

# Application for foundation degree awarding powers: Hull College Group

## Scrutiny team report

September 2015

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## About this report

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

The application was considered under criteria approved by Government in 2010. In advising on applications, QAA is guided by the Government's relevant criteria and the associated evidence requirements. QAA's work in this area is overseen by its Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP), a subcommittee of the QAA Board.

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

Scrutiny teams produce reports following each of the engagements undertaken. The final report reflects the team's findings and is structured around the four main criteria contained in the 2010 FDAP criteria,<sup>1</sup> namely:

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

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

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

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

## Executive summary

### **A Governance and academic management**

Hull College Group's financial management is careful and rigorous. There are appropriate structures and systems in place to provide for the management of staffing, allocation of resources, and business planning cycles. Deans are assisted in the development of their plans by the relevant central functions.

At the beginning of the scrutiny there were four awarding body partners. In 2012, the Group established a partnership with the Open University (OU) to become its main awarding body and courses with Leeds Beckett University and the University of Lincoln are being phased out. The partnership with Huddersfield University in the area of education continues.

Late in the scrutiny, the Group was invited to bid for partnership with the University of Hull (the University) to run undergraduate provision at the University's Scarborough campus as the University wished to withdraw from this teaching but retain a research facility there. This partnership and the attendant financial negotiations were completed in February 2015. Academic planning began immediately afterwards. The Corporation was fully involved in the Scarborough project from the receipt of the invitation to bid. The Corporation and its subcommittees are all ably chaired, and the level of debate and challenge is appropriate.

Leadership at senior levels is strong, and effective structures are in place to support foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP) with the requisite experience to draw upon from both the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) and the governors. Having rewritten its regulatory framework in 2012-13 when the Group went into partnership with the OU as its principal awarding body, the Group was well placed to develop the new regulations into the set, which it will use if granted FDAP. These have been through the relevant committee structures and aligned to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code).

### **B Academic standards and quality assurance**

There is an appropriate committee structure to deal with the management of higher education. The senior committee for higher education is the HE Academic Board but, for quality assurance purposes, the key committee is the HE Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC). Confidence in operating the policies and procedures and dealing with the committee business is a feature which has noticeably developed during the scrutiny.

Although the quality assurance policies and procedures were in place and well implemented, two rapid changes of personnel holding the post of Group Director of Quality and Standards, which covers the management of quality and standards in higher education and further education, occurred in the early stages of the scrutiny. In March 2014, the appointment of the Principal of Harrogate College to this role stabilised the situation. The current Group Director of Quality and Standards is a member of the SLT and attends governors' meetings. The scrutiny team agrees overall with the Group's assessment of academic management, as set out in the application.

The efficient administration and leadership of the HE Registry has proved a reliable central focus for higher education staff for information, analysis and management information. Information for staff and students is readily available.

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

The Group is proactive in terms of its support for staff and students to ensure an effective learning experience and achieved outcomes. Staff are well qualified in their academic subject and as teachers.

There has been a growing strategic approach to research and scholarly activity over the course of the scrutiny. Participation in research and scholarly activity has increased through the introduction of ways into research for staff not previously active and the further encouragement of those already active. The support for more staff to undertake higher degrees including doctorates contributes to this and these activities are feeding back into the curriculum.

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

Students are well supported by staff and they are extremely appreciative of the way staff are readily available and respond so promptly to requests for help. The scrutiny team considered that the supportive personalised approach to learning and the effective and responsive student support arrangements in place were a strength.

Information to students on the outcomes of assessment in a timely manner is an area for improvement. Actions to be taken to address the issue are appropriate. However, the scrutiny team considers that, for the Group to have a clear overview of timeliness of feedback, a more systematic approach to monitoring its promptness needs to be taken.

Overall, the scrutiny team found that provision for learning, teaching and student support is well managed and resourced. Careful account is taken from the initial planning approval for programmes to document the resource requirements, and deans monitor the ongoing requirements through their business reviews and annual monitoring.

The scrutiny team found that while public information, student handbooks and information for students was accurate and complete, some information for staff on the portal was not updated promptly.

The Group intends to continue with its current partners, who will be the OU and Huddersfield University, for the validation of programmes at Levels 6 and 7. The Scarborough campus has demonstrated that the management of a significant new project is being competently led to allow appropriate systems to be developed. In 2015-16, existing programmes will continue but programmes will be approved in 2015-16 by the University of Hull for operation by the Group at the Scarborough campus. There is ample evidence that the Group has managed its previous multiple partnerships with awarding bodies and the transition to new ones with efficiency. Staff across the institution have considerable experience of managing provision for awarding bodies and the scrutiny team's findings suggest that progression arrangements will continue to be well managed.

## **Privy Council's decision**

The Privy Council's decision is to grant Hull College Group foundation degree awarding powers for six years from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2022.

## Introduction

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

The application was considered by QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP) in March 2013 when the Committee agreed to proceed to the detailed scrutiny of the application. The team appointed to conduct the detailed scrutiny comprised Emeritus Professor Nicholas Goddard, Mr Derek Greenaway and Mrs Patricia Millner, with Mrs Catherine Cobbett acting as the scrutiny secretary. The detailed scrutiny was managed on behalf of QAA by Dr Penny McCracken, Assistant Director.

The detailed scrutiny began in July 2013 culminating in a report to ACDAP in September 2015. In the course of the scrutiny, the team read a wide range of documents presented as part of the evidence in support of the application. The team also spoke to a range of the institution's stakeholders and observed meetings and events pertinent to the application.

## Key information about Hull College Group

There are currently three Colleges which together form the Hull College Group: Hull College, Harrogate College and Goole College. Goole College has been in partnership with Hull College for over 25 years. At present, higher education is delivered at Hull and Harrogate although there are plans to recommence higher education at Goole in the future. The Hull School of Art and Design, founded in 1860, formed the basis of the higher education provision at Hull College and was transferred to the University of Lincoln where it had faculty status. In 2006, the School was transferred back to Hull College, followed in 2008 by the transfer of Harrogate College from Leeds Metropolitan University (now Leeds Beckett University). In 2012, the Group acquired a training provider, Rhino, wholly owned by the Group.

Each College has a Principal and there is a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who heads the Group. During 2014, the Chief Operating Officer was promoted to the new post of Deputy CEO. The Principal of Hull College has Group oversight of higher education but in September 2015 this responsibility will move to the new post of Principal of the Scarborough Campus, soon to be appointed. There are two faculties: Arts; and Business and Science. The faculties currently operate across all sites and include both higher and further education. There are no departments within faculties.

At the start of the scrutiny, the Group had partnership arrangements with the University of Lincoln and Leeds Beckett University. Following the withdrawal of the latter from partnership arrangements, the Group developed a partnership with the OU, which now includes all the higher education provision except teacher education. As a result, the majority of the provision to come under the remit of the OU was reviewed and revalidated just before the start of the scrutiny in 2012-13. Teacher education has been part of the provision for over 20 years through the University of Huddersfield. This partnership has recently been reviewed and consolidated.

Late in the scrutiny, the Group was invited to bid for partnership with the University of Hull (the University) to run undergraduate provision at its Scarborough campus as the University wished to withdraw from this teaching but retain a research facility there, notably in marine biology and coastal studies. This partnership and the related financial negotiations were completed in February 2015.

The proposed curriculum model provides for progression to Level 6 study from the foundation degree programmes in health; visitor economy; science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects; education; and higher level professional programmes with the ability to progress to postgraduate level study in business. The Group hopes to develop further appropriate postgraduate progression opportunities alongside those postgraduate level progression routes which are available locally through the University.

In addition, the Group proposes to offer some further education provision, mainly centred on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)/English as a Foreign Language (EFL) with the creation of an international school specialising in language development. To promote progression into higher level programmes, either at Scarborough or to the University, there is a proposal to deliver an Access to Higher Education route (Health and Science). Both areas build on existing experience, in particular, the Access course to nursing programmes at the University of Hull.

All the provision proposed for delivery at Scarborough is currently validated and offered at either Hull or Harrogate and in a position to be delivered at Scarborough. For September 2015, these existing programmes would continue and students would enrol on new programmes from September 2016 with an anticipated 565 students rising to 820 in year three across all programmes, and eventually to 2,250 in year six.

Since March, the Deputy CEO has project managed a series of task groups with membership from the University and the Group to develop and plan the integration and operation of the new partnership. The scrutiny team was able to observe some of these.

Hull College Group had a total of 26,000 registered students of whom 1,002 were studying full-time on higher education programmes in 2014-15. The total full-time equivalents registered on higher education programmes was 1,164. The large majority of students were from the UK, eight students are from the EU and one student was classed as international.

Twenty-two full-time permanent academic staff, 48 part-time permanent academic staff, together with guest lecturers, the majority of whom are active practitioners in their field, contribute to the higher education provision. (See also section C.)

Hull College Group's mission is 'Innovative and enterprising people enabling excellent learning for employability and social fulfilment'.

## **Statement on progression arrangements**

In 2011-12, the Group changed its awarding body to focus undergraduate provision largely with the OU and Huddersfield University (the latter for education provision). Programmes validated by the Universities of Lincoln and Leeds Beckett are being phased out. The policy is to retain the current partners as the awarding bodies for Level 6 and above. The Group has taken on more devolved powers and responsibility under the OU and, on the basis of the evidence seen, has shown itself capable of implementing the proposed progression arrangements. The recent arrangements over the Scarborough Campus with the University of Hull include progression arrangements where appropriate. The Group has a record of efficient dealing with its partners and evidence available to the scrutiny team indicates that the adjustment of the current arrangements, should FDAP be granted, would be appropriate.

# Detailed scrutiny against foundation degree awarding powers criteria

## A Governance and academic management

### Criterion A1

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

1 The Group has a detailed business and financial planning cycle in place which is explicitly linked to the Group Strategy and its Higher Education Strategy. At the core of the process the SLT reviews strategic priorities, future markets and direction and produces a draft strategic plan. This is then reviewed by governors and staff, students, employers and other stakeholders and, after any modifications, is agreed by the Corporation at its July meeting, following scrutiny by the Finance Committee. The deans and heads of service produce business plans in which they are assisted by business support managers drawing on information provided by areas such as finance, estates, ICT, human resources, marketing and commercial areas.

2 Business plans produced by the two faculties draw upon extensive resource efficiency indicators based on the past year's performance and targets for improvement arising out of the previous year's Quality Enhancement Plans. Business review meetings held early in the academic year to review past performance are effectively chaired by the Assistant Principal for Higher Education with substantial input from the HE Registry. Deans and deputy deans defend their faculty targets. Key performance indicators (KPIs) include staff costs and utilisation, and reports on teaching remission to confirm that time granted was consistent with institutional policy. The faculty quality enhancement plans identify areas for improvement as well as strengths and are linked to reference points such as the National Student Survey (NSS) results, external examiner reports, student feedback and annual monitoring. The process is robust; targets are challenged.

3 The HE Planning and Resources Committee has an important role in assessing course proposals and their associated financial and resource implications within the context of the Group Higher Education Strategy and Mission. It coordinates and manages business reviews and approves recruitment targets. It also monitors the extent to which faculty plans support Group objectives and is chaired by the Assistant Principal HE. The Committee maintains an oversight of recruitment and funding and, from the early part of 2015, maintained the validation schedule for provision planned for delivery at the Scarborough Campus.

4 One of the six strategic objectives of the current Group Strategic Plan and Higher Education Strategy is to 'ensure financial viability and sustainability'. The scrutiny took place against the backdrop of a challenging external financial environment for further education generally to which the Group was not immune. Factors such as increases in contributions to national insurance, teachers' pensions and the overall impact of the comprehensive spending review were compounded by a shortfall in higher education fee income for the year ended July 2014 in the order of £750,000. To address this shortfall the SLT initiated a

number of measures to correct the situation by making savings on expenditure and by attempting to increase income. These measures include ongoing rationalisation of the Group estate (including disposals), efficiencies in programme delivery including the increase of generic modules, overall staffing reductions and reform of pay structures to eliminate 'incremental drift' by moving towards performance pay at all levels although this latter measure is not expected to yield significant savings. The Group sees the profile of higher education being strengthened by rebranding as an Associate College of the OU and the designation of a specific Higher Education Centre on the Hull campus to give higher education greater visibility. There is also a recognition that the Group needs to diversify its income streams by the development of commercial products through its training arm, HCUK Training.

5 The period of the scrutiny has been a challenging one for the sector in general and observations of the governors and the senior management meetings show that steps have been undertaken to reduce the past deficits. The Group financial plan for 2014-17 projects a 'break even' outcome for the year ended 31 July 2015 and elimination of the deficit which obtained for the previous two years, with a total income for the Group of £59,678m against a total expenditure of £59,639m moving into a small surplus by the year ended 2017 with a financial health grading of 'good'. For higher education, the budgets reflect a modest growth in fee income and a reduction of the bursary fund. Group-wide voluntary redundancies are projected to achieve £2m full-year savings from 2014-15 and further efficiency reviews, begun in the autumn of 2014, are planned to deliver a further £1.8m full-year savings.

6 The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) categorised the financial health of the Group as 'satisfactory' for the year ending July 2014. The Group's own financial self-assessment against KPIs employed by the SFA (debtor days; cash days; wages in relation to turnover) was 'satisfactory' up to March 2015. For period 8 (March) 2015, the financial health of the Group, using SFA methodology, was better than at the same point for the previous full year scoring 150 compared with 120 for 2014. The planned reductions of staff costs in relation to income is expected further to improve the position for 2015-16.

7 In the context of these financial challenges, the development of the Scarborough Campus does not carry with it substantial start-up costs as the Group is acquiring an existing provider of higher education on favourable lease terms from the University of Hull. Extensive financial modelling has taken place which indicates a margin of £2.5m, on a cautious estimate of recruitment of 820 FTEs, can be achieved by the third year (2017-18) of operation and a student population in excess of 2,000 students is projected by the sixth year. The agreement allows for the Group to terminate the arrangement after a period of two or five years. Although there are reputational and some financial risks associated with the project, overall the risk was graded as 'acceptable'. Scarborough has the potential to make a positive financial contribution if the recruitment projections are met.

8 The challenging financial situation has not inhibited involvement in capital projects, most notably redevelopment of the Harrogate campus whereby the Group successfully raised a commercial loan to match funding of £3m provided by North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership. In general, the Group's financial position is being addressed by driving through further efficiency savings, including further staffing reductions, and developing the commercial activities of the Group, particularly HCUK Training.

9 Each area of the Quality Code has been reviewed by a working group, a process which was started early in 2013 and building on earlier work to map policies against the Code of Practice, with the initiative being taken by senior quality officers, as appropriate, to the chapters of the Quality Code. In practice, the HE Registry has taken a lead role in this process with the HE Quality and Research Manager effectively overseeing progress. The HE AQSC received regular reports on the progress of the alignment of Group quality practices



and procedures during the course of the scrutiny. The majority of policies only required small adjustment as far as Part B of the Code was concerned, and the Group embarked on Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, which is important if the Group is to confer its own awards. This exercise has been approached in a meticulous manner. The implementation of working group recommendations was largely completed by 2014. (See also B2.2.)

10 The scrutiny confirmed that the Group's foundation degrees are informed by the QAA *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* and Subject Benchmark Statements. Group foundation degree programmes all include an element of work-based or placement learning, in practice largely work-related, which is subject to scrutiny at initial programme validation and at periodic reviews (see B3.6). New proposals have to demonstrate that the proposal satisfies the requirements for foundation degrees as set out in the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* and work-related learning, employer engagement and work placement is subject to detailed scrutiny during internal and external validation. The distinction between the first two years of a foundation degree and the first two years of a BA programme has been the subject of discussion in validation scrutiny; it was a condition of the Foundation Degree in Performing Arts that the programme should consistently conform with the distinctive nature of foundation degrees as defined in the Subject Benchmark Statement. The same panel, however, commended the way in which the Group and its staff were involved with the wider artistic environment of Hull and the north of England, and employer involvement in the development of Group foundation degrees is a strong feature of its provision.

11 The Group has a clearly articulated Strategic Plan which sets the overarching framework for the direction of the Group for the years 2014 to 2017. This was developed before the Scarborough project emerged. The Group Vision is to be 'First Choice for learning, ensuring excellence, and innovation in everything we do'; the Group Mission is 'Innovative and enterprising people enabling excellent learning for employability and social fulfilment'. Attached to the mission and values are six strategic objectives, the last of which is 'To ensure financial viability and sustainability'.

12 The SLT works closely with governors in determining the strategic direction of the Group and in setting priorities. The current Strategic Plan and associated HE Strategy was reviewed and updated during 2014 against a background of the Group financial deficit brought about by increased costs (especially by increases to teachers' and local government pensions) and declining income. As far as higher education is concerned the removal of the recruitment cap in 2016 is seen as a particular challenge. As noted, the Group has an objective to develop its commercial activities and the Managing Director of HCUK Training is a member of the Curriculum, Innovation and Development Group, which considers higher education curriculum proposals.

13 The HE Strategy provides a clear direction for the future of the Group and links with other strategies and plans such as the Young People's Strategy; Teaching, Learning and Quality Improvement Strategy; Adult Skills and Quality Improvement Strategy; Work Related Learning and Employability Strategy; and the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) Strategy. It is linked to, and supported by, six strategic objectives with a range of key performance indicators. These are headed by the achievement of HEFCE recruitment targets and retention rates.

14 The higher education mission and associated strategies are promulgated in a variety of ways. The Strategic Plan is portrayed in a 'rich picture' format, which is widely displayed on Group premises. Information for staff and students is readily accessible on the Group intranet and the Portal Press staff newsletter is issued weekly as a means of communicating strategic updates and policy developments.

15 Staff and students are made aware of the Group mission and policies during a comprehensive induction process. There is also a short 'hands on' guide to regulations for students. Staff, students and support staff, met by the team and in meetings observed, are generally well informed about policies and systems.

16 The Scarborough project is entirely in conformity with the Group mission and the HE Strategy which stresses increased participation and the provision of STEM subjects. The hinterland of Scarborough, situated as it is between Humberside and Teesside, has been identified by HEFCE as a 'cold spot' for higher education participation.

17 A discrete Higher Education Division was established in 2010 and is now firmly embedded in the Group management structures. The separation of higher education from further education, with a dedicated HE Registry allows for concentration on the delivery of the specific HE Strategy. The HE Academic Board has overall responsibility for academic standards, the regulatory framework governing the Group's higher education provision, the appointment of examiners and research and scholarly activity. It reports to, and advises, the Chief Executive on all matters pertaining to higher education and its development within the overall Group HE Strategy. It is ultimately responsible to the Corporation.

18 The HE Academic Board is assisted in its work by a number of subcommittees including faculty boards for each of Arts and Business and Science. These boards lead curriculum development, research and scholarly activity, the teaching and learning strategies, coordinate teaching delivery and resource utilisation, and facilitate the annual course reporting process. The faculty boards are effectively chaired by the deans and membership consists of both teaching staff and representatives of support services including library, financial and information technology. This is valuable in supporting the Board's important role in business planning. There are also student representatives.

19 Additional committees reporting to the HE Academic Board include the higher education Learning and Teaching Committee, AQSC, HE Student Experience Committee, the Research and Scholarly Activity Committee and HE Planning and Resources Committee. This structure allows a firm focus on the Group's higher education delivery and its development.

20 The Corporation does not have a subcommittee specifically dedicated to higher education but all its subcommittees are involved in the oversight of various aspects of the Group's higher education provision. Following an effectiveness review involving a self-assessment of each committee for 2014-15 and recommendations made by a governance working party these committees are currently: Audit; Estates; Excellence; Finance; First Choice; Governance; Remuneration; and SWOT (the latter replacing the former Strategy Committee) which has delegated authority to consider matters determined by the Group management as well as the Corporation, in relation to opportunities or threats.

21 These committees give detailed scrutiny to matters relating to higher education. For example, before approving the financial model for the Scarborough project, members of the SWOT committee undertook a close examination of such matters as the nature of the higher education culture on the campus, the financial risk and the possible impact of competition from other providers. The Excellence Committee has an important role in managing the quality of the Group's higher education and asks searching questions about such key areas as recruitment targets and their calculation. The Corporation sub-committees are effectively chaired and provide strong oversight of the structures and systems for managing higher education across the Group. The CEO is a governor and always attends along with other relevant senior managers; the scrutiny which the Corporation committees provide has been enhanced during the current academic year by an increase in the quoracy from two, which the scrutiny team considered to be low, to three governors. While these arrangements are

currently effective, the combination of higher education and further education items on Corporation and its subcommittee agendas is a matter that the Group may wish to review as higher education numbers increase when Scarborough comes on stream.

22 The Principal of Hull College currently has oversight of Group HE Strategy and there is an Assistant Principal of HE who heads the Higher Education Division. From September 2015, the Head of the University Campus, Scarborough, will assume responsibility for higher education across the Group. As noted, the two faculties are led by deans, supported by associate deans and heads of learning and teaching. Each faculty has a linked Quality Improvement and Student Support Manager (QuISSM), formerly faculty but now registry-based. Faculties work closely with the HE Registry headed by the HE Registrar and well supported by an HE Quality and Research Manager. From its observations and meetings, the scrutiny team concludes that these post holders effectively discharge their responsibilities and provide proactive leadership. This is likely to be further enhanced by the appointment of the Scarborough Principal.

23 Under the decisive direction of the CEO, who conveys a keen appreciation of Group strategic priorities, the strength of leadership across the organisation as a whole was enhanced during the course of the scrutiny. For example, the team had initial concerns about a delay in the replacement of the Group Director of Quality and Standards who resigned after a short tenure and which was considered to put this area at risk. However, early in 2014 this post was combined with the post of Principal of Harrogate College and, although the decision to combine these roles was in part financially led, the arrangement has proved effective (see B2.2). Several key posts were filled by internal promotions during the course of the scrutiny including the HE Registrar and the Deputy CEO who was promoted from the former post of Chief Operating Officer and who is the lead for the Scarborough project and internal change-management across the Group.

24 Shortly after the start of the scrutiny, a Clerk to the Corporation combined with a new post of Legal and Governance was appointed. Previously the position had been called the Corporation Advisor and Secretary to the Board. The new Clerk quickly established an effective working relationship with the CEO and Corporation Chair and as a result the capacity of the Board to provide effective leadership has been strengthened.

25 The Governance Working Party, which reported in July 2014, concluded that Group management and leadership is responsive to challenges as well as opportunities and this has been confirmed by the way in which the Scarborough project has been expedited. Part of the objectives of the working party was to consider how to increase the contribution of governors to policy making rather than merely agreeing existing policies. Governors now receive a full induction, are given appropriate training and have annual one-to-one meetings with the Clerk. This has enhanced the effectiveness of governors in their leadership capacity.

26 The Corporation does not have members with a distinct higher education brief but it has a number of members with specific higher education expertise. They are for the most part drawn from the ranks of senior professionals in law, finance, public services, commerce, HR and related roles and they collectively provide strong leadership. However, the time commitment required for the discharge of the responsibilities involved has meant that it has sometimes proved difficult to recruit governors of the requisite calibre. During the scrutiny the Corporation operated at below its full complement of 20 members; it stood at 17 at the conclusion of the scrutiny in June 2015.

27 At the end of the scrutiny the future chairing of the Corporation was also under review following the resignation of the current Chair with effect from 31 July 2015 after four years in post (one year in addition to the standard three year term). It seems probable that

the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Corporation will be undertaken, short term, by two existing governors who have experience of effectively chairing some of the Corporation's subcommittees. The Clerk has reviewed the role specification of the Chair to make the responsibility for line management of the CEO and Clerk more explicit and has made an estimate of the time commitment required to discharge the Chair's responsibilities. The calculation led to the conclusion that 170 to 185 hours per year is required to be devoted to the role. There has been some consideration as to whether the Chair should be remunerated in the future, a suggestion rejected by the Governance working party but with some support from current governors.

28 The Corporation provides effective leadership in partnership with the Group senior management and scrutinises policy and executive decisions which, on occasion, have been appropriately challenged. For example, a Group proposal in 2014 to engage in training for the Saudi Arabian Government was questioned on financial, reputational and ethical grounds. The effectiveness of the Corporation in providing leadership has been demonstrated in the context of the Scarborough development when searching questions were asked about the demand for higher education in the area adjacent to the campus, the proposed fee differential between Scarborough (£9,000) and Hull and Harrogate (£6,000) and the threat of competition from other providers. The Scarborough project showed that the governors understand that risk is not only financial but that failing to take an opportunity can itself be a risk

29 While senior management across the Group is strong and effective, a staff survey in 2014 revealed a perceived need for leadership training at middle management level. In the course of observations, the scrutiny team occasionally found the participation of staff at this level on higher education committees to be somewhat passive.

30 The Group management engages with those responsible for the delivery of the higher education programmes and other stakeholders, such as employers and Local Enterprise Partnerships in a number of ways. The CEO issues regular internal team briefs which update staff on Group policies and developments. The team brief for January 2015 was used to inform staff about the development of the Scarborough project. There are regular Staff Voice meetings which allow a wide variety of issues, concerns, suggestions and good practice in the implementation of academic policies and systems to be considered. Staff Voice is formed into two main groups, one exploring innovation chaired by the CEO and a Continuous Improvement Group chaired by the Deputy CEO. Examples of topics explored include the Group's possible involvement with educational provision in Saudi Arabia to which there were staff reservations and, more recently, pay progression policy. The SLT also holds regular 'road shows' to communicate and engage with staff. External stakeholders are informed about Group policies, initiatives and developments and contribute ideas at consultative forums held regularly at the current three Group constituent colleges. These attract a wide variety of participants drawn from commerce, industry, local government, arts, technology and the professions.

31 An institutional register of all policy, procedures and guidance documents is in place and available to staff and students through the Group intranet. Review dates are attached to each of these policies, together with the higher education manager responsible; in practice this is generally the HE Registrar. Each area of policy and guidance - there are currently 24 separate items - is assigned to one of the higher education committees, normally the HE Learning and Teaching Committee or the AQSC. In a limited number of cases the HE Academic Board takes responsibility as in the case of, for example, the higher education procedure for approving public information. Some policies are institutional and apply to the full range of Group provision; these include the Praise and Complaints Policy and the safeguarding and PREVENT strategy.

32 The mapping exercise carried out by the Group to ensure that its policies are aligned with the Quality Code has enabled it to identify any gaps in its policies against expectations and indicators. The HE Quality and Enhancement Plan arising from the Organisational Self Evaluation Review identifies areas for improvement with clearly specified target dates. An example is the need to increase awareness among staff to ensure that the Quality Code relates to all course, faculty and wider Group processes. The NSS also provides information which is used to identify any deficiencies in Group policies and activities, for example the need to improve student satisfaction with assessment and feedback as well as course organisation and management (see D1.2 and 1.3).

33 The Group has a formal Risk Management Policy and operates a risk-based approach to all its key operations. This policy is based on risk identification, risk assessment, risk mitigation and risk monitoring and is managed by a risk management subgroup of the SLT, while the Board of Governors is responsible for overseeing risk management within the Group as a whole. Risks are categorised as high, medium or low and assigned a net risk score to produce a traffic light classification of green (0-5) and acceptable, yellow (6-12) and 'acceptable but requires close review' and red (12-25) and 'not acceptable as above risk appetite or where risk exposure is not known'. At the beginning of the scrutiny, the Group high level risk register identified 13 strategic risks and 28 operational risks. In 2014 this was reduced to eight key strategic risks, which was thought to make the management of risk more effective.

34 Each strategic risk is overseen by a member of the SLT and there is a detailed risk description; each risk is assigned to a Corporation subcommittee. Thus, there is a detailed description of risks associated with financial stability at the head of the list and currently graded red. Existing and planned controls are itemised and in this case the Chief Executive Officer has management ownership of the risk which is assigned to the Finance Committee.

35 Two strategic risks have been added to the register which was last updated on 24 February 2015. The first is Rhino Training, a wholly-owned Group subsidiary based in Glasgow (separate from HCUK Training) which is underperforming and may not be able to repay a financial liability to the Group. This has the potential to impact adversely on the Group balance sheet at a time when it is important for it at least to break even at the end of the 2014-15 financial year. Resolution of this problem has proved somewhat intractable. The second addition is the Scarborough project which, while by no means risk-free, is considered to carry an 'acceptable' risk. This is managed by the Deputy CEO and overseen by the entire Corporation. As noted, the project does not involve a significant financial liability and the risk associated with it has been considered to be as much reputational as financial. The Scarborough project is seen as an essential means of diversifying Group activity and an opportunity which is not likely to recur. It illustrates well the Group appetite for risk which recognises that there are risks associated with not taking up opportunities.

36 An audit report of governance and risk management found that 88 per cent of governors considered that they tracked and discussed risks allocated to them regularly and concluded that the risk register was effectively managed by the committee structure with a clear oversight of risk management. Nevertheless, the Group faces increased threats including funding reductions, competition and rising pension liabilities at a time of change. At a Governor Strategy Day in March 2015 it was recognised that, while current risk management was effective, there would be a need for a more sophisticated approach to risk management in the future which recognised that not all risks were financial, especially during a period of transition.

37 The Group expanded its portfolio of higher education programmes in 2006-07 and established a discrete HE Division in 2010. It has in place a comprehensive academic and administrative infrastructure to support its higher education awards, backed up by a

comprehensive suite of higher education policies and regulations. The HE Registry is highly effective in producing documentation and information for the Group's higher education committees; supporting documentation for these committees is detailed. It has a successful track record of working with external awarding universities, most recently the OU. It is significant that the most recent institutional overview undertaken by the OU did not identify any issues requiring immediate action and that comments in the 2013-14 overview included 'A successful year in which newly validated curriculum was successfully delivered on the Hull and Harrogate Campuses'.

38 The management and delivery structures in place and their operation, as seen through observations, provided the scrutiny team with reassurance that the Group has the capability to manage the additional responsibilities associated with FDAP. The awarding body representatives are supportive. The majority of policies and procedures needed are in place and the Group has addressed Quality Code, Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, which is necessary if the Group is to confer its own awards. As noted at paragraph 40, the OU assigns to its partner institutions considerably more delegated powers than do the Group's previous awarding bodies and this, together with the additional experience that Group staff have gained during the revalidation of its provision for OU awards, means that the Group is well positioned to assume the additional responsibilities associated with FDAP. The Group has well established procedures in place for the OU with regard to the appointment of external examiners which is a key element of degree awarding powers in upholding standards. The procedures in place for such key areas as examination boards are comprehensive and efficient. The conduct of examination boards provided good evidence of institutional ability to award foundation degrees; at examination boards observed by the scrutiny team staff demonstrated good understanding of regulations and the boards were conducted with a high degree of professionalism.

39 The scrutiny team found that the claim in the application that the establishment of the HE Division and the HE Registry were instrumental in promoting the further development of higher education was justified and this has been seen to develop further during the course of the scrutiny.

## B Academic standards and quality assurance

### Criterion B1

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

40 The Group states that its procedural framework is appropriate and consistent with its current non-awarding body role. As noted above, it has been required to follow the assessment regulations of Leeds Beckett University, the University of Lincoln and the OU, including provisions for referral, resitting of assessments, mitigation and classification. Now the major awarding body, the OU has a more devolved framework whereby institutions devise their own regulatory provisions including their overall framework and more detailed criteria, such as referral and compensation, while complying with the OU's general enabling regulatory framework. For example, the mitigation panel is operated under Group procedures since the OU devolves responsibility to this panel and the Group and there is no OU representation. The transfer to the OU as the main awarding body required the Group to develop a set of regulations which have formed the basis of the prospective set. The first examination boards under the OU regime took place in summer 2014 and were all at Level 4. Summer 2015 will therefore see the first OU foundation degree graduates.

41 The Group has a set of policies and procedures related to the quality assurance of higher education including regulations. While transferring to the OU, these were reviewed and revised to take account of the greater responsibility of the Group and also of the developing Quality Code and the potential of being granted FDAP. The OU revalidations which followed the approval of the Group as a partner college provided a useful opportunity for the review, revision, and implementation of the majority of higher education programmes and provided many opportunities for promoting staff understanding of the operation of regulations, the Quality Code and the Group's policies and procedures.

42 The Group claims it has a good track record in operating these regulations and managing multiple regulatory frameworks. The scrutiny team's findings indicate that this claim was justified.

43 The development of an appropriate regulatory framework to fulfil the additional areas of delegated responsibility associated with the OU validation model represented one of the most significant areas of development during 2011-12. The Group claimed in its application that it was well positioned for the acquisition of FDAP and had identified a small number of anticipated additional prospective provisions being required.

44 By December 2014, the Group had modified a substantial number of its policies, procedures and strategies, including the HE Strategy 2013-16 and the Research and Scholarship Strategy, in readiness for the potential granting of FDAP. The later ones included peer review of teaching and the procedures for initial planning approval of new higher education programmes. By September 2014, the AQSC had demonstrated a comprehensive, rigorous and honest assessment of its strategy. It had also worked through a programme of checking the alignment of policies with the Quality Code.

45 The current operation by the Group of a robust regulatory framework on behalf of its awarding bodies provides reassurance that the Group is demonstrating its readiness to implement its own regulatory framework.

## Criterion B2

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

46 Processes for the management of the standards and quality of higher education provision have recently been revised. Scrutiny of the appropriateness of the programmes for the stated level takes place at both stages of the validation process and at periodic review. It is implicit in the annual course review process and the rigorous faculty self-evaluation reports (SERs) also encourage comment on such matters. Through induction and development activities, as well as the annual cycle of assessment, staff are encouraged to develop their understanding of academic levels. Many staff have a good deal of experience in writing modules and programmes as, for example, for the recent extensive revalidation of programmes undertaken for the change of awarding body.

47 External examiners consistently report satisfaction that FHEQ levels are being delivered and achieved. Examiners have commented that the range of assessment methods is effective in providing students with opportunities to demonstrate the outcomes of learning.

48 The AQSC undertook a project during 2012-14 to align all policies and procedures with the UK Quality Code and these have been incrementally adjusted to take account of its developing requirements. All new courses are developed in alignment with the Code and scrutinised at initial validation (both internal and external stages). Existing programmes reflect the relevant award and subject benchmark statements, together with recognised sector requirements. These are checked at validation and subsequently at annual monitoring. The Quality Code mapping exercise undertaken by the Group was a comprehensive exercise which the Group clearly takes seriously.

49 Involvement with professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs) reinforces the robustness of Group procedures. The Royal Institution of British Architects (RIBA) has accredited Hull College for five years. This confirms that national guidance on programme specifications, and the requirements of any relevant PSRBs is observed and promoted. There were no conditions to the accreditation approval which is a very rare occurrence. The MArch was also approved at validation by RIBA.

50 Over the course of the scrutiny, the AQSC has emerged as an authoritative committee, providing the scrutiny team with reassurance that robust and proactive standards and quality structures are in place and operated securely. In the early stages of the scrutiny there were significant changes in the oversight of the quality of higher education in terms of a significant post-holder, including short periods when there was no-one in the permanent post with quality oversight of higher education and further education at Group level. Two people appointed to the post left the Group after a short period. Early indications were that the AQSC was passive rather than proactive. Annual monitoring reports, approval of external examiners' reports, validation reports and progress in mapping Group procedures on external examining against the relevant section of the Quality Code (*Chapter B7: External Examining*) were all passed with little debate or challenge. Generally, however, committee members demonstrated good awareness of institutional responsibilities for management of academic standards although the general approach to quality assurance was rather passive with little discussion, for example, of good practice and mechanisms for its dissemination.

51 In October 2013, under a new Director of Quality and Standards, the quality of debate in AQSC meetings was more challenging. By December 2013 the Director of Quality and Standards had left after only a few months in post; no mention was made of replacing the post but an interim Director was in place. The scrutiny team learnt that in February 2014



the Principal of Harrogate College had been given additional responsibility for the oversight of standards and quality across the Group and had carried out this role since the departure of the former Director of Quality. Coincidentally, the Registrar left to take up a post elsewhere and the SLT took the opportunity to reappraise the function and roles of the Group's Quality Office and HE Registry. An Interim Registrar, with considerable experience of the Group's quality procedures, was appointed and was subsequently confirmed in post.

52 From March 2014, the Principal of Harrogate College formally took on the role of Group Director of Quality and Standards (DQS). This role has a strategic overview for quality and standards across the whole Group (further education and higher education) and links into the SLT. The DQS reports on quality matters at both higher education and further education levels to the governors. The Principal at Hull currently has a strategic overview of higher education, although this will pass to the new Principal at the Scarborough campus in September 2015, and the Assistant Principal for HE has responsibility for higher education across the Group.

53 The DQS has had a beneficial impact on higher education quality assurance; for example, the development of quality flowcharts/cycles, meetings with higher education staff with responsibility for quality, and a new impetus for the review of teaching observation and peer observation. The scrutiny team is of the view that the appointment and input of the new DQS is having a positive impact on the management of higher education quality and standards across the Group. Combined with the Registrar, the operation and management of higher education quality and standards is efficient and more target driven.

54 The Group uses external advisers and peers in a variety of ways to help confirm the standards of its awards. The validation policy requires that foundation degree approval panels include both an external subject specialist and an external employer, sector or professional body representative; this policy operates systematically. Validation panels are always chaired by a senior member of academic staff from the faculty not involved in the proposal and include two members of staff proposed by AQSC.

55 External examiners' reports go through a well-defined cycle in order to ensure they are responded to by the programme teams. On the Group's receipt of the reports, the Quality Manager highlights good practice or concerns before the report is sent to the faculty. The programme teams prepare their responses, which the HE Registry ensures are sent to the external examiners.

56 The Group has links with a number of professional associations. As mentioned above, RIBA accredits the Group's Architecture provision including a new MArch. Staff are supported to increase their involvement with peers through the membership and activities, including conferences, of professional associations and there is evidence that this is welcomed and taken up by staff (see paragraph 107). Many staff are professional practitioners in their own right and have many sector contacts which they use for the benefit of colleagues and students. The members of Hull's Chamber of Commerce provide helpful input on work-related learning and the business environment. The Group values this input.

57 The Group has recently reviewed policies and pro formas to guide and assist staff in the approval, monitoring and review of programmes. These have all been aligned to the Quality Code and include the externality required both in terms of external examiners and validation panels (see paragraph 48). The QuISSM role for each faculty provides a useful source of advice and guidance in the context of the subject being considered and these post-holders gain an overview of faculty work which promotes consistency. They provide a useful source of quality assurance advice for staff.

58 The programme planning procedure is clearly set out and followed. It allows discussions to include estates and the library to ensure the information forwarded to the

HE Planning and Resources Committee for consideration is accurate and detailed. The arrangements for annual and periodic review are well publicised and observations and meetings with staff showed that staff were familiar with all these procedures and that they were carried out consistently. The HE Registry is an important factor in promoting consistency. Registry staff coordinate both stages of validation events, liaise with awarding bodies, deal with nominations of panel members and ensure that appropriate external members are included. They also follow up any conditions and recommendations from the event and monitor their completion. Scrutiny of a sample of review reports demonstrates that the exercise is consistently and robustly carried out and operated with integrity and openness.

59 The terms of reference of AQSC allow it to interrogate annual monitoring, periodic reviews and form an overview of strengths and areas for development within the higher education provision. The organisation of higher education conferences for staff provides opportunities for staff to be updated about changes in procedures, the result of MIS analysis and to share good practice.

60 At the start of the scrutiny, no programmes were delivered outside the Group. However, following the Group's response to the University's paper 'Exploring Options', in November 2014, the Group was recognised by the University of Hull as its preferred partner for the delivery of higher education programmes on the University's Scarborough Campus. It confirmed that the University of Hull will continue to support delivery of higher education on the campus within the context of a broader strategic partnership that is to be developed.

61 New programmes developed and operated by the Group are not due to start at the Scarborough Campus until September 2016-17. However, extensions of current validations of the University will be adopted and renamed by the Group as its own programmes during subsequent validation stages. For example, the Group is considering offering a Foundation Degree in Coastal and Marine Biology, building on the expertise and facilities developed at Scarborough by the University, which will be maintained for the University's own continued research purposes.

62 An application for the first stage approval of a partner institution has been made to the University's faculties of Science and Engineering and Education, in the Schools of Biological, Biomedical and Environmental Science and the Centre for Educational Studies respectively. This is also attached to the Stage II approval covering due diligence. The documents were signed by the Principal and Assistant Principal Higher Education on 2 April 2015. It has been agreed that the protocols and procedures will be used as a pattern for all future applications for approval. Outline planning approval from the University of Hull for a BSc/BA (Hons) in Digital Design and Software Development is an early outcome of this new partnership. The programmes due to start in September 2016 have been put forward for development consent following which the programmes will be developed and proposed for validation in 2015-16.

63 The records of observations and meetings undertaken by the scrutiny team since December 2014, showing the Group's continuing and regular consideration and updating of its policies and procedures, confirmed that the Group will continue to operate similar robust processes for monitoring the standards and quality of its higher education programmes at the Scarborough Campus both for its own registered students and those of the awarding body delivered at the Scarborough Campus. The main higher education committees are already taking on board the implications of the Scarborough project in addition to the existing business. The Group has demonstrated its effectiveness to ensure consistency of academic standards and quality across its higher education provision. It is likely that the Group will operate similar robust processes for managing the same on its programmes. Added security

is indirectly acknowledged by the University of Hull's recognition of the Group as its preferred partner for the delivery of the University's programmes.

64 The consideration of resources is built into the programmes from the initial seeking of planning approval. The criteria for consideration include resources and the fit with the academic portfolio of the relevant faculty. Proposals for new courses are discussed with the finance department and then considered by the HE Planning and Resources Committee, chaired by the Assistant Principal HE. Advice may also be sought from estates and the IT and library services concerning resources. Once a programme is operating, teams are required to comment on resources in annual monitoring and subsequently in periodic review. At periodic review, the physical resources are generally assumed to be in place unless there is a significant change in the curriculum and any extra staffing requirements are carefully considered.

65 The HE Planning and Resources Committee also considers the impact of funding when there is a shortfall in recruitment. In 2013-14, for example, there was a shortfall of eight per cent and this triggered Group level discussion about fee levels. Modelling has been introduced to offer a more refined and detailed consideration of different scenarios and strategies. The Committee is scrupulous in its scrutiny of the factors affecting the finances, staffing, facilities and accommodation across the higher education provision in the Group.

66 External examiners are also invited to comment on the appropriateness of resources for current programmes. The utilisation of resources is monitored by the Dean through the annual business review process. Engaging students in decision-making processes, including the planned utilisation of resources, is an important feature of the Group's approach.

### **Criterion B3**

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

67 Within the context of the Group Teaching, Learning and Assessment and Quality Improvement Strategy, the HE Strategy 2013-16 and the Learning and Teaching Strategy for HE 2011-14 establish a strong commitment to the continued improvement of learning and teaching. In addition, each faculty has a detailed learning and teaching plan setting out the range of skills and learning experiences it intends for its students. Important in these aims is the concept of developing lifelong, independent learners equipped with employability and transferable skills. The Group has robust monitoring processes for pursuing the objectives and KPIs through observations, reporting and its committee structure. There is also a comprehensive infrastructure for support for staff in the development and enhancement of teaching and learning (see paragraph 132). The Group has used the Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching* as the basis for evaluating its own processes. As a result, progress is being made with a large degree of conformity already present across the provision. It is intended that the HE Learning and Teaching Committee will undertake continual review of this process over the coming academic year. This committee has the remit to consider the current practices, promotion of opportunity for staff development, the NSS results and to ensure the implementation of the relevant parts of the HE Strategy.

68 The scrutiny team saw evidence that a wide range of learning and teaching strategies is used, appropriate to the subjects taught. External examiners refer to the close links with professional work, the professional edge to some of the work and the practice-based experience of staff. The awarding bodies have confidence in the ability of the Group to offer a wide range of learning and teaching strategies and ensure these are aligned with

the planned outcomes of each programme. The Group has strategies in place and uses its committee structure to ensure these are implemented and to maintain oversight of this area.

69 Staff are informed about new or amended policies and procedures for programme design, monitoring and review in a number of ways. New documentation is published on the staff portal. Higher education conferences include dissemination of these changes and information is disseminated through the faculty structures to programme teams, with the QuISSMs available for additional advice and guidance. Senior staff within faculties, some of whom will have been on the committees which discussed and approved the changes, also disseminate this information.

70 At various stages, information to students and staff related to learning outcomes are clearly set out. These include programme specifications listing learning objectives and module descriptors within student handbooks, which also include the aims and objectives. Staff met by the scrutiny team were articulate and confident in their collective knowledge of the Group's policies and the procedures for the design, monitoring and review of programmes. They were able to articulate clearly the procedures from the initial proposal of a new programme through the stages outlined in the Group policies to the review following the first year of programme delivery. Staff are familiar with the employer engagement agenda and appreciate the engagement of work-based learning monitors.

71 The HE Registry is responsible for administering validation events. A member of the HE Registry staff organises and attends each event and writes the report. The HE Registry is also responsible for ensuring that any conditions and recommendations are considered and implemented by the programme team. This is monitored to ensure that all conditions are met by the team before the programme enrolls students.

72 Staff are aware of the requirement to observe within both the Group policies and procedures and also those of the OU. All found the OU development days of great value. They particularly valued visits from external examiners, employers and former OU academic staff who will be the Group's initial external examiners.

73 Few courses incorporate pathways; where they do so, consideration of their overall coherence within programmes is considered at initial validation and subject to further consideration as part of annual monitoring and periodic review.

74 The Group provides a comprehensive range of learning support services for students and has built in links with programmes at important stages of the approval and review processes. Support of students is a high priority for the Group in a city which traditionally has low rates of engagement with higher education. Support is built into the programmes; for example, study skills are built into the Personal Development Planning modules in most programmes. Students are assessed at induction or early in their programmes to identify any learning needs which are then supported. Students are unfailingly appreciative of the formal and informal support given by lecturers and personal tutors.

75 The Group is building on the most recent NSS results and the maintenance and further improvement of the learning resources for students is proactively considered as part of this. In its action plan in response to the NSS of 2014, the Group has committed to maintain the current communication between service areas and faculties; monitor and review user feedback by service areas; and maintain its current IT services, library resources and estates provision, including specialist provision for students. It also committed to record progress on learning resource provision and feedback within faculty quality enhancement plans and reports to faculty boards, the HE Learning and Teaching Committee, AQSC and HE Academic Board, as appropriate. It is maintaining its aim to continue the NSS response

rate at 78 per cent. The institutional action plan will be monitored through the year by the HE Academic Board, with the committees below this dealing with the areas relevant to each.

76 The Group does not deliver any distance learning provision. Given its focus on vocational learning, it offers a considerable amount of work-based and work-related learning in many of its programmes, not only in foundation degrees. Placements and work-based learning take place in a variety of contexts. They include live briefs from employers, community or third sector experience, shadowing and informal mentoring, internships, visiting/guest speakers, visits to industry, national and local competitions. In the Faculty of Arts, for example, projects are often presented to students by the external organisation. The Faculty has been proactive in seeking opportunities arising from the selection of Hull as City of Culture 2017. Programmes include at least 30 credits of placement or work-based learning in each level of study. This commitment benefits students but requires considerable work by staff in finding placements, maintaining contact with employers and ensuring students and mentors understand the role of the work-based study.

77 Some effective examples of work-based learning with professional involvement were observed. The relevance and standard of the experience within the programme is evidenced by the employment opportunities offered to students which is clearly linked to the needs of industry and the further progression from HND to BSc (Hons).

78 Where students work within a company for a project they are ably supported by the programme leader and lecturers. Students spoke appreciatively of the support of lecturers and programme leaders and for the opportunity the experience had given them. Overall, students found placements of great benefit to their learning and wider understanding of their sector. Many local employers are very supportive of the Group and the programmes, and the Group might benefit from this goodwill by exploring further and effective ways of working together.

79 However, practices are not entirely consistent across programmes especially where the students are in employment. The mentoring arrangements can be so flexible that the Group may find it difficult to assure itself of the equivalence of student experience. Work-based and work-related learning are operated on a programme by programme basis as is appropriate. The Group has identified this as an area for development. Since 2014, the Registrar has taken on overall responsibility for this area and ensures that information about work-based learning goes through the committee structure and is monitored for consistency and for the sharing of good practice.

80 As indicated above, the need to write a regulatory framework and the recent approval processes undertaken for the OU involved the Group in a comprehensive reconsideration of approval, review and assessment practices and procedures. Policies and procedures for these have in many cases been revised and recently approved through the HEQSC and then the HE Academic Board. Observations of validations, reviews, examination board, meetings with staff and scrutiny of external examiner reports all indicated that programme managers were confident and knowledgeable about the separation of academic standards and quality assurance. Programme leaders and other staff administering these procedures were familiar with the use of the cycle of monitoring, review and programme approval and aware of its importance in ensuring academic standards of their programmes.

81 The Group has clear policies and procedures to ensure all staff and students are familiar with assessment criteria and practices. There is a higher education assessment policy which refers to the Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning* for guidance. The HE Registry has oversight of the policy and

its application within the higher education division. Within the faculties, deans and managers implement the policy, which is operated by programme leaders and lecturers.

82 Students are introduced to assessment in various ways. At induction, students are introduced to the principles of assessment which are also in the student handbooks. Assessment schedules and the intended learning outcomes are provided in the detailed module specifications. The learning outcomes are presented alongside the learning and teaching strategy to be used. Each specification has a grid showing which learning outcomes of the full range will be assessed in that module. All these are supplemented by more detailed information at the start of the module and explanations from the tutor. Staff are readily available for further advice.

83 All staff who are teaching on higher education programmes have to be approved by the Recognised Teacher Status (RTS) panel and approved by the HE Learning and Teaching Committee (see paragraph 120). All policies and procedures are available on the portal and briefings to update staff take place as needed. Structured staff development opportunities are offered through the programme of activities derived from the appraisal and teaching observation processes. The higher education conferences also include sessions on aspects of assessment. The sharing of experiences through programme team meetings, moderation and cross-marking activities all help to create a consistent basis from which staff can work with confidence.

84 As noted above, the spread of assessment is communicated to students and checked at validation and annual review. External examiners confirm that the aims stated in the programme and module descriptors are underpinned by Subject Benchmark Statements and the standards set meet the guidelines given in the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*. The learning outcomes, subject content and planned assessment are directly related to appropriate study areas. Modules reflect FHEQ qualification level descriptors and the range of assessment methods is effective in providing students with opportunities to demonstrate the outcomes of learning and are vocationally relevant to the learners studying for the qualifications.

85 In modules with assessment of work-related/work-based learning, students have opportunities to apply their knowledge in a range of practical settings or work-related environments. More traditional strategies, including essays and reports, have been complemented by innovative practical tasks, which have enabled students to contextualise their learning to the required level. In FdSc module handbooks, grading criteria have been further contextualised to provide a useful guide for Level 4 students.

86 The Group has aligned its policies and procedures with the Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*. Currently, it proposes candidates for external examining to its awarding bodies for approval. However, in other respects it operates appropriate procedures for the operation of the external examiner process (see paragraphs 54-55). It provides briefing opportunities and liaises with external examiners to ensure that they operate to the Group's timescales. The HE Registry is responsible for the management of external examiner reports, including their receipt and responses from the programmes. The annual faculty self-evaluations include a consideration of external examiner comments and any planned actions at faculty level. AQSC is responsible for approving the annual monitoring reports and the overview report of the findings from external examiner reports and the associated action plans from programmes, for final approval by the HE Academic Board.

87 The Group also pays attention to the consistency of internal marking across the levels taught. Among the formal procedures covering assessment are procedures for second marking, moderation and assessment verification. There had been some variability across programmes according to the awarding body but these are reducing with the implementation

of the OU programmes. Some programme managers have operated a cross-site marking exercise with students studying the same subject area from different campuses. Staff commented that much was learnt from this exercise, not least giving confidence in the consistency of assessment design and marking.

88 The reliability and validity of assessment is regularly and routinely reviewed as part of annual monitoring, module evaluation and in response to feedback from and reports of external examiners. There is a systematic process for providing a thorough response to every examiner's report by all programmes. Set actions, responsibilities and target date are identified, further informing the AQSC deliberations. Awarding bodies express satisfaction with the Group operation of assessment and monitoring.

89 Increasingly, the scrutiny team saw evidence that the Group shows the ability to be proactive in its management of academic standards and the learning opportunities offered to students.

90 There is a formal procedure for the closure of programmes. During the transition between awarding bodies, there were many such examples and the programmes have been run out with the original awarding body and the new OU programme has begun with the next cohort. Appropriate care has been taken of any students who do not fit into a specific cohort, for example through health-related long-term absences.

#### **Criterion B4**

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

91 Over the course of the scrutiny, the culture of critical self-assessment has developed and become more pervasive across most areas of higher education provision. The development of procedures and their systematic implementation, together with the previously described OU transitional validations and extensive course reviews produced a manifest increase in the sense of a shared responsibility for academic standards and quality assurance of higher education. Staff told scrutiny team members that the stages of the annual monitoring process are a valuable learning experience and inform the continuous development and enhancement of programmes. It is common practice to involve staff outside the specific discipline area to give an 'external' viewpoint and to learn of, and disseminate, good practice.

92 The faculty annual SERs involve evaluating and making judgements against the three parts of the Quality Code and the embedding of enhancement. These reports provide a valuable opportunity for consideration of the strength of the current provision and the areas for development. They are carefully written and considered documents which contribute greatly to the shared understanding of higher education and the generation of ideas for continuous improvement. The SERs are clearly taken seriously at senior committee and SLT meetings of the Group.

93 During the later stages of the scrutiny, the increasingly proactive approach of senior staff and senior committees in discussing and resolving problems and identifying the potential for enhancement has become apparent. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities in committees and the business of committees is now carried out effectively and purposefully.

94 Structural and administrative systems are in place to ensure that actions identified are carried out. The efficiency and effectiveness of the HE Registry has been a key factor in driving the reliable and consistent implementation of policies and procedures and their

dissemination across the Group's staff. The administrative role of the HE Registry ensures that documents are centrally held, available widely and updated. During the course of the scrutiny, action planning for higher education quality at the higher education committee level has become more robust. As set out above, the Registry is responsible for the organisation and administration of the validation process and for checking that conditions of validation are met. The subcommittees of HE Academic Board meet regularly and, at least annually, review their terms of reference. Their remits cover the lifespan of programmes from initial planning to periodic review. The minutes are useful records of the discussions and feed into HE Academic Board and thence to governors.

95 As mentioned above, the procedures for review are thorough and robust. Faculties maintain appropriate overview of their provision and pay close attention to coherence of intended learning outcomes and the most effective ways for students to achieve these.

96 Findings from the module evaluation process, which feeds into annual course reporting, informs the next iteration of module delivery and helps determine any changes in the design and delivery of the course. Findings identified as areas for development feed into the rolling action plan for the course, which is monitored by the team, discussed at course committee meetings, fed back to students and incorporated into annual course reporting. External examiners are consulted and informed of developments, as appropriate, and any resulting minor or major modifications are considered in accordance with approval requirements including those of relevant awarding bodies.

97 The Group is actively involved with many employers and organisations at local and national level through which the opportunities for work-based and work-related learning are expanded (see paragraphs 76-78). Some of these employers have been involved in the design and development of programmes. A practitioner and a subject academic from outside the Group are required for the validation of foundation degrees.

98 Employers set briefs for students and may also be involved in hearing presentations, viewing the work produced by students and giving mock interviews. Students find these experiences invaluable. Criminology programmes have sought and used community wardens, police constables, police community officers and a barrister, who have contributed to programme design and development and have also been involved in monitoring and review.

99 There are effective ways of supporting staff and students. Staff have access to a wide range of support, academic development and continuous professional development (CPD) (see in particular paragraphs 101, 106-107 and 119-122). They have considerable experience of recognising and supporting students at all stages of their programme. In the early stages, when students are most at risk, programme teams are trialling a 'rapid intervention policy' when there were, for example, attendance and learning problems. Another team identified the late detection of learning difficulties, not declared at enrolment, resulting in poor retention and alerting staff to be proactive in the future. Debate at programme team level confirms that there is open discussion about ways of improving the student learning experience; ideas from all participants are welcomed.

100 The HE Registry has been central to the establishment of systems and the robust and systematic operation of procedures and ensuring they are known, as appropriate, by all members of staff. The culture of continuous improvement has been seen to operate at all levels of the Group.



## C Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff

### Criterion C1

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

101 The Group's HE Strategy 2013-16, updated in December 2014, states its commitment to deliver an excellent, inspiring learning experience. The strategy highlights an emphasis on embedding employability and entrepreneurial skills and on developing research focused learning and teaching strategies which 'support development, higher education pedagogies and discipline focused enquiry leading to the creation of new bodies of knowledge'. These intentions are underpinned by strategic objectives which demonstrate a commitment to academic excellence through creating a culture which supports staff to reach their highest possible levels of achievement. The pursuit of scholarship and research shown by the KPI of 95 per cent of higher education staff participating in research and scholarship, is a high priority. The Group has fitting structures and processes in place to progress these aspirations and is making good progress.

102 The expectation is that staff should be qualified to a level above that at which they teach and, to a very large extent, this is realised. In the Faculty of Arts, one staff member with a foundation degree teaches Level 5 (one per cent), 10 staff (14 per cent) with a first degree teach Level 6, and 11 (16 per cent) staff with a master's degree teach at Level 7. The Faculty of Arts has a policy of recruiting staff who are active practitioners in their field and maintain the currency and professional orientation of the curriculum through their research, scholarly activity and professional practice. This is confirmed by staff curricula vitae, applications to the RTS panel and meetings with staff at both the Hull and Harrogate campuses. As is usual in the sector, there is a larger than normal proportion of part time staff (six per cent) the majority of whom are active practitioners. Eight (11 per cent) staff hold relevant professional qualifications only one of whom, a part-time lecturer, does not hold an academic qualification. Currently, no staff in this faculty hold a doctorate but five are undertaking higher level study including PhDs. Forty of the 70 teaching staff hold a master's degree (57 per cent).

103 In the Faculty of Business and Science, there is the same policy of recruiting highly qualified staff who are specialists in their field and maintain currency of their professional practice and/or knowledge. In this Faculty, one member of staff with a foundation degree teaches at Level 6, four with first degrees teach at Level 6 and two with master's degrees teach at Level 7. While this is contrary to the Group's expectation, in the scrutiny team's view this is an acceptably low level. Staff are carefully vetted by awarding bodies at validation and subsequently staff academic currency and professional expertise is monitored by a rigorous RTS procedure. Within the faculty, one (two per cent) member of staff holds a doctorate, 24 (47 per cent) have master's degrees, 20 (39 per cent) have first degrees and three (one per cent) hold foundation degrees. One member of staff who teaches at Level 6 has a professional qualification but no degree while 12 (24 per cent) other members of staff hold relevant professional qualifications in addition to academic awards.

104 The Group operates a formal approval procedure for the appointment of staff. The guiding principle is that staff should be qualified to a level above that on which they are teaching with a minimum of a first degree and/or relevant professional qualifications plus experience of teaching of three years. A teaching qualification is desirable but not essential in the first instance. Staff may be appointed on the basis of their specialist expertise and

professional practice and experience. If they do not have the qualification one level above that at which they teach they will be expected to undertake further study. The Group also requires a teaching certificate and will support staff to undertake one. The level and currency of staff qualifications and professional practice is followed up at Annual Staff Performance and Development Review (ASPDR) and the RTS process. The RTS panel decides whether a new staff member may carry out assessment marking in their first year but whenever this occurs it is overseen by a mentor. Staff appointed to teach on higher education programmes have an induction, support and training for staff development purposes and a period of probation. The HE Registry staff provide support on information for staff new to teaching higher education. In appointing staff to teach higher education programmes at the Scarborough campus, there is no reason to believe that the Group would not operate the same rigorous scrutiny of potential lecturers.

105 As the above analysis shows, academic staff are appropriately well qualified and experienced for the responsibilities they hold. However, both faculties face the risk associated with small teaching teams where there is heavy reliance on individual staff to deliver a large part of the curriculum or where one individual has the specialist expertise in a niche area. The deans have also identified the challenge of finding suitable cover for possible long-term absence of key programme staff. This has also been raised during validation events and by external examiners. Senior managers are fully aware of the problem and have put in place satisfactory contingency plans to mitigate the risk to student learning.

106 Staff are encouraged to participate in peer networks. The Group is an institutional member of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in order to inform staff further of the professional framework and application process for individual professional recognition and membership. The Group actively supports staff to apply for fellowship status. For example, at the July 2014 Research and Scholarship conference, an Academic Development Officer from the HEA addressed the staff about routes to fellowship. Subsequently, the Group organised a writing retreat for staff to develop their applications. To date, in the Faculty of Arts there are three academic leaders and one member of teaching staff who are Fellows of the HEA and one Associate Fellow. In the Faculty of Business and Science, no academic leaders have HEA recognition but three teaching staff are Fellows. Staff reported that they found the HEA communications, online resources and website useful for teaching ideas. Sometimes a target set in the ASPDR is to join HEA. The Group acknowledges the benefits arising from membership of the HEA, including HEA conferences and national workshops. The Group was also invited to contribute to an HEA project on the development of a grade point average scheme working with 30 other higher education institutions.

107 A significant number of academic leaders and teaching staff belong to the Institute for Learning (IfL). The Faculty of Arts has 30 members (43 per cent) while the Faculty of Business and Science has 17 (34 per cent). A high number of staff belong to a wide range of professional bodies or other relevant associations such as creative networks and chartered societies. This is often in connection with their continuing professional practice in the vocational area. Staff gave examples of their membership of organisations such as the Chartered Management Institute, Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport, Institute of Chartered Accountants, Chartered Society of Designers, the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Chartered Association of Building Engineers, among many others. These organisations benefit staff by providing opportunities to access current information and journals for subject updating. In addition, staff engage in local networks such as the Early Years network in Hull and community and civic projects, which now include the planning of activities connected with the City of Culture 2017.

108 Research and scholarly activity (RSA) has been a major focus for higher education and over recent years this has evolved and become more strategic and coherent. The HE

Strategy 2013-16 identifies as part of its major objectives the encouragement of staff to pursue scholarship and research, including the publication of research activities within the Group and externally at public events, exhibitions and presentations at conferences.

109 The specific HE Research and Scholarship Strategy 2012-15 and the associated faculties' RSA Strategies and Implementation Plans further reinforce the Group's commitment to, and active pursuit of, scholarship by staff. The Research and Scholarship Committee informs institutional policy and operationally facilitates the development of RSA. It reports to the HE Academic Board. It has been instrumental in successfully driving the research and scholarship agenda in recent years. The Group definition of research as 'a process of investigation leading to new insights effectively shared' is taken from the Research Excellence Framework 2009. This exceeds the requirements for the activity of staff delivering foundation degrees. However, in developing further the Group's understanding and approach to RSA, the RSA Committee will consider revisions of the definitions of research, scholarly activity and CPD for the next RSA Strategy from 2015 onwards. The Group also recognises that it needs to ensure that all staff teaching higher education have a clear and shared understanding of each of the definitions. It is also cognisant of its need to capture more systematically the RSA activities from the faculties, in order to give an accurate account of the variety of work being done and to enable sharing of innovation and good practice.

110 The HE Strategy set a KPI for this at 95 per cent of higher education staff participation in research and scholarship activities by October 2014. The annual report of activity for the Research and Scholarship Committee 2013-14 sent to the Academic Board meeting in December 2014 states that this KPI was confirmed verbally by the deans after the completion of ASPDR.

111 The Group is also developing its understanding of the measurement of outputs and their impact on teaching and learning. While the KPI of 95 per cent of higher education staff engaged in RSA is impressive, the Group does not as yet use direct evaluation methods or external peer assessment to inform itself of the quality of the outputs of RSA. However, the level of commitment and staff enthusiasm for RSA, together with professional practice updating, is commendable and goes beyond the requirement that staff teaching foundation degrees 'maintain a close and professional understanding of current developments in scholarship in their subjects'. Staff are aware of a growing research culture to inform teaching. The RTS, ASPDR and staff development funding enable all higher education lecturers to take up many different opportunities to enhance their knowledge, skills and experience to directly enhance teaching and learning. The relatively large number of staff with, or studying for, doctorates and master's degrees is evidence of this. There are numerous examples of staff who continue to engage in scholarship after gaining qualifications.

112 Staff teaching Level 6 modules are given additional time allowance (1.5 hours allowed for one hour delivery) but as yet this does not occur at Levels 4 and 5. The Group considers that, given the constraints of the financial budget, the shortened academic year for higher education programmes and the requirement for 15 days of research or scholarly activity affords staff sufficient time.

113 Within the Group there are various ways that research and scholarship is shared across all higher education staff. There is a specific research conference day each year held in the summer. The day also includes guest speakers and talks providing practical advice on RSA development. Each faculty has a research blog and journals to share the research and scholarship activity across the staff.

114 Higher education teaching staff are provided with many opportunities to increase their knowledge and understanding of current scholarly developments in their discipline area to enhance their teaching at foundation degree level. The recent successful bid to the Association of Colleges' HE Scholarship Catalyst Fund will enable the Group to work with two other further education colleges with large higher education provision to develop and evaluate its evidence-based research framework to enhance scholarly culture and practice.

115 Based on the evidence available to it, the scrutiny team concluded that the Group's claim that it has a track record of supporting staff to develop their capacity to deliver higher education, including the upgrading of their academic qualifications, is well founded.

116 Both faculties have a policy of recruiting staff with vocational experience as well as appropriate academic qualifications (see paragraphs 101-103). At internal and external validation events for foundation degrees, the CVs of staff teaching on the programmes are scrutinised to verify that the delivery teams have the appropriate professional or industrial experience. This is to ensure that students receive relevant and current knowledge and understanding of their sector and the practical aspects of their studies. All staff are expected to maintain and refresh in their discipline of professional practice to ensure currency of the curriculum. External examiners often comment on the professional currency of students' work.

117 Many teaching staff are also professional practitioners and are self-employed or work in businesses or creative organisations. One tutor negotiated a reduction in hours to increase time working on creative projects. The RTS process and ASPDR procedure record and monitor the currency of lecturers' vocational experience and may set targets for employment updating. Some staff need to evidence their practical employment development for their continued membership of professional bodies.

118 Vocational updating is strongly encouraged and well supported by the Group. The Group expects, and makes time available, for three days of industrial updating over three years as a minimum and this is recorded in the ASPDR. Recent examples include work for Yorkshire Tourism Wildlife and Ecology projects; updating knowledge of digital marketing using new software and technology; a year's unpaid sabbatical to work in industry on public engagement in art (with a resultant positive impact on teaching). In addition to finance from central staff development funds, faculties have a budget which can be used for continuing professional development, defined as updating in professional practice. Of the annual reviews of the two faculties only that of the Faculty of Arts provides a brief overview of area of professional and industrial engagement undertaken by staff.

119 The Group has a Staff Learning and Development Policy which aims to use CPD, including research and scholarly activity, to ensure that staff are appropriately qualified and experienced for the level of teaching they undertake. Along with ASPDR and the rigorous RTS process, the policy is effective in providing opportunities for staff personal and professional development, which aligns with the Group's strategic objectives and fulfils the individual's own development aims.

120 All staff teaching on higher education programmes must initially be recommended through the RTS panel and approved by the HE Learning and Teaching Committee. Usually approval is for three years but there could be minor conditions attached or a reduced period of approval when, for example, a member of staff may be asked to undertake further study or work experience. Outcomes from the panel are relayed to the relevant dean and the member of staff and also feeds into the ASPDR process, which records planning and achievement of professional or industrial updating and research and scholarly activity. The ASPDR results in a personal development plan addressing skills, knowledge or behavioural competencies and career development objectives.

121 Development needs for all staff are collated centrally to inform the planning of in-house staff development events, including mandatory sessions on health and safety and equality, diversity, inclusion and safeguarding. Whole Group development events occur for one week three times each year, in addition to individual staff development. The Group may provide financial or other support to staff who need to take teaching qualifications as identified in an ASPDR. In the HE Registry, the HE Quality and Research Manager collects and analyses the development plans of higher education staff. Funding for higher degrees and small research projects is managed by the HE Registrar. Staff are clear about the processes of applying for this financial support for short courses and longer ones through the Research and Scholarly Activity sub-group. Faculties also have a budget which can be used for CPD, defined as updating in professional practice.

122 The Group has an excellent record in supporting staff to upgrade qualifications particularly to master's level. There is now an increasing emphasis on more advanced forms of study such as doctorates and research. There is a clear commitment to building staff capacity with prioritised financial resources to support the HE Strategy through funding for scholarly activity and higher study. Funding, managed through the HE Registry, over the five years 2009-10 to 2013-14 has been consistently generous. For example in 2013-14, approximately £84,000 was used to support new applicants and staff continuing long courses to enhance their academic and professional qualifications. Staff may also apply to this source to cover costs of conferences and short courses or they may apply to faculty funds. To date, there has always been adequate funding to meet requirements of agreed applications for further degrees. For 2014-15 the budget is broadly similar. Staff are very appreciative of the support provided by the Group in this respect and are proactive in taking up opportunities.

123 The Scarborough project involves the maintenance of a research base by the University and closer links with university staff offers opportunities for an additional stimulus to RSA for the Group.

124 The Group has been active and successful in developing higher education provision over more than 20 years. The Faculty of Arts' previous partnership with the University of Lincoln afforded the Group opportunities for staff to engage with academic peers and take part in university committees. There was a well-established tradition of higher education delivery across most subject areas prior to the development of foundation degrees. Staff have an established track record in curriculum design and assessment through their working relationships with a range of university partners over a number of years.

125 Programme leaders had previous experience in the design of the foundation degrees validated by Leeds Metropolitan University. However, the partnership arrangements with the OU allow considerable delegated authority, an acknowledgement of the Group's maturity as a higher education provider. For the many revalidations of programmes by the OU, the majority of staff guided by programme leaders designed and developed all the modules and assessment methods for the new awards. OU validation events are rigorous and the Group was successful in achieving validation for the programmes it put forward. Where conditions or recommendations were applied, the Group responded effectively to enable a positive outcome.

126 Through experience of validations with a number of different university partners, programme leaders and other teaching and management, staff have gained knowledge and practice in using the expectations of the Quality Code, Part A: Setting and maintaining Academic Standards. Programme leaders are fully conversant with the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*, and have a complete understanding of programme specifications, programme outcomes and module intended learning outcomes. They are also confident of the employer engagement agenda

and work-based and work-related learning required by foundation degrees. The academic staff profile shows 61 staff with experience of curriculum development and/or assessment design on the Faculty of Arts. This group includes all 25 academic leaders and 36 teaching staff. In the Faculty of Business all 18 academic leaders, as well as 19 teaching staff, have programme and assessment design experience.

127 Programme leaders and other teaching staff sit on internal validating panels and some staff have acted as advisers to other Groups in the development of their foundation degrees, for example in Interior Design. External examiner reports comments are largely very positive about the well-designed curriculum of the OU programmes and the relevance and wide range of assessment methods.

128 The Group actively encourages and supports higher education staff to engage with other higher education providers. When the HE Registry receives advertisements for external examiners, they pass on the information to the appropriate faculty. Staff have responded positively and recently there has been greater success in gaining positions. The Faculty of Arts has eight staff who are external examiners, while Business and Science has two.

129 In the Faculty of Arts there are four staff with experience of sitting on external validation panels with other universities while in Business and Science there is one. A larger number of staff at both the Hull and Harrogate campuses are engaged with other external networks such as the Local Enterprise Partnerships or regional development forums: 14 in Arts and 17 in Business and Science. Staff at both campuses are also involved with other networks: 20 staff in Arts and six staff in Business and Science. For example, a tutor in Business and Science was invited by an awarding organisation of a professional body to join a panel which monitors training programmes. Teacher training staff are active in the Huddersfield teacher education consortium. One member of staff (in the Faculty of Arts) is a QAA reviewer.

130 In the application, the Group recognises that encouragement for peer networking, participation in external examining and other activities of other higher education providers is an area for development. The Group still gives less recognition and emphasis to this type of interaction with other providers of higher education, focussing more on research and scholarly activity. For example, the faculties' SERs for 2013-14 do not specifically record and comment on this staff experience. However, the Group's efforts to encourage and support staff to become external examiners is to be commended.

131 Overall, the scrutiny team came to the view from the evidence seen that the claims made in the application concerning the scholarship and pedagogical effectiveness of staff can be confirmed.

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

### Criterion D1

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

132 The primary means of assessing the quality of teaching and learning is the Group's formal lesson observation policy and procedure based on Ofsted principles. Observations are carried out by current higher education tutors who may or may not be a subject specialist in the area of teaching being observed. However, all observers are trained to apply specific higher education criteria for grading based on the FHEQ descriptors which relate to levels of skills and independence.

133 The process is coordinated by the Group Director for Quality and Standards in liaison with the HE Quality and Research Manager. Outcomes are reported to the deans and faculty boards and, through the HE Learning and Teaching Committee, to the HE Academic Board and Corporation. As well as faculties having the overview report for their area, the whole Group overview is taken by the Teaching Improvement Manager who reports to the whole Group Learning and Teaching Quality Improvement Committee.

134 Observation grades are considered in programme annual monitoring and faculty SERs for reflection and action planning by practitioners. They are also used in the ASPDR process. Grades reported to date are high. In the Faculty of Business and Science, 55 per cent of staff gained grade 1 and 45 per cent gained grade 2 in 2013-14. Where poor performance is identified there is substantial support for improvement. This may be provided within the faculties by the HE Learning and Teaching Managers or centrally from the Head of Learning and Teaching, learning coaches and the QulSSMs. For example, a tutor previously graded 4 gained a much improved grade when re-observed after support was provided. The observations are supplemented by 'Learning Walks' carried out by managers or peers and may be based on a theme such as equality and diversity in the curriculum.

135 The probation policy for new members of staff requires a satisfactory teaching observation. Support for teaching development is provided by mentors and learning coaches, and from managers and peers within each faculty. The consistency of the observer assessments has recently been strengthened by the introduction of a moderation process.

136 As a result of the positive responses from staff to the funded pilot project on a Peer Observation Model in 2012-13, the HE Division is rolling out a formalised process which will continue to be voluntary. This will enable peers to share their practice and encourage debate on pedagogy and research informed teaching and learning. This is a positive development in the Group's endeavours to enhance student learning experiences.

137 Good practice is effectively shared in a number of ways. There is an annual HE Learning and Teaching conference which is addressed by external academics but also has sessions led by higher education staff to showcase the various projects they are involved with. For example, at the conference in February 2014, staff presented on 'Employer Partnerships in the Arts', 'A Peer Student Support Model' and 'Students as Partners in Decision Making'. Faculty development days also afford opportunities for staff to meet as a community to share practice. 'Teach Meet' and bite-size training sessions also allow staff to develop pedagogic skills.

138 There is a clear connection between the HE Research and Scholarship Strategy and that of higher education learning and teaching. There is an aim to enrich the learning and teaching experience of students through research and scholarship. In both faculties, this encompasses the educational ideology of 'student as producer' and research-informed teaching. It is a continuing area for staff development in 2014-15. Currently, the impact of staff research and scholarly activity is measured indirectly, but the Group continues to advance its understanding of this issue and intends to develop better evaluation methods.

139 External examiner reports and student feedback in module evaluation and NSS are used to inform managers about standards of teaching and learning and to establish the influence of research and scholarly activity. External examiners often mention the high quality of teaching apparent from students' work. In the NSS 2013 and 2014, the score for 'teaching on my course' was 84 per cent, just one percentage point lower than the FEC average in 2014. The NSS action plan in response to this has put in place a target of 85 per cent for 2015 and actions to promote practice and pedagogy to develop learning and teaching. Students who met the scrutiny team were enthusiastic about the standard of teaching and support provided by tutors.

140 Based on previous developments and current practices that the Group has demonstrated to ensure consistency of scrutiny of teaching and learning across the Hull and Harrogate campuses, it is likely that the Group will operate similar robust processes for monitoring the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning at Scarborough.

141 An HE Assessment Policy refers to the Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Assessment of Learning Outcomes*. The HE Registry has oversight of the policy and its application within the HE Division. Within the faculties, deans and managers implement the policy which is operated by programme leaders and lecturers. It requires feedback to be provided in a timely way but does not specify a period of time in which assessment feedback should be received by students.

142 Assessment schedules are provided in module handbooks. The information provided states that, normally, feedback will be given within three working weeks. However, there were differences between the students in their experiences of having assessment feedback. Some reported they received it within two or three weeks, some had 'quick' feedback, but others said it took longer and was sometimes not received in time to inform subsequent assignments. Students' understanding was that this was because the work had to be second marked and this caused the delay.

143 Outcomes from the NSS also indicate that students are less satisfied with the promptness of feedback. For both faculties scores for this item were low in 2013 and 2014. The action plan arising from the 2014 results sets an improved target from 77 per cent to 80 per cent satisfaction. Actions include a review of assessment loads and staff development to clarify the expectation on assessment and feedback.

144 Information to students on the outcomes of assessment in a timely manner is an area for improvement. Actions to be taken to address the issue are appropriate. However, the scrutiny team considers that, for the Group to have a clear overview of timeliness of feedback, a more systematic approach to monitoring the promptness of feedback would need to be taken.

145 The HE Assessment Policy clearly sets out the need for robust assessment practice and indicates to staff that assessment is concerned with providing opportunities for students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. As such, the assessment criteria must be reliable and made plain to students in the spirit of fairness and consistency. If special circumstances arise then the organisational procedures and awarding body regulations must be followed.



146 The guidelines state that assessment should be formative and summative and promote learning. Feedback should be motivational and developmental, enabling students to improve their performance. The Group makes these principles known to new staff at an induction and they are regularly revisited at staff development events.

147 Students reported that feedback was very useful, constructive and an essential part of their learning; it was written and verbal. They commented that assessment methods, briefs and criteria for marking are very clearly explained in module handbooks, the virtual learning environment (VLE) and through in-class discussions with staff. In some cases students felt that the quality of feedback depended on the tutor but, in the main, there were very positive responses about the supportive and helpful discussions they had with staff. However, the NSS scores for assessment have been lower than expected in the 2014 survey. There was an overall improvement in assessment and feedback in 2013 from 78 per cent to 80 per cent but this dropped by three per cent to 77 per cent for 2014. The data is analysed in greater detail at faculty and programme level. In the Faculty of Arts the score for assessment and feedback improved by three per cent from 2013 to 2014 to 76 per cent which is one per cent below the FEC benchmark. However, at programme level there were some poor results. In the Faculty of Business and Science, the score dropped by 12 per cent from 89 per cent in 2013 to 77 per cent in 2014. Steps are being taken to identify the issues giving rise to the disappointing scores and actions put in place. For example, student and staff focus groups have been set up in the Faculty of Business and Science, while in the Faculty of Arts there has been a rebalancing of assessment load and weighting together with mid-year feedback to include indicative grades for long, thin modules.

148 External examiners consistently comment on the high quality of assessment feedback given to students. Many remark positively on the way that feedback is linked with learning outcomes providing greater clarity and detail to students about their performance. They also comment that the assessments are challenging and fair with clear briefs and criteria. The scrutiny team considers that students receive suitably constructive feedback with some slight inconsistencies across programmes and across modules within some programmes. However, evidence of the Group's diligence in acting promptly with a determination to improve assessment and feedback provides confidence that assessment and feedback do not put the student experience or standards at risk.

149 The Group is proactive in seeking views from students, staff and other institutional stakeholders such as employers in a number of effective ways. It is appreciative of the opinions of all constituents who have an interest in the Group and is appropriately responsive.

150 There are a number of structural and informal opportunities for students to communicate with staff at both campuses at different levels. Much feedback is informal. The very positive, close working relationships between teaching staff and students and the teachers' open door policy allows constant interaction which resolves many issues promptly. More formally, students complete module reviews about teaching, learning and assessment. An elected student representative for each programme may attend course committee meetings and raise issues from the cohort. The programme annual monitoring report gathers the student group ideas and incorporates them into an action plan or staff relate back through the student representatives where and why some issues cannot be altered.

151 Each semester both faculties hold a student consultative meeting with the student representatives of all programmes. The Dean, Associate Dean and QuISSMs hear at first hand the issues raised by the student groups. A positive feature of these meetings is the attendance of staff from central Group services such as IT, estates and finance who can often provide an answer to student concerns immediately. It also sends a signal to students that the Group takes seriously their opinions and needs.

152 The HE Student Experience Committee has representatives from all programmes and may be accessed by students at the Harrogate campus by teleconferencing. This is an efficient and effective way to engage students from Harrogate. However, the Group has needed to be proactive in encouraging attendance from Harrogate students and participation improved over the period of the scrutiny. The Assistant Principal for higher education chairs this meeting and again there is a positive effect from the presence of staff from central departments including the library, student services, IT, and estates. The HE Academic Board receives an annual report which provides a summary of student consultations during the year.

153 Student Voice meetings are attended mostly by further education students though higher education students are also invited. This is a useful link between further education and higher education with students' views provided by a HE Registry officer, the Assistant Principal for HE and one of the deans. Feedback to students may be immediate within meetings or through teaching staff or emails to student representatives who report back to their groups. The Group consults students regularly on specific issues. For example in 2013-14, students took part in focus groups about student handbooks, marketing, fees, equality and diversity, bursaries and scholarships and the visibility of financial information. Students from across the Group were consulted through a thorough process on the Group's FDAP application. The responses were broadly positive. This also broadcast widely the Group's intentions. Outcomes were published in a high quality brochure which was widely distributed.

154 There is provision for student representation on a wide range of higher education committees, including the HE Academic Board and its subcommittees. In practice it is usually the Student Union President who attends the higher level meetings. At faculty board and programme meetings student representatives are invited though attendance may be inconsistent. The students' awareness of the Group committee structure and the role of their student representative was variable. However, most felt that the Group responded promptly and positively to their comments.

155 As can be seen from the above, the Group takes the results of the NSS very seriously. Each year the outcomes are carefully analysed by HE Registry staff, deans, QulSSMs and programme teams. Trend data compares year-on-year figures and there is benchmarking against similar further education colleges. Students are consulted on outcomes to get a more detailed picture of issues giving rise to the responses. Comprehensive action plans and targets are formulated which are monitored throughout the year.

156 The Group operates a number of successful mechanisms to communicate with staff and obtain feedback. Staff views are sought by an annual Staff Survey, Staff Voice meetings and at meetings held by the SLT at all campuses. Staff feel able to raise issues with the dean and faculty staff. The summary results of the Best Companies' Survey are considered at the Organisational Development Committee and published on the staff portal and posters. The CEO and Deputy CEO chair the recently introduced Staff Voice meetings attended by a range of staff representatives. The aim of the meetings is to inform staff of strategic objectives and new initiatives and to capture innovative ideas from staff and to allow staff to raise issues of concern. There are now three subgroups for Staff Voice. Staff feel they have sufficient opportunities to feed back their views. Staff at Harrogate feel fully included in Group activities. Group news is published in the Portal Press which is available electronically and faculties produce regular newsletters.

157 Developing employability and entrepreneurial skills with stakeholders to enhance the curriculum is a key objective in the higher education strategy. The faculties have started to formulate their policies on employer engagement. Programme teams and students have substantial engagement with industry and employers relevant to the curriculum area. As seen earlier, many staff are practitioners and interact with professional colleagues to inform

curriculum development and provide opportunities for student work placements or 'live' assignment briefs. In June 2013, the Group set up Employers' Consultative Committee meetings at each campus in order to gain employers' perspectives on the strategic direction of the Group. The drive for improving employability prospects of students is also a key aim.

158 The Group has a strong commitment to continuous quality improvement and welcomes and seeks feedback from all stakeholders to inform its strategic and operational activities. Its current practices work effectively across the three Colleges in the Group and makes the extension of this model to include the Scarborough Campus eminently feasible.

159 The Group provides a high quality, comprehensive service to students in terms of pre- course advice and guidance, induction to their programmes and individual support for study. The HE Registry, Marketing Department and programme teams work cooperatively to arrange open days and other advice sessions, provide full and accurate website information and arrange interviews to ensure students have chosen the correct programme for them and that they are suitably equipped to succeed on their course. There is a thorough induction process covering Group and programme specific information, including a welcome pack for international students. At interview, induction and continuing throughout their programmes, students are informed of, and assisted to access, extra support from Student Services for personal or academic needs.

160 The HE Induction Procedure document aims to ensure that the induction of students across programmes and campuses is consistent. It outlines the purpose of induction, responsibilities and minimum components which include a welcome, orientation to the Group, academic information, registration and enrolment. Students confirmed that induction was useful and informative. They appreciated the opportunity to understand the library and work placement services offered.

161 Students are assessed at induction or early in their programmes to identify any individual learning needs. Students were aware of support services and some had used extra support provided for English, maths and computer skills. Additional learning support is provided to students who are funded but there is also provision for those not formally diagnosed or who are waiting for the outcome of assessment for funded support. For example, support has been provided for students with dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and in need of basic word processing (in the latter case access was granted to a dedicated laptop with software enabling assignments to be dictated and then edited for submission purposes).

162 Study skills development is provided by the Personal Development Planning modules or students can attend specific workshops offered by the library or learning support teams. Individual tutorials by academic staff also identify support needed and, where appropriate, signpost students to appropriate services. Students were extremely appreciative of the way staff are available and respond so promptly to requests for help. Students were also very positive about the support they get from their personal tutor who would 'bend over backwards to help'. This is a strength within the Group.

163 There is a dedicated HE Student Engagement Officer. The major focus for this role is support for students who are at risk of failing. Students may self-refer or be directed by a tutor. The main issue for referral is low attendance (below 85 per cent). Other reasons for accessing the Student Engagement Officer include academic or personal issues. An annual report of support provides a summary of the number of higher education students receiving help. Careful monitoring of the usage of learning support by higher education students enables the Group to assess the adequacy of its provision. The Group considers areas of good practice to be its supportive personalised approach to learning and its effective and responsive student support arrangements. The scrutiny team agrees with this. Ongoing

detailed monitoring will be essential in order to maintain the service in times of increasing financial constraints and the new regulations being introduced for Disabled Students' Allowance funding.

164 As part of the planning process for the Scarborough campus, the Management Information Systems/Student Experience planning group has identified the issues the Group needs to address for enrolments at Scarborough in September 2015, to ensure students are clearly informed about the higher education provision on offer, the admissions systems and subsequent support for new and continuing students. The relevant staff from each institution are meeting to share information and agree working practices. The meeting of the group demonstrated a firm commitment to ensure students were not disadvantaged or negatively affected in any way by the changes following the handover of responsibility to the Group.

165 At validation the resources required to support the achievement of the learning outcomes are identified and the Group's ability to supply them is assessed by the awarding body. Thereafter the Group reviews effectively the quality, adequacy and currency of learning resources at regular meetings of the HE Planning and Resources Committee (five meetings in 2013-14), by annual business planning and by using staff and student feedback and external examiners' comments. Appropriate resources are sufficiently accessible to part-time and full-time students at both the Hull and Harrogate campuses.

166 The Group has responded positively to NSS outcomes which refer to resources. For example, ICT Services and the HE Library and eLearning Service produce their own detailed NSS Improvement Plans, as does each faculty. A small number of external examiners have commented, particularly in Arts, where delivery is more resource-intensive. For example, concerns were raised about the currency of media equipment. In response, the Faculty has put forward a capital investment bid to improve media resources. For 2014-15, the Faculty is replacing older computers, photography and film equipment. The Dean continues to monitor closely the use of resources. Student issues with resources are identified through module evaluations, faculty consultative committees, programme team meetings and the HE Student Experience Committee. Often problems can be resolved immediately through the presence of representatives of estates, the library and IT. The close liaison between academic staff and the library and IT areas ensures that new developments and refurbishment or replacement are identified and bids suitably submitted. Faculty SERs evaluate library and learning resources and identify expenditure already used and further investments needed.

167 Generally, students are positive about the learning materials and resources in the libraries which support their needs. Usually the library can supply or obtain books, journals and other materials on reading lists supplied from every module. Part-time students appreciated being able to borrow more books than full-time students but felt that there was a lack of eBooks in some areas. Some students based at the KC Stadium in Hull felt that there should be a small dedicated facility there as students usually needed to travel to the main Hull campus to obtain books. However, students extensively use online resources and electronic access to books and journals. They value highly the use of the VLE to access remotely learning materials such as lesson notes, handouts and presentations. The Group has an ongoing strategy to develop further technology enhanced learning through a Student Digital Literacy Entitlement.

168 The Group has an HE Placement/Work-Based Learning policy which sets out generic principles for all placement learning in the HE Division to enable students to achieve their learning outcomes (see paragraphs 76-79). In addition, faculties have set out for programmes the approach taken to work experience which may be a period of placement, working on 'live' or simulated briefs, work-related learning or community collaborations. Students' employability skills and prospects are further developed through a large number of varied enhancement opportunities arranged by staff. These include taking part in

competitions, exhibitions, business pitching and Young Enterprise schemes. Students also benefit from staff who are practitioners through introductions to professionals as guest speakers or hosts at industry/workplace visits. The extent and quality of enhancement opportunities demonstrates the high level of commitment of staff at the Group.

169 The Group has a comprehensive range of services available to students at both the Hull and Harrogate campuses. These include pre-entry advice, general welfare, health and well-being, multi-faith chaplaincy, counselling, financial and accommodation advice. International students can obtain guidance relevant to them. Specific higher education careers advice is provided by an external agency. Career planning, employability skills development and financial advice are provided and are also appreciated by students. The Group is committed to providing a high quality student experience which extends to the support services as well the academic provision. Students are made aware of this in the Student Charter. The Director of Student Services has overall responsibility and line manages a Service Manager and team of staff.

170 Services are widely advertised throughout the Group on posters and clear leaflets. Students are also informed of where and how to access help at induction, in tutorials, in the HE Student Journal and from the VLE. The service area undertakes to provide impartial information, advice and guidance (IAG) throughout the student journey from initial contact and at all key stages through to leaving. The high quality of provision was verified by the achievement of the Matrix accreditation for its IAG services.

171 Confidential counselling services are available for staff and students. The Human Resources department has ensured that, in times of stress and change management, extra resources are made available for staff. Students were aware of the counselling service and have found it helpful.

172 Staff providing pre-application advice are well qualified with NVQ Level 4 IAG qualifications. Counselling staff are also appropriately qualified and undertake supervision and the 10 to 15 hours of CPD needed to maintain their British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) registration. The student support area produces an annual self-assessment report. It uses feedback surveys from students, parents and carers, focus groups, and reports from the enrichment team. Class representatives in the faculties also feed into the report. The report outlines the activities provided, key strengths and areas for development and highlights the staff development needs for the following year. It shows a significant amount of training being undertaken by support staff. However, the report does not provide any quantitative data or an analysis of the numbers and nature of students using each service. Resource needs are identified through student and staff feedback. This has proved to be a satisfactory method but greater benefit may be had by more in-depth examination of the usage of services. The services are of good quality and highly valued by students.

173 There has been additional investment in an administrative and academic infrastructure to enable higher education development in the Group. As reported above, the HE Registry and a higher education-specific governance framework have been established to support the HE Division. The HE Registry has recently undergone further restructuring which strengthens the quality overview of higher education and the links between the faculties, and central higher education administration provide efficient and effective management. The close and effective working relationships between the HE Division and the central Group functions of finance and business development ensure that accurate and timely management information is used to maintain and develop higher education provision.

174 Higher education business plans are developed through collaboration between the deans, Assistant Principal HE and the HE Registrar using the higher education strategy

framework. They rely on past statistics to set targets for recruitment, retention, achievement, curriculum development, staffing level requirements and validations. Staff from central finance and business functions are often invited to faculty boards and HE Executive meetings to provide data and advice. The HE Registry has confidence that its management information systems (MIS) provide reliable information in appropriate ways to suit the needs of different users. For example, MIS was recently used to obtain 2014-15 data and equality, diversity and inclusion profiles from autumn term numbers; MIS promptly and easily provided the appropriate information. Programme staff and faculty management teams analyse student retention and achievement data in their annual and self-evaluation monitoring reports. During the recruitment period, student applications, interviews, offers and acceptances are closely monitored on a weekly basis using management information numbers. Staff have confidence that the software provides prompt, fit-for-purpose data.

175 The Group operates effective examination boards for all its programmes. Most external examiners comment that they received information prior to meetings in good time. Examination boards are run efficiently. All the required documentation is prepared carefully, and accurate assessment outcomes are provided in hard copy. Examination boards are attended by all members of a programme team who were able to verify the accuracy of the data provided by the HE Registry.

176 The MIS/Student Experience planning group for the Scarborough campus has identified the issues involved in using two student management systems and has an action plan which sets out how the systems can be matched. The IT provision is also being examined and meetings between the relevant university and college staff are continuing to ensure smooth operation of information management which is not confusing or onerous for staff. This exemplifies the cooperative and proactive way in which the Scarborough project is being approached.

177 The Group has a confidential Praise and Complaints Policy which explains the arrangements for students, customers, partners and members of the public to make a complaint if there are concerns on any aspect of the Group. It is available on the Group website under the HE Registry. It is obtainable on the staff portal and signposted in the HE Student Journal and VLE for students. The complaints procedure deals with academic and non-academic matters. It is a staged process starting with student representation to a tutor. It then escalates through the relevant dean and the Student Services Manager to the Director of Student Services.

178 Students reported that they were clear about how to make a complaint and where to find out how to do it. However, students feel able to directly approach their programme leader or other tutors and use the student representative system to voice any concerns so that there are fewer resorts to the formal process than might otherwise be the case.

179 In response to an external audit in 2012-13, the HE Registry now maintains a central record of HE Complaints and Praise. These are rendered anonymous and reported to the AQSC, HE Academic Board and the Excellence Committee of the Corporation. An evaluation of the Group dealings with complaints is included in the Annual Institutional Overview for the OU. In this report in 2013-14, there were 10 complaints which were successfully resolved and two formally recorded instances of praise. However, the report to Academic Board in December 2014 also recorded 10 complaints and two instances of praise in semester one 2014-15. Most complaints concerned specialist learning resources or staffing. They were resolved satisfactorily with only one complaint reaching the third stage of the process.

180 The number of complaints across the Group, including those against service areas as well as curriculum areas, are analysed for any equality and diversity matters. During the

period January 2011 to September 2013 there was only one such complaint which was upheld. The higher education data on complaints does not, as yet, provide this level of detail. However, the mechanisms to deal with complaints regarding higher education provision are effective and confidential.

181 The Group has an institutional commitment to CPD which is well embedded. The Group's Institutional Staff Learning and Development Policy and ASPDR applies equally to administrative, service area and support staff. The Organisational Development Committee has strategic responsibility for the policy. The Learning and Development Manager supported by the human resources team has operational management.

182 The ASPDR process identifies staff development in line with strategic planning. The annual staff learning and development plan for the Group is formulated from this and local plans are developed within the Group's functional groups. An annual staff development budget is allocated to cover in-house training, qualifications and courses. The Group facilitates an annual programme of corporate staff development for organisational needs and new national policy initiatives. There are three whole Group development periods when the CEO may present the Group's strategic direction and new initiatives. Other mandatory training events are held throughout the year.

183 Administrative staff are clear about how, and where, to apply for funding for other activities such as attendance at conferences or short courses. For staff supporting the HE Division, there is the opportunity to apply to the higher education staff development budget to undertake training in subjects related to their role. For example, an admissions officer attended a UCAS conference, a staff member in the Data Services section attended a HEFCE funding meeting and library staff have been supported to undertake master's degrees. Academic and higher education administrative staff are supported to attend events held by awarding bodies and national organisations, such as the Association of Colleges, Mixed Economy Group and QAA. The Group runs a leadership development course, called ASPIRE, to develop management skills in staff who may progress to roles of greater responsibility.

184 The Group considers its funded support for staff development to be an area of good practice. Staff are very enthusiastic about staff development and the Group funding has been able to meet the majority of applications. The infrastructure for identifying development needs and the Group's procedures to support all staff to progress in their role and in their personal career plans supports the claim to a high level of commitment for CPD.

185 The Group has a comprehensive policy and procedure for maintaining accurate and consistent public information. This includes pre-enrolment information, programme specifications, course and module handbooks and programme marketing materials including the website. It clearly states the detailed procedure and division of responsibilities for the design, development, checking and signing off public information prior to publication. This includes ensuring compliance with awarding body requirements. An overview of information about higher education is maintained by these unambiguous processes and accountability ensured through the committee structure. The HE Planning and Resources Committee has a remit to advise on the accuracy and completeness of management and other information which the Group produces regarding its higher education provision including Key Information Sets and UCAS profiles. The Marketing and Publicity Manager is an ex-officio member of this committee. Minutes go to the HE Academic Board and then to the Corporation. The HE Registry plays a key role in developing and approving all public information and information provided to students. The development and handling of information provided for students and stakeholders have been mapped against the Quality Code Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision by the HE Registry. The Group is confident its procedures align with the Quality Code Expectation.

186 Marketing business partners work with the faculties to produce promotional materials. Within the faculties there are members of staff known as Student Journey Leads for marketing who work across the Group. Their remit is to gather stories and articles for wider dissemination for in-house newsletters and external broadcasting of the Group's successes. An iterative process between faculties, marketing and the HE Registry operates to final approval of publicity, for example the prospectus and other promotional materials such as leaflets and flyers. The higher education Registrar advises the Principals who sign off publicity materials. Programme handbooks and module guides are produced in the faculties by programme teams. The OU requirements for programme handbooks are prescriptive and handbooks have to be produced at validation and agreed. They are checked by the QulSSMs, and the HE Registry examines a sample for quality assurance purposes. The Group provides higher education students with an HE Journal (diary), a programme handbook and module guides. The HE Journal, also available on the VLE, is produced from information from Registry and Student Services for generic material. Students find the website information, prospectus and handbooks informative and accurate. In response to an advisable recommendation in the Summative Review report published by QAA in 2012, the Group has successfully strengthened its procedure to ensure the accuracy of its website and that information is consistent between the website and prospectus. Changes have to be approved by the Marketing Business Support office and authorised by the HE Registry before they are released into the public domain.

187 The scrutiny team found that, while information pertaining to public information, handbooks and information for students was accurate and complete, some information for staff on the portal was not updated promptly. For example, the schedule of higher education committee meetings for 2012-13 was still showing in January 2014 but with no further information about the schedule for 2013-2014. In addition, the section for the NSS showed outcomes for 2011 when accessed in January 2014. However, by the end of the scrutiny the portal had been updated.

188 The website information and prospectus for 2016-17 was in the process of careful development by the Curriculum Planning group for the Scarborough provision. The Principal of Hull College along with the HE Registrar were working closely with the Marketing department to ensure that the information about the Group's offer at Scarborough will be accurate.

189 Overall, the scrutiny team considered that the Group has sufficient and thorough controls to safeguard the accuracy and completeness of information produced about its higher education provision.

190 The Group demonstrates a strong commitment to equality and diversity. The website has a detailed section which states the Group's intention to provide an environment that promotes equality for all and celebrates its diverse community. In compliance with law, the Group implements a Single Equality Scheme and Action and Improvement Plan which applies to both staff and students. The Plan incorporates specific equality objectives. The Group regularly reviews its performance and publishes an annual Public Sector Equality Duty report on the website and in hard copy. It is a comprehensive document providing the breakdown figures for the protected characteristics for staff and students accompanied by a thoughtful analysis. It has a section describing case study examples of the positive effects that the Group's work and activities has had on individuals and groups with different protected interests. The discrete policies associated with equality are widely available for staff and students, for example on the staff portal, for students on the VLE and are encompassed in the Student Charter. Staff and students are informed of the Group's equality and diversity statement at induction. Subsequently, staff are required to undertake mandatory Equality, Diversity and Safeguarding (EDS) staff development modules.



191 The Group has effective structures, policies and procedures for monitoring and developing its EDS agenda. The EDS Board meets three times each year with the remit to oversee the development and operation of strategies and policies in relation to the Group's agenda for equality, diversity and safeguarding. It reports to the Corporation. The Equality and Diversity Team is made up of the Group's Equality and Diversity Officer and senior managers and staff from across the Group. This team reports to the EDS Board on policy development and operational matters. In addition, the Group uses a process of equality analysis to assess the impact of policies and procedures on other Group policies. Each higher education faculty and school in the FE division has a Student Journey Lead with special responsibility for raising the profile of EDS with teaching and support staff. This is an innovative initiative and constitutes good practice. An internal audit report on equality and diversity was carried out in December 2013 by an external audit company. It concluded that the Group's policies were in line with best practice and no areas for improvement were identified. Furthermore, it noted that all policies are reviewed on a regular basis.

192 Among the facilities the Scarborough Campus offers is greatly increased access for those with disabilities, including the added advantage of offering accessible residential accommodation. Triggered by the newly available facilities at Scarborough, the Group's HE Access Agreement for 2016 entry has been considered and the HE Planning and Resources Committee decided that the Access Agreement will be across the Group.

193 Within faculties, student and staff profiles are analysed, reported and evaluated. The central information management team provides a useful, clear guide to equality and diversity data which enables staff to understand what data is available, how to access it, how to analyse it and how it can be used to narrow achievement gaps or measure the impact of any strategies over time. This information is included in annual SERs and may result in action points in improvement plans. Business reviews held each term also evaluate the performance of students by age, disability, ethnicity and gender in order to inform action plans.

194 The EDS Board has an intention to strengthen the embedding of equality and diversity into the curriculum. This is a feature of the teaching observations called Learning Walks which look for differentiated challenges. In addition, the Group runs extracurricular events to celebrate and value the rich diversity of the Group's population. For example, in April 2013 a week of activities included workshops in Mandarin, Chinese calligraphy, sports and games accessible for all and talks by Amnesty International. A diversity calendar and planner on the VLE informs students of some of the secular and religious festivals and events which will be occurring throughout the year.

195 Equal opportunities are observed in recruiting staff. Job descriptions are checked thoroughly by Human Resources and by Trades Unions at the drafting stages. Person specifications are transparent and decisions are always taken by a panel not an individual. In its operations the Group strives to be fair to all and there are many examples of good practice. It has a proactive approach to supporting all members of the Group and to promoting positive equality messages.

196 When identifying staff to work at the Scarborough campus the College clearly operated a fair process to allow staff to volunteer to work there and subsequently allocated work to which staff then had the opportunity to respond. The Curriculum Planning Group was endeavouring to make timetables workable but also looking to support staff who may need to travel to Scarborough.

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