staff are expected to engage in activities and opportunities to enhance the learning opportunities available, and good practice is effectively and systematically disseminated across the institution. This positively impacts on learning opportunities available to students throughout their time at the College. Quality assurance processes are designed to identify good practice and opportunities for enhancement. This is underpinned by extensive staff development opportunities, which are also strategically led and managed.

4.2 The review team tested the College's strategic and operational approach to improving the quality of students' learning opportunities through a review of the College's minutes of relevant meetings, the Staff Handbook, policy and procedure documentation, the student submission, and meetings with staff and students in order to understand the College's approach to enhancement.

4.3 The College's Staff Handbook defines the strategic approach to enhancement at the institution. This handbook and the supporting resources provided through the staff VLE provide an effective framework for enhancement activities and a clear focus on the improvement of student learning opportunities. Evidence from a number of programme areas was provided and numerous examples were discussed in meetings, for example the development of interactive elements of the VLE, the integration of scholarly activity within the curriculum and the development of formative feedback to support student development.

4.4 Enhancement activities are a clear part of the annual quality planning and review cycle, providing a systematic structure for the consideration of the enhancement of learning opportunities. These processes include annual programme review, external examiners' reports, teaching observations and staff development sessions. There is clear evidence that these processes lead to improvements of student learning opportunities. Moreover, students were found to be engaging positively in a number of these processes, with their comments leading to further changes and enhancements.

4.5 Senior managers and teaching staff met by the team demonstrated a clear understanding of the strategic approach taken to improve learning opportunities and provided many examples of how the strategy was put into operation. Staff development, underpinned by the higher education teaching staff development policy, provides many opportunities for engaging with enhancement activities, and these are proactively taken up by staff. Seventy three per cent of full-time higher education teaching staff have achieved fellowship/senior fellowship of the HEA, which contributes to the enhancement of teaching practice. Research and scholarly activity is also encouraged by the College, again with the emphasis upon improving learning opportunities for students. Staff research impacts upon the design and delivery of the curriculum, a fact that students recognise as a positive benefit and which contributes to the overall ethos of enhancement. Further enhancement activities include writing retreats for staff and the provision of scholarship and research grants. This range of enhancement activities further contributes to the good practice identified in paragraph 2.16.

4.6 Engagement with employers around the enhancement of learning opportunities for students is very effective and results in a highly relevant curriculum that reflects the most up-to-date thinking in the relevant sectors. Employers are engaged in programme design and review and are regularly engaged through both guest lecturing and provision of placements (see also paragraph 2.3 and associated good practice).

4.7 Good practice within the College is frequently identified and is subsequently disseminated across the institution. Annual review processes include sections for identification of good practice, as do individual staff appraisal processes. Teaching observations are used extensively across the provision at the College and these are seen by teaching staff as positive and contributing to enhancement. Good practice through these observations is communicated through staff development events and there is clear evidence of elements being adopted across the institution. Moreover, staff undertaking development through the HEA accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education or scholarly activity are encouraged to further contribute to the development of their own and their colleagues' practice through staff development sessions.

4.8 Quality processes are effective in identifying potential areas for enhancement activity at the College. There is clear evidence that where an element of practice is identified that requires change or improvement, swift and effective action is taken. The recent changes made to the VLE are an example of this (see paragraph 2.18). Student feedback is also taken fully into account in these processes and regularly leads to changes that are seen as positive by students and contribute to the enhancement of learning opportunities (see Expectation B5).

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.9 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no recommendations or affirmations. Two features of good practice have been specifically identified in this judgement but features of good practice in other areas, for example Expectations B3, B4, B5 and B6, recognise the effective approach taken by the College to enhancing student learning opportunities. The College has a strategic approach to enhancing student learning opportunities, which is effectively put into operation, and there is an overall ethos of continuous improvement. The range and depth of enhancement activities taking place at the College, and their significant impact on the learning opportunities available to students, is considered by the team to go beyond the expectations of the Quality Code and is therefore **commended**.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 There is an extensive range of curricular and extracurricular opportunities offered to students to enhance their employability skills and prospects. This is further enhanced by the varied opportunities for volunteering which are available to students, both on campus and in other locations. Students can also apply to be Graduate Assistants or Graduate Interns. Graduate achievement of College students is four per cent higher than the national average.

5.2 The College activities relating to employability focus on building employability skills into the curriculum, work-based learning and/or professional practice placements, field trips, visiting speakers from industry, and volunteering opportunities. Work placement units bearing credit are included on the vast majority of courses. Students the team met and the student submission confirm that these elements of the study programmes are highly valued.

5.3 Employer engagement is an integral part of programme approval and periodic review through the use of Vocational Panels and external reviewers, which ensures that employability is a key feature in programme design (see paragraphs 1.22 and 2.3).

5.4 The Higher Education Prospectus for each department has a major focus on employability through the use of case studies. The timetable facilitates activities related to employment with one day a week free from teaching. Facilities and events at the College provide the opportunity for students to work in real life settings, gaining valuable vocational experience (Equine Therapy Centre, Equestrian Centre Events, Canine Hydrotherapy Unit). Study weeks are built into the curriculum, which are designed to further develop students' skills or enable them to gain a national level qualification. Students may also take a range of short courses.

5.5 Placement providers are given a Placement Provider Handbook, Module Guide and Placement Provider form. There is a process for signing off a placement as suitable, which includes a Placement Provider form, and a site visit is undertaken if needed. Students can only go on a placement if they have a Placement Approval Certificate, the Placement Provider form has been signed, they have completed the mandatory health and safety briefing, and the Student Agreement form has been completed and signed. Student placements can be of a few weeks' duration up to the mandatory 60 weeks for veterinary nursing. In all cases students are visited on placement or the provider is contacted by College staff. Placement providers complete forms at the end of placements, which discuss various competencies demonstrated by students and can be used as evidence for professional logs, as in the case of veterinary nursing.

5.6 The range of volunteering opportunities available to students is a notable feature of the College activity in enhancing student employability. Many of the College facilities such as the Equine Centre are also operated as commercial ventures and students can either volunteer to work in them or indeed be offered paid employment. These opportunities are highly valued by students.

A member of staff from the University visits weekly to provide careers advice to students and there is also extensive information about career opportunities on the VLE and website. The student submission expressed some dissatisfaction with the careers advice provision at the College. However, the review team confirmed that this was more a problem of perception rather than lack of provision and information. As part of its employability strategy in higher education the College has created the new Innovation, Careers and Enterprise Centre, which is run by a Principal Lecturer in Employability and will include all employability activity, streamlining placement delivery and bringing careers advice in-house from UWE. The centre

has the potential to enhance the already excellent work that is being done by the College in promoting employability skills and activities for its students.

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.

QAA957 - R3795 - Oct 14

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786