Quality Enhancement Review of Neath Port Talbot College trading as NPTC Group of Colleges

Technical Report

June 2022

Contents

This report is published in both English and Welsh.

About the Quality Enhancement Review method

The QAA website explains the method for Quality Enhancement Review (QER) and has links to the QER handbook and other informative documents.[1] For 2021-22, the scope of QERs focused on quality assurance in line with the changes made by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) to external quality assurance requirements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, QAA published an addendum to accompany the QER handbook which explains the adaptations to the method delivery. For 2021-22, providers have the opportunity to engage with QAA separately on quality enhancement. You can also find more information about the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).[2]

About this review

This is the Technical Report of the QER conducted by QAA at Neath Port Talbot College trading as NPTC Group of Colleges. The review visit took place online between 27 and 29 June 2022. The review was conducted by a team of three reviewers:

- Ms Tessa Counsell
- Dr Osian Rees
- Dr Bradley Woolridge (student reviewer).

In advance of the review visits, the provider submitted a self-evaluative document (the Self-evaluative Analysis), a change report, and a Prior Information Pack, comprising a range of materials about the provider's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards.

About this report

In this report, the QER team makes judgements on:

- the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) Part 1 for internal quality assurance
- the relevant baseline regulatory requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales.

The judgements can be found on page 2, followed by the detailed findings of the review given in numbered paragraphs.

Technical Reports set out the QER team's view under each of the report headings. A shorter Outcome Report sets out the main findings of the QER for a wider audience. The Outcome Report for this review is on the QAA website.[3]

QER Technical Reports are intended primarily for the provider reviewed, and to provide an information base for the production of thematic reports that identify findings across several providers.

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[1] About QER: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-enhancement-review
[2] About QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us
[3] Outcome Report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Neath-Port-Talbot-College

Overarching judgement about NPTC Group of Colleges

NPTC Group of Colleges **meets** the requirements of the ESG Part 1 for internal quality assurance.

NPTC Group of Colleges **meets** the relevant baseline requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales.

This is a positive judgement, which means the provider has robust arrangements for securing academic standards, managing academic quality and for enhancing the quality of the student experience.

1 Contextual information about the provider, student population and the review

1.1 Summary information about the provider, including strategic framework, organisational structure

1 NPTC Group of Colleges (NPTC Group) has been in operation since August 2013, when the merger occurred between Neath Port Talbot College and Coleg Powys. The higher education (HE) provision is delivered at five sites: Afan College, Brecon Beacons College, Llandarcy Academy of Sport, Neath College and Newtown College. NPTC Group delivers both further education and higher education programmes. HE programmes lead to a range of qualifications: Certificate in Higher Education; Higher National Certificate; Diploma of Higher Education; Higher National Diploma; Foundation Degree; Professional Certificate in Education in Post Compulsory Education and Training; Bachelor degrees with honours top-up provision; Bachelor degrees with honours, including Degree Apprenticeships; and Professional Graduate Certificate in Education in Post Compulsory Education and Training.

2 NPTC Group's mission statement is 'Inspiring Learning, Enriching Lives, Delivering Success', and this is delivered through a Strategic Plan. In addition, NPTC Group has a Higher Education Strategy. This sets out four strategic aims and is supported by a HE Operational Plan, monitored by the Senior Management Team and the Board of Governors.

3 NPTC Group is led by a Senior Management Team who report to the Board of Governors. The Senior Management Team is made up of senior post-holders and Assistant Principals who work across NPTC Group.

1.2 Composition, key trends and anticipated changes in the student population, including information on retention, progression and outcomes

4 Approximately 550 higher education students are studying across a range of programmes which are delivered as either franchised or validated provision. The higher education students account for about 7% of the student population; and, of the 550, 35% of the students study part-time.

5 The HE students are studying across nine of the 12 academic schools, with the majority studying at Afan College and based in the School of Health, Social and Childcare.

6 NPTC Group can see that recruitment to full-time study has been declining, with reasons identified, including the impact of the pandemic, the demographic dip in 18-year-olds nationally, and unconditional or lower offers being made by local competitors. Part-time enrolments are not affected. NPTC Group has invested in the appointment of an Assistant Principal, with responsibility for student recruitment, to focus upon marketing and recruitment to HE programmes.

7   Retention figures for HE programmes vary widely. Actions have been taken and are proving effective in tackling withdrawal rates from the Care programmes, delivered at Afan College, and the Cert HE Substance Misuse programme. Attendance monitoring is carried out with the aim of identifying and supporting students at risk of withdrawal.

8   The figures for students achieving good honours degrees show improvements to 68% from 67%, with firsts improving to 35% from 31%. Figures for HND/C achievement are broadly comparable with last year.

1.3   Commentary on the preparation for the review, including how the provider and students worked in partnership in review preparation

9   A Quality Enhancement Review Project Group was formed in order to prepare for the review. The group comprised a wide range of post holders, with academic and professional responsibilities, and included HE Student Ambassadors and the Students' Union HE Officer. Support was provided by a critical reading group and final approval of the documentation was provided by the Senior Management Team and the Board of Governors.

10   NPTC Group decided to integrate the Change Report into the Self-evaluative Analysis (SA), in order to allow the SA to capture NPTC Group's progress since the last review.

11   The Students' Union HE Officer and the HE Ambassadors, who led the preparations for the student submission, made the decision to work with NPTC Group and develop a Self-evaluative Analysis, which combined NPTC Group's analysis with the student submission, in order to demonstrate the partnership between NPTC Group and the students. The student voice was gathered in a range of ways, which included the use of a questionnaire, focus groups, and the use of Padlet.

12   The feedback provided by the students will be further used by NPTC Group to structure the themes for their next HE conference.

1.4   Summary of the provider's follow-up to the previous review

13   In the last QAA review in 2016, NPTC Group achieved judgements of 'meets UK expectations' in relation to 'the quality of student learning opportunities' and 'the quality of information about learning opportunities'. It received a judgement of 'requires improvement' in relation to 'enhancement of student learning opportunities', and, following its action planning, was successful in having the judgement amended to 'meets UK expectations' in 2017. Since this time, NPTC Group has continued to develop its work with regard to the area of good practice, the two affirmations and the 12 recommendations.

14   The good practice relating to support for students has continued and NPTC Group identifies that new appointments, such as a Wellbeing Officer and a HE Study Coach, have made a positive impact, along with responsive support provided during COVID-19.

15   The affirmations which were focused upon work in developing learner information for tutors and in developing student representation systems have been embedded. NPTC Group now uses OnTrack to provide the relevant data to staff; and the recruitment, training and clear expectations of the student representative role have been developed.

16   The recommendations in relation to the enhancement of student learning opportunities have continued to be developed. In relation to the first recommendation to establish a process to record systematically staff engagement with higher education specific continuing professional development (CPD) and scholarly activity, NPTC Group reports that staff records in the HR dashboard show CPD carried out and that staff CPD is reported at the Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Management Group (HEQEMG). HE staff attend bespoke CPD sessions, including those delivered by awarding partners. Following the second recommendation to take further steps to ensure the effectiveness of NPTC Group's internal moderation processes and to make such processes clear for external examiners, moderation processes are covered as part of CPD sessions and external examiners report positively on internal moderation processes. With regard to the third recommendation, to ensure that all additional course costs are clearly indicated in all appropriate publications, additional course costs are updated yearly and set out in the HE Student Fees document. The fourth recommendation was to strengthen mechanisms for the central oversight and monitoring of the accuracy and timeliness of all published information. It can be seen that accuracy of all published information is the responsibility of the newly created post of Assistant Principal (Student Recruitment). Timelines and sign-off procedures have been improved and University partners review and sign off programme handbooks. The fifth recommendation was to take steps to develop existing networks to facilitate employer input into the design and approval of programmes. The strategic aims set out in the Curriculum 2019-23 strategy focus upon closer working with employers from the point of course development onwards and NPTC Group also runs an Employer Engagement Strategy to further build relationships with employers. It was recommended that NPTC Group provides an annual consolidated summary of the strengths and areas for improvement from all external examiner reports and a summary of external examiner reports is now presented to HEQEMG.

17   To ensure that all employers are provided with appropriate information on course content and students' progress was the seventh recommendation. A range of processes and documentation are in place to support students and employers undertaking work placements. The eighth recommendation asked NPTC Group to work with the awarding body to embed work-based learning in appropriate modules to adhere to the requirements of the Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark. Courses that include work-based learning take account of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and the Credit and Qualifications Framework Wales at the development and approval stage. The HEQEMG was set up in order to enhance the oversight of awarding bodies' programme monitoring and review reports in response to the recommendation to ensure more comprehensive oversight by NPTC Group's Senior Management Team of the awarding bodies' programme monitoring and review reports. In response to the tenth recommendation to develop formal processes for selecting and training student representatives and monitoring the effectiveness of the arrangements, a range of materials are available to tutors in order to train elected student representatives. Further to the eleventh recommendation to work with the awarding bodies, to consider how external examiners' reports for awards offered across a number of providers can be disaggregated to indicate the partner responsible for delivery; the indication of partner responsible for delivery in external examiner reports is an area NPTC Group is keen to further develop and the HE Manager is part of a working group seeking to address this. The final recommendation was for NPTC Group to develop a strategic approach to enhancement and ensure that enhancement initiatives are identified and implemented in a planned manner across NPTC Group. Enhancement initiatives are identified from student and staff feedback and data, and two to three projects are then agreed upon, based on a review of the proposals submitted to HEQEMG for approval.

1.5   Details of the provider's responsibilities for the higher education it provides on behalf of the degree-awarding body/ies it works with

18   NPTC Group works with four degree-awarding partners: University of South Wales (USW), University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD), Wrexham Glyndŵr University (WGU), and Pearson.

19   The responsibilities that NPTC Group has for the higher education that it provides are set out in a 'Responsibilities Checklist' for each degree-awarding partner.

2   Academic standards and quality processes

2.1   Key features of the provider's approach to managing quality and how students are involved in contributing to the management of the quality of learning

20   From documentation provided pre-visit and information discussed during the review visit, the review team identified that NPTC Group manages quality very well. An initial process for quality management is through internal moderation processes, which are followed according to the requirements of the awarding organisation. External examiners' reports show evidence that sampling of assessment and communication is well organised and efficient, including during the additional challenges of the pandemic.

21   NPTC Group has been through a range of reviews in recent years from, for example, QAA, Estyn and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). Since the previous QER review, the HE management team has been expanded and quality processes centralised under the Assistant Principal (Higher Education). The expansion of staff for the HE provision was clear to see and had led to positive developments at NPTC Group, and, as such, led the review team to commend the expansion (see section 2.4). The partnerships NPTC Group holds with its collaborative partners add further scrutiny to the management of quality at NPTC Group and help to monitor the programmes offered to students. Additionally, members of the HE team are involved in all levels of NPTC Group's meetings.

22   The review visit meetings highlighted the range of data sources NPTC Group uses to manage quality such as: pre-enrolment data; induction data; annual monitoring of programmes; module feedback; student surveys; and staff module reviews. It was clear that students are heavily involved in the quality management at NPTC Group, as described in the student submission parts of the Self-evaluative Analysis (SA) and during the review visit. Students expressed their satisfaction at being involved in these processes and felt their contributions were valued. NPTC Group demonstrated its commitment to the involvement of students in teaching and learning quality in the Strategic Plan and Student and Staff Involvement Strategy. Students are involved in contributing to quality assurance through the completion of module feedback, through their representation on the Board, HEQEMG and the Student Wellbeing and Involvement Strategy Group, and have the opportunity to participate in validation/revalidation and periodic review events. The student representative system and the advancements in student representation roles (such as the Students' Union HE Officer and the HE Student Ambassadors) show the opportunities students have to feed back about their experiences. The 2022 student HE conference provided the opportunity for the three HE Student Ambassadors to lead sessions on feedback from students on the quality of the student learning experience. The review team felt confident from the evidence gathered that students felt they had a voice and were contributing to the management of quality at NPTC Group.

23   The review team considers that the steps taken by NPTC Group to ensure that students are fully involved in quality processes, such as involvement in strategy and new programme development, representation on relevant committees and a range of feedback opportunities enhances the quality assurance process. The review team therefore **commends** the institution's commitment to student engagement and the student voice, enabling students to contribute to the overall quality of provision.

2.2 Key features of the approach to setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards

24 It should be emphasised that the entirety of NPTC Group's HE provision is delivered in collaboration with four separate awarding partners, which has the effect that different processes in relation to academic standards operate simultaneously. To reflect this, detailed responsibilities checklists have been prepared by NPTC Group for each partner institution, and various key processes in relation to academic standards, for example programme approval and annual monitoring arrangements, are implemented in accordance with the requirements of the relevant partner.

25 Since the previous QAA review in 2016, a centralised approach to quality assurance has been established across NPTC Group. A higher education manager with extensive experience of quality assurance in the HE sector was appointed, with responsibility for the operational management of HE provision at NPTC Group. The review team learnt that this has enabled systems and practices from HE to be developed. HE Leads have also been established in order to improve links to the partner institutions. Their role is outlined in section 2.4.

26 NPTC Group's quality assurance structures are set out in the Quality Control and Quality Assurance Policy. At the institutional level, a committee structure is in place in order for quality assurance matters to be reported to the Senior Management Team and Board of Governors, which holds overall responsibility for quality and standards at NPTC Group. The primary committee in this respect is the Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Management Group, which was developed in response to the previous QAA review, and is chaired by the Vice Principal: Academic Services. NPTC Group receives reports from the Higher Education Operational Group and the Higher Education Coordinators Group. It also considers reports produced by the Schools, including self-evaluation documents in relation to HE provision. Additionally, the HEQEMG monitors action plans in response to National Student Survey (NSS) results, and receives a summary external examiner report. An Annual HE report is prepared by the Assistant Principal: HE, detailing relevant quality related matters and is considered by the Board of Governors.

27 At the time of the review, a Quality Assurance Handbook for NPTC Group's HE provision was in the process of being developed. The review team was informed that some of NPTC Group's existing quality processes are divided between different documents, which are stored on different electronic platforms. Accordingly, the purpose of the Quality Assurance Handbook is to draw together existing information on all aspects of HE provision with the effect of improving the accessibility of information in order to support staff. This project had commenced prior to the pandemic, but had stalled due to workload pressures resulting from the pandemic. The review team was informed that work would continue on the handbook over the course of summer 2022, with the intention of the document being finalised by September 2022. The review team was also informed that the handbook would be subsequently reviewed by the Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Management Group on an annual basis to ensure that it remains current. The review team therefore **affirms** the development of the Quality Assurance Handbook in order to centralise the policies and procedures relevant to quality assurance in an accessible manner.

2.3 Use of external reference points in quality processes

28 As noted in section 2.2, due to the collaborative nature of NPTC Group's HE provision, approval and reapproval for programmes delivered by NPTC Group take place in accordance with the processes of the partner institutions. As part of these processes, programme teams are expected to ensure that programmes meet the requirements of the FHEQ, CQFW, QAA subject benchmarks and other relevant benchmarks.

29   NPTC Group's quality processes have been mapped against the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines Part 1 for internal quality assurance. At the time of the review, a mapping exercise to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education was underway, and had been partially completed by the time of the review visit. Staff who the review team met during the course of the review visit expressed the view that this was a useful developmental exercise in itself in terms of improving their knowledge and understanding, and would be of assistance when preparing for future quality reviews. The review team was informed that, as with the Quality Assurance Handbook, the mapping documents would, once completed, be updated on an annual basis to ensure continued alignment with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

30   The review team is of the view that completing the mapping of NPTC Group's procedures against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education is an essential exercise, as is ensuring that the mapping is subsequently reviewed on an ongoing basis. The review team therefore **affirms** the steps being taken to map quality processes to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education in order to ensure practices are continually reviewed and monitored to ensure ongoing alignment with sector expectations.

31   Appropriate use is made of external examiners for NPTC Group's HE provision, in accordance with the procedures of the partner institutions. A summary of external examiner reports is presented annually to HEQEMG, with a view to identifying strengths and areas for improvement. It was recommended in the previous QAA review that consideration should be given to how external examiner reports for programmes delivered on behalf of the awarding body at a range of institutions could be disaggregated to indicate the partner responsible for delivery. The review team was informed that improvements have been made in this respect, and that NPTC Group continues to work with partner institutions to try to ensure that reports make specific reference to the provision delivered by NPTC Group.

2.4   Commentary on action taken since the previous review and identification of matters arising from the Prior Information Pack not otherwise explored

32   As outlined in section 2.2, NPTC Group has developed its HE quality assurance process since the previous review. Allied to this, NPTC Group has also expanded its HE staff team significantly. At the time of the previous review, there was an Assistant Principal: Higher Education, along with one administrator, with any additional support being provided by staff within NPTC Group as required. Currently, in addition to the Assistant Principal: Higher Education, there is a HE Manager; a Senior Officer UCAS and Widening Access Coordinator; a Higher Education Support and Systems Administrator; and a Higher Education Administrator. In addition, four academic members of staff have been appointed as HE Leads – one for each partner institution. The role of the HE Lead is to work with managerial staff, partner institutions and the HE Coordinators in order to ensure the effective management of NPTC Group's HE provision. Examples of the activities undertaken by the HE Leads include providing professional development and support to colleagues; holding regular operational meetings; partaking in quality assurance processes; sharing information and ensuring effective lines of communication.

33   Staff informed the review team during the review visit that these developments had significantly enhanced NPTC Group's ability to work effectively with its partner institutions. In particular, staff referred to a feeling of being supported, and to being part of a shared collaborative process. The link tutors from partner institutions, whom the review team met during the review visit, expressed similar views, emphasising that the mechanisms enable frequent meetings to take place and that relationships between NPTC Group and their institutions are strong.

34   The review team considers that the deliberate steps taken by NPTC Group to expand the staffing to support its HE provision demonstrates a commitment to further embedding the HE provision delivered in conjunction with its partner institutions, with the effect of improving the operation of quality processes and enhancing the student learning experience. Accordingly, the review team **commends** the institution's expansion of the HE staff team to recognise the distinctiveness of the HE provision and to create a HE community in order to enhance the student experience.

35   The review team found that NPTC Group's response to the pandemic was rapid and emphasised enhancement of the Blended Learning Framework to total online/hybrid delivery with enhanced student support. The review team viewed much information regarding the use of digital technology to enable teaching and learning to continue during the pandemic. NPTC Group information to HEFCW, including a COVID-19 update (May 2021), Delivery of Learning (20-21) and Quality of the Student Experience (January 2021) provide detailed information, including a significant improvement in the use of the virtual learning environments and remote delivery during the pandemic. At the review visit, the team heard confirmation that NPTC Group immediately put measures in place to ensure continuation of learning, including access to online support for staff and students, involving significant investment, including in infrastructure. Students met by the team at the review visit agreed that the move to online learning was seamless, and that support was readily available at suitable times for them. The review team **commends** the numerous steps taken to ensure continuity in teaching, learning, student support and well-being during the pandemic.

36   The review team heard that digital poverty was an issue for some students during the lockdown. Where this was an issue students were able to safely access the facilities on site. In addition a loan scheme for laptops and dongles was instigated, with an Assistive Technology Manager to provide support. External examiner reports for the 2020-21 academic year confirm the appropriate use of digital delivery to maintain teaching, assessment and student support during the Covid pandemic. In addition, NPTC Group received a commendation from the University of South Wales regarding the results of the 2021 NSS for Foundation Degree Childhood Studies, relating to the rapid roll out of digital support for students in the pandemic and subsequent NSS feedback.

37   With the easing of pandemic restrictions, NPTC Group has continued to invest in infrastructure in order to retain the benefits of digital technology in a hybrid approach to teaching and learning. The review team heard that NPTC Group is now further developing the use of digital technology following the pandemic response, with students and staff supporting a hybrid approach, with recording and uploading of teaching sessions and access to support through digital learning champions, a Digital Learning Coordinator and drop-in access to improve digital skills.

2.5   Approach to using data to inform decision-making and evaluation

38   The review visit provided the review team with greater detail on the separation of HE data, which allowed the team to see that HE data can be used effectively to inform decision making and to evaluate processes and delivery. Academic staff explained that the handling of HE data and the systems used have developed and allow them to analyse data efficiently. The Self-evaluative Analysis highlighted that NPTC Group had found it challenging to recruit specialist MIS staff to help them analyse and evaluate data; however, it was confirmed that NPTC Group has now filled the majority of these roles and is better placed to use data effectively. Since the last QAA review, NPTC Group has enhanced the data systems and accompanying training for staff in using and developing bespoke HE reports.

39   There were examples given in meetings where data collected has been used to

inform decisions made. NPTC Group has many mechanisms for collecting data (such as module feedback forms, NSS results, an induction survey, annual programme reports, and through the student representative system) that build sufficient evidence for NPTC Group to make informed decisions. This data is reviewed at a range of committees and working groups, such as the Higher Education Quality and Enhancement Management Group and the Quality Enhancement Review Project Group, allowing both staff and students to feed back and to collaboratively work towards developing NPTC Group's provision. Students expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to provide feedback to NPTC Group. Considering the HE provision at NPTC Group is relatively small (HE students make up only 7% of overall numbers), the data gathered is extensive and enables NPTC Group to make informed decisions. However, as these systems have only recently been established NPTC Group recognises that there are still further steps that can be taken to enhance the process. Therefore, the review team **affirms** the progress being made in the effective collection and use of HE data in order to inform decision making and evaluation.

2.6 Effectiveness of how approaches to quality are used to improve and enhance learning and teaching

40 The documentation provided prior to the review highlighted advancements made in learning and teaching, with the integrated student submission indicating the students' satisfaction in these areas. NPTC Group has a diverse team of staff that contribute to learning and teaching beyond the academic teaching staff, such as study coaches, wellbeing officers, personal tutors and library advisers. The review team heard in the meeting with students how valuable all these staff are and how helpful particular initiatives are, such as the Confident Learner Programme, in supporting students to adapt to learning and teaching in HE and in meeting students' individual needs (see also section 2.1 for further details). This led the review team to **commend** the institution's commitment to providing tailored support to students to meet their academic and pastoral needs so as to enable them to achieve their potential.

41 NPTC Group's Digital Strategy 2019-23 is aligned to the Welsh government's Digital 2030 strategic framework. It sets out strategic aims and objectives covering digital enhancement of learning and teaching, the digital learning environment and necessary resources.

42 The October 2021 update to NPTC Group's Operational Plan states that the Digital Strategy has all areas performing in line with the aims of the Operational Strategy. In addition, the HE Operational Plan October 2021 update includes an objective to 'integrate new technologies and innovative teaching opportunities to increase access and fully engage learners in their learning'. NPTC Group received a TEF Silver award in 2017, which noted 'an institutional approach to developing physical and digital resources, which are used frequently by students to aid and enhance learning and develop study and research skills'. NPTC Group is compliant with the Welsh Government's Digital National Teaching Standards. The Digital Enhancement Reports to HE Quality and Enhancement Management Group for November 2021 and March 2022 describe enhancement to digital provision for HE in line with the requirements of the awarding higher education institutions (HEIs).

43 The review team heard that most HE teaching rooms now have integrated technology to facilitate remote, blended and hybrid delivery patterns, with the Neath campus having a specialist facility, developed in collaboration with Swansea University, for digital interactive teaching. This academic year, NPTC Group is developing a dedicated HE teaching room with cutting edge digital teaching technology to allow staff to share good practice and to upskill.

44 A HE Digital Enhancement Project is ongoing in the current academic year, aiming

to enhance opportunities for higher education students and staff to maximise usage of digital technologies provided by NPTC Group, while ensuring that the requirements of HE partners and Pearson are upheld in terms of hybrid/online teaching and learning.

45   NPTC Group's Teaching Observation process assessment form includes the use of digital technology. In addition a useful HE Staff Skills analysis spreadsheet notes a range of aspects regarding the use of digital technologies and relevant equipment, with requests for staff development. At the review visit, the team heard that the process is designed to be supportive, with opportunities for peer observation, mentoring of new members of staff and the sharing of good practice at school and institutional level.

46   The review team **commends** the development and effective use of digital technology across NPTC Group, within a supportive environment, enabling the ongoing enhancement of teaching and learning.

47   A wide range of staff expressed high levels of satisfaction at the opportunities they were provided with to develop within their role and to continue their professional development. High levels of support were available to help staff deliver the digital learning technology that was required. Staff spoke about opportunities to share good practice and the benefits of drop-in sessions which helped staff upskill for the delivery of digital technologies. The review team **commends** NPTC Group's commitment to encouraging all HE staff to pursue professional development in relation to teaching, learning and student support at HE level in order to benefit the individual and the student body.

2.7   Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards

48   Section 2.2 summarises the arrangements used by NPTC Group for securing academic standards. External examiner reports confirm that academic standards are appropriate.

49   There was a significant increase in the proportion of good honours degrees from 2019-20 onwards, with 67% attaining a first-class or upper second in 2019-20 and 68% in 2020-21, compared with 56% in 2018-19. The number of first-class degrees, in particular, increased significantly in this period, rising from 18% in 2018-19, to 31% in 2019-20 and 35% in 2020-21. In discussion with the review team, NPTC Group stated that it was likely that the adoption of amended policies by partner organisations in response to the pandemic, for example the use of no-detriment policies, may have had an impact in this respect. At the same time, it was noted that the relatively small size of the HE population may limit the significance of the statistics in terms of identifying trends.

50   While emphasising that all of NPTC Group's HE provision is delivered in collaboration with partner institutions, who have overall responsibility for academic standards as the awarding bodies, the review team concludes that the arrangements made by NPTC Group for securing academic standards are effective, and are consistent with relevant national benchmarks and award frameworks.

2.8   Effectiveness of the provider's approach to self-evaluation, including the effective use of data to inform decision-making

51   NPTC Group provided evidence in the pre-visit documentation and during the visit itself to demonstrate the effectiveness of their self-evaluation and use of data. Despite some issues cited in section 2.5 regarding data separation, the approach to self-evaluation is demonstrably sound, involving a multi-layered approach from module evaluation to programme and school level, culminating in regular reports to HEQEMG, the Standards and Performance Monitoring Group, the Senior Management Team and the Board of Governors, the HE annual Report, the Annual Assurance Return to HEFCW and Annual National

Student Survey Report. There were further examples in the SA regarding how self-evaluation is effectively used, for example to improve retention and in annual monitoring.

52   The review visit meetings highlighted how both partner institutions and students also had an input and contributed to NPTC Group's self-evaluation. Annual reports were the main mechanism used by NPTC Group to self-evaluate and they have been informed by data to continue to make progress for NPTC Group's systems, processes and student experience. UWTSD and Wrexham Glyndŵr University both use annual monitoring reports for each programme and require completion of an annual partner overview. Student support needs are reviewed annually by NPTC Group campus, academic school and at the level of identified or disclosed need, thus using a needs-based approach to allocate resources. The introduction of HE Ambassadors and a paid sabbatical role for the post of Students' Union HE Officer has helped to ensure students' voice is heard and contributing to the self-evaluation processes.

3 Collaborative provision

3.1 Key features of the provider's strategic approach (to include collaborative activity, online and distance learning where delivered with others, and work-based learning)

53   NPTC Group is in partnership with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, the University of South Wales and Wrexham Glyndŵr University, with 30%, 28% and 5% of the delivered provision respectively, the remaining 37% being Pearson programmes. NPTC Group has taken deliberate steps not to be overly reliant on a single partnership to minimise risk of a change in strategic direction by university partners with regard to their collaborative provision priorities.

54   All the responsibilities checklists state that NPTC Group is responsible for quality assurance processes regarding learning resources, and placement providers where used on programmes.

55   Work-based learning features in a number of programmes at NPTC Group by means of work placements, where the requirements of the FHEQ/CQFW and the awarding partner expectations are met at programme approval stage and monitored through work-based learning procedures, annual/continuous monitoring and student feedback mechanisms. Mapping of NPTC Group policy and practice regarding work placements has been undertaken to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Detail is given for each relevant programme - PCE/PGCE, degree apprenticeships and the Care Practice module. The Assistant Principal (Higher Education) has overall responsibility, while HE Coordinators are the main leads at programme level, liaising with employers to source placements and mentoring and observation of students in the workplace. A detailed Employer Engagement Strategy forms part of the Strategic Plan 2019-2023, emphasising the importance NPTC Group places on work with employers in delivering suitable programmes. In addition, the draft Quality Assurance Handbook contains a section on work-based learning which will provide a useful additional information source for staff.

56   The review team learnt that vocationally led programmes have placements at the core, and link theory and practice. The design and planning of the programmes have incorporated the professional standards and codes of practice. Competencies carried out during the placement are assessed, with two appraisals during the year and the use of self-reflective journals. All Care students undertake a 30-credit, 210-hour Care Practice module and work placement. Many already work in the sector and, where this is not the case, they find voluntary placements themselves, which NPTC Group supports. NPTC Group is responsible for undertaking due diligence and health and safety checking for each placement setting. The team also heard examples of students on the Business Management and IT degree undertaking live projects during their placement, helping to develop the employer's website, demonstrating their readiness and preparedness to engage with the world of work.

57   Support during the placement is very much focused upon the academic support required to ensure students meet the criteria for the module. Clear lines and channels of communication are set up between the students, NPTC Group and the placement. A placement monitor operates to check in and ensure that transparent, free-flowing communication takes place. Documentation is provided from NPTC Group to the relevant placement mentors/supervisors, with any issues picked up by the placement lead or placement monitor. The review team heard that students are very appreciative of the placement experience and associated mentoring. A QER questionnaire carried out in 2021 showed that 82% of students undertaking work placements were satisfied with the support provided.

58   The review team heard that placements have been a challenge for tourism and hospitality programmes. The placement has been linked with an International Travel Operations module requiring students to operate as a team to undertake and complete this in order to achieve the placement element of the course. Revalidation is underway, with QAA placement guidance referred to, resulting in a more flexible approach, building on current experiences.

59   Since the last review, an Industrial Engineering Design (Mechanical) BEng (Hons) Degree Apprenticeship has been approved to be delivered from the Neath campus.

3.2   Information on the extent and nature of collaborative provision and plans for change

60   NPTC Group is part of the collaborative provision of its partner HEIs, as opposed to being a lead partner as per a university, with both franchised and validated provision. The review team heard at the visit that there are no plans for major change, but that NPTC Group is part of a new pan-Wales partnership seeking to create a 'social partnership approach' to the delivery of higher education for the future, building on the current franchise and validation model.

3.3   Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative provision including arrangements for securing academic standards and improvement and enhancement of the student learning experience

61   NPTC Group adheres in full to the regulations of its partner HEIs and Pearson, in order to ensure the securing of academic standards, with overall responsibility for academic standards remaining with the awarding organisations.

62   Four HE Leads are in place, each linking to a partner HEI/Pearson providing support to the Assistant Principal (Higher Education) and HE Manager with the quality assurance and enhancement of the HE provision.

63   NPTC Group has a history of successful Estyn reviews, oversight by partner universities and through annual reporting to HEFCW. NPTC Group processes are designed to fit awarding partner requirements while still retaining a level of oversight and approval within NPTC Group systems, for example the approval of new programmes. The enhanced HE team ensures a thorough reporting structure at various levels of the institution, with the Board holding ultimate responsibility. The Quality Control and Quality Assurance Policy sets out principles and procedures to implement a comprehensive quality assurance and control system for every aspect of NPTC Group's operations. Responsibility for HE quality assurance lies with the HE Quality and Enhancement Management Group, the HE Operational Group, the Senior Management Team and the Board. Reports to the various groups seen by the review team demonstrate a thorough and effective approach to quality assurance, including the management of collaborative provision. Annual monitoring is undertaken by the partner universities regarding their provision at NPTC Group, and these also demonstrate good practice in NPTC Group's management of the relevant programmes.

64   External examiner reports seen by the review team confirm the quality of academic processes and monitoring.

65   The Quality Assurance Handbook, currently in draft, will provide a useful central document, informed by mapping to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and covering quality assurance and enhancement, admissions, assessment, complaints and appeals and work-based learning.