Higher Education Review of Reaseheath College

May 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Reaseheath College. The review took place from 6 to 9 May 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Kevin Burnside
- Professor Derrik Ferney
- Mr Anthony Bagshaw (student reviewer).

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

In this report the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

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

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review webpages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Reaseheath College

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

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

Good practice

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

- The alignment of the higher education portfolio with the College's mission and values (Expectations A4, A5 and B1).
- The management and use of long-term strategic relationships with external stakeholders to enhance the student experience (Expectations A5, B1, B3, B4 and Enhancement).
- The integrated and coordinated activity of curriculum areas and student support services to provide comprehensive support for the student learning experience (Expectations B2, B3 and B4).
- The full involvement of students in the extensive formal and informal student engagement opportunities (Expectation B5).
- The systematic approach to providing work-based learning opportunities of quality and relevance to students and to the College's mission (Expectations B3, B4, B10 and Enhancement).
- The consolidation of the higher education ethos through investment in leadership, organisational structures and estate (Expectations B4 and Enhancement).
- The strategic recruitment and development of the higher education staff (Expectations B3, B4 and Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The approach taken to understand and address the issues highlighted by the NSS around organisation and management, and assessment and feedback (Expectations B3 and B6).
- The work to improve the consistency and accessibility of information available to students on the virtual learning environment (Expectation C).

Theme: Student Employability

Reaseheath College, as a specialist provider of land-based education and training, has a commitment to and a close relationship with a variety of employers in relevant industry sectors. This extends to employer engagement in the design, quality assurance and delivery

of higher education. The College offers a range of foundation degrees, which aim to develop the higher-level vocational skills that are required by industry to prepare students to enter employment or enhance the prospects of those already in the workplace. The relationship with employers enables students to enhance their skills by studying and working in an environment that offers industry-standard facilities and practical experience.

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

About Reaseheath College

Reaseheath College (the College) is a land-based college of further education situated in Nantwich, Cheshire, that originally opened as the School of Agriculture in 1921, becoming a college in 1967. The College is a specialist provider of vocational education and training in further and higher education for businesses, industries and communities that are mainly rural and land-based, that aims to meet the needs of a wide range of students, including full and part-time learners, from the county and beyond its borders. Its mission is 'to inspire individuals, communities and rural businesses by developing world class education and skills, accessible to all'.

The College is set in 330 hectares of farmland, parkland and woodland with specialist facilities including an equestrian centre, a farm with a dairy herd, a food-processing hall and an onsite zoo with over 200 animals. The College has residential accommodation and around 400 higher education students live on campus.

Learning opportunities are delivered to around 7,000 learners each year with 2,000 full-time equivalents (FTEs) attributed to further education and a further 300 FTEs to work-based apprenticeships. At the time of the review, its 650 FTE higher education students represented just over one quarter of the total student body. The College employs staff who teach across further and higher education, but as the higher education provisions grows there has been an increase in the number of academic staff who only deliver, or mostly deliver, on higher education programmes.

The College has formal partnership agreements with two awarding bodies for its higher education programmes: Harper Adams University and the University of Chester. The College has associate college status for both and manages its higher education provision according to the terms of each partnership. The awards offered on behalf of Harper Adams University are on a validated basis and taught wholly on the College campus by College staff; those of the University of Chester are franchised and while some are taught wholly on the campus, most involve teaching at the College and the University.

The College has reviewed its Higher Education Strategy to take account of its growing higher education provision and to develop further the higher education provision as a distinct entity while at the same time protecting the College mission and vision. To this end the College has seen the development of a Higher Education Centre and the appointment of an Assistant Principal and Dean of Higher Education, under whom there is now a higher education management team and increasingly standalone higher education teaching teams. The College underwent Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2010, which determined that confidence could be placed in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership or centre recognition and approval agreements, for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding bodies and for the quality of learning opportunities it offers. It also found that reliance could be placed on the accuracy and completeness of public information.

At the time, the College produced an action plan in response to the eight features of good practice, two advisable and three desirable recommendations. The self-evaluation document, submitted as part of the Higher Education Review process, sets out the actions that have been taken to maintain and enhance the identified good practice and address the recommendations.

The College submitted evidence that these have generally been effective both in maintaining the identified good practices and in addressing issues where advisable and desirable actions were noted. In particular, there has been considerable investment in the College's estate to

further support the curriculum and the professional and educational resources for students, and development of specific higher education academic and pastoral support provided by the Higher Education Support Team and delivered though the Higher Education Centre.

One area where the College recognises that further action still needs to be taken is with regard to delays in returning assessment feedback to students. Although improvements in the timeliness and effectiveness of feedback have been noted by students in their submission, this concern continues to be reflected in recent National Student Survey (NSS) results.

At the time of the review, the following programmes were offered:

Harper Adams University
FdSc Adventure Sports and Management
FdSc Agriculture
FdSc Agriculture with Dairy Herd Management
FdSc Rural Events Management
FdSc Countryside Conservation and Recreation Management
FdSc Agricultural Engineering and Mechanisation
FdSc Construction Plant Engineering
FdSc Machinery Dealership Management
FdSc Equine Science, Complementary Therapy and Natural Horsemanship
FdSc Equine Science and Management
BSc/BSc (Hons) Equine Science including one year BSc top-up
BSc/BSc (Hons) Food Technology including one year BSc top-up
FdSc Food Industry with Management
Cert HE Food Industry with Management
FdSc Dairy Technology
FdSc Garden and Landscape Design
BSc/BSc (Hons) Landscape Design and Management one year top-up

University of Chester
FdSc Animal Management (Behaviour and Welfare)
BSc (Hons) Animal Behaviour top-up
FdSc Animal Management (Zoo Management)
BSc (Hons) Animal Management/Zoo Management top-up
BSc (Hons) Wildlife Conservation and Ecology

Explanation of the findings about Reaseheath College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1   Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: The national level*

Findings

1.1   The College is an associate college of two Universities: Harper Adams University and the University of Chester. It has worked in partnership with both institutions for over 10 years. The College has had directly funded student numbers since 2012-13; these students are on Harper Adams-validated programmes in agriculture, countryside, equine, food, horticulture, land-based machinery, adventure sports and rural events management. University of Chester programmes, which are provided in the areas of animal behaviour and welfare, zoo management, wildlife conservation and ecology, and food technology, are run on a franchise basis. The College offers foundation degrees and bachelor's programmes. In the case of Harper Adams programmes, these are delivered exclusively at the College. For University of Chester programmes, some teaching is delivered at the University for bachelor's programmes, while foundation degree programmes are delivered solely at the College.

1.2   As the College does not have degree awarding powers, its role is to support the maintenance of the academic standards of its two degree-awarding bodies. In the case of the allocation of awards to the appropriate level of the FHEQ, the College's understanding is that the degree-awarding body partners have full responsibility for meeting this Expectation. The relevant policies which the College provided, relating to the degree-awarding bodies' requirements for the development and amendment of programme specifications, demonstrate that each award should be allocated explicitly to the appropriate FHEQ level.

1.3   The review team saw completed programme specifications and student handbooks which confirm the allocation of awards to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. Furthermore, the College's website contains a clear description of the awards available and external examiners' reports confirmed that the awards are allocated to the appropriate level. Teaching staff, whom the review team met, confirmed their familiarity with the FHEQ and its importance in programme development.

1.4   Overall, the review team concludes that the College effectively discharges its responsibilities, within the context of its agreements with its awarding bodies, for allocating qualifications to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A1 of the Quality Code has been met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.5   The College supports the maintenance of the academic standards of its two degree-awarding bodies, Harper Adams University, which validates some of the College's programmes, and the University of Chester, with which the College delivers programmes under a franchise arrangement.

1.6   The College's understanding is that the degree-awarding body partners share responsibility for meeting this Expectation. The College provided the review team with the policies of its degree-awarding bodies which confirm the respective responsibilities; both Universities explicitly require the consideration of subject and qualification benchmark statements in the process of validation of new awards. The review team confirmes, in meetings with the College's academic staff, that they are aware of this requirement. Furthermore, external examiners' reports confirm that the College's programmes reflect the relevant benchmark statements.

1.7   The review team found that the College discharges its responsibilities effectively to ensure that its higher education programmes take account of the relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements. There is robust use of external examiners in assessing the provision against the appropriate subject benchmark statements. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A2 of the Quality Code has been met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: The programme level*

Findings

1.8   The College is responsible for ensuring that its students receive definitive information about their programmes of study. The review team found, through documentary evidence and in meetings with staff and students, that it does so through programme handbooks which are made available to students in hard copy on induction and on the virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.9   In the case of University of Chester programmes, for which information to students is provided through both the College's and University's VLEs, the review team found that definitive information was available. The review team looked at both VLEs and asked students and staff about the distribution of information and its completeness. Both groups informed the team that programme information is available on the College VLE and module information is available on the University VLE.

1.10   In the development and amendment of programmes, the College is required to prepare definitive programme specifications for approval by its degree-awarding bodies. Some handbooks contain programme specifications and in some cases the handbooks state that programme specifications are available to students on request. Specifications the review team saw conform to the requirements of the degree-awarding bodies.

1.11   The review team concludes that Expectation A3 of the Quality Code, that higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study, has been met, and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A4: Approval and review*

Findings

1.12   Responsibility for setting academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities for courses delivered in their name rests with the College's two awarding bodies and is specified in their quality handbooks. Programme approval occurs through a formal process involving the College, its awarding bodies and external advisers. Revisions to programmes and modules may be made subsequently as required provided they do not exceed 25 per cent of the programme content. Programmes are monitored annually and at the time of the review visit the College was planning for the periodic review of all its programmes in 2015-16.

1.13   The approval and review processes of the College's awarding bodies and the oversight they provide align with *Chapter A4: Approval and review* of the Quality Code.

1.14   The review team examined how the partnership structures worked in relation to the exercise of authority in programme design, approval and review and tested it by following programme proposals as they progressed through the approvals process of its partner Universities. This process, by preventing mission drift, contributes to the feature of good practice identified under Expectation B1 that the College aligns its higher education portfolio with the its mission and values.

1.15   In the case of Harper Adams University, responsibility for academic standards lies with its Academic Standards Committee, which operates under the delegated authority of the Academic Board. In the case of the University of Chester, it lies with the Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee which operates under the delegated authority of the Senate. Annual partnership reviews with Harper Adams University and twice-yearly operational meetings with the University of Chester provide additional shared oversight of programmes.

1.16   These committee structures oversee the use of standard processes and proformas to articulate the course design, approval and review practices of the College and its awarding bodies with institutional policies and external points of reference including the Quality Code. Programme specifications incorporate the FHEQ, relevant benchmark statements, programme specifications and module descriptors with associated learning outcomes and assessment strategies. Progression routes are identified for foundation degrees.

1.17   The effectiveness and oversight of approval processes is evident from the minutes of the panels and committees, which deal with programme approvals. The team found evidence of the clear articulation of policy and practice in the approval of new programmes, effective cross-membership of committees between the College and its partner Universities, and rigorous use of external reference points and external advisers from industry.

1.18   Revisions to programmes and modules are overseen by the Programmes Approvals Committee at Harper Adams University and the relevant Board of Studies at the University of Chester. Scrutiny of relevant minutes supports the College's assertion that the logic for proposed changes is properly tested.

1.19   Programme monitoring is carried out annually using the processes of the College's awarding bodies and includes full consideration of external examiners' reports, student feedback and other management information. Programme review is carried out every six

years and at the time of the review visit the College was preparing to review all its programmes in 2015-16. Consequently, there were no recent periodic review reports for the review team to examine. As with annual review, periodic review processes are determined by the College's awarding bodies.

1.20   The review team concludes that the College's engagement with the processes of its partner Universities meets Expectation A4 and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality*

Findings

1.21   The College uses external representatives from higher education and industry to assist in setting academic standards during programme approval processes and to help it ensure that proposed new programmes of study reflect the College's mission to enable its students to develop higher-level vocational skills needed by employers. This practice contributes to the feature of good practice identified under Expectation B1: the alignment of the higher education portfolio with the College's mission and values.

1.22   Following identification and nomination by the College, external examiners are appointed by the awarding bodies to advise the College on the maintenance of the academic standards of its provision; the currency of its curriculum; the rigour and fairness of its assessment; and levels of its student achievement compared with other providers.

1.23   The College complies with the policies and procedures of its awarding bodies for the use of external expertise in quality assurance. These policies and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter A5: Externality* of the Quality Code.

1.24   The review team assessed the effectiveness of the College's use of external expertise by looking at awarding bodies' policies and procedures, their appointment processes, and examining the minutes of approval panels and scrutinising external examiners' reports.

1.25   The two-stage process for appointing both external examiners and external advisers is appropriately rigorous, with College nominations being subsequently approved by its awarding bodies. Proposed external examiner appointments are approved by the Academic Standards Committee at Harper Adams University and by the relevant Faculty Board and Academic Quality and Standards Committee at the University of Chester.

1.26   The review team also found that external advisers and examiners make an effective contribution to the setting and maintenance of standards. External examiner reports provide appropriate scrutiny of academic standards at module and programme level, of the appropriateness of assessment methods and of the level of student achievement. External examiners' reports are evaluated as part of the annual monitoring process and incorporated into the current year's action plan. The effectiveness of action taken is then checked retrospectively in the next annual monitoring round, with additional checks being provided by the College's Higher Education Quality Assurance Reviews. The College's Higher Education Academic Board receives an annual overview report on external examiner feedback and programme-level responses, and senior committees of the College's awarding bodies have oversight of the responses made to external examiners' reports.

1.27   The use of external expertise in this area contributes to the good practice identified under Expectation B1: the management and use of long-term strategic relationships with external stakeholders to enhance the student experience.

1.28   The review team concludes that the College's approach to the use of external expertise in quality assurance processes meets Expectation A5 and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.29   In the design and approval of new programmes, intended learning outcomes and assessment strategies are established at course and module level. Once programmes are running, external examiners are responsible for checking the validity of assessment tasks and commenting in their annual reports on the reliability of the assessment process and standards of student achievement. Their reports form part of the annual programme monitoring and quality assurance cycles.

1.30   The College devises and conducts assessment in accordance with the assessment policies and processes of its awarding bodies, which align with the Expectations of *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes* of the Quality Code.

1.31   The review team confirmed this through examination of programme approval and monitoring documents and a range of related course and module guides. It also read external examiners' reports and talked to staff, students and external stakeholders about their experience of the assessment process.

1.32   Both awarding bodies provide clear guidance on the purpose of formative and summative assessment and on mapping module outcomes, assessment and assessment criteria to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. Approval templates evidence reflection on assessment strategies in course design and the review team heard that external experts provide valuable guidance in formulating industry-relevant assessment briefs. Boards of Studies and Validation Panels are charged with satisfying themselves that the volume and type of assessments are appropriate to the learning outcomes they seek to address and are therefore not over-demanding of student time. College staff told the review team how they made use of subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ to set a variety of assessment tasks at the appropriate level. Students spoke of the value of formative assessment and confirmed how programme handbooks and module descriptors enabled them to understand the relationship between assessment tasks, assessment criteria and module and programme-level learning outcomes. Students explained how their programmes provided increasing levels of challenge as they progressed through the years and the review team was impressed by their familiarity with the relevant levels of the FHEQ.

1.33   External examiners approve assessment briefs before they are given to students. Students' assessed work is marked, moderated and sent to external examiners who comment on the robustness of assessment practices and the standard of student achievement in their reports. The review team found that external examiners' reports are used to good effect by the College, both in the annual monitoring and quality review processes.

1.34   The review team concludes that the College's approach to the use of external expertise in quality assurance processes meets Expectation A6 of the Quality Code and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.35   In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area have been met with a low level of risk and there is evidence that, although the College's degree-awarding bodies have ultimate responsibility for the setting of the academic standards, the College is aware of its responsibilities for maintaining those standards.

1.36   The team identified no recommendations or affirmations for this judgement area. This judgement area contributes to two features of good practice, which are explained more fully under Expectation B1: the alignment of the higher education portfolio with the College's mission and values and the management and use of long-term strategic relationships with external stakeholders to enhance the student experience.

1.37   The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of threshold academic standards of awards offered by the College on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College identifies potential new programmes of study on the basis of market demand, employer engagement, staff expertise, resources and student feedback. Curriculum areas use their strong connections with industry to engage industry representatives in developing programmes that meet sector needs and thereby promote the employability of students. Courses selected for approval are then referred to the College's awarding bodies for further discussion prior to entering the formal approval process.

2.2 The approvals process is overseen by the College's partner Universities and aligns with *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval* of the Quality Code.

2.3 The review team examined how the process of development and approval worked in practice by speaking to staff, students, employers and external advisers and by reading the minutes of relevant panels and committees.

2.4 Proposals for new programmes are developed within curriculum areas and departments and considered by the College's Higher Education Academic Board, the College's Senior Management Team and governors. Proposals are checked to ensure they are consistent with the College's mission and values and assigned to one or other of its awarding bodies, as appropriate. The College's proposals are discussed with the relevant awarding body and, if accepted, enter the approval process described under Expectation A4. In developing their proposals, College staff are supported by their awarding bodies in preparing documentation for the consideration of approval panels. At the University of Chester, the relevant Board of Studies approves the initial proposal for submission to the University-level Development Advisory Group (DAG), which then gives approval for the programme to be developed through a steering group containing University and College representatives, as well as external advisers. At Harper Adams University, initial proposals are considered by the Programmes Approval Committee which appoints a scrutiny panel.

2.5 Approval events involve external subject experts, student representatives and representatives of the College's validating Universities. An approval event confirms alignment of the programme with reference points, checks the balance of practical and academic components, and approves the relationship between learning outcomes, assessment strategies and student workload.

2.6 The decisions of approval panels are reported to the relevant Boards of Study and to Senate at the University of Chester and to the Academic Standards Committee at Harper Adams University. The review team saw good levels of engagement of College staff in the approval process and, though it noted the absence of staff CVs in one proposal, concluded that the processes were generally robust.

2.7 The review team found evidence of the centrality of the College's mission and values in its planning and was able to confirm that these act as a key reference point in selecting proposed new programmes for approval. Staff gave examples of proposals which had ultimately been rejected or substantially amended after consultation with students and external stakeholders because of perceived 'mission drift' and the associated risk of moving too far away from the knowledge base and expertise of its staff. The College's mission and

values are further referenced during the approvals process to ensure high levels of industrial engagement and to promote employability and the incorporation of work experience in all its programmes. The review team concludes that the alignment of the higher education portfolio with the College's mission and values is **good practice**.

2.8   To understand how external expertise is used in programme design and approval, the review team read relevant briefing documents, scrutinised minutes from a sample of course approvals, and met a number of external stakeholders. As noted in Expectation A5, the minutes of approval events illustrate the seriousness with which sector-specific industrial expertise is taken, not only in top-level course design but also in the concern for vocational relevance and industrial currency at the level of the individual module.

2.9   The employers and external advisers whom the review team met provided a detailed account of the very significant contribution that they, as critical friends, make to the approval, ongoing currency and, in some cases, the delivery of the College's programmes of study. College staff endorsed the key role external industry professionals play in helping them maintain the vocational relevance and currency of programmes in often fast-moving industries. Staff and students spoke of their appreciation of the work experience opportunities and support with final-year students' major projects, which a number of external stakeholders provide. It was clear to the review team that the College had selected its external advisers carefully, that it encouraged them to provide advice as critical friends and that it maintained a continuing relationship with them through a range of stakeholder and other events. The review team concludes that the management and use of long-term strategic relationships with external stakeholders to enhance the student experience is **good practice**.

2.10   The College regards the high success rate of validation events as evidence that the approvals process is working well and identifies a number of ways in which it evaluates the approvals process. These include the annual monitoring of validated programmes, staff development events at partner Universities, and the College's intention to increasingly focus its own Contined Professional Development activity on validation and review processes in the run-up to a major round of periodic reviews in 2015-16.

2.11   Based on the evidence provided, the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B1 and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions*

Findings

2.12   The College has a clear Higher Education Admissions Policy that can be accessed from the College website, and is linked to *Chapter B2: Admissions* of the Quality Code. The Policy sets out the application, complaints and appeal processes for full-time, part-time and international students' applications. Students are recommended to attend an open day before applying. Full-time applicants apply through UCAS and, depending on partnership arrangements with the awarding bodies, all other applicants apply direct to the College or the University of Chester. All international applicants are required to comply with and abide by UKBA regulations. All Harper Adams-affiliated applicants are required to undertake an interview on-campus or by telephone and are advised of the possibility of advanced entry subject to meeting the accreditation of prior learning requirements of the awarding body. The College runs summer schools and uses social media to keep students engaged throughout the application process and support for students preparing for the transition to higher education study is good.

2.13   Information regarding courses and applications procedures is made available to students through the College undergraduate prospectus, the College website and through open days to which all applicants are invited. Students report that the quality of information provided is good or better.

2.14   Decisions on applications for Harper Adams University courses are generally made by programme managers who understand the requirements of the courses and are trained and guided on admissions procedures by the Course Managers Handbook. Decisions on applications for University of Chester courses are made by the University. Once a student has been offered a place, they are issued with a joining pack which includes information on enrolment, accommodation, student support and transportation. Students are required to complete a questionnaire, which alerts the College to students with disabilities. This is followed up by direct contact with students to identify their specific needs, facilitate independent assessment if required and put support in place prior to induction. This contributes to the good practice explained more fully under Expectation B4: the integrated and coordinated activity of curriculum areas and student support services to provide comprehensive support for the student learning experience.

2.15   Existing College students on level 3 courses and mature applicants are prepared for progression to higher education and students reported that they were well supported in this transition.

2.16   Admissions policies and procedures are monitored and reviewed by the Higher Education Curriculum Group and there was evidence that steps had been taken to improve the speed of the application process and enhance the accuracy of information given to students where changes occur, for example in the place of delivery. Admissions data is also regularly presented to the Higher Education Academic Board, Higher Education Curriculum Group and governing body meetings. The College's policies and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B2: Admissions* of the Quality Code.

2.17   The review team looked at the operation of admissions processes by talking to academic and support staff, through discussions with students, by scrutinising guidance to staff and applicants, and by reviewing the College's prospectus, website, minutes of meetings and reports where admissions issues are discussed.

2.18   The evidence confirms that admissions processes are clear, fair and effective and that the additional needs of applicants are identified and addressed during the process. Students confirmed that they found the admissions process straightforward and that the information provided to them was accessible, clear and accurate. Students benefit from an induction programme in which generic student and course handbooks providing information on their courses and how they are assessed are issued and academic expectations and standards are explained. Students are also screened to identify development and support needs. The review team saw evidence that feedback from induction surveys led to improvements in subsequent years. The review team met academic and support staff who demonstrated a clear understanding of admissions policies and processes.

2.19   The review team concludes that the College has clear, effective and accessible admissions policies and procedures which are regularly reviewed and enhanced in response to student feedback. Therefore, Expectation B2 has been met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*

Findings

2.20   The College has a higher education strategic planning process, which includes support services and feeds into an Annual Action Plan, part of which explicitly sets out objectives relating to effective teaching and learning, curriculum objectives and compliance with respect to academic standards and quality and the use of technology to support innovative teaching and learning. It also identifies actions to achieve these objectives. College support services including finance, marketing, human relations, property and learning resources produce their own strategic plans that are aligned to the College Annual Action Plan and the effectiveness of their services is reviewed in annual self-assessment reports and the Annual Course Monitoring reports.

2.21   The College has systematic processes in place to review and enhance the provision of teaching and learning practice which include a Teaching and Learning Strategy. Although this strategy is shared across all of the College's provision, staff are able to demonstrate a clear differentiation in their approaches to teaching and learning in higher education.

2.22   The quality of further and higher education teaching is reviewed and reported on separately through lesson observations which are graded using Ofsted grades. These feed into a Quality Review Action Plan, which identifies priorities for teaching and learning, which in turn feed into a structured Continued Professional Development programme.

2.23   In addition to lesson observations, the College employs a range of other mechanisms designed to systematically review and enhance learning and teaching including consideration of external examiner feedback at curriculum level by the Higher Education Academic Board. In addition, a Higher Education Quality Assurance Review process considers course management materials and module information. Student feedback is collected through course representative meetings, internal surveys and the NSS. These in turn are reported to the Higher Education Academic Board with actions plans if appropriate. The review team also heard from students that actions are taken in response to feedback. The College's policies and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* of the Quality Code.

2.24   The team tested the evidence by speaking to senior and academic staff, services and support staff, student and employers, and by scrutinising relevant policies, guidelines and meeting minutes.

2.25   All higher education academic staff have appropriate qualifications for their roles and new staff are required to have postgraduate qualifications which are checked by the awarding bodies. All staff have teaching qualifications or are working towards them, and are encouraged to work towards a Higher Education Academy (HEA) qualification. Staff are also encouraged to undertake continuing professional development (CPD) both at the College as part of a structured CPD programme and at the awarding institutions. New staff are supported by a mentoring system which includes co-teaching with mentors, developmental observations and peer review. Existing staff new to higher education are required to

undertake a HEA bridging module to facilitate their transition into higher education. Advanced practitioners have been appointed in all curriculum areas to develop, support, disseminate and enhance teaching practice in areas such as employability and use of the VLE.

2.26   Scholarly development is clearly defined in guidelines to staff who are encouraged to undertake scholarly activity, which may take the form of study for HEA or postgraduate qualifications, consultancy or applied research often in conjunction with final-year student projects.

2.27   The review team heard that support services and curriculum staff work together to support and enhance the student learning experience. This is explained more fully under Expectation B4, which identifies the following good practice: the integrated and coordinated activity of curriculum areas and student support services to provide comprehensive support for the student learning experience.

2.28   The College's learning environments are of a high standard with standard teaching accommodation, a VLE, ICT and traditional library resources complemented by industry-standard specialist resources. Recent investment has included the development of the Higher Education Centre which houses the Higher Education Support Team and the Higher Education Management Team, and further investment in teaching accommodation is planned. In addition to the general laboratory, library and residential facilities which are shared with further education students, the Higher Education Centre provides dedicated learning and social facilities for higher education students. The quality and accessibility of the facilities are recognised as a strength of the provision by students.

2.29   Students are encouraged and supported in their engagement with learning opportunities by regular group and formally recorded individual timetabled tutorials, which are designed to provide guidance and feedback on academic progress and performance and on personal development. Academic and employability skills development and support are provided to students either through skills modules within their programmes or skills development workshops. Further individual support is available to students through the Higher Education Support Team. The review team has identified the strategic recruitment and development of higher education staff as good practice and this is further discussed under the Enhancement section of this report.

2.30   The College meets regularly with employers and uses these opportunities to engage them in the development of new programmes and curriculum design; to identify current and future skills needs and work-based learning opportunities; and to enable staff to update their industrial skills and develop the College's research agenda. The College is currently developing an Employment Engagement Strategy, which is designed to formally articulate these activities. These factors contribute to two further features of good practice: the management and use of long-term strategic relationships with external stakeholders to enhance the student experience discussed under Expectation B1, and the systematic approach to providing work-based learning opportunities of quality and relevance to students and to the College's mission under Expectation B10.

2.31   The NSS identified issues with organisation and management in part of the provision. Students who met with the team confirmed the situation. However, the review team found evidence that steps had been taken to understand and address these issues. The review team **affirms** the approach taken to understand and address the issues highlighted by the NSS around organisation and management.

2.32   The review team concludes that the College has effective policies and processes in place to deliver, monitor and enhance learning and teaching. This is achieved through systematic processes designed to collect and respond to feedback on the quality of learning

and teaching; engagement of employers in curriculum design and development of work-based learning opportunities; the College's strategic recruitment process and support given to staff development; the quality of physical learning resources; and the integrated planning and delivery of curriculum areas and support services students receive to enable them to engage with the learning opportunities provided.

2.33   The review team concludes that although Expectation B3 has been met, the associated level of risk is moderate. The level of risk reflects the need to continue to address the issues identified in the NSS.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.34   The College has a draft Higher Education Strategy which sets out the strategic objectives of the higher education provision within the College, which are to offer vocationally based programmes which develop higher skills and knowledge in students to promote their future progression in education or at work. This document informs a Higher Education Action Plan which is in turn reflected in annual curriculum and service area plans which are reviewed and monitored in an annual self-assessment report as noted under Expectation B3. These self-assessments are reviewed by the Higher Education Academic Board.

2.35   These plans, which are industry led, include input from stakeholder groups including employers and students and inform the process of identifying areas of growth which require additional staff and resources which can then be agreed with the College Executive. The review team heard evidence that this process also ensures that new course proposals align with the College's mission and values.

2.36   Following the development of the Higher Education Centre noted in IQER, and in accordance with its Higher Education Strategy, the College has continued to invest in its higher education provision and management by developing the Higher Education Faculty. This has seen the recent appointments of Assistant Principal and Dean of Higher Education and a Higher Education Curriculum Area Manager who are responsible for developing the higher education team and quality assurance processes across the College. The College is also investing in its estate with the development of new facilities to support food and horticulture provision and new student residence. These are contributing factors to the features of good practice identified under Enhancement around the consolidation of the higher education ethos through investment in leadership, organisational structures and estate, and the strategic recruitment and development of the higher education staff.

2.37   The College has a significant number of students with complex needs. Its dedicated Higher Education Support Team (HEST), based in the Higher Education Centre, offers an array of specialist support to students ranging from providing access to disability assessment and support in applying for Disabled Student Allowance, to support for maths, literacy and employability skills development.

2.38   The team tested the support and resourcing for students by meeting with senior, academic and support staff and with students and their representatives and by scrutinising student feedback and other relevant documents.

2.39   The College supports the transition of students from level 3 to level 4 with a variety of bridging initiatives. These include invitations to open days and summer schools, transition workshops, 'taster' assessments and feedback for existing level 3 students and Access to HE programmes. Students going on to level 6 also receive support to facilitate the transition to honours degree study. In discussions with the review team, students confirmed that they found these transition arrangements very useful in preparing them for higher-level study.

2.40   From induction onwards, students are supported in their academic development in a variety of ways. All students on Harper Adams courses are required to do a common module supported by tutorials which is designed to develop their academic skills.

Academic skills development for the University of Chester students is delivered through timetabled skills workshops. Library, science, maths and statistical skills are supported by additional workshops where needs are identified. Where required, additional learning support or support for students with disabilities is planned, managed and provided by the Higher Education Support Team. In meetings with the review team, students confirmed that they felt well supported in the development of these skills.

2.41   The College encourages students to develop their employability skills through a variety of mechanisms including the skills development workshops noted above, preparation sessions for work-based learning placements, achievement of additional qualifications such as First Aid and Mountain Leaders certification and British Horse Society awards, participation in the running of the Student Association and engagement with industry research as part of final-year projects. All programmes also contain an element of work experience, which is supported by academic induction and support services. Students are supported in the development of these skills by staff who have recent or current industry experience and the College uses its strong links with employers to provide specialist input into programmes, give specialist lectures, provide case studies and support research projects.

2.42   The review team found clear evidence of students receiving helpful and comprehensive support from application and induction onwards from both tutors and support staff. In meetings with students, the review team found that students are well prepared and jointly supported by academic and student services staff in their development of skills, for transitions from levels 3 and 5 to higher-level studies and for work experience and subsequent transition into employment on graduation.

2.43   Support staff were able to give numerous examples of the way in which the College had provided support to students including development of academic and employability skills, research training, disability support and financial, welfare and visa advice. The provision and quality of support services is regularly monitored in course meetings and students are invited to give feedback on them though surveys. The review team found that the planning and resourcing of all student support services are aligned and integrated with the strategic plans of the College. The integrated and coordinated activity of curriculum areas and student support services to provide comprehensive support for the student learning experience is **good practice**.

2.44   The review team concludes that the College effectively plans, allocates and manages resources and supports students' academic, personal and professional development to reach their potential. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B4 has been met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student engagement*

Findings

2.45   The College has a Learner Engagement Policy which sets out the support the College provides tor the Student Association, for the recruitment and training of student representatives and policies regarding the appointment of student governors and the collection of student feedback and communication with students. There is evidence that this policy is implemented and students confirm that measures in place for student representation and training are effective.

2.46   The team tested the College's engagement of students by meeting with senior and academic staff, and with students and their representatives, and by scrutinising the above documents and student survey data. The Learner Engagement Policy describes the College's commitment to the importance of student feedback and recognises its impact on student experience. Although the College is good at communicating with students, it recognises that deeper engagement of students in decision-making processes and quality assurance is desirable. In addition to informal feedback through course managers, feedback from students is collected through module surveys, internal and national student surveys and through course representatives' meetings and reports, meetings with the Student Association and through student representation on bodies such as Annual Course Monitoring committees, the Higher Education Academic Board and the governing body.

2.47   Student representation is supported by the College through the funding of a sabbatical post for the Student Association and all student representatives receive training. Student representatives attend Annual Course Monitoring meetings and their views are reported in detail to Higher Education Academic Board. Students note that their involvement in new course development, curriculum design and in quality assurance is effective; students reported that their views are sought actively during dedicated meetings with the Higher Education Curriculum Area Manager.

2.48   The review team found extensive evidence of students' formal and informal involvement in quality assurance and enhancement of the learning experience in a range of forums and at a variety of different levels in the College. Student engagement and the College's response to the student voice has led to improvements to the estate and wireless provision, involvement in appointing new staff, course development and validations, the enhancement of support for study skills development and the development of social networking to improve communications and timetabling. The College's responses to feedback are communicated to students informally through tutors and the Higher Education Curriculum Manager, a 'you said, we did' system and via course representatives.

2.49   The review team concludes that, based on the evidence provided, the College effectively engages with students. Students are clear about how the student representative system works and representatives are fully trained in their roles. Students are offered many opportunities to engage with the College, both formally and informally, and take advantage of these to contribute to the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The full involvement of students in the extensive formal and informal student engagement opportunities is **good practice**. The review team therefore concludes Expectation B5 has been met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.50   The College regards assessment as measuring achievement of specified learning outcomes by students while providing them with opportunities to reflect on their learning. Assessment policies, regulations and processes are set by its awarding bodies and implemented and monitored locally by the College. Consistency is achieved by means of annual partnership reviews with Harper Adams University and twice-yearly operational meetings with the University of Chester. All programmes provide opportunities for the accreditation of prior learning and credit transfer using University partner guidelines and processes which students are informed of prior to module registration and in programme handbooks.

2.51   The College's two awarding bodies are responsible for setting and monitoring academic standards, assessment regulations and student conduct in assessment, with the College being responsible for implementing and maintaining them.

2.52   While the assessment policies, regulations and processes set by its awarding bodies meet the Expectation in *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning* of the Quality Code, the College's self-evaluation document identifies a number of concerns about their implementation at College level, acknowledging that in some programmes of study feedback could have been more timely and informative. The student submission also identifies the quality of feedback as varying from programme to programme. Student concerns about assessment had been noted in the College's 2010 IQER report and despite the College's attempts to address these concerns, NSS outcomes between 2011 and 2013 indicate that student satisfaction with assessment and feedback has continued to fall.

2.53   The review team examined minutes and documents and spoke to students and staff to establish whether the College's recent actions to remedy concerns about assessment had been effective to date and were likely to continue to improve the quality of the student learning experience within a reasonable timescale. It learned that prior to the academic year 2012-13, the College's Higher Education Academic Board had regarded NSS issues primarily as the concern of its awarding bodies and had only revised this position when Harper Adams University transferred higher education student numbers to it in 2012-13. The review team examined the minutes of the Higher Education Academic Board and was able to confirm growing oversight of NSS-related matters from 2012-13 onwards. Staff are aware of NSS concerns and increased College oversight is being translated into planning at all levels, ranging from departmental action plans to the 2013-14 Higher Education Strategic Action Plan.

2.54   The review team notes the contribution made by external examiners' reports to identifying concerns about assessment such as staff workload, quality of feedback and consistency in writing assignment tasks, and the systematic way in which these are addressed through annual monitoring reports and consequent staff development.

2.55   Teaching staff explained to the review team that, as a result of staff development, they now approached assessment as a team using a number of formal and informal techniques to ensure newly appointed staff mark to the appropriate standard and plan ahead

for the peak periods of assessment to enable staff to mark to schedule. They also spoke of the value of grading software in improving feedback to students and of the new checks on assessed work prior to it being sent to external examiners. In parallel, additional support in revision strategies and examination technique has been provided and students told the reviewers how much they valued this support.

2.56   Programme handbooks provide an overall assessment planner and generic assessment criteria. Students confirmed to the review team that, despite occasional inconsistencies, the volume of assessment is generally appropriate and that tutors provide detailed and useful assessment criteria when assessment briefs are launched. Students understand what is expected of them and receive feedback within the prescribed four-week period using standardised feedback sheets, with additional tutorial support being available if needed.

2.57   The students whom the review team met were supportive of the College's revised assessment processes, though they expressed some concern about the bunching of assessments. College staff indicated that processes were in place between the College and the University of Chester aimed at avoiding assessment bunching but students expressed some concern to the review team about the number of short assessments in programmes taught by the University of Chester, as well as a perceived lack of communication between University of Chester staff and the College about agreeing an overarching assessment calendar. The student submission makes a similar observation.

2.58   Student work is marked in accordance with processes defined by the College's awarding bodies. Following first marking and internal moderation, marks are received by module-level assessment boards which external examiners attend. The Colleges states in its self-evaluation document that these boards discuss possible improvements to assessments but there is little evidence of this in board minutes. Once marks have been verified and approved at module level, they go forward to Subject Assessment Boards at the College's awarding bodies and are subsequently communicated to students.

2.59   Although the College has experienced substantial historic difficulties with assessment and feedback to students, the review team formed the view that it is now making a determined and systematic effort to address them at every level. This is evident from the seriousness with which the NSS is being taken, the engagement of staff with feedback from students and external examiners and the growing satisfaction of students, as evidenced by the student submission and the most recent internal student experience survey. The review team **affirms** the approach taken to understand and address issues highlighted by the NSS around assessment and feedback.

2.60   On the basis of the evidence, the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation B6 and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External examining*

Findings

2.61   External examiners provide feedback to the College about curriculum currency, the rigour and fairness of assessment and the comparability of student achievement with that of their peers at other institutions. They are expected to be sufficiently qualified, experienced and knowledgeable about their subject to advise on the academic quality and standards of the awards to which they are assigned. External examiners may be nominated by the College, but they are appointed by its awarding bodies which keep a central register of appointments and tenure. The nomination process checks for possible conflicts of interest and ensures periodic rotation of external examiners. External examiners meet students and review learning resources. They approve assessments, sample student assessed work, attend module and/or subject assessment boards and prepare annual reports which are sent directly to the awarding bodies. After initial scrutiny they are forwarded to the College where they receive further scrutiny. Course leaders respond to the reports within four weeks of receipt and the College Higher Education Curriculum Area Manager compiles a key findings report in the autumn term, which is received by the Higher Education Academic Board and the Quality and Standards Committee, and which is also reflected in the College's Quality Reports. External examiners' reports are further considered in annual monitoring meetings and reports and are made available to students through the VLE.

2.62   In respect of the nomination and contribution of external examiners, the College adheres to the criteria and processes of its awarding bodies which align with *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code.

2.63   The review team examined the role played by external examiners by considering the terms of their appointment, the content of their reports and the use made of them by the College in maintaining standards and quality.

2.64   The College uses the forms of its awarding bodies to nominate external examiners. These forms provide explicit criteria in respect of the qualifications, experience and professional standing expected of external examiners and, in the case of Harper Adams University, expectations regarding the mix of academic and industrial expertise. Nominations may be made by the College, but oversight is retained by senior committees and post-holders in the accrediting University and relevant committee minutes indicate that levels of scrutiny are appropriate. The College's awarding bodies induct and provide written guidance for new external examiners.

2.65   External examiners' reports follow templates provided by the College's awarding bodies, which elicit comments on alignment with the Quality Code, assessment arrangements, academic standards and student achievement, curriculum, learning and teaching and enhancement. External examiners' reports demonstrate high levels of engagement with College provision and the reviewers noted the importance of their comments in helping the College identify and address assessment and feedback issues.

2.66   The review team examined ways in which the College oversees action taken in respect of external examiners' reports. Course teams are required to respond to external examiners' reports within four weeks of receiving them. Staff explained to the review team how the reports are first considered collectively at programme meetings, which formulate a response. The responses are collated and reviewed by the Higher Education Curriculum Area Manager who provides the College Higher Education Academic Board and the Quality

and Standards Committee with an overview of external examiner feedback and curriculum area responses, and with a related report on the outcomes of the recently introduced and insightful Higher Education Quality Assurance Reviews. The latter evaluate programme performance against a number of quality assurance criteria and check, for example, that the most recent external examiners' reports have been posted on the VLE so that students can access them. External examiners' reports are appended to, and evaluated within, annual course reports which are agreed at course committees and follow the process described under Expectation B8 of this report.

2.67   On the basis of the evidence, the review team concludes that the care taken in appointing external examiners and professional advisers, the quality of their reports and the College's oversight of the use made of them mean the College meets Expectation B7 and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.68   The College plays a full role in annual monitoring processes, and is currently planning for the periodic review of all its courses in 2015-16.

2.69   Responsibility for programme monitoring and review lies with the College's awarding bodies whose policy and processes align with *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* of the Quality Code.

2.70   To assess the effectiveness of the College's use of these processes, the review team spoke to staff and students about their involvement in them and read course review documentation. The College identifies its curriculum teams as key to ensuring the ongoing review and enhancement of programmes. This was confirmed by the College's quality assurance arrangements and by the staff whom the review team met who explained actions they had taken as a result of the annual monitoring process, which they saw as taking feedback from all angles and compiling it into a single document.

2.71   Course Managers write annual course reports using prescribed templates and submit their draft reports for approval to the Annual Course Monitoring Meeting, which is chaired by the Higher Education Curriculum Manager and attended by the relevant Curriculum Area Manager, Course Manager, Module Leader(s) and student representatives. The College's new Higher Education Student Representative System Policy strengthens the commitment to increase student awareness of Annual Course Monitoring reports, as well as external examiner reports and NSS outcomes.

2.72   The Annual Course Monitoring reports read by the review team were informed by feedback from external examiners, student surveys and other management information. They contain detailed analysis, particularly when addressing areas of concern such as retention or modules receiving low module evaluation scores, and lead to 'SMART' action plans that are implemented in the current year and reported back on the following year. Annual Course Monitoring reports are received by the College Higher Education Academic Board and reported to the relevant Board of Studies at the University of Chester and the Academic Standards Committee at Harper Adams University.

2.73   Additional oversight of the course monitoring process is provided by the annual partnership review meetings with Harper Adams University and to some extent by the operational meetings held with the University of Chester.

2.74   College staff explained to the review team how they evaluated the College's contribution to approval processes in terms of their growing familiarity with them. This is leading to stronger proposals and fewer requirements or recommendations from approval panels.

2.75   The College will be undertaking the concurrent periodic review of all its courses in 2015-16 and the review team saw evidence of its detailed planning for this complex schedule of events. The review team learned that the College intends to use the periodic review process as part of its strategic development of higher education and will take full account of relevant external reference points including regional and national reports and government initiatives and involve wide-ranging internal consultations with students, stakeholders and staff.

2.76   Based on the evidence, the review team concludes that annual monitoring processes are conducted thoroughly and working well. Although historic evidence of periodic review was not available, the review team examined the College's strategic and operational forward planning for review in partnership with its awarding bodies and concluded that it is likely that periodic review would operate as effectively as annual monitoring. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B8 has been met and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.77   The responsibilities documentation shows that appeals are solely the responsibility of the awarding bodies whose policy and processes align with *Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals* of the Quality Code.

2.78   The College has a Complaints and Appeals Policy specifically for its higher education provision which is available on the College's public-facing website. The student submission states that students have information about complaints and appeals from handbooks and tutors.

2.79   The complaints policy, revised in February 2014, is comprehensive in scope and clearly signposts students to the academic appeals procedures of the awarding bodies. The review team saw evidence of the monitoring of complaints, through reports to the Higher Education Academic Board, which indicated that the provider manages complaints in a timely manner with appropriate action taken in response.

2.80   Students whom the review team met confirmed that they knew that appeals are the responsibility of the degree-awarding body, and further confirmed that they knew how to make an academic complaint or appeal should the need arise.

2.81   The review team fids that the College has fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals. The review team therefore concludes that the College meets Expectation B9 and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.82   The College's self-evaluation document did not contain information on the way in which it addresses the Expectation in this area. However, the review team found, through documentary requests and in meetings with staff, students and placement providers, that the College manages student learning opportunities effectively where delivery takes place outside the College. In the case of the College, this Expectation applies to its placement and other work-based learning opportunities so far as they are part of students' programmes.

2.83   All of the programmes have work-based learning opportunities and for a majority of programmes this is a compulsory element. In the case of University of Chester programmes, the work-based learning module is run by the University and not the College, although the College actively supports students in preparing for placement, including working with them to explore what sort of placement would complement students' career aspirations.

2.84   Student handbooks contain detailed information on the expectations for students and placement providers in respect of work-based learning. Students and staff whom the review team met confirmed that the expectations placed on all parties are clear: that pre-placement compliance, for example health and safety, is complete; that comprehensive preparation and ongoing support are provided for students through placement tutors; that placement reports are complete and useful. The external stakeholders whom the team met, including placement providers, further corroborated this finding.

2.85   The review team found, particularly through its meetings with staff and students, that the College invests significant time and effort in developing its work-based learning offer by seeking out new opportunities for students. Furthermore, staff reported preparing students from the outset of their programmes to undertake a placement by explaining the formal requirements and encouraging students to develop ideas for where they might like to undertake work-based learning. The process takes a 'matchmaking' approach to find the best fit placement for students, which meets both their academic and personal development needs.

2.86   The review team found that the ways in which the College approaches work-based learning, in both the development of relationships with placement providers and the identification of the contribution placements make towards students' personal and professional development, were strong. Furthermore, the commitment to industrial engagement was evident across the breadth of the College's provision. As part of the College's wider commitment to engagement with industry and the provision of opportunities for students, the review team concludes that the systematic approach to providing work-based learning opportunities of quality and relevance to students and to the College's mission is **good practice**.

2.87   The review team concludes that Expectation B10 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research degrees*

Findings

2.88   The College does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.89   In reaching its commended judgement, the review team matched its findings to the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area have been met and the level of risk, for all but one, is low. The College has put measures in place to mitigate the moderate level of risk associated with Expectation B3.

2.90   The College has plans to enhance this judgement area by developing its higher education ethos and putting in place mechanisms that will aid this. Student engagement in the management of this area is widespread and supported and managing the needs of students is a clear focus of the College's strategies, policies and actions.

2.91   This judgement area contributes to all seven features of good practice identified by the review team in this report: the alignment of the higher education portfolio with the College's mission and values (Expectation B1); the management and use of long-term strategic relationships with external stakeholders to enhance the student experience (Expectations B1, B3 and B4); the integrated and coordinated activity of curriculum areas and student support services to provide comprehensive support for the student learning experience (Expectations B2, B3 and B4); the full involvement of students in the extensive formal and informal student engagement opportunities (Expectation B5); the systematic approach to providing work-based learning opportunities of quality and relevance to students and to the College's mission (Expectations B3, B4 and B10); the consolidation of the higher education ethos through investment in leadership, organisational structures and estate (Expectation B4); and the strategic recruitment and development of the higher education staff (Expectations B3 and B4).

2.92   There are no recommendations in this area. The College has acknowledged two areas of weakness identified in the NSS and has taken steps to address the issues that will contribute positively to the student experience and further enhance quality. The review team affirms the approach taken by the College to understand and address the issues highlighted by the NSS around organisation and management, and assessment and feedback (Expectations B3 and B6).

2.93   The review team therefore concludes that the quality of learning opportunities at the College is **commended**.

3   Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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

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

Findings

3.1   Information to students is communicated in a variety of ways along the student journey from prospective student to enrolment, induction and eventual study on a programme. The College website provides a range of information regarding course availability and open days, student support and facilities including accommodation, the Higher Education Admissions Policy and advice on how to apply. The website, which has a specific area for higher education, also provides access to the undergraduate prospectus which provides detailed information on course content and validation, admissions requirements, accommodation, fees and student loans and progression opportunities. The website also provides Key Information Set data.

3.2   Contact is maintained with students throughout the application process when further information regarding the progress of their application, details of accommodation, student support and the enrolment process are sent to them. The College works in partnership with its awarding bodies to ensure the accuracy of all this information with final approval lying with the awarding bodies.

3.3   During the induction process, students are issued with a generic Student Handbook and Diary and comprehensive course-specific handbooks based on templates provided by the partner institutions. Responsibility for the content of the handbooks lies with the College and they are approved by the awarding bodies. The generic handbook sets out the core values of the College and, together with the course handbooks, provides information about the structure and management of the courses; the support available to students and how to access it; a range of College rules and regulations; and the appeals and complaints policies and procedures. Student handbooks also contain the student charter that describes expectations that students may have of the College and it of them.

3.4   Information about Harper Adams courses is also made available to students through the College VLE. All information relating to University of Chester courses is accessible to students on the University's own VLE, accessed via the College's VLE. Module handbooks, assessments, assessment schedules, lecture notes and supporting learning materials are made available to students on the VLEs.

3.5   The review team tested that information was fit for purpose, accurate and accessible by speaking to students and staff and by scrutinising the website, the VLE, the student submission and examples of handbooks and other documents outlined above.

3.6   Students told the review team that before applying they had accessed information about their courses and the College through the prospectus and the website, through the awarding bodies, by visiting the College on open days and speaking to staff. Prior to induction, students receive joining instructions which provide information on the enrolment process, finance and accommodation. Induction surveys and discussions with students confirmed that information they received from the College was accessible, accurate and sufficient. Evidence from students, the student submission and induction surveys confirmed

that information in student and course handbooks and information on the website and VLE are fit for purpose. Students also confirmed that they know where to find information regarding assessment regulations, appeals and complaints policies.

3.7   Since the IQER in 2010, the College has made significant progress in developing its VLE to support higher education and students confirmed this during meetings and in their submission. There is evidence that minimum requirements for VLE content are set by the College and are being checked by the Higher Education Curriculum Manager. The review team was able to check the accuracy and accessibility of course information, appeals and complaints policies and information relating to student support. Students confirmed that they knew where to find information when needed.

3.8   Although there is evidence that the minimum expectations, which include a scheme of work, module handbooks, programme specifications, timetables, external examiner reports and course reports for the previous year, are being met in many areas, the review team found that implementation and content is variable and that the structure of the VLE is inconsistent across programmes and modules. This was confirmed by staff and students in meetings and by students in their submission.

3.9   The College has put in place processes which will enhance the quality of the VLE and has appointed a member of staff to investigate and develop innovative technologies and further develop use of the VLE. The review team **affirms** the College's work to improve the consistency and accessibility of information available to students on the VLE.

3.10   Overall, the College, in conjunction with its partner institutions, has in place effective quality assurance policies and procedures to ensure the accuracy of its information about its higher education provision. Staff, students and the awarding bodies confirmed that all significant sources of information are fit for purpose, accurate and accessible. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation C has been met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.11   In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched the findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk was low. There were no recommendations. However, the review team affirmed the College's work to improve the consistency and accessibility of information available to students on the VLE. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of information produced about its higher education provisions **meets** UK expectations.

4   Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1   The College takes deliberate steps to enhance the learning experience for its higher education students. The review team saw evidence of the operation of the College's strategic approach to enhancement and ethos of continuous improvement within several areas of the College's work, specifically: leadership, management and resources, staff development, and engagement with industry.

4.2   The College does not have a formal enhancement strategy, and did not fully articulate its approach to enhancement in its self-evaluation document. However, the review team was able to identify the College's enhancement approach through the meetings it held with staff, students and external stakeholders. These meetings provided the team with information which illustrated the application of College policies, for example the use of teaching observations for enhancement. Senior College staff stated that they aspire to meet the standards required for foundation degree awarding powers, which demonstrated a commitment to further development of the processes by which the College supports its higher education provision.

4.3   The College has invested in its physical estate including the creation of dedicated higher education resources for students. It has further invested in industrial-standard facilities, which provide students with a highly workplace-relevant learning environment, for example within the food production programmes and horticulture. Students whom the review team met expressed enthusiasm for the quality of the facilities available at the College.

4.4   The College has created a differentiated management structure for higher education and, at the time of the review, shared plans for future development including an additional post of Assistant Dean to support work in this area. Staff whom the review team met explained that they had a number of curriculum area and cross-College forums for sharing good practice. Specifically, the Higher Education Curriculum Group was cited as particularly effective in this regard.

4.5   Furthermore, in a meeting with services and support staff, the review team found that there was a clear and integrated commitment to supporting higher education students from across the whole of the College staff, including close liaison between student support and curriculum teams.

4.6   This approach to considered reflection, leading to improvement in organisational structures, and the investment in the management of higher education demonstrate the College's commitment to enhancement. The review team consider that the consolidation of the higher education ethos through investment in leadership, organisational structures and the estate is **good practice**.

4.7   The College has given thorough consideration to the staff development needs of its staff working within its higher education provision. Through its Scholarly Activity Committee it manages staff applications for professional development including teaching qualifications, membership of the HEA and formal taught and research qualifications with fee support and teaching remission. The College has reviewed its recruitment requirements and now requires minimum qualifications at least one level higher than that which they will teach for its higher education teaching staff. Students are involved in recruitment of staff.

4.8   The College has a developmental peer observation scheme as well as formal teaching observation activity, the latter through Quality Review Week. Primarily a tool for quality assurance, the review team saw evidence of Quality Review Week being used for enhancement with teaching staff providing examples of how their practice had improved through this process. Further examples of supporting development of teaching and learning were seen by the review team: the work of the teaching and learning coach, a managed induction process supporting staff transition to teaching in higher education, the graduate trainee scheme and its structured teaching development, and one hour of continuous professional development for all staff each week.

4.9   The review team found that the College's Advanced Practitioner role is an example of systematic enhancement. The title and associated pay increment is awarded to staff for a time-limited period; staff members in this role must continue to operate as leaders in teaching and learning to retain the position. Teaching staff whom the review team met confirmed that the advanced practitioners in their curriculum areas were available to assist with developing teaching and learning, thus supporting enhancement. Furthermore, the advanced practitioners work on task-and-finish activities, which are themselves cross-College enhancement projects. The review team heard of a further example, that of an employability portfolio, which was successfully developed for the College's further education provision and was being adapted for the higher education students. The review team met the Advanced Practitioner leading this project who explained that the project group was involving students in the project. The strategic recruitment and development of the higher education staff is **good practice**.

4.10   The College is embedded in its local community and economy and leverages its well developed relationships for the benefit of students. The review team saw evidence of the involvement of external stakeholders in the review and development of curricula and in the provision of learning opportunities including industry-relevant research projects. As noted under Expectation B1, the management and use of long-term strategic relationships with external stakeholders to enhance the student experience is **good practice**.

4.11   Work-based learning opportunities, including placements and internships, are well managed for the benefit of students and tailored to students' professional development needs (see Expectation B10). Furthermore, the College provides students with learning opportunities beyond the formal curriculum including accredited professional certificates related to students' academic programmes and vocational areas. The review team heard from both students and staff that the College seeks out additional qualifications to offer to students to enhance their learning opportunities.

4.12   The approach to seeking and delivering additional learning opportunities, in addition to the extensive placement activity, led the review team to conclude that the systematic approach to providing work-based learning opportunities of quality and relevance to students and to the College's mission is **good practice**.

4.13   The review team concludes that the Expectation that deliberate steps are being taken at College level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities has been met, and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.14   In reaching its commended judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

4.15   The review team concludes that the College demonstrates that it has a strategic approach to enhancement that is embedded across its higher education provision, and that part of the College's higher education ethos is to seek out and deliver enhancement using a coordinated and systematic approach.

4.16   The review team identified two features of good practice in this area: the consolidation of the higher education ethos through investment in leadership, organisational structures and the estate, and the strategic recruitment and development of the higher education staff. The features of good practice under Expectations B1 and B10 also contribute directly to the enhancement of learning opportunities. There were no recommendations or affirmations in this area.

4.17   Therefore, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College is **commended**.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The College's stated mission articulated in the College's Higher Education Strategy is 'To inspire individuals, communities and rural businesses by delivering world class education and skills accessible to all' and this objective is reflected in the prospectus on the website and in the draft Employer Engagement Strategy. All the College's programmes incorporate elements of work-based learning, work placements, internships or other opportunities for students to gain experience of work as part of their study at the College.

5.2   Generic employability skills are developed through specific skills-based modules in the case of Harper Adams University as timetabled workshops or as part of the work-based induction programme in foundation degrees. Recent industrial experience is an important criterion for the appointment of academic staff and many staff continue to spend part of their time engaged in industry or are engaged with influential groups within their sectors. This level of engagement with industry and currency of experience ensures that skills development and practice delivered within or in addition to programmes are both up to date and relevant.

5.3   The College operates a number of industrial enterprises on the campus including a farm, a zoo, an equestrian centre and a licensed food factory. Students engage in these to develop their practical skills and knowledge in areas such as health and safety, animal handling and specialist equipment operation. Students are also encouraged to participate in a range of external-facing activities including lambing and equine event days and open days.

5.4   The College Careers Service provides support to students by providing advice and guidance on careers planning; employability skills development, including preparation for interviews; assessment centres; and assisting students in finding work experience and graduate placements.

5.5   The review team heard of numerous examples of activities designed to promote the employability of students, some of which were particularly innovative. These included providing opportunities for students from all curriculum areas to gain additional recognised qualifications alongside their academic degrees, the support given to students to use the strong industrial links the College has to engage with industry as part of their final-year projects and the College's graduate trainee programme, which is designed to support a number of students into careers in teaching.

5.6   The success of these measures is reflected in Destination of Leavers from Higher Education data reported by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) with a significant majority of students going onto employment and/or further study. Students whom the review team met were very positive about the support the College provides in developing their employability skills, felt they were well prepared for work-based learning placements and internships and particularly valued the opportunities available to gain additional practical qualifications alongside their degrees.

5.7   Links with local industry are strong, with the College supporting these through a wide range of mechanisms. These include informal direct contact with tutors and course managers, invitations to employers as critical friends to comment on, review, inform and validate the development of new and existing programmes, running frequent stakeholder events, using employers to develop student projects, and more traditional placement of students for work-based learning and internships. Examples of these include the development of FdSc Food Technology and Agricultural Engineering and Mechanisation programmes. Students also benefit from using industry-standard equipment and resources

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donated or loaned from employers. Employers are clearly very aware and supportive of the College's aim to produce 'work-ready' graduates. In addition to providing opportunities for students to engage with live projects as part of their studies, employers also contribute to the applied research projects the College engages in and contribute to careers days and open days for prospective students.

5.8   The review team was impressed with the breadth and depth of employer links and the extent of employer engagement in the design, quality assurance and delivery of higher education in the College. The team was also impressed with the innovative ways in which the College uses links with employers and employers' commitment to the enhancement of practical skills development and the wider student experience. The management and use of long-term strategic relationships with external stakeholders such as employers to enhance the student experience has already been highlighted as good practice (see Expectations A5, B1, B3, B4 and Enhancement).

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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