



Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology

Review of College Higher Education
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

June 2013

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About this review

This is a report of a Review of College Higher Education conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology. The review took place on 3-6 June 2013 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Steve Finch
- Miss Maxina Butler-Holmes
- Mr Jamie Clark (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report, the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on:
 - whether the college fulfils its responsibilities for maintaining the threshold academic standards set by its awarding bodies
 - the quality of learning opportunities
 - the quality of information
 - the enhancement of learning opportunities.
- provides commentaries on the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the [key findings](#) can be found in the section starting on page 4. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

In reviewing Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology 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 2012-13 are the First Year Student Experience and Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.¹ Background information about Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology is given on page 4 of this report. A dedicated [page of the website](#) explains more about this review method and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.²

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx

² www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/rche/pages/default.aspx

Amended judgement

Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology underwent a Review of College Higher Education in June 2013, which resulted in a judgement of 'meets UK expectations' against the academic standards of the awards the College offers on behalf of its awarding bodies and the quality of student learning opportunities at the College. However, it also received judgements of 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' against both the quality of information produced by the College about its learning opportunities, and against its enhancement of student learning opportunities. These judgements are regarded as unsatisfactory and are subject to formal follow-up action by QAA, which includes the College's development of an action plan responding to the 14 recommendations contained in the report.

The College published an action plan describing how it intended to address the review findings, putting particular emphasis on the weaknesses underlying the unsatisfactory judgements, and has been working over the last eight months to demonstrate how it has implemented that plan. The College has taken action in response to all the recommendations in the report.

The follow-up process included scrutiny by the review team of the College's progress reports and the supporting documentary evidence along with a one-day follow-up visit on 26 September 2014. During this visit, two members of the original review team attended the College on an informal basis and met with senior staff to discuss progress and triangulate the evidence base received over the preceding months.

The visit confirmed that the actions, germane to the Information and Enhancement judgements, had been successfully addressed. Actions against recommendations in Quality and Learning Opportunities, that received positive judgements, had also been completed on schedule and contributed to the progress against Enhancement.

In summary, the team found:

- External examiner reports are more effectively used. External examiners comments are summarised in the Oversight and Evaluation Report which is considered at the Higher Education Forum (HE Forum) and by Academic Leadership Team (ALT) to identify enhancement opportunities.
- The role of the external examiner is explained to students at induction and all external examiner reports are published in full on the College virtual learning environment (VLE) and are discussed with students at tutorials.
- The College has responded to the need to ensure consistency across assessment boards. The Assessment and Award Board has provided a context to review elements of assessment across programme areas.
- There is a more formal and effective approach to the oversight of higher education provision. The emergent HE Self-assessment Report (HE SAR) informs a Quality Improvement Plan. This supports enhancement across the higher education provision within the College. The review team affirms the development of a more evaluative system of oversight using qualitative data.
- Mapping against the Quality Code is carried out through the Enhancement Group, to a planned programme. Staff are made aware of developments and expectations through the HE Forum.
- The HE SAR is being further developed to make more use of management information, feedback, module level analysis and annual monitoring review data.

The College acknowledges that data analysis needs to move beyond the further education focused indicators.

- A higher education admissions policy has been developed through the HE Forum and admissions processes have been mapped to *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.
- 'The Agency' has been in operation for a year and has a dedicated higher education progression specialist and a higher education work experience co-ordinator to incorporate a specific focus on the needs of higher education students.
- A new Student Charter sets out the expectations of students and the College.
- All quality documents are available on the VLE for staff and, where appropriate, for students. Revisions are discussed through HE Forum and training updates are provided.
- All information is subject to an auditable staged sign off by the HE Co-ordinator. A system to trigger policy review dates has been devised and updated through the Information Working Group, a sub group of the Enhancement Group. Ultimate approval of documents now lies with the HE Co-ordinator.
- All handbooks are approved by the HE Co-ordinator before being released to students. A criteria-based checklist was agreed by the Information Working Group, which was used to guide the production of handbooks and the new course specifications. The College has produced programme specifications for the Pearson programmes. These appropriately reflect the provision at the College and are published on the website.
- The appointment of HE Co-ordinator was a deliberate step taken by the College to drive a higher education focused agenda within the existing structures and to improve the quality of the learning experience.
- The Enhancement Strategy originally presented for RCHE was revised to a Higher Education Student Enhancement policy with the twin themes of 'Experience and Engagement'.
- Induction has been reviewed to promote more of an identity for higher education and there are new physical facilities to create higher education zoned areas. The College is developing learning communities that are championed by the Principal. A specific Higher Education Learning Community is being established, led by a former programme leader, to meet the professional development needs of staff with particular emphasis on learning and teaching pedagogies in higher education.
- Progress has been made in the deliberate use of management information, student performance, feedback and tutor evaluation to enhance the provision as described under other recommendations.

The judgement is now formally amended to indicate that the review team confirms that the recommendations relating to quality of information and the enhancement of student learning opportunities have been satisfactorily addressed and meet UK expectations, and the review can be considered to be signed off as complete.

Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology (the College).

QAA's judgements about Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology.

- Academic standards of the awards the College offers on behalf of its awarding bodies **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets UK expectations**.
- The quality of information produced by the College about its learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet UK expectations**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology.

- No features of good practice were identified by the team.

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology. The review team recommends that by the beginning of the academic year 2013-14 the College:

- develops and implements a systematic approach towards the consideration of, and response to, all higher education external examiner reports to inform practice and promote enhancement (paragraph 1.7)
- ensures that all higher education external examiner reports are made available in full to students (paragraph 1.9)
- adopts a more formalised approach for its Pearson programmes assessment boards to ensure consistency across the provision (paragraph 1.15)
- establishes a mechanism to promote the effective oversight and evaluation of its higher education portfolio on an annual basis, referring particularly to *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraph 1.21)
- develops and makes public an admissions policy for entry to its higher education programmes (paragraph 2.23)
- integrates existing information into a higher education student charter or equivalent document that is aligned with Part C: 'Information about higher education provision' of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and ensures the document is then reviewed by students and staff regularly (paragraph 2.39)

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- reviews its range of policy documents relating to the academic standards and quality of its higher education provision to ensure that they are fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (paragraph 3.7)
- ensures that all handbooks for its Pearson programmes are comprehensive, consistent and meet the needs of higher education students (paragraph 3.8).

The review team recommends that by the beginning of the spring term 2014 the College:

- uses management information relating to its higher education provision in an effective manner to ensure institutional oversight of higher education quality and standards, and to identify enhancement opportunities (paragraph 2.22)
- ensures staff have access to quality assurance information appropriate to its higher education provision (paragraph 3.6)
- establishes and implements an auditable process to ensure that all information produced is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (paragraph 3.7).

The review team recommends that by the beginning of the academic year 2014-15 the College:

- aligns its higher education provision with, and raises staff awareness of, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraph 1.26)
- development of 'The Agency' incorporates a specific focus on the needs of its higher education students (paragraph 2.30)
- develops an understanding of the meaning of enhancement in a higher education context and produces a revised enhancement policy that delivers a strategic higher education approach to improving the quality of students' learning opportunities (paragraph 4.4).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The College's plans to encourage research-based teaching (paragraph 2.7).
- The College's plans to appoint student representatives to the Academic Leadership Team (paragraph 2.13).
- The College's development of 'The Agency' to provide a unified approach to student support and development (paragraph 2.30).

Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology has identified student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement as an area for development and has in place a Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy to promote the participation of students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, resulting in the improvement of their educational experience.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the [handbook](#) for Review of College Higher Education, available on the QAA website.³

About Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology

Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology is the largest provider of vocational education in Shropshire. It is a medium-sized general further education college which serves the town of Shrewsbury, much of north Shropshire and parts of south Shropshire and Telford. It describes its mission as 'Unlocking potential, realising aspiration, achieving success' and its vision is 'To be first class, first choice'.

The focus of its higher education provision is delivered from two main campuses, in London Road and Radbrook. The college is currently undergoing a significant estates investment programme with over £12 million being invested to create a new campus at London Road.

As well as Pearson programmes the College offers a range of higher education programmes in conjunction with Edge Hill and Staffordshire universities. Currently 263 students are enrolled on the College's higher education programmes.

The College's higher education provision includes Foundation Degrees in Complementary Therapies, Computing, Counselling, Construction-Architectural Design, Construction-Quantity Surveying, Contemporary Art Practice, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Leadership and Management and Manufacturing Technology, and a BA Hons Business Management Top Up. The College also offers Higher National Diplomas in Applied Information Technology, Business, Fashion, Performing Arts-Theatre, and Sports Studies, and Higher National Certificates in Business, Fashion, Interactive Media and Music Production.

Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology underwent a QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Summative Review in 2007 which found confidence in the College's management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The review also concluded that reliance could be placed on the accuracy and completeness of information.

³ www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx

Explanation of the findings about Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.⁴

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](#)⁵ is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the [handbook](#) for the review method, also on the QAA website.⁶

1 Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards at Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 The College delivers awards offered by Staffordshire University and Edge Hill University. These awards are underpinned by the Staffordshire University Memorandum of Cooperation or the Edge Hill University Collaborative Delivery Plan. There are some students enrolled directly on Pearson programmes.

1.2 The review team found that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). This is established through the validation processes of both universities. The validation reports confirm the matching of outcomes with the qualification descriptors, and the appropriateness of the volumes of study. The College assumes responsibility for ensuring the implementation of these requirements. External examiner reports confirm that programmes are located at levels which lead to student achievement of appropriate standards.

1.3 The relevant awarding body develops programme specifications for the university-validated awards. The programme specifications provide a clear insight into programme structures and reference the FHEQ level. The College has not adapted these models for the Pearson awards and uses the generic Pearson publications as the point of reference. However, there is evidence that the College is taking steps to develop handbooks that include programme specifications as recommended by the 2007 Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review.

Use of external examiners

1.4 Subject staff understand the role of external examiners and the College ensures that staff are able to actively engage with the processes and procedures of each awarding body, including attendance at examination boards. The College has no involvement in the

⁴ The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However, it is available on request for inspection: please contact QAA Reviews Group.

⁵ www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx

⁶ See note 4.

appointment of external examiners. For the university validated programmes, common appointments are made whether modules are delivered on-campus or in a partner college.

1.5 The arrangement with the Edge Hill Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) sees the external examiner visiting the College, including on a themed basis; the most recent centred on sharing experiences of mentoring. The Pearson external examiners are invited to attend at the most appropriate times of the year; in the creative studies area this is usually timed with practical shows.

1.6 External examiner reports are received by Staffordshire University and Edge Hill University and then forwarded to the College's Head of Quality. Pearson reports are received directly by the College. There is no overall analysis of all reports through which the College would benefit as part of sharing higher education practice. Currently the focus is largely restricted to issues being passed on and corrected. These are monitored through the Academic Leadership Team. Pearson external examiner reports are summarised by the Head of Quality and passed onto individual programme teams.

1.7 External examiner reports are discussed in programme team meetings and there is good use of examiner comments in annual course reports. There is, however, no overall consideration and analysis of reports across the portfolio to inform and potentially enhance practice across subject areas. The College's self-evaluation document identifies that the newly appointed HE Coordinator will assume this responsibility. The review team **recommends** that the College develops and implements a systematic approach towards the consideration of, and response to, all higher education external examiner reports to inform practice and promote enhancement.

1.8 Students with whom the review team met reported that external examiner reports are not routinely shared with them. Staff expressed the view that it may not be appropriate to do so as often they are not directly relevant to the particular college. Staffordshire University is currently considering how a college specific annex might be attached to the full document. Some of the Programme Leaders, who are also Advanced Learning Coaches within the college, indicated that this is planned to be addressed as part of continuing professional development activities. Reports are expected to be placed on the virtual learning environment but this is not proactively promoted.

1.9 The review team was informed that the reports would be included in handbooks in the next academic year. Edge Hill University students have been involved in discussing reports and meet with the external examiner; they are able to access the reports on the Edge Hill University virtual learning environment. Some module handbooks contain summary points from the previous year's external examiner. There are some experimental pilots using social media to disseminate external examiner reports. The review team **recommends** that the College ensures that all higher education external examiner reports are made available in full to students.

Assessment and standards

1.10 For the university programmes, assessment strategies are approved at validation and are described in student handbooks. College staff participate in the review of assessment practices as part of the peer-based subject level relationships with university colleagues. Pearson external examiners confirm that assessments are well planned and enable students to achieve appropriate standards. At the time of the review visit, the external examiner for HND Theatre suggested that some of the student work be uploaded to the Pearson website as an example of good practice.

1.11 Student handbooks provided by the partner universities contain comprehensive guidance including assessment and grading criteria, arrangements for submission and the governing academic regulations. The College Quality Handbook contains sections relating to the higher education assessment policy for the Pearson programmes. Students confirmed their understanding of these arrangements and also affirmed consistency between policy and practice for feedback on assessment.

1.12 Second marking and moderation takes place between the College and relevant university staff. The College supports staff in attendance at development days for planning and reviewing of assessment practices. In HND Sport, the College team now uses the university documentation for second marking and the production of assignment briefs, following a positive response to a request to do so. For the Pearson awards, there is an appropriate internal verification approach with recording mechanisms in place; this is confirmed by all external examiners. In HNC Fashion, for example, assignment briefs and assessments are noted as being 'comprehensive and consistent'.

1.13 The review team found that most students welcome the quality of feedback received from their tutors. The College acted on poor satisfaction levels among some Business Studies students for assessment and feedback in the National Student Survey. The autumn 2012 consultative showed an improvement. The external examiner for HNC Business required an action to provide greater consistency in feedback to students. Both of these have been acted upon, including staff development among the course team and through the use of Advanced Learning coaches. The review team heard from a relatively new member of staff that informal staff development was supportive in ensuring understanding of assessment practices.

1.14 For the university-validated provision, course tutors are encouraged to attend formal examination boards; this provides the opportunity to observe practice and engage directly with external examiners' feedback. The College operates a formal calendar of case conferences where the performance and progression of every student in the College is discussed.

1.15 The College presented conflicting messages within the self-evaluation document and in meetings of the boards for its Pearson programmes. Although the College conducts award boards for these programmes, which are in some cases attended by external examiners, the current arrangements are largely informal and inconsistent. The review team **recommends** that the College adopts a more formalised approach for its Pearson programmes assessment boards to ensure consistency across the provision.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.16 The College has a well established relationship with Staffordshire University and other regional colleges. This relationship is set out in the Staffordshire University Regional Federation memorandum of cooperation. The University has overall responsibility for the quality and standards of its courses. The relationship with Edge Hill University is identified in the Collaborative Delivery Plan. There are effective programme level relationships which ensure an actively engaged partnership. There is a Foundation Degree Programmes Board held at Edge Hill University, which includes student representation, which encompasses all Foundation Degrees and all colleges involved.

1.17 Curriculum planning and review processes, once approved by the Academic Leadership Team, take place between subject-based staff and the awarding body's partnership nominee. The College does not conduct any internal programme review in line with the plans of the awarding bodies and staff rely on the university to lead.

1.18 Students have not been involved directly in review processes although some have fed back comments in advance of reviews, for example in Complementary Therapies.

1.19 There are examples of subject-level engagement. The Computing staff attended the revalidation event as observers. In Sport, staff have been more active in reviewing the modules to suit local needs for the transition from HND to Foundation Degree. At the time of the review visit, the Engineering programme leader was contributing to the Staffordshire review. Some evidence of a proactive approach to curriculum development was identified with a potential Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care in partnership with the local authority.

1.20 The College does not have a holistic mechanism to promote the effective oversight and evaluation of its higher education portfolio on an annual basis. Each curriculum area produces a self-assessment report which includes courses ranging from entry level through to higher education. For the university validated courses, the annual monitoring reports provided by the awarding body are completed. These are discussed within the programme teams, and then forwarded to the College's Quality Office prior to transmission to the host university. Action plans are monitored at course level and electronic copies are maintained on the intranet. The HE Course Tutors Forum does not routinely discuss the reports holistically. The review team members were informed that higher education teams currently operate in isolation.

1.21 The review team **recommends** that the College establishes a mechanism to promote the effective oversight and evaluation of its higher education portfolio on an annual basis, referring particularly to *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

1.22 There are no formal Boards of Study within the College for its higher education programmes. Although there are some informal approaches, there is inconsistency in relation to course committee or course team meetings. Students may be invited to meetings, depending on the agenda items. Electronic action plans from Annual Monitoring Reports and consultatives are updated on the virtual learning environment and reviewed at Academic Leadership Team meetings. The review team found that staff could access the reports and action plans for other programmes if they wished, but this is voluntary.

1.23 Modules are evaluated online by students and the feedback is provided through student forum meetings and consultatives. For Edge Hill programmes these are considered by an Evaluation Board and the following year a 'you said, we did' is included in module handbooks. Some students expressed the view that the College should communicate more explicitly the importance and value of the process of module evaluation to inform practice and to promote enhancement.

Subject benchmarks

1.24 As noted earlier, responsibility for programme design, approval and review processes reside with the partner university. The programme handbooks developed by the awarding bodies contain references to qualification statements. College staff demonstrated awareness of appropriate QAA subject and level benchmark statements. As noted previously within this report, subject level relationships are effective.

1.25 The Pearson specifications are used as the reference point to ensure that modules are delivered at the appropriate level. Staff demonstrated their understanding and were able to identify where differentiation may be required in a mixed group of students. For example, in Performing Arts where level 4 and level 5 students are together or with the PGCE where individual students may be working at level 7.

1.26 The College acknowledges the requirement to engage with the Quality Code. Some early discussions have taken place at staff development events and through the HE Course Tutors Forum. The university partners are including college staff in awareness-raising activities. The review team **recommends** that the College aligns its higher education provision with, and raises staff awareness of, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 Staff are aware of the importance of providing the appropriate and supportive environment for successful learning. Meetings with students supported this evidence and the students were clear that one of the best things about studying at the College was the learning environment provided and the support they get from staff.

2.2 The Higher Education Learning and Teaching Strategy sets out the expectations of staff to enable successful student-centred autonomous learning. This is an area for development recognised by the College in the self-evaluation document and clearly described in the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Strategy.

2.3 Staff are encouraged to take part in scholarly activity. However, the review team heard that workload agreements were not altered for those teaching higher education to allow for this, as they were often teaching both higher education and further education. This evidence contradicts that heard previously where the review team learnt about relaxing the teaching requirements for those staff teaching on higher education programmes.

2.4 A survey of scholarly activity took place in the period of 2011 to 2013. This included, among other things, attendance at conferences, obtaining higher education qualifications and research activity. The review team were not aware of any summary or evaluation of the survey by College senior management or of any evaluation by individuals about how activity has influenced their practices. The Human Resource team is encouraging staff to study at level 7. The College offers a Higher Level Study support scheme through its Human Resource department, which can contribute towards tuition fees for staff who wish to study for a higher award.

2.5 All teaching staff on the validated programmes are approved at validation, where the Universities approve Curricula Vitae. Between validations Edge Hill University allows Shrewsbury College to appoint staff, but then come and observe teaching. Staffordshire University has to approve the new staff member. All staff are expected to have a first degree and all new staff expected to have a teaching qualification.

2.6 There is a formal mentoring system in place where higher education tutors are paired with new staff members to observe, support and agree an action plan for development. All members of staff are allocated an observer and the system has been running for several years with an emphasis on development of practice, either in particular areas or more generally. Mentors can also be arranged by the University partners to come in from other colleges to provide support and help to College staff.

2.7 The review team heard about an initiative to be rolled out in July 2013 giving training based on a Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) national research conference, but this was in only one curriculum area and no other examples were given. The review team were told that the relevant managers would deal with research time for higher education staff within each curriculum area. The review team were not provided with evidence of a coordinated College-wide approach. The review team **affirms** the College's plans to encourage research-based teaching.

Learning resources

2.8 The Higher Education Learning and Teaching Strategy underpins the College's commitment to ensuring the effectiveness of teaching and the support available to students. It commits all staff teaching on higher education programmes to achieve 'Associate Lecturer' status with their respective partner universities and commits the College to resourcing other support areas with appropriately qualified staff and associated educational resources. Meetings with students confirmed that they are generally satisfied with their achievement of learning outcomes on the higher education programmes.

2.9 The review team saw evidence of staff development days, which are offered to everyone employed directly by the College, including part-time staff, along with themed staff conferences and sharing fairs which are held annually. The Human Resource Manager confirmed that bids for staff development are considered on merit, and that the budget is centrally managed and not divided between higher and further education. Staff development need is determined by teaching observations, annual appraisals and specific requests from staff. All members of staff employed directly by the College are made aware of staff development opportunities and the Human Resource team liaise closely with the quality manager to assess need.

2.10 There is no overall strategy for the allocation of learning resources, but the resourcing of teaching and learning forms part of the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Strategy and is considered at Senior Management Team meetings. Resources are allocated by a bidding system overseen by the Senior Management Team, with the final decision taken by the College Principal.

2.11 Students seem generally happy with resources for learning and teaching. The introduction of campus-wide broadband Wi-Fi has released the pressure on access to IT facilities which was raised as an issue in the student written submission.

2.12 There had been a Learning Resources Centre audit that had noted criticisms by students about higher education facilities including space, IT facilities and e-book provision. These will be addressed in the new build and the team heard from the two Learning Resource Centre managers that they were giving a higher priority to higher education students and the College had also invested in new e-resources. They also provide a one-page guide to 'Learning Support for HE students'.

Student voice

2.13 Two higher education students are co-opted members of the Corporation Quality and Standards Committee and the self-evaluation document suggests that the College has plans to appoint student members to the Academic Leadership Team. The review team **affirms** the College's plans to appoint student representatives to the Academic Leadership Team.

2.14 There is also full and part-time student representation on the HE Course Tutors Forum, although minutes of these meetings seen by the team did not identify students explicitly among the attendees. At programme level, there are representatives from courses on course committees and consultatives. Students reported that the system at programme level works in practice and they are able to use the representatives to make their voice heard.

2.15 There is no student representative handbook produced by the College although the review team saw evidence of guidance on the virtual learning environment. The two partner universities offer students' union support for the programme representatives, with Edge Hill University confirming that their Students' Union offers training and Staffordshire University confirming that they are working towards the same process.

2.16 Students are also asked to provide online written module feedback and feedback on support services. These are then analysed by the quality team and reported to the HE Course Tutors Forum, Academic Leadership Team meetings and the Governors Quality and Standards Committee. The review team saw evidence from the Academic Leadership Team meetings minutes that these are considered and acted on. Online module and resource/support surveys make it easier for part-time students and students off campus to participate in providing feedback.

2.17 The self-evaluation document described the results of last year's National Student Survey, which had picked up an issue with the teaching and learning on one of the HND programmes. Although the review team saw no formal action plan, the problems were discussed at an HND Student Forum meeting and the review team was informed that the issues had been addressed successfully with a higher level of satisfaction from internal student feedback for this year.

Management information

2.18 The Senior Management Team meetings have a standing agenda item on enrolment and application data, as well as updates on issues such as bursary applications, student performance and staff utilisation. However, the minutes of these meetings do not make it clear that they are used for evaluation and enhancement purposes.

2.19 The review team were provided with a document showing the Higher Education Funding Council for England funded higher education provision success rates, which were broken down into full-time and part-time students for 2011-12 and 2010-11, but it was not made clear where this information is considered and whether it is used for the purposes of enhancement or improvement.

2.20 The review team were provided with information on student achievement by gender, disability, ethnicity and social disadvantage in which higher education students were identified. However it was not made clear to the review team where this information was considered strategically.

2.21 The review team saw two annual reports on complaints. There were not enough complaints with a specific focus on the higher education population (13 in 2010-11 and 18 in 2011-12) to produce meaningful statistics, although some analysis had taken place. The review team were told that destination statistics were collected but not for higher education students.

2.22 In general, the review team felt that not enough strategic use was being made of higher education specific management information to enable deliberate steps to be taken to improve the student learning experience. The review team **recommends** that the College

uses management information relating to its higher education provision in an effective manner to ensure institutional oversight of higher education quality and standards, and to identify enhancement opportunities.

Admission to the College

2.23 There is no general admissions policy published on the College website, nor was one provided to the team as evidence. The College did submit as evidence the admissions procedure to be followed should a student declare a disability. The review team **recommends** that the College develops and makes public an admissions policy for entry to its higher education programmes.

2.24 Students that the review team met with were clear that the information provided about the programmes they wished to join was accurate and helpful. All students are interviewed and one-to-one telephone conversations with tutors are offered which persuaded at least one student to attend Shrewsbury College rather than going elsewhere. The team also heard of higher education Taster Days provided for applicants.

2.25 The team did not see evidence that the effectiveness of admissions policies and procedures was evaluated at a senior level.

Complaints and appeals

2.26 There are university complaints procedures on their respective websites and an internal complaints procedure available to students on the College virtual learning environment. The students who met with the review team were not aware of the complaints policy and told the review team that they would make a complaint through their tutors and would expect the tutors to be aware of the policy. Students report that this works effectively.

2.27 The review team saw evidence that the limited number of complaints in the two annual Complaints Compliments reports were dealt with by appropriate action plans. There were two annual reports containing the details of and actions arising from student complaints, both of which had recommendations for actions arising from the complaints themselves but the review team did not see evidence that the effectiveness of the College's complaints procedure was evaluated at a senior level.

Career advice and guidance

2.28 The College self-evaluation document admits that there is little formal curriculum content focussed on career development but the College is engaged in improving the links with industry by inviting ex-students to talk about employment in the relevant professions, and through its placements. Employers are encouraged to come and talk to students and the universities both offer student access to career events at their respective campuses.

2.29 The College has a part-time Higher Education Careers Advisor and the careers service is advertised on the student higher education virtual learning environment. The careers department has sent out emails to staff offering help and guidance on careers advice. These included links to external websites and to Staffordshire University's 'Eguidance' service where students can get individual advice from an Employability Consultant. Teaching staff, during their meeting with the review team, said that they had little to do with careers advice to students, as they believed the careers service was so good.

2.30 One of the major planned areas of improvement is the setting up of 'The Agency' which will be designed to support students through their College careers and beyond and will

work outside the normal curriculum. The aim is to offer a more coherent approach to employability. The review team **affirms** the College's development of 'The Agency' to provide a unified approach to student support and development and **recommends** that the College development of 'The Agency' incorporates a specific focus on the needs of its higher education students.

Supporting disabled students

2.31 The College has an Admissions for HE procedure for disabled students and the review team saw evidence of an Individual Support Requirements Form which all students fill in at interview as a starting point in assessing needs. There is also a policy for additional learning support which sets out the procedure for identifying individual student needs. Within this document there is a specific section on higher education students.

2.32 The disabled student which the review team met expressed satisfaction with the support they had been given and was making use of specialist software to enter information onto computers for assessments, as well as receiving individual support and guidance. Advanced Learning Tutors work closely with the students requiring help and also with tutors who are responsible for them through their programmes. The review team saw emails confirming that adjustments to the assessments and teaching of higher education modules had been made to accommodate disabled students.

2.33 Disability issues are considered by the Equality and Diversity Committee and through general learning resources planning during validation or revalidation events.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.34 Students at the College have access to a range of technologies to support their learning experience; however, the College does not currently offer learning opportunities through flexible and distributed learning as set out by the review process.

Work-based and placement learning

2.35 The College is not directly responsible for this aspect of its provision as the responsibility lies with the awarding bodies. Its direct Pearson courses do not incorporate work-based learning.

2.36 All students on a work-based placement are assigned a personal tutor and a placement mentor to help support and guide them during their placement. Students who met with the review team commented on the quality of opportunities available to them and agreed they were well supported during their placements by their College personal tutors and workplace mentors.

Student charter

2.37 The College does not have a student charter or similar document that sets out in detail what they expect of current students and what current students can expect of them. Some course handbooks refer students to their student charter. However, the College has not submitted one to the review team as evidence. Student course handbooks, in some cases, contain general information relating to support services and institutional information. However, this information is not standardised across all handbooks. The course handbooks, which are prescribed by the awarding bodies, do not contain College-specific information apart from a link to the College's main website and an instruction to seek support there.

2.38 The College produces an information leaflet that is given to students at the start of their studies. The intention is that students keep this with their ID card to allow quick access to general and support information. In practice students stated that they had either not seen the leaflet or that it is not something to which they refer. In addition, all higher education and further education students sign a standard learner agreement at the start of their studies agreeing to comply with the general rules of the College. The College has also produced a poster setting out its values.

2.39 Students report that their tutors, the student services desk, reception and the virtual learning environment are the key points of contact for finding out about any information they may require relating to their time at the college. Students appeared satisfied that they could find the information and support they needed should it be required. The review team **recommends** that the College integrates existing information into a higher education student charter or equivalent document that is aligned with Part C: 'Information about higher education provision' of the Quality Code, and ensures the document is then reviewed by students and staff regularly.

3 Public information

Summary

The quality of information produced for applicants and students at Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology **requires improvement to meet UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

3.1 During the review visit, the review team analysed a wide range of the College's public and internal information and were able to assess the procedures and processes in place to ensure accuracy and appropriate dissemination of such material.

3.2 Public information produced by the College relating to its programmes of study is subjected to appropriate scrutiny before publication through mechanisms in place with its awarding bodies. Any information about these courses is signed off as accurate by the awarding body before the College publishes the information in the College prospectus or on its website.

3.3 The College provides prospective students with appropriate information, which describes the process for application and admission to its programmes. Students progressing from further education programmes at the College report that they are fully supported and informed of the process for applying to higher education courses and that the steps involved in the application process are explained by their tutors.

3.4 Students who met with the review team made it clear that they were provided with appropriate information throughout their study to help ensure that they were able to achieve their learning outcomes. This included module information sheets, learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Students stated that their tutors were good at explaining what was required prior to commencing a module and assessment. Course specific information is on the virtual learning environment, which is maintained and updated by course tutors. The review team found that the quality and content of these pages is not consistent across all courses. The Foundation Degree in Engineering was noted to be a good example of what should be contained on such pages in order to benefit students.

3.5 The College has a Quality Handbook, which details the framework for the management of its entire provision and while it does contain the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Strategy, along with the Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy and

the forms to be used during the consultatives, the handbook does not differentiate between further and higher education. The handbook does not set out the framework for managing academic standards and quality assurance and enhancement as it applies to its higher education provision.

3.6 There is a moderate risk that staff involved in managing higher education provision at the College would not be aware of what is expected of them in relation to the College's overarching procedures that relate specifically to its higher education provision. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure staff have access to quality assurance information appropriate to its higher education provision.

3.7 Published policy documents did not consistently detail the review date or those responsible for reviewing them. The review team were not able to ascertain when documents were reviewed and by whom. Documents are accessible but the review team cannot say that they remain fit for purpose or trustworthy. The review team **recommends** that the College reviews its range of policy documents relating to the academic standards and quality of its higher education provision to ensure that they are fit for purpose and trustworthy. The review team also **recommends** that the College establishes and implements an auditable process by which all information produced is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.8 The College is responsible for the production of handbooks for the direct Pearson programmes. These vary across subject areas and demonstrate little consistency. The College did not provide evidence of a rigorous approach that would cover both accuracy and completeness and ensure that handbooks contained consistent information and guidance in relation to assessment, appeals, academic offences, and so on. Course teams are responsible for the creation and content of handbooks. However, there are no guidelines in place for what should be included. The review team **recommends** that the College ensures that all handbooks for its Pearson programmes are comprehensive and meet the needs of higher education students.

3.9 In conclusion, the review team identified several gaps and inconsistencies in the information the College produces for prospective students, current students and staff with responsibility for standards and quality. While these gaps and inconsistencies do not present serious risks to standards and quality, nonetheless they could, without action, lead to serious risks over time. The review team, therefore, judged that the quality of information produced by the College requires improvement to meet UK expectations, and recommends that, in order for the College to make this improvement, it should:

- ensure staff have access to quality assurance information appropriate to its higher education provision
- establish and implement an auditable process by which all information produced is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy
- ensure that all handbooks for its Pearson programmes are comprehensive and meet the needs of higher education students.

4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology **requires improvement to meet UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1 The College has not demonstrated that it is currently taking deliberate steps at institutional level to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.2 The College provided the review team with references to areas it had identified as examples of enhancement activity in both the self-evaluation document and during meetings. However, many of the activities and opportunities are those which would be considered enrichment of the learning experience at a local course level and not activities which were occurring as a direct result of an overarching College level strategy. Teaching staff were able to provide the review team with several examples of institutional practice; including the staff conference held annually in September and the sharing fairs held in February, which offer teams the opportunity to share practice. However, the review team was not presented with evidence that this is recorded and evaluated holistically to inform and lead developments across the higher education portfolio.

4.3 The College has a recently approved Higher Education Enhancement Policy document which commits to continuous enhancement of the student learning experience so that it remains of the highest quality. However, while the document details the College's intent, it does not describe how it will realise this strategy or how staff will identify and promote good practice across the higher education provision.

4.4 The review team concluded that the College did not demonstrate that its staff and management have an understanding of enhancement of learning opportunities in a higher education context. The lack of a College-level strategy or framework represents a moderate risk to the quality of students' learning opportunities. The review team concluded, therefore, that the enhancement of learning opportunities at the College requires improvement to meet UK expectations. The review team **recommends** that in order to make this improvement the College develops an understanding of the meaning of enhancement in a higher education context and produces a revised enhancement policy that delivers a strategic higher education approach to improving the quality of students' learning opportunities.

5 Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Each academic year, a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Review of College Higher Education teams. In 2012-13, the themes are the **First Year Student Experience** or **Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement**.

The review team investigated the Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement at Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology, which the College has highlighted as an area for development in its self-evaluation document.

5.1 As part of the College's move towards alignment with *Chapter B5: Student engagement* of the Quality Code, the Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy has been introduced. The strategy builds upon existing practices. Meetings are held three times a year to capture more formal dialogue between students and staff in each curriculum area.

These are made up of 'consultatives' and a forum. At the first team visit, some students were unsure of some of the terminology, however, overall both staff and students spoke positively about the usefulness of these meetings. There are examples of teams sharing external examiner reports and module evaluations at these meetings. There is currently no cross disciplinary student engagement through the meeting structure.

5.2 The College has two higher education students who are co-opted members of the Corporation. They have been supported by the Clerk in preparing them for the role. These students have not established links with all student representatives across the higher education provision; this could be encouraged as part of building the internal community.

5.3 Attendance at university course committees is encouraged but very few students are able to attend. Written feedback can be contributed. The HE Course Tutors Forum has extended membership to include student representation. This is a positive step, although students have yet to participate. There is a proposal under consideration for student attendance at Academic Leadership Team meetings.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions; for example, pages 17-20 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of threshold academic standards, learning opportunities and enhancement.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/rche-handbook.aspx.

If you require formal definitions of other terms, please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:

www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

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

academic standards: The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

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.

enhancement: Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

feature of good practice: A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution or college manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

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*.

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

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

operational definition: A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

programme (of study): An approved course of study which 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.

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.

threshold academic standard: The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications **frameworks**. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

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

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