



Application for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers: South Devon College

Scrutiny team report

November 2018

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About this report

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

The application was considered under criteria approved by Government in 2015. In advising on applications, QAA is guided by the relevant criteria and the associated evidence requirements. QAA's work in this area is overseen by its Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP), a subcommittee of the QAA Board.

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

Scrutiny teams produce reports following each of the engagements undertaken. The final report reflects the team's findings and is structured around the four main criteria contained in the 2015 FDAP criteria,¹ namely:

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

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

¹ The FDAP criteria are available in Annex A of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills guidance: *Foundation Degree Awarding Powers: Guidance for Further Education Institutions in England: Criteria and Process for applying for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers* (October 2015) at www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/526812/BIS-15-532-foundation-degree-awarding-powers-october-2015.pdf (PDF, 430KB).

Executive summary

Governance and academic management

The management and governance structures already in place provide assurance that South Devon College (the College) has the capability to manage the additional responsibilities associated with Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP). The College's financial management is consistently sound and there is a clear relationship between financial planning, resource allocation and academic standards and quality. Governors and senior managers develop strategic objectives and policy in a collaborative and constructively challenging way, and the College has an effective approach to the management of risk and organisational change.

The Higher Education Strategy and other policies and procedures for the management of higher education are well understood and used consistently by both staff and students. Comprehensive account is taken of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and associated guidance within higher education policies, documentation and operations. There are effective means of developing, implementing, communicating and reviewing academic policies and systems in collaboration with higher education staff and the Governing Body.

The College's governance and its deliberative and executive systems operate effectively, differentiating with clarity between their respective functions and responsibilities. The College benefits from the significant strength of academic leadership at most levels and new roles have the scope to strengthen the HE team, by reducing the onus on a specific role. At section and programme levels, there is greater variability of practice but staff are clear about their academic roles and responsibilities.

The College has effective governance, is strongly and carefully managed, and has a deliberative structure that has enabled the development of an academic regulatory framework which is fit for purpose. Financial planning, quality assurance and resource allocation policies are coherent and effective. Following rigorous development and approval of College policies and procedures, a robust set of mechanisms is now in place, ready to secure the academic standards of foundation degrees, should the College be granted FDAP.

On the basis of these findings ACDAP concludes that South Devon College meets Criterion A.

Academic standards and quality assurance

Building on a substantial period working alongside its awarding body, Plymouth University, the College has developed a comprehensive suite of policies, procedures and regulations governing its higher education provision. The College's structure of well-informed deliberative and decision-making committees and groups provides systematic scrutiny of routine academic business and shapes the College's responses to local, regional, national and sectoral changes. The Higher Education Quality Faculty team, ably led by the Higher Education Manager and Academic Registrar, provides strong leadership and support to the College's higher education staff and students.

The College maintains a strong strategic presence in relevant local, regional and national higher education fora. Investment in this level of engagement enables the College to benefit from the challenge and support provided by an extensive, external higher education network as it secures its academic standards, assures the quality of the student learning experience and prepares itself for the responsibility of exercising its own degree awarding powers.

The various College committees and groups fulfil their responsibilities as specified in their respective terms of reference. Of particular note is the work of the Governing Body, the Higher Education Strategy Group and the Quality, Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee. Through their continuous review and improvement of strategies, policies, procedures and data relating to quality, teaching, learning and assessment, these bodies make a positive contribution to the quality assurance and enhancement of student progression, achievement and satisfaction.

The College is experienced and well prepared for the responsibilities it hopes to exercise as a degree-awarding body. It has in place an appropriate and comprehensive regulatory framework and makes optimal use of its relationships with its awarding body and other relevant providers to ensure that its mechanisms for securing academic standards are fit for purpose. Key committees and groups focus on enhancing student progression, achievement and satisfaction, and a pervasive culture of critical self-awareness ensures that the College promotes its strengths and addresses its limitations constructively.

On the basis of these findings ACDAP concludes that South Devon College meets Criterion B.

Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff

The College has sufficient academic and/or professional expertise to deliver foundation degree programmes. Most higher education staff hold bachelor's level or higher qualifications in appropriate disciplines, and external examiners confirm that staff are suitably qualified and that the content of programmes delivered by the College is at an appropriate level. There is considerable variation between programmes in terms of staff who hold postgraduate qualifications.

Teaching staff are sufficiently engaged with the pedagogic development of their discipline; a significant proportion of staff hold teaching qualifications and/or are members of professional bodies/subject associations. Although the number of Higher Education Academy Fellowships remains relatively low, with considerable variation across the College, there are signs of progress in this respect. Staff understand how the College's arrangements work for continuing professional development and for performance and personal development review; they are also aware that HE-specific staff development opportunities are available.

Existing programme teams have gained valuable experience of designing, developing and validating programmes by working in partnership with the College's awarding body. The College has provided further staff development opportunities by involving staff as panel members within internal approval processes for sections other than their own. However, relatively few members of staff have experience of engaging with other providers in quality assurance roles.

Many staff engage in some level of scholarly activity, which assists them in keeping abreast of current scholarly developments in their discipline area at a level appropriate for foundation degree delivery. There is some variation, however, in the extent and depth of scholarly activities undertaken by individuals and between subject areas.

The College's staff are sufficiently well qualified, experienced and competent to design, deliver and assess the College's higher education programmes leading to the award of foundation degrees. There are areas in which the staff profile could be strengthened in relation to scholarship and pedagogical effectiveness, and the College is committed to the further development of its staff.

On the basis of these findings ACDAP concludes that South Devon College meets Criterion C.

The environment supporting the delivery of foundation degree programmes

The College has designed and implemented appropriate policies and processes to create an effective learning and teaching infrastructure to support the delivery of foundation degrees. It has also established appropriate structures and processes for keeping the infrastructure under continuous review and for involving stakeholders in its enhancement.

Implementing and/or enhancing the policies and processes that underpin the infrastructure can be regarded, in some respects, as work in progress. This is particularly obvious in relation to the following components: the teaching observation process; consistently engaging a critical mass of students in all aspects of making the student voice heard; building equally strong employer relationships across all higher education programmes; and monitoring student destinations, particularly over the long term. Nevertheless, the College is working hard and making progress in all these areas and it is notable that students are generally very satisfied with their experience.

The College has a widening participation mission and is particularly effective in providing opportunities to groups that are under-represented in higher education and subsequently supporting students to make the most of those opportunities. Considerable attention is paid to formulating pre-entry, induction and retention strategies, which are kept under review and further developed as required. Concern for the welfare of students pervades every level of the College, including the Governing Body, the Students' Union and the academic and professional services staff.

The College's learning and teaching infrastructure is sound, effective and monitored systematically for enhancement purposes. In areas where further development is desirable, work is in hand and progress is being made; students are largely content with the quality of their learning experience. The College's commitment to promoting and supporting equality of opportunity throughout the student lifecycle are noteworthy.

On the basis of these findings ACDAP concludes that South Devon College meets Criterion D.

Privy Council's decision

The Privy Council's decision is to grant South Devon College renewable foundation degree awarding powers beginning on 18 March 2019 and expiring on 17 March 2025.

Introduction

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

The application was considered by QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP) in November 2016, when the Committee agreed to proceed to the detailed scrutiny of the application. The team appointed to conduct the detailed scrutiny comprised Dr Neil Casey, Dr James Freeman, Mrs Polly Skinner and Dr Fiona Tolmie (scrutiny team members) and Mr Gregory Clark, (secretary). The detailed scrutiny was managed on behalf of QAA by Dr Melinda Drowley, Coordinating Officer.

The detailed scrutiny began in March 2017, culminating in a report to ACDAP in November 2018. In the course of the scrutiny, the team reviewed a wide range of documents presented in support of the application. The team also spoke to a range of stakeholders and observed meetings and events pertinent to the application.

Key information about South Devon College

South Devon College is a medium-sized general further education college. It is predominantly focused on serving the learning needs of South Devon's students aged 14-19, higher education students and adult learners.

The College's higher education vision states that 'South Devon College is passionate about providing accessible, employment focused and high quality higher education'. It has been delivering higher education qualifications since the 1970s. In 2017-18, a total of 101 staff were employed to deliver its higher education programmes, 76 of them full-time and 25 on part-time/fractional contracts.

In 2017-18, a total of 730 higher education students were studying at South Devon College, comprising 563 undertaking foundation degrees, 52 undertaking higher national certificates (HNCs) and 115 undertaking honours degrees. The College attracts higher education students mainly from Torbay, Teignbridge and the South Hams (the districts that constitute South Devon) with some applications from further afield.

The College recruited to 37 programmes in September 2017, including 23 leading to foundation degrees, six leading to HNCs and eight at level 6 leading to BA (Hons) or BSc (Hons) awards. Higher Apprenticeships and Degree Apprenticeships are also offered. The College aims to align its higher education developments to regional priorities, specifically in the service sector, health and high technology industries.

The College offers foundation degrees in the following subject areas: arts; computing and engineering; management; sciences; construction; digital and media; health and education; social sciences; and sports and coaching. Higher and degree apprenticeships are offered in engineering; construction; science; management; and digital and technology. Higher education programmes, which are managed by HE Programme Leads and Coordinators are organised alongside further education programmes within sections, each of which covers a broad curriculum area and is managed by a Section Head. Sections are clustered within departments led by Assistant Principals who are members of the Senior Leadership Team.

The College has been working in partnership with Plymouth University since 1988 to deliver higher education opportunities. The focus has been primarily on foundation degrees, but more recently the University has also approved several full degrees and level 6 top-up degrees. The two institutions are also working collaboratively on higher and degree-level

apprenticeships. All but one of the College's higher education qualifications are validated by Plymouth University under the Academic Co-operation Agreement, which is updated annually. The College runs one programme as a franchise (Year 0 Science), for which the College uses the same programme structure, modules and assessment as the University programme.

Other partnerships include co-sponsorship with the University of Exeter of South Devon University Technical College for students aged 14-19 specialising in Engineering, Water and Environment.

Statement on progression arrangements

All the College's foundation degrees have at least one built-in progression route to an honours degree, agreed at programme approval. In most cases either Plymouth University provides the progression route or the College itself provides a route on one of its level 6 top-up programmes, validated by the University. Graduating foundation degree students from relevant College foundation degrees are guaranteed an interview by the University. In some cases, students may be eligible to progress to another institution.

Plymouth University has made a commitment to continue providing progression routes for existing College foundation degrees and has declared that it is keen to maintain progression routes from the College to the University, regardless of which institution is validating the award. The College will continue to work with the University and other providers, as necessary, to ensure that all foundation degree graduates have appropriate opportunities to progress.

Detailed scrutiny against foundation degree awarding powers criteria

A Governance and academic management

Criterion A1

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

Financial planning, quality assurance, and resource allocation policies are coherent and relate to the organisation's higher education mission, aims and objectives

- 1 The College has a comprehensive, systematic approach to strategic and financial planning. The Strategic Planning Framework, and the Higher Education Strategy (HE Strategy), are developed and approved by the Governing Body in partnership with the Principalship and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).
- 2 The Higher Education Strategy Group (HESG) systematically develops and monitors the HE Strategy with an evident awareness of regional, national and sectoral trends, which are considered in planning student numbers. Five sub-groups, including the HE Curriculum Development Group and the Student Recruitment and Retention Group, undertake more detailed work. The College's Academic Improvement and Development Board (AIDB) cedes responsibility for academic quality of higher education to the College Higher Education Board of Studies (CHEBOS) where senior managers oversee the development and review of core quality assurance policy and processes.
- 3 A clearly defined annual financial planning cycle links a three-year Financial Plan to strategic aims. The Principalship and the SLT drive the development of the annual budget at SLT meetings with Assistant Principals who manage academic departments. Preparatory work is undertaken by the HE Recruitment and Retention Group and the HE Curriculum Development Group, which recommends approval of a business case for initial proposals. A separation between business and academic development is maintained, with academic approval being under the auspices of CHEBOS. The Principalship requires sign-off from key managers prior to scrutiny at Resources Committee (see paragraph 5) for approval by the Governing Body. The College's financial health is classified by the Education and Skills Funding Agency as 'good'.
- 4 Progress against strategic aims, as articulated in financial and academic key performance indicators (KPIs), is systematically monitored at SLT meetings chaired by the Principal. Comprehensive data enables managers to monitor performance both thematically and at a more granular level.
- 5 The Governing Body maintains oversight of the College's progress in meeting strategic and financial aims with the help of comprehensive finance reports, benchmark information and updates on strategic targets. Resources Committee plays a key role in recommending the HE Strategy to the Governing Body and monitoring KPIs. It is also rigorous in monitoring the College's financial management, human resources, and accommodation strategy. Major business and investment projects, as set out in the

detailed five-year Property Strategy, are monitored by a Project Board reporting to Resources Committee. Generally, there is prudent management of major initiatives. Audit Committee is effective in monitoring the adequacy of the College's audit arrangements, framework of governance, risk management, and resource use. The Governing Body delegates oversight of academic quality to the Quality, Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (QTLA), which appropriately exercises its responsibility to safeguard student achievement and satisfaction, and promote review of strategies and policies covering quality, teaching, learning and assessment. Taking full account of HEFCE and now requirements of the Office for Students, QTLA recommends the annual HE Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Report for Governing Body approval.

6 Governors and College managers work together with an appropriate blend of collaboration and challenge to enable development and monitoring of strategic objectives and constructive development of policy. Financial planning, quality assurance and resource allocation policies are coherent and effective. The College's financial position is robustly managed by the Principalship and SLT and is effectively overseen by the Governing Body.

Higher education activities take full account of the UK Quality Code and associated guidance

7 Commended judgements in the 2014 Higher Education Review attest to the College's alignment with QAA external reference points. The College has focused attention on making effective use of the Quality Code and other external reference points in its pursuit of foundation degree awarding powers (see paragraphs 41 and 43). Recent sector-wide changes to the regulation of higher education have been monitored and the HE Strategy revised accordingly.

8 CHEBOS has formal responsibility for aligning policy to the Quality Code. Terms of reference for CHEBOS and its five subcommittees allocate precise responsibility for consideration of relevant sections. Higher education committees and groups regularly discuss national policy developments, including changes to the Quality Code and other external reference points.

9 The Staff Quality Handbook, which brings together existing and emerging policy and procedures, makes systematic links to the Quality Code and other sector guidance such as the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF), as well as key policies of the University. The approach to self-evaluation in annual monitoring reflects QAA review methods by requiring judgements about threshold standards, learning opportunities and enhancement. Programme approvals, under University and College procedures, must consider the alignment of proposals with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and Subject Benchmark Statements. The College's higher education policies, documentation and operations take comprehensive account of the Quality Code and associated guidance.

Makes reference to QAA's Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark Statement and its successor statement, Foundation Degree Characteristics which is part of the Quality Code

10 The College's guidance on programme development, design and approval, rooted in University policy and procedures, requires proposers to take account of external reference points including the QAA *Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement* (FDCS). CHEBOS was proactive in ensuring that institutional policy and procedures took account of the FDCS when it was introduced (see paragraphs 43, 64, 69 and 95). A recently developed HE Work-Based Learning Policy is closely aligned to the FDCS. Senior higher education staff provide advice and promote consideration of the FDCS in the context of programme

development. Staff engaged in early stages of curriculum development are made aware of benchmarking requirements.

11 Overall, the College takes account of the FDCS and uses it appropriately. In some cases, papers for University-validated and College approval events and their associated reports clearly reference the FDCS, and most obviously in programme specifications. Even where that is not the case, it is evident that proposals incorporate work-based learning modules, have placements and engage effectively with employers, thus illustrating consistency with the FDCS.

12 The Governing Body approves the HE Strategy annually and, in that context, has been fully involved in the application for foundation degree awarding powers. Members of the Principalship and the senior HE team are knowledgeable, including with respect to sector trends, and clear in their leadership of the HESG and its subgroups. The Strategy and its action plan are annually reviewed.

13 On behalf of AIDB, CHEBOS and its clutch of subgroups are effective in managing key aspects of quality assurance including maintenance of academic standards, development of academic regulations, external examiners, and validation and review. The membership, which includes Assistant Principals and representative Section Heads, is fully engaged in fulfilling the committee's brief.

14 Information about higher education policies is summarised in the Higher Education Framework. Over the duration of the scrutiny, the College was developing a full suite of higher education policies and procedures in readiness for the award of its own foundation degrees. Staff are kept informed about these developments at College Leadership Team and HE Leads and Managers (HELM) meetings. The latter is a comparatively infrequent and passive forum where information relating to higher education policies and procedures is presented. Nevertheless, staff delivering higher education programmes were clear about policies germane to their roles.

15 Students are made aware of relevant higher education policies within Programme Handbooks, designed on the University template, and available on Moodle, at the beginning of the year. Representation on deliberative committees and various forms of student engagement also help raise knowledge of relevant policies and procedures. The HE Student Governor is given space at Governing Body meetings to present items for discussion. Students whom the team met had been made aware of the College's application for foundation degree awarding powers and are supportive. Those connected with the delivery of the higher education programmes (and students as appropriate) understand and apply consistently the College's higher education mission and its HE Strategy, together with the associated policies and procedures for the management of higher education.

There is a clarity of function and responsibility at all levels in the organisation in relation to its governance structures and systems for managing its higher education provision

16 A comprehensive Management Calendar provides clear definitions of functions and responsibilities at the executive level of the Principalship and the SLT, across deliberative committees, and on Governing Body. The Principal and the two Vice Principals are significantly involved in the leadership of College higher education. The Vice Principal, Curriculum, Quality and Performance exercises responsibility for oversight and management of higher education efficiently, chairing both the HE Strategy Board, which reports to QTLA, and CHEBOS, the main higher education deliberative committee.

17 HE Strategy Board fulfils its remit to oversee the strategic direction of higher education and management of student numbers. By reporting to Governing Body via QTLA,

it makes governors aware of higher education developments. Similarly, CHEBOS is effective in its deliberative oversight of higher education, both in its own stewardship of higher education and in its proportionate delegation to working groups. These task and finish groups undertake tasks, such as considering external examining and academic regulations, in preparation for the College being granted its own awarding powers (see paragraphs 56, 65, 75, 83, 86 and 93).

18 Operationally, there is a discrete higher education division, led by the HE Manager and Academic Registrar (HEMAR) supported by a small team. The HEMAR and his colleagues play a fundamental role in developing, reviewing and disseminating higher education policies and systems.

19 While there is clear understanding of responsibilities and function at the key executive and deliberative committees, where meetings are firmly led, business is conducted professionally, and members are well engaged, some of the subcommittees and groups are less efficient, with late and more disorganised agendas, documentation and minutes. On occasions during the scrutiny, this had an impact on the potential for staff engagement, since members had not been able to read papers in advance.

20 Higher education provision is distributed across three departments, managed by Assistant Principals. Within each department there are several sections, most of which deliver both further and higher education programmes. The Assistant Principals are members of the SLT and play an important role in higher education business planning. Section Heads have immediate operational responsibility for aspects of quality assurance, including annual monitoring and curriculum development. More granular consideration of higher education provision is undertaken by programme teams, located within sections. While the Staff Quality Handbook stipulates that programme teams should meet at least three times a year, practice varies with both section and programme meetings adopting different patterns of scheduling, meeting formats and agendas. The team noted the recent appointment of Departmental HE Academic Coordinators (see paragraphs 57 and 69) who will have the capacity both to provide further support to higher education leads and programme teams, and to improve the effectiveness of meetings.

21 The Governing Body and its subcommittees effectively scrutinise the HE Strategy and activities, in line with national and legal expectations. Several governors have experience in higher education, including with respect to FDAP. Senior managers are in attendance to explain developments and field queries. At full board meetings, governors tend to be more passive and in receipt of outcomes, but at subcommittees there is evident support and challenge. Training sessions delivered before each Governing Body meeting help promote governor understanding of the role. Generally, governors and senior managers are aware of their respective responsibilities, which are carried out effectively.

There is depth and strength of academic leadership across the whole of the organisation's higher education provision

22 Under the leadership of the Principalship, the College has embarked on significant capital projects, maintained a healthy financial position and developed its higher education. The College maintains proactive relationships with national and regional stakeholders and employers (for example with respect to student accommodation, portfolio development and achievement of awarding powers). There is a clear sense that senior staff, across executive and academic committees, drive the HE Strategy. Key committees such as CHEBOS and HE Strategy Board are ably chaired by senior managers.

23 The Governing Body and its subcommittees are also well chaired and provide effective leadership in scrutinising policy and executive decisions. The Principalship and the

Governing Body maintain constructive relationships with support and challenge from members matched by clear, relevant responses from managers.

24 The HEMAR works across academic areas to lead higher education academic and administrative functions. His knowledge, motivation, and external engagement are key to the operational and strategic management of higher education. He is supported by a small team and the College has supplemented this support by appointing a Scholarship and Research Development Coordinator and an Employability and Enterprise Coordinator. Nevertheless, the team noted that HEMAR participates in a very extensive range of committees, groups and other activities (including validations and assessment boards), as a member, an invitee, or often a chair. Although the College has informal succession plans, the portfolio remains challenging and the team notes the potential value of the appointment of HE Academic Coordinators in mitigating the risk of over-reliance on an individual member of staff.

25 The HE Leadership and Management Grid clearly defines leadership roles from Assistant Principal to Section Head, HE Lead and Programme Coordinator. The Assistant Principals, as members of SLT, fulfil business planning and academic management responsibilities effectively. Section Heads and HE Leads are competent in managing higher education functions within their remit. In the main, post-holders are able successfully to meet their responsibilities in key activities including assessment boards, annual programme monitoring (APM), and programme approval. However, the College acknowledges that it needs to rely on its more experienced staff for programme development.

26 There is significant strength of academic leadership in executive and deliberative management structures. Furthermore, the Governing Body offers constructive support and challenge in its oversight of higher education. The College has recognised that there is scope to strengthen the breadth of leadership in terms of management and administration of higher education activities.

The organisation develops, implements and communicates its academic policies and systems in collaboration with those responsible for the delivery of its higher education programmes, and with relevant stakeholders

27 Academic strategy is carefully developed and monitored at HESG. Academic policies are framed and reviewed at CHEBOS where academic and professional post-holders contribute to developments. In both arenas, the HE team and other senior managers present policies, collaborating constructively with other stakeholders. Members of SLT and the HEMAR tend to predominate, but CHEBOS has representative HE Leads and elected members.

28 The College has made efforts to involve the majority of HE Leads and Programme Coordinators in at least one of the subgroups of HESG or CHEBOS. For example, individual staff have been co-opted onto the HE Teaching, Learning and Assessment Group (HETLAG) to work on College annual programme monitoring and review processes in preparation for the award of foundation degree awarding powers. Otherwise, staff may receive information at HELM meetings and action meetings, if higher education is discussed, and can consult relevant guidance. As noted (see paragraph 25), for the most part, staff demonstrate understanding of academic systems in their contributions to approvals, annual monitoring and assessment boards.

29 Through its approval of the HE Strategy and in the work of QTLA, the Governing Body is able to learn about and inform strategic and policy development relating to higher education provisions.

Academic policies, systems and activities are monitored and reviewed, and appropriate and timely action is taken when deficiencies are identified

30 A culture of continuous improvement pervades the College's higher education activities. The HE Framework lists all policies, their dates of review and whether they will be used if the College is granted its own awarding powers. In addition to recording progress against the College's and the University's strategic objectives, the annual HE Quality and Enhancement (HEQAE) Action Plan also addresses engagement with students regarding the quality of their experiences and focuses on enhancement by highlighting areas of effective practice and documenting developments that address pedagogical, disciplinary and (where appropriate) sector/industrial professional initiatives, policy and practice. Both the HE Framework and the HEQAE are considered at CHEBOS, which is attentive to development and review of academic policies, monitoring of core quality assurance processes, and analysis of outcomes including student satisfaction. At the same time, HESG develops and monitors more strategic policies (for example, the Retention Strategy) and maintains a live action plan, outcomes of which are reported to the Governing Body and subcommittees as necessary. The work of HESG and SLT in monitoring progress against KPIs is assisted by the quality and quantity of available data. All higher education policies and procedures are also subject to an Equality Impact Assessment at the Policy Review Group. The College's overall approach to APM also facilitates appropriate and timely action where issues are identified. In general, the College has an effective system for monitoring and review of academic systems and activities.

Academic risk and change management strategies are effective

31 The Governing Body approves the Strategic Risk Management Plan, which defines and classifies risk, identifies mitigation, records progress, and monitors regular reports from College managers. An Audit Committee approves a programme of internal and external audit reports based on systematic assessment of key risks. Resources Committee, in its consideration of the Strategic Planning Framework, finance, accommodation and property, is equally attentive to financial, reputational and academic risk. In response to emerging responsibilities against the Higher Education Code of Governance and its stewardship of the annual HE Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Report, QTLA now oversees an Academic Risk Register. The Register, produced for AIDB and QTLA, is developed at CHEBOS. Project Board uses multiple risk registers to monitor reputational and financial risk attaching to major developments.

32 Within the Principalship, the Vice Principal Corporate Services has operational accountability, managing and reviewing the approach to risk, including with respect to the strategic risk management process, managing identification and evaluation of risk, and annually reviewing the Risk Management Plan and effectiveness of the system at SLT. These responsibilities are exercised efficiently.

33 Awareness and analysis of risk pervades levels of management and operations. HESG considers risk, for example in discussing applications and a major accommodation development. Risk is explicitly addressed by the HE Curriculum Development Group in consideration of programme proposals (see paragraphs 39-42). The College takes a systematic and prudent approach to risk which has not inhibited it from embarking on several significant projects but has ensured that each has been rigorously assessed for risk.

Robust mechanisms are in place to ensure that the academic standards of the organisation's foundation degree awards are not put at risk

34 The College has established a sound academic and administrative infrastructure in place for the management of its provision. Higher education deliberative committees are well run and facilitate the successful monitoring and review of academic standards and quality.

CHEBOS and its subgroups have been active in drafting and finalising key mechanisms, rooted in University policy, including with respect to academic regulations, external examining, and the operation of assessment boards. Policy and procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review operate effectively. While University staff are present at subject assessment panels (SAPs) and award boards, senior and academic staff are, in the main, clear about the awarding framework within which they are operating and their powers and limitations. Issues affecting academic standards are raised and reported effectively.

35 Confidence in the College's capacity to ensure that academic standards of foundation degrees are secure is enhanced by the College's successful track record of working with its awarding body and by outcomes of QAA review. The careful and rigorous development and internal approval of the College's own policies and procedures, coupled with the University's recognition of the College's strengths, confirm that there is a robust set of mechanisms that secure the academic standards of foundation degrees.

The organisation has the capability of managing successfully the additional responsibilities vested in it were foundation degree awarding powers granted

36 The College considers that achievement of foundation degree awarding powers would be a 'natural progression' that would allow it to attain the flexibility it needs to better meet regional needs for a skilled workforce, while maintaining its relationship with the University for the bulk of its higher education provision. The University has been supportive of the College's application and notes its rigorous management of academic quality and self-criticality, as well as the readiness of necessary systems and processes.

37 Governance is sound and well developed; the Governing Body is fully involved in, and supportive of, the College's aspirations. The Principalship and the SLT demonstrate strong and systematic leadership of the HE Strategy. The HE team led by the HEMAR, while sometimes appearing to be 'stretched', has been successful in drafting policy and procedures and in operating and administering the existing management of higher education. CHEBOS is at the core of an effective deliberative structure of committees which has driven the development of a regulatory framework for higher education.

38 The College has established an effective governance system which is strongly and carefully managed. It encompasses a deliberative structure that has enabled the development of an academic regulatory framework. The College has the capability to manage additional responsibilities, such as appointment of external examiners and management of assessment boards, were it to be granted the right to award its own foundation degrees.

B Academic standards and quality assurance

Criterion B1

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

The regulatory framework governing the organisation's higher education provision (covering, for example, student admissions, progress, assessment, appeals and complaints) is appropriate to its current status and is implemented fully and consistently

39 Having complied fully with the University's regulatory framework, the College is now entrusted with a significant amount of responsibility for local regulatory concerns by its awarding body. This includes student admissions, assessment, appeals and complaints as well as initial programme approvals, APM and the operation of examination boards.

40 The rigour of processes that involve both the University and College, such as SAPs, award boards and programme approvals, indicate that both parties work collaboratively, conducting meetings according to the appropriate terms of reference and regulations. The College's regulatory framework is appropriate to its current status and is generally implemented fully and consistently. However, on one occasion during the scrutiny, a referral board stepped outside the rules in relation to a case where a decision about an alleged academic offence was outstanding. Close scrutiny of several relevant sets of minutes and further observation of award board meetings reassured the team that this aberration was uncharacteristic and does not signal a risk for the future.

The organisation has created in readiness a regulatory framework appropriate for the granting of its own higher education awards

41 The College has made thorough preparations for operating its own regulatory framework should it be granted awarding powers. Responsibilities are distributed appropriately between various academic bodies: the HE Academic Regulations Group (HEARG) is responsible for preparing and updating the College's framework; CHEBOS endorses the framework; AIDB ratifies policies and procedures, including those related to student services; and QTLA provides strategic oversight. The regulatory framework is comprehensive and embedded within the wider HE Framework. It is mapped against the Expectations of the Quality Code, includes a complete list of higher education policies, procedures and regulations and specifies committee responsibilities for overseeing the development, implementation and review of the Framework. The new Framework, which is the result of careful planning, is currently retained on the website in 'shadow' format and provides a sound basis for the exercise of foundation degree awarding powers.

Criterion B2

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

Higher education awards are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the Qualifications Frameworks

42 Current arrangements between the College and University ensure that approved awards delivered by the College are aligned with the appropriate levels of the FHEQ. Clear guidance in the HE Assessment Practice Strategy and the HE Quality Handbook reinforce staff knowledge and understanding of how to identify and apply appropriate academic levels in their practice. Level descriptors are described in the Appendix to the Strategy, which is easily accessed by all stakeholders.

Management of its higher education provision takes appropriate account of the Quality Code, qualification and Subject Benchmark Statements, as appropriate, and the requirements of any relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

43 The College's current and 'shadow' regulatory frameworks are both aligned with the Quality Code (including the FHEQ, the FDCS and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements), the Qualifications and Credit Framework for England and the requirements of relevant professional and statutory regulatory bodies (PSRBs). The College is committed to taking proper account of national regulatory changes and, therefore, invests in maintaining healthy levels of external awareness among staff. To this end, senior and middle management participate in strategic higher education groups locally, regionally and nationally.

44 QTLA addresses adherence to statutory and regulatory requirements and is charged with ensuring that quality assurance procedures are robust. HETLAG and HEARG both attentively review policies and procedures in respect of academic standards. In addition to its other functions, the HEQAE Action Plan also reviews the College's small but increasing number of PSRB accreditations.

In establishing, and then maintaining, comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level programmes, the organisation explicitly seeks advice from and engagement with external peers and, where appropriate, professional and statutory bodies and relevant employers

45 During annual SAPs and award assessment boards, the academic support provided by University staff and industry peers adds to the clarity and expertise brought by the College's external examiners. External examiners are specifically asked to confirm comparability of academic standards within their reports on each programme. Outcomes are systemically considered through the overall external examiner summary report presented at CHEBOS. Academic and industry peers are routinely engaged in programme approval and in the evaluation of programmes within the University's six-year cycle of periodic review that operates through the formal committee structure (see paragraph 52 for details about the College's new system). The percentage of College higher education staff serving as external examiners or verifiers of other institutions is gradually increasing and currently stands at approximately 10 per cent.

46 Programmes within healthcare, biosciences and construction have successfully achieved PSRB accreditation; accreditation for programmes in adventure sports, manufacturing, electronics and robotics remains work in progress. Notably, the College's largest and most diverse healthcare programme delivers a South West Health Education

Council-funded pilot, that enables the College productively to develop, compare and contrast academic standards with other regional partners and particularly with the national regulatory body, Health Education England. The team noted that the FdSc in Bioscience is the only foundation degree in the UK to receive accreditation by the Royal Society of Biology.

47 The Principalship and SLT maintain currency with shifts in the strategic direction of higher education locally, regionally and nationally and use their knowledge to inform higher education developments at the College. Changes in the academic portfolio tend to be externally driven. Programme teams liaise with industry contacts, engaging in wide-ranging discussions on programme design, curriculum enhancement and employability.

Programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements are robust, applied consistently, have at all levels a broadly based external dimension and take appropriate account of the specific requirements of different levels of award and different modes of delivery

48 QTLA and HESG maintain effective strategic oversight of new programme development, and the processes of monitoring and review. CHEBOS makes effective use of various means to monitor management of key quality assurance processes. For example, CHEBOS monitors what programmes are being developed and their current status; oversees the operation of annual monitoring; and checks on how effectively its subgroups are meeting the demands of the HE Framework. Departmental self-evaluations employ the QAA Higher Education Review categories, and judgements are routinely summarised for CHEBOS and comprehensively inform the ongoing HEQAE, which is considered by QTLA.

49 Programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements are robust. They build upon the College's enduring experience with its awarding body, as the College makes the transition into its own well-adapted systems. The College makes consistent and effective use of University academic staff and external industry expertise to develop new programmes or modify existing ones, in order to meet changing academic, industry and/or student needs for viable progression routes and enhanced employability.

50 The College HE Curriculum Development and Approval Procedure specifies clearly what is required at each phase of a typical programme approval process. Programme specifications, operational specifications and templates for module records, together with guidance for completion, ensure consistency. In general, the College operates its well designed, coherent staged process for programme approval consistently and effectively. At the preliminary stage, HESG identifies broad areas for development and then receives more detailed proposals for new curricula which may or may not be approved for further development at the HE Curriculum Development Group. The team noted that the programmes presented are at variable stages of development, some submissions being better informed than others, although this variability is not considered to weaken the approval process.

51 At this point the College decides whether to use its own or the University's approval process. The College process prudently involves two stages: Stage One entails examination by an internal panel who provide recommendations to the programme team for further development; Stage Two entails detailed scrutiny by a panel that includes external academic and industry advisers, a student representative and a senior quality coordinator.

52 The Annual Programme Monitoring/Programme Committee process comprises two meetings, each with standard agendas, which take place in the first and second terms of the academic year. The meetings are provided with comprehensive data sets including student evaluations, external examiner reports and employer feedback. Outcomes of the process are captured succinctly within an action plan and employability report. The current process of

periodic review, which the College operates responsibly and effectively, reflects the University's requirements and includes academic and industry externals at cluster level. The College's risk-based approach to its future periodic review remodels and improves the current periodic review process better to suit its own purposes, notably considering Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) metrics. Staff and external peers will together review the academic health of all programmes. Annual, section-level higher education learning reviews will consider teaching, learning and pedagogy, while APMs will continue to review approvals, revalidations, major and minor changes and programme closures. Quality Review Visits will be less frequently moderated, mirroring QAA Quality Review Visits, and will continue to use the expertise of external peers.

Where the organisation's programmes are delivered outside the college's own environment, appropriate and effective quality assurance mechanisms are used to ensure the maintenance of academic standards and quality

53 Standard College quality assurance mechanisms apply to off-site delivery at Noss Marine Academy, Horizon Centre at Torbay Hospital and Live Well in Plymouth. The team noted how the effective operation of its quality assurance systems alerted the College to inconsistencies in assessment practice in another off-site delivery site (see paragraphs 57 and 85). The College responded appropriately and proportionately by closing the delivery site and further strengthened the multi-site provision overall by centralising module leadership in-house, where continuity and consistency can be safeguarded by College staff.

There is an explicit and close relationship between academic planning and decisions on resource allocation

54 Capital and academic resource implications are dealt with explicitly through the committee structure and overseen by the Governing Body through its Resources Committee and QTLA (see paragraphs 3-6 for details). The academic rationale for perceived resource requirements is a mandatory part of the planning process that must be completed before the approval process can begin. The impact of human and physical resources on the higher education curriculum is considered at Governing Body subcommittees. This is particularly evident in the minutes of the Project Board, which currently has a strong focus on resourcing the Hi-Tech centre, the success of which depends largely on employer engagement. There is a clear relationship between academic planning and strategic decisions on resource allocation.

Criterion B3

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

Strategies for learning and assessment are consistent with stated academic objectives and intended learning outcomes

55 The aim of the HE Assessment Practice Strategy is to enable academic staff to adopt consistent assessment practices while the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy includes the aim to support 'learning and assessment in order to provide the best possible learning opportunities for all (the College's) students'. These and other relevant strategies comprehensively set forth what students should be able to demonstrate through achievement of all learning outcomes. They specify clearly how each component of the assessment regime should be linked to the relevant module's intended learning outcomes. These in turn, contribute to the achievement of programme outcomes as encapsulated in the module specifications presented during the approval process.

56 The College identifies emerging teaching, learning and assessment issues of strategic significance during the academic year and deploys task and finish groups to investigate and address them promptly.

Relevant staff are informed of, and provided with guidance on, its policies and procedures for programme design, monitoring and review

57 All academic and support staff have access to relevant policies and procedures available online in the HE Staff Quality Handbook, which provides comprehensive, detailed information on the procedures for programme design, monitoring and review. Furthermore, the involvement of academic staff in strategic and operational groups ensures staff are well informed about relevant structures, roles and responsibilities, together with current changes and developments in policies and procedures for programme design, monitoring and review. The recent appointment of Departmental HE Academic Coordinators, to extend the quality team, is intended to supplement the support currently provided to programme teams by section-based HE Leads.

58 During the approvals process, staff are provided with comprehensive guidelines and standard templates to ensure consistency. Guidance materials, developed for the post-FDAP era but closely aligned to those currently in use, are now being piloted demonstrating a prudent approach to ensuring the College's readiness to exercise its own degree awarding powers. APM processes are similarly fit for purpose and conducted efficiently by programme leads, using a pro forma that has been informed by and developed through the College's relationship with its awarding body. This template will also provide a sound basis for APM should the College be granted degree awarding powers (see paragraph 65).

Responsibility for amending or improving new programme proposals is clearly assigned and subsequent action is carefully monitored

59 As indicated at paragraph 51, the College's process for programme approval provides three opportunities and clear guidance for programme teams to respond to recommendations for amending or improving new programme proposals: the preliminary stage, and Stage One and Stage Two of the process. Programme teams provide intelligent, well-informed responses within the given time-frame at each stage of the approvals process. Actions are carefully monitored by the HEMAR and the College Quality Team.

Coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is secured and maintained

60 The final composition of programmes comprising either multiple elements or alternative pathways and titles, including any bracketed titles, is decided by the panel during Stage Two of the approval process. Programme structures and pathways are clearly described, illustrated and mapped in programme specifications and programme handbooks.

Close links are maintained between learning support services and the organisation's programme planning, approval, monitoring and review arrangements

61 The College ensures that support services play an integral role in programme planning, approval, monitoring and review by including key post-holders in the relevant academic committees and groups. For example, the Vice Principal Curriculum, Quality and Performance, the HEMAR and the relevant Assistant Principal for the proposed new programme curriculum area serve as essential members of the College's planning process for new programmes and attend meetings of Stage Two approval panels. The College ensures that the quality cycle is thoroughly informed of current learning resource and support provision by producing annually the LRC Operational Plan and the Student Support Services Review, both of which are considered by CHEBOS and other relevant bodies.

62 A support staff report on implementing changes to Disabled Students' Allowances, provides strong evidence that close links are maintained between learning support services and the College's programme planning, approval, monitoring and review arrangements. A report on progress made in implementing the Employability Strategy confirms this, noting that employability opportunities are shared at tutorials and online access is provided for students.

Robust arrangements exist for ensuring that the learning opportunities provided to those students that may be studying at a distance from the organisation or in work-based settings are adequate

63 The College recognises that authentic and innovative work-based learning (WBL) is an integral part of foundation degrees and takes a robust but flexible approach to the quality assurance of this aspect of provision. The Work-Based and Placement Learning Policy sets clear standards by stipulating minimum requirements in respect of delivery and support of WBL, while recognising that the method of meeting these requirements will need to be adapted to the needs of individual programmes. The decision to deliver programmes off-site is agreed by the HE Curriculum Development Group; site visits are routinely made to provide assurance that the learning environment is suitable.

64 The team concurs with the finding of the 2014 Higher Education Review (HER) that arrangements for WBL are implemented securely and managed effectively. The HER report also affirmed work being undertaken to develop a more strategic approach to the monitoring of employability initiatives and their outcomes. Since 2014, the College has continued to build on this work through the College Employability Enhancement Project (EEP), established in response to the HER affirmation, the introduction of the FDCS and an increased focus on employability within the Key Information Sets (KIS) and the TEF. Positive outcomes have included a range of initiatives resulting from the Good Practice in Embedding Employability report, notably the development of the Higher Education Strategy for Enhancing Employability. In addition, EEP has instigated a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the alignment between the FDCS and WBL within the College's foundation degrees.

65 Programme teams now focus explicitly on monitoring the quality of WBL provision; they have updated WBL forms and consider them routinely during APM/Programme Committee Meetings (PCMs), to identify good practice and areas requiring improvement. In response to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) recent criticism of the quality of WBL across the sector in general, the College has established a task and finish group to establish a protocol for planning, supporting and evaluating WBL student activity.

66 EEP has issued helpful guidance to assist programmes to engage annually with industry. The minutes of industry liaison meetings indicate that most programmes have succeeded in developing useful relationships with industry contacts who contribute to curriculum development and enhancement by offering advice about how the value added to the student experience through WBL can be extended. The value of the College's industrial liaison work was clearly illustrated by the attendance of employers offering WBL at a full-day event held by Social Science and Society to showcase potential career opportunities.

67 Scrutiny of the APM/PCM process for the FdSc Yacht Operations programme demonstrated that learning opportunities for this off-site delivery location are fit for purpose. Currently only the FdSc Healthcare Practice is delivered at a range of off-site locations. Observation of APM processes within this programme confirmed that the College is successfully coping with the challenges of managing complex and changing delivery patterns. Regulated by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), students on the Health Education England pilot may be seconded, or funded by the host organisation, or higher level

apprentices with set placements, or self-funded students. The College's decision to close one of the off-site delivery locations because of concerns about academic standards demonstrates the effectiveness of its quality assurance systems in identifying problems and the College's readiness to take prompt remedial action.

Through its planning, approval, review and assessment practices, the organisation defines, monitors, reviews and maintains its academic standards

68 The College states that its consistent application of processes for programme planning, approval, monitoring and review, together with rigorous assessment practices, ensures that academic standards are set and maintained. CHEBOS effectively fulfils its specific remit in respect of academic standards and produces the Annual HE Quality Assurance Report which provides the Governing Body with the core information required for it to discharge its overarching responsibility for academic standards and quality of HE provision. The HEQAE Schedule and Action Plan is updated regularly and sets out clearly the quality cycle of setting, monitoring, reviewing and maintaining academic standards, to which the College adheres.

69 Threshold academic standards are set during the approvals process. Programme assessment strategies, which are currently compliant with University regulations and take account of the College HE Assessment Practice Strategy, are determined at programme approval and systematically documented in standardised programme specifications and module records. Intended learning outcomes are mapped to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and the FDCS and aligned with industry standards as appropriate. Appropriately experienced internal staff have recently been appointed as HE Academic Coordinators and will be responsible for overseeing alignment with the FHEQ and assuring quality processes.

70 Individual grades are anonymised for assessment panels. University staff who attend SAPs and award assessment boards attest to the academic standards of module assessment and the reliability and validity of the College's assessment procedures. The award external examiner endorses the academic standards of awards and the integrity of the examination processes.

71 The maintenance of academic standards is secured through APM and periodic review processes, which are reported to CHEBOS and reflected in the Annual HE Quality Assurance Report to QTLA. Module leaders, who are accountable for academic standards and quality within their modules, play a key role in APM and SAPs. Module reviews and APM reports inform section self-evaluations, which are also reviewed by CHEBOS.

Assessment criteria and practices are communicated clearly to students and staff

72 The HE Staff Quality Handbook and Style Guide incorporate information about the College's assessment strategy and practice and are readily accessible to staff. The College Handbook and HE Charter specify what students and the College can expect of one another in respect of tutorials, teaching, learning and assessment.

73 Programme handbooks, available on the College website, clearly describe the definitive details of each programme. Assessment Board minutes, analytical registry reports on extenuating circumstances and academic offences and observations by the team all provide evidence that assessment criteria and practices are explicitly and effectively communicated to students and staff.

74 Following the recent pilot of proprietary software to support assessment processes, both staff and students are content that the product facilitates ready access to assessment information and feedback. Most staff are now trained in its use and students comment favourably about its application.

75 As a result of the work of a task and finish group and subsequent testing with staff and students, revised templates are currently under development for assessment briefs, feedback, module guides, assessment and internal verification.

Assessment practices fully cover all declared learning objectives, learning outcomes and modes of delivery

76 The College ensures that assessment practices cover the full range of learning objectives and outcomes, regardless of modes of delivery by specifying the way in which programme assessment strategies are to be developed through a mapping exercise at the initial stages of programme design. Observations of SAPs confirmed that module content is varied yet balanced and demonstrated that staff reflect productively upon their assessment practices. Referral assessment opportunities must be 'like for like', addressing all assessment requirements. Programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements are robust, taking into account the specific requirements of different modes of delivery.

Appropriately qualified external peers are engaged in the organisation's assessment processes and consistency is maintained between internal and external examiners' marking

77 University procedures determine the selection, approval and appointment of College-nominated external examiners. A regularly updated register records all contractual arrangements and the HE External Examiners Group oversees, reviews and monitors external examiner reports and activities. External examiner reports are received by the HEMAR and the HE team and forwarded to the HE Lead, Curriculum Section Head and Head of Department. Assistant Principals receive the reports for information. Programme teams give reports full and serious consideration, with the HE Lead providing a formal response. APM processes routinely entail further detailed consideration of these reports; responses are incorporated into the programme action plan and reflected in the overall external examiner summary report, produced by the External Examiner Group for CHEBOS.

78 Experienced higher education staff, contributing as members of the HE External Examiners Group, have worked diligently on the design and development of the College's 'shadow' specification of the roles and regulations for external examiners.

79 The scrupulous use the College makes of suitably qualified external peers to assure consistency in assessment processes is illustrated by the involvement of external advisers on award boards, SAPs and approval panels and the engagement of senior higher education College staff within significant strategic national and regional groups. Staff take advantage of opportunities to share good practice, get involved in debate in national fora and network with peers from like organisations.

80 External examiners attending SAPs noted a good range of marks, critical reflection and that outcomes were in line with comparable higher education institutions. External examiners confidently confirmed marks and grades and singled out for praise the following aspects of provision: the strength of the early assessment strategy; the range of assessments; transparency of the marking process in respect of the use of second markers/moderators; and strong links between academic and professional practice.

The reliability and validity of the organisation's assessment procedures are monitored and its assessment outcomes inform future programme and student planning

81 QTLA secures and interrogates sufficient evidence to assure the overall reliability and validity of the College's higher education assessment procedures. Higher education academic policies, systems and activities are monitored and reviewed against set timescales.

82 Assessment Board minutes demonstrate that the reliability and validity of the College's assessment procedures are monitored, and its assessment outcomes inform future programme and student planning. HESG oversees strategic direction and, informed by the Higher Education Curriculum Development Group and the Data Quality Group, sets and reviews student targets.

83 HETLAG established one task and finish group to evaluate the results of the early summative assessment pilot and another to rationalise all programme assessment documentation. Precise details are yet to emerge from a third such group working on assessment pedagogy.

84 The College takes seriously the challenge of meeting the University's regulations concerning anonymous marking. The University has recognised that small class sizes can make full compliance difficult to achieve and has supported the College in making reasonable adjustments as appropriate to each setting. The matter remains a live issue on HEQAE and University/College action plans. Assessment briefs make clear to students how their work is marked.

Clear mechanisms are in place for use when a decision is taken to close a programme or programme element, and in doing so, students' interests are safeguarded

85 HESG makes informed decisions about any programme closures, following University procedures. In most cases the best interests of students are safeguarded by guaranteeing continuation of the programme until completion of their studies. When the College closed one programme delivered off-site, all existing students graduated successfully apart from one who withdrew.

Criterion B4

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

Critical self-assessment is integral to the operation of the organisation's higher education provision and action is taken in response to matters raised through internal or external monitoring and review

86 Critical self-assessment is integral to the operation of the College's HE provision; action is taken in response to matters raised through internal and external monitoring and review processes, including the Joint Board of Study. Section self-evaluations and action plans progress systematically through the academic committee structure, with appropriate consideration at every stage, in line with each committee's terms of reference. The process culminates in the submission of the HEQAE to the Governing Body. The College also makes beneficial use of task and finish groups to address operational gaps or take initiatives in the delivery of its higher education programmes.

87 The Peer Observation Developments and Planning Report, well supported by comprehensive data, presents analysis of overall gradings, variations over time, and areas of strength and weaknesses, accompanied by an insightful overall analysis. This enables QTLA to gain insight into the extent to which peer observation is enhancing teaching quality by, for example, highlighting issues concerning the speed of implementation and the complexity of the process.

Clear mechanisms exist for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny, monitoring and review of agreed learning objectives and intended outcomes

88 SAPs follow a model that facilitates comprehensive review of standards of assessment across a subject to ensure the maintenance of subject academic standards within modules. Staff demonstrate sound understanding of the College's regulatory framework and guidance, which clearly define the parameters for approval, revalidation, major, minor and permitted programme changes. During APM, learning objectives and intended learning outcomes are reviewed and evaluated. Programme teams are permitted to redesign/redevelop modules to meet changing sector needs or advice and guidance from external examiners.

Ideas and expertise from within and outside the organisation - particularly from relevant employers (for example on programme design and development, on teaching and on student learning and assessment) are drawn into its arrangements for programme design, approval and review

89 The College demonstrates both a capacity for consolidating its higher education provision and a flexible approach when presented with a compelling rationale for change. Drivers for change typically include local or national economic trends, potential student numbers, programme viability or external advice. Considerable attention is focused on undertaking imaginative and clear strategic reviews of the College's curriculum portfolio. Employer collaboration is captured within the College's higher education KPIs, while the HE Strategic Growth Plan documents local and national priorities.

90 The College sources external industry-related expertise and academic advisers who contribute to approvals processes, employer engagement, critical thinking and diagnostics, programme design and development, programme/employer liaison meetings and research events.

Effective means exist for encouraging the continuous improvement of quality of provision and student achievement

91 The HE Strategy 2016-21 articulates clear strategic aims and objectives while the HEQAE Schedule sets out the continuous improvement cycle. HESG, reporting to the Governing Body, regularly updates and reviews the HEQAE action plan. Members of HESG demonstrate sound understanding of the local and national higher education environment and directly encourage student representatives to contribute to meetings. The Policy Review Group conducts equality impact assessments of all higher education policies and procedures.

92 Student representatives contribute positively in strategic meetings including the Governing Body, approvals panels and APMs, although the timing of these events sometimes precludes student attendance. Reports on student surveys provide evidence of good response rates and high levels of satisfaction.

93 Three task and finish groups have made valuable contributions to constructive discussion and evaluation of student achievement by focusing, respectively, on continuous improvement of work-based learning (stimulated by recent OIA national findings) (see paragraph 64), timely assessment opportunities and the transparency of student-focused higher education documentation.

94 Developments in higher education peer observations of teaching show that effective means exist for encouraging continuous improvement and enhancing student achievement. Outcomes are monitored at a high level.

95 The Employability and Enterprise Coordinator supports extracurricular activities and placements that enhance student learning opportunities and employability, focusing on the FDOS and employability outcomes as part of the KIS and, more recently, the TEF metrics.

C Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff

Criterion C1

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

All higher education teaching staff have relevant academic and/or professional/vocational expertise

96 The College's Strategic Objectives for Higher Education state that it aims to 'sustain inspirational teaching, learning and assessment practice' and describes staff scholarship and subject expertise as the 'primary mechanism for ensuring that academic standards are maintained'. The 2016 HE Strategic Plan aims to develop a strategic approach to staff scholarship, 'employ, retain and support appropriately qualified staff to teach and support higher education', and to 'support scholarly activity and professional practice to maintain and enhance academic standards on all programmes'.

97 Staff delivering foundation degrees bring relevant academic and/or professional/vocational experience to teaching and learning. According to 2018 data, the College has 101 academic staff involved in delivering higher education programmes, with 25 of these working part-time. Overall, seven per cent of academic staff hold foundation degrees as their highest qualification, 49 per cent hold bachelor's degrees, 35 per cent hold master's, and 6 per cent hold doctorates. The remaining 3 per cent hold no degree. There is some variation by subject area, with postgraduate qualifications ranging from 55 per cent of all staff in one area to 29 per cent of staff in another. The majority of doctorates are held within one subject area.

98 The College is committed to appointing staff with qualifications at least one level higher than those that they teach (known as the '+1 model'). Such qualifications are specified as essential appointment criteria; professional skills and experience are also required where appropriate. In practice, the College usually meets its commitment to the +1 model in relation to foundation degrees. Nearly all the 29 staff described as academic leaders hold bachelor's level qualifications. Most of the wider teaching teams hold qualifications a level above that at which they teach. The specific qualifications held also indicate subject expertise relevant to programmes that staff deliver. There are a few exceptions to the +1 model in cases where staff are working towards the higher level qualification or have exceptional professional expertise.

99 Excluding academic leaders, proportions of staff holding postgraduate degrees vary between sections (for example 13/22 in one section compared to 7/27 and 7/18 in others). While the majority of academic leaders hold postgraduate qualifications, the concentration varies by subject area: 7/8 academic leaders in one section have master's level qualifications, compared to 2/5 and 4/10 in others. Overall, the 2018 data indicates that 38 per cent (11) of the 29 staff delivering level 6 teaching across the College do not hold level 7 qualifications or higher.

100 Staff expertise is considered during programme approval, both within the College's own processes and currently via the awarding body's procedures. The internal pro forma

used to make an initial proposal enables teams to provide a brief indication of additional staffing needs, and fuller documentation (which includes helpful CV summaries) is provided when programmes are submitted for final approval.

101 The HEMAR (and presently the University) approves any changes to staffing, which are logged effectively. Existing staff who move into higher education teaching must be approved via the same process.

102 The College operates an appropriate mentoring and induction programme for new staff, which includes training sessions on research and scholarship expectations and resources. Performance and personal development review (PPDR) processes are used effectively to identify opportunities for staff to pursue higher level academic or professional qualifications (see paragraph 123). However, the College is currently implementing a new system for recording and managing PPDR data related to scholarly activity, to which the team have not had full access. Staffing levels and some forms of scholarly activity are monitored through section higher education self-evaluations. These feed into department level overviews, are then considered at CHEBOS and ultimately feed into the HE Action Plan. Recent reviews by the University raised no issues regarding staffing and confirmed that programme teams are delivering good quality provision. External examiners attending SAPs likewise endorse the academic standards of awards and comment positively on staff expertise in their written reports.

103 As for many providers of its size, retaining academic and professional expertise is a risk for the College, given its reliance upon small programme teams. The College has recognised this and designated 'staff quality and succession planning' an amber risk on its register. Fifteen per cent of programmes are identified as relying upon a single staff member to deliver more than 40 per cent of the programme and 34 per cent of programmes rely upon one member of staff's expertise for a particular aspect of provision. The College has clear plans to mitigate this risk to programmes in several ways including: co-delivering modules; reallocating modules to other members of staff; and using staff development to increase the number of staff qualified at higher levels.

All higher education teaching staff have relevant engagement with the pedagogic development of their discipline (through, for example, membership of subject associations, learned societies and professional bodies)

104 Staff appointed without a teaching qualification are required to undertake one within the first two years of appointment (although the job descriptions provided state three years). Consequently, 92 per cent of staff hold a teaching qualification, 10 per cent of which are specific to higher education. These figures are based on a 2018 dataset and differ from earlier data supplied with the application (which reported 46 HE-specific teaching qualifications in 2016 compared with 10 in June 2018). Twelve members of staff are members of the Institute for Learning.

105 The College encourages staff to become members of the Higher Education Academy (HEA and now Advance HE). The College purchases credit from the HEA and staff benefit from several annual consultancy days to support applications. The College does not run a compulsory HEA-accredited continuing professional development (CPD) programme for staff, instead, it invests 75 per cent of the cost of making an initial application on a case-by-case basis. Some CPD events have been organised to support interested staff in 2016-17 and 2017-18 with some successful outcomes. The College has an HE peer-observation scheme in place, which is usefully aligned to the evidence requirements of the HEA scheme.

106 At present, membership of HEA is limited to a relatively small number of staff, with 12/101 staff holding fellowship status. In some departments there is a positive

trajectory.

In one, for example, numbers have risen from zero to four Associate Fellows and one Fellow since 2016. In another, the figures have held steady at 2/27 (both Senior Fellows or above), but in a third, 5/26 staff now hold Senior Fellow or above membership, whereas none was listed in 2016. The picture is more variable at subject level. Data from the latest Annual Research and Scholarship Report indicates that there are no HEA Fellows in nine sections, excluding SLT members who teach on these programmes. The overall picture, then, is one of considerable variation, albeit with signs of progress.

107 Membership of professional bodies or subject associations is higher and more evenly distributed across staff. Currently, the strongest concentrations of staff with such memberships are linked to sections teaching vocational subjects. Overall, appropriately 50 per cent of staff are members or have some subject or professional affiliation, though the number could be inflated by double-counting those who meet both criteria.

All higher education teaching staff have relevant knowledge and understanding of current scholarly developments in their discipline area at a level appropriate to a foundation degree and that such knowledge and understanding directly inform and enhance their teaching

108 There is evidence that most teaching staff engage in some form of scholarly activity that enables them to keep abreast of current scholarly developments in their discipline area at a level appropriate to a foundation degree. There is, however, variation between individuals and between subject areas, in the volume and depth of scholarly activity undertaken.

109 The College's HE Strategic Plan and Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Scholarship policy commit it to 'promoting high-quality teaching and learning that is informed by relevant scholarly and research activity'. To further this, the College has recently taken a more strategic approach to scholarship and research, developing a Research and Scholarly Activity (RSA) procedure. The HE Scholarship and Research Group, which reports to CHEBOS, leads on this and works closely with key members of staff to operationalise and monitor the procedure. The overall RSA procedure and relevant KPIs are also scrutinised closely by QTLA and considered as part of the wider annual higher education self-evaluation.

110 The College defines scholarship as 'activities that increase and improve subject knowledge or pedagogy' and which contribute to enhancing the student experience. The College emphasises demonstrable impact on its HE Community. The College shares with its staff a good understanding of the kinds of research it is willing to support; these range from student and industry-led projects to individual academic and pedagogical research. The College's definition of scholarship aligns with that required for the delivery of foundation degrees, even though some of the listed activities (for example, attendance at staff meetings) and some observations undertaken by the team occasionally suggest a less precise understanding of scholarship.

111 The College has developed clear formal procedures to support scholarship and research. The College expects those delivering higher education to engage with scholarship at a level 'pertinent to their role'. It has mapped minimum expectations of each role: for example, lecturers should attend internal conferences, CPD sessions, and undertake subject reading/further study and develop individual/student-led research projects, but do not have a minimum expectation to attend external conferences. Staff are entitled to 21 days CPD annually and there is a high level of awareness that 14 of these can be used for scholarly activity. The activities outlined below suggest that many staff have used some of their CPD allocation for scholarly activities.

112 In April 2017, the College developed a set of KPIs to measure scholarly activity and gauge the impact of its supporting procedures. The College recognised that its ability to establish reliable baseline data for staff engagement with scholarly activity was limited by the absence of a central system for recording unfunded activity. The Annual Report on RSA has therefore drawn upon a survey, the design of which, unfortunately, has not always permitted fine-grain disaggregation between different types of scholarly activity. The team acknowledges, however, that such data collection is challenging and considers that the survey constitutes a positive, proactive step to establish some form of baseline data.

113 The College supports small-scale research projects through its internal bids process. In 2016-17 it funded two projects related to Marine Biology and in 2017-18 has funded three projects related to employability, support for vulnerable students, and biochemistry. A revised ethics policy and procedure provides rigorous means of approving research projects.

114 To support more sustained research and scholarly activity, the College now gives staff the opportunity to apply for HE Research Fellow status, through which they receive 150 hours' remission from teaching for a year. Fellows undertake a research project, linked to the HE Strategy, that involves working closely with staff and students. Some concerns have been raised about how far these posts have succeeded in engaging with staff and students, and one Fellow withdrew in July 2017. However, the remaining post has been effective; the project, which concerned shark conservation, has involved nine students in the research activity and led to important links being made with external organisations. In addition to their individual projects, the Fellows worked collaboratively on a literature review project with the RSA Coordinator. Two further appointments have been made in 2017-18: one appointee is assessing the importance of research for higher education staff in an further education context; another is focusing on animal behaviour.

115 The 2017 RSA Report stated that four staff had published in academic journals between 2014 and 2017. The latest data record improved figures with ten staff publishing journal articles (mostly from one department) and five members of staff publishing books or book chapters. There are several examples of staff producing original research as part of international research teams, but the wider data collected by the College does not clearly indicate what proportion of articles are focused on subject as distinct from pedagogical research, or what proportion are peer-reviewed. Survey data suggests that between 2014-17 85 per cent of staff had read journals and other publications. The data also appears to suggest that only 55 per cent had updated reading lists as a result. However, the College believes this low figure was due to staff misunderstanding the question asked.

116 The picture is much stronger in terms of staff involved in disseminating research via conference presentations and other formats. Forty-eight members of staff attended external conferences between 2014-17, with 26 presenting papers or posters at conferences ranging from local network events to international Business and Biology conferences. Staff across various departments have represented the College at external events, such as the Association of Colleges National Conference on Healthcare Practice, British Psychology Society conference and the Leisure Studies Association conference. The RSA Report's survey data suggests that a much higher percentage of staff attend internal conferences and research events (94 per cent), such as Research Lunches, workshops or the Research Showcase.

117 There is evidence attesting to greater dissemination of research and scholarly activity within the College. Previously, staff reported that attendance at research events had been patchy, but between October 2017 and July 2018, nine research lunches were scheduled and attendance levels increased. In addition to newsletters and blogs, the College organises internal events that showcase staff scholarship. For example, in June 2018 the College

hosted a Psychology, Criminology and Sociology Conference, to which it invited potential applicants as well as local employers. The event was primarily intended as a marketing opportunity, where staff could outline recent work in their field to inspire potential students and employers. While the event was not primarily designed to disseminate original research or scholarship among programme staff, the presentations did demonstrate the considerable subject expertise of the staff who contributed. The College also organises an annual research showcase. This event is focused on the assessment of student presentations rather than on staff showcasing their research and scholarship. Many of these presentations demonstrated the centrality of research methods to students' programmes.

All higher education teaching staff have opportunities for accessing relevant employment experience and studying the implementation of relevant and up-to-date professional practice

118 The College's recruitment policies and job descriptions recognise the value of vocational expertise alongside academic qualifications and many staff have professional qualifications, memberships or industry experience. As noted in paragraph 107, a significant number of staff are members of professional bodies, with particularly high concentrations in vocational subjects. Data from 2018 suggests that 21 staff have either been seconded to industry and/or have other employment related to their discipline. A fair proportion of staff have carried out creative work, consultancy or professional practice. During programme approval events, the industry expertise of staff delivering programmes forms part of the discussion as to whether appropriate expertise is in place. External examiners comment positively, both on the professional expertise of staff delivering programmes and on the industrial and vocational opportunities available to students.

119 The College's Collective Agreement sets out both the expectations of staff in terms of professional updating and their entitlement to 21 days of CPD, 14 of which are self-directed. The expectation that staff maintain and refresh their knowledge of professional practice is widely understood and the College's survey evidence indicates that many staff use their self-directed CPD days to engage with industry or professional bodies. For example, staff delivering the College's maritime and adventure leadership programmes refreshed their instructor qualifications, while other staff worked with the Depression and Anxiety Service, Devon and Cornwall Police, and the Fisheries Agencies.

120 To aid staff access to relevant employment experience, the College organises Industry Liaison panels. These meetings attract a wide range of employers and are effective fora in which industry representatives meet with programme teams to give feedback on programme design, to identify skills gaps and/or to participate in 'live brief' assessments. The College also has also recently approved a Strategy for Enhancing Student Employability, that includes a commitment to engage with key stakeholders to ensure students are provided with current information on careers and employability. The College has previously gathered useful information on how employers are involved in programmes through Employability Reports. The College's new strategy seeks to build upon this by outlining plans to introduce central reporting of employer engagement activity and for a Higher Education Employability and Enterprise Co-ordinator to provide input to annual monitoring and attend Stage 2 programme approvals.

All higher education teaching staff have staff development and appraisal opportunities aimed at enabling them to develop and enhance their professional competence and scholarship

121 The College's HE Teaching, Learning and Scholarship Policy sets out its expectations of staff in terms of CPD. The College also has a comprehensive College-wide

CPD policy, which describes a framework of College CPD days, mandatory training and the range of teaching qualifications the College will support.

122 The College offers a wide range of CPD sessions, some of them HE-specific, mostly held on College CPD days. For new staff, sessions are provided on the FHEQ and academic regulations, while specific CPD days are organised for HE Leads and Section Heads. Levels of engagement with these activities are high (44 per cent of HE staff had organised a session between 2014-17). A CPD panel, with strong representation from higher education staff, organises and monitors this programme, although ultimate responsibility rests at Vice Principal level. Teaching and learning coaches deliver some of this activity along with more specific support, such as for peer-observation training.

123 CPD needs are identified through PPDR, and, as mentioned (see paragraph 102), there has recently been more focus on managers using PPDR to identify scholarship and personal development needs for higher education staff. Staff are using the RSA survey completed last year to identify needs. The College has also appointed an R&SA Development Coordinator, charged with working with staff to identify their CPD needs in relation to scholarship and supporting managers with the scholarship aspect of PPDR.

124 The College has in place a well embedded peer observation scheme for HE staff, to enhance professional competence. HELTAG developed and reviews the scheme, which requires all staff to observe teaching and be observed annually. The process is clear, broadly effective and fit for the purposes of higher education. Recent adjustments to the process have succeeded in making its documentation less prescriptive, albeit at the expense of simplicity and some explicit references to the UKPSF. By late 2017, 72 members of higher education teaching staff had been involved in observation activities.

125 Higher education CPD does not form a separate part of the agreed annual staff development budget, although there are specific funds for higher education available and all applications for support have been funded in recent years. The process for funding the pursuit of higher qualifications permits staff to apply for financial support to undertake master's and doctoral qualifications (normally up to £1,000 per year). Seven staff received financial support to study for postgraduate qualifications in 2016-17 and 14 are receiving support in 2017-18. More broadly, survey data suggests that around 50 per cent of staff undertook a higher qualification between 2014-17. However, the survey question was worded in a way that prevented differentiation between staff undertaking further qualifications while in role and those who had achieved them in the past. Updated 2018 data indicates that there are currently 21 staff members studying for higher level qualifications.

126 Taken together, the activities described represent an effective range of CPD structures and opportunities that enable staff to develop both as teaching professionals and subject experts.

Staff with key programme management responsibilities have relevant experience of curriculum development and assessment design

127 The College has a strong track record of developing programmes with the University through which staff have gained valuable experience in designing programmes and assessment. For example, staff successfully proposed an FdSc/HNC Electronics and Robotics Control Engineering and an FdSc/HNC Manufacturing and Mechatronic Engineering. Staff experience and readiness has also been enhanced through operation of the College's own two-stage internal approvals procedure. The College has issued extensive guidance about the process and the kinds of questions staff should consider when completing the documentation. For example, several College academics have recently prepared the proposal and supporting documentation necessary for a new FdA Creative Digital Design and have successfully taken these through the approvals procedure.

128 The University has also delegated considerable responsibility for assessment and module design, entrusting College staff not only with initial design but also with responsibility for subsequently evaluating and making changes to their design in response to student and external examiner feedback. Data provided in 2018 shows that 45 per cent of staff members have been involved in curriculum design and/or assessment design. There is some variation across the College, but a majority of academic leaders in every department have benefited from this experience. The College also makes good use of its staff during approvals processes. For example, during the recent approval of the FdA Creative Digital Design, a Section Head from an unrelated curriculum area served as a member of the panel reviewing the proposal.

Staff with key programme management responsibilities have relevant engagement with the activities of providers of higher education in other organisations (through, for example, involvement as external examiners, validation panel members, or external reviewers)

129 The College encourages staff to engage with other higher education providers and has organised training to assist staff who want to improve their academic CVs to secure external appointments. The Research and Scholarly Activity procedure contains inadequate detail about how the College will support this activity, however, compared to other elements of the strategy. Formally, the External Examiners Group takes responsibility for overseeing the engagement of College staff as external examiners for other providers, however, staff engagement in the quality assurance processes of other organisations has not been prominent on the agendas of either HESARG or the External Examiners Group.

130 A small number of staff have experience as external examiners or as members of external validation panels. According to 2018 data, five members of staff have served as external examiners, six have participated in external validation events, and two have acted as members of QAA review teams. A wider range of staff (between 15-26) participate in external networks or regional fora like the Torbay Development Agency's Digital Network, and 47 staff visited other providers in the period 2014-17. Between 2014 and 2017, nine staff also acted as academic/industry advisers to external organisations in a range of capacities.

131 Overall, a reasonable proportion of staff with key programme management responsibilities have relevant engagement with other providers. The programme co-ordinator for FdSc Healthcare Practice, BSc (Hons) Healthcare Practice, and BSc (Hons) Enhanced Integrated Care, for example, has experience as an external examiner and of participating in other providers' validation events. Similarly, the programme co-ordinators for FdA Teaching and Learning, FdSc Construction and FdSc Civil and Coastal Engineering have experience as external examiners. Amongst the wider HE management, the Deputy HE Manager, HEMAR and Principal have external experience in relation to HE, as do some members of the Governing Body.

132 However, not all of those with key programme management responsibilities engage with the activities of other HE providers. For example, there are six programmes in which none of the HE Leads or programme co-ordinators is recorded as having served as an external examiner or as a member of an external validation panel. There is a discrepancy, however, in at least one instance, between the record and what is recorded in CVs. It is also possible that other members of the programme team may possess the experience required: staff teaching modules on FdSc Sport & Exercise have experience with the quality assurance processes of other providers and the wider sector, for example.

D The environment supporting the delivery of foundation degree programmes

Criterion D1

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

The effectiveness of learning and teaching activities is monitored in relation to stated academic objectives and intended learning outcomes

133 The framework for learning and teaching activity is contained in the HE Framework, particularly the Teaching Learning and Scholarship Policy and the HE Assessment Practice Strategy, developed by HETLAG and approved by CHEBOS. The processes for monitoring academic outcomes and the quality of learning and teaching activity are clearly set out in the Programme Monitoring and Review Procedure and are the responsibility of HETLAG, CHEBOS and AIDB. Oversight is exercised effectively by the QLTA.

134 The College's quality monitoring processes were noted as robust in the 2014 QAA Higher Education Review and the College has continued to develop them subsequently. Student results are monitored at both AIDB and QLTA in relation to trends over time, type of programme and student demographic grouping. External examiners' comments on both outcomes and assessment practice and student feedback on their experience of learning teaching and assessment contribute to annual monitoring. Outcomes data include percentages of those enrolled who both complete and pass but do not monitor data relating to levels of performance of achieving students. These processes remain robust and enable the College to monitor the effectiveness of learning and teaching in relation to intended outcomes.

135 In addition to annual monitoring of outcomes, the College monitors teaching practice through learning walks and observations, on which it reports to QLTA. HETLAG has made considerable efforts to differentiate the HE peer observation process from that used for further education, although implementation of the resulting process has proved slower than hoped and there have been suggestions that the it may be over-complicated. The HETLAG report considered at CHEBOS in May 2018 noted that targets for learning walks and observations had not been met; discussion at the meeting noted the need for Section Heads to prioritise this.

136 The College has monitored graduate outcomes through the Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) survey; DHLE data are positive. In contrast, TEF 3 supplementary data sets relating to income five years post-graduation flag two areas as negative. While detailed high-level strategic oversight of academic outcomes is much in evidence, there is currently less of a forensic focus on employability outcomes; the HE Strategy for Enhancing Student Employability does not explicitly envisage monitoring destinations data, although the HEQAE Action Plan for 2017-18 identifies DLHE data as a measurable outcome of the Strategy. Although there is scope for a sharper focus on longer term outcomes, the processes currently in place are sufficient to provide an oversight of destinations outcomes.

Students are informed of the outcomes of assessments in a timely manner

137 The College makes a commitment within its HE Assessment Practice, repeated in the HE Student Charter, to provide feedback on assessments within 20 working days. This is

monitored through comments from external examiners, who are specifically asked about timeliness of feedback, and through the student voice, in particular via student surveys.

138 NSS results on the timeliness of feedback to students are largely positive and improving. In 2014, 75 per cent of students agreed that feedback on their work had been prompt; this rose to 80 per cent in 2016 and 80.8 per cent in 2017. In areas where student satisfaction is notably lower, the APM process leads programmes to address the issue. At its autumn 2017 meeting, the programme committee meeting of one of the lower performing programmes in this respect, commented that the introduction by the College of submission through an online assessment resource would improve matters.

Constructive and developmental feedback is given to students on their performance

139 The College provides clear, explicit guidance on providing feedback. The HE Assessment Practice Strategy outlines the expected approach to feedback on performance, stating that individual feedback is to be provided for all assessments and that the module guide must state clearly how and when this will happen. Students are to be given opportunities for formative assessments within modules and for draft summative work to be reviewed. There is a helpful template feedback form. Comments from one external examiner on variability in the quality of feedback has led to the establishment of a Documentation Evaluation Group charged with identifying good practice in assessment rubrics from elsewhere in the sector. College processes and clear concern to provide effective feedback result in a positive experience of feedback for students.

140 The National Student Survey (NSS) and Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ) results indicate that students generally find their feedback useful and that there is an upward trend in this regard. In the most recent NSS, 91.9 per cent of respondents agreed they had received helpful comments on work; there was some variability across the College but only two areas (level 6 Management and FdSc Healthcare Practice) were very slightly below the average for England.

Feedback from students, staff (and where relevant) employers and other institutional stakeholders is obtained and evaluated, and clear mechanisms exist to provide feedback to all such constituencies

141 The Student Engagement Strategy, updated in 2018 and available on the College website, outlines the ways in which student feedback is obtained and evaluated. The student voice is captured through the following means: the College Induction Survey; early module reviews, conducted six weeks into teaching in each semester; the SPQ for non-final year students; the NSS; the Student Support Services User Survey; and end-of-module questionnaires. Responses to surveys are considered thoroughly by HETLAG, CHEBOS and QLTAC. They are shared with programme teams and form part of discussions at APM programme committee meetings. Student representatives contribute to annual quality review by attending programme committees; the Academic Risk Register presented at CHEBOS in May 2018 noted that all programme committees had student representation that year. According to the NSS, students are generally happy that their voice is heard with 81.5 per cent of respondents being positive about their experience. There is evidence in the partnership annual monitoring reports of responsiveness to student concerns.

142 Course representatives meet together each term as part of the Student Consultative Forum. Outcomes from the forum are shared with the student body via the course representative Moodle page and are reported at CHEBOS. The elected Lead Student Representative represents the University student body at the AIDB and at Governors' meetings. While not particularly well attended, the Student Consultative Forum appears an effective formal channel for capturing and responding to student issues. The team also noted

that the size of student groups and the ready availability of higher education staff means that student issues tend to be resolved informally.

143 The team noted the absence of students at several other committees. The challenges faced by the College in engaging students in the broader life of the College, which are not unusual in the sector, are also evidenced by the recent cancellation of several student-led social events. The College has been attempting to increase student engagement with representative processes; recent amendments to the Student Engagement Strategy included rebranding student representatives as Student Academic Representatives (StARS) and adding two Student Fellow roles to spread the workload of representing students at the main committees relevant to the student experience.

144 The Governing Body considers the student voice on a termly basis and QLTAC receives student and employer feedback in the summer term, according to the statement of governing body oversight of higher education provision approved by QLTAC in March 2018. Minutes of QLTAC meetings in summer 2016 and 2017 show that previously QLTAC considered the views of students but not of employers.

145 The College's strategy is to engage in dialogue with employers via an annual skills summit, sector focus groups and industry liaison panels. The Recruitment and Retention Group noted in September 2017 that successful recruitment correlates with strong programme-level relationships with employers; there are ongoing efforts to ensure such relationships across the higher education provision. The HEQAE for 2017-18 includes the aim of further embedding the employer voice and both CHEBOS and HESG discussed the need for more robust capture of employer involvement. Various industry liaison meetings took place in May 2018, providing evidence of College activity to enhance these stakeholder relationships; industry liaison meetings cover most of the higher education provision and notes of the meetings are recorded against a template that ensures that all aspects of the relationship are reviewed. HETLAG has oversight of employment involvement and industry liaison meetings feed into programme management committees. Strategic oversight of employer feedback is currently less systematic than that of student feedback although the HE Strategy for Enhancing Student Employability envisages creating and monitoring a centralised mechanism for reporting on employer engagement activity.

146 Staff feedback on programmes is obtained through the quality cycle and Your Ideas encourages staff to provide ideas for improvements and innovations.

Students are advised about, and inducted into, their study programmes in an effective way, and account is taken of different students' needs

147 The HE Admissions and Enrolment Group, working with the HE Data and Information Group, coordinates arrangements for admissions and initial student induction. There is a comprehensive programme of pre-entry activity and communication ahead of the formal start of the programme, including workshops to prepare students for higher education. An induction survey evaluates the effectiveness of the initial induction process. There is evidence that the HE Admissions and Enrolment Group has introduced enhancements to induction in light of survey results. This thorough approach and constant search for ways of enhancing pre-entry activity and induction is effective.

148 The Supporting Your Success guide, HE Study Skills programme and tutorial support provide ongoing support for student transition into higher education. The HE Student Retention Strategy, developed by HE Recruitment and Retention Group and approved and kept under review by HESG, also aims to support student adjustment to higher education. Improving retention figures evidence the positive impact of this work.

Available learning support materials are adequate to support students in the achievement of the stated purposes of their study programmes

149 Learning resources and support are provided to students through the Learning Resources Centre (LRC) and the online environment, Moodle, as well as face-to-face by study skills support staff and programme staff. Consideration of resources forms part of the curriculum approval process and the annual LRC Operational Plan presents resource acquisition plans in response to NSS feedback. IT facilities to access online resources are available around the campus, with dedicated higher education resources in both the University Centre and LRC to access e-books, journals and physical resources. Free Wi-Fi is available throughout the campus, including a higher education-specific roaming wireless network. The College has recently implemented an online assessment and plagiarism-detection resource, through which all submissions for assessment are made and all marks and feedback are returned. Students and staff are generally happy with this system.

150 Students are satisfied in the main with the provision of both learning resources (88 per cent in the NSS, although with some variability and Design and Computer Studies students being the least content) and academic support (90.9 per cent in the NSS although again with some variability particularly in relation to the question on sufficient advice and guidance).

The effectiveness of any student and staff advisory and counselling services is monitored, and any resource needs arising are considered

151 The annual Student Support Services Review, which draws on the Student Support User Survey, is presented to CHEBOS. Initial analysis of the 2018 review generated the following findings: continued student awareness and satisfaction with the Well Being Service; a small increase in students who are unaware of the academic support available; an overall increase in satisfaction with academic support among those who use it; a decrease in the number of students who are unaware of available research support; and a high level of satisfaction among those who use research support. In 2017-18, higher education support staff recorded screencasts to be used during tutorials to address the challenge of resourcing face-to-face meetings with all groups during induction. The review indicated that students did not find this as effective and CHEBOS determined that further consideration be given to delivering the sessions in person. In addition, the Equality and Diversity Committee maintains oversight of support for students with particular needs and has been considering in some detail the issue of resourcing requirements under the new Disabled Students Allowance framework, as noted below.

152 The College uses the Investors in People framework as a method of reviewing support for the development and well-being of staff and has recently received the Platinum (top) level of accreditation.

Administrative support systems are able to monitor student progression and performance accurately, and provide timely and accurate information to satisfy academic and non-academic management information needs

153 The HE Data Quality and Information Group (HEDIG), chaired by the Assistant Principal with responsibility for systems and information, maintains oversight of the management of data and servicing of information needs, on behalf of HESG. In recognition of the complex data needs of higher education provision, the College has appointed a full-time HE Data Coordinator who is a member of this group. HEDIG operates effectively: the Group makes robust use of a rolling HE Data and Information Action Plan to oversee projects in progress and adopts a thorough approach to keeping itself informed about relevant changes in the higher education landscape. Examples of enhancements effected

through the work of this Group include recognition of the need to be able to deal with complex funding arrangements for higher level courses; and recently, data collection and analysis of outcomes for students by demographic characteristic to support the College's equal opportunities work.

154 Higher education meetings and committees are well supplied with data to support academic and non-academic decision making. For example, the Retention and Recruitment Group was able to use data to pinpoint the start of the spring term as a period with a high rate of withdrawal within an overall improving picture. SAPs and award boards are supplied with necessary information, including key statistical data, in both soft and hard copy. HESG recognises the need for amendments to systems to align the live application dashboard with planning targets and thereby avoid a manual workaround. However, staff turnover within the Learner Information Services Team has prevented the College achieving this within the desired time-scale.

Effective and confidential mechanisms are in place to deal with all complaints regarding academic and non-academic matters

155 Both the HE Complaints Procedure and the (Plymouth University) Academic Appeals Procedure are available on the College website. They are explained to students through several mechanisms including the Student Charter and the Student Handbook, issued electronically to all students. Considerable work has been done to ensure that the HE Students Complaints Procedure (Academic) and the HE Students Complaints Procedure (Service) are distinct from one another, giving careful attention to the detail of the complaints process. College awareness of good practice in relation to student complaints is strengthened by the HE Deputy Manager's membership of the Advisory Board for the OIA.

156 CHEBOS receives and considers thoroughly an analysis of the complaints received via the HE Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee and reports on any overarching issues to AIDB which in turn reports to QLTAC. The Governing Body oversees complaints effectively through termly reports from Student Governors and the annual report to QTLA. CHEBOS recently noted the implementation of a CPD session for staff in responding to complaints. Data demonstrates that there are very few formal complaints.

Staff involved with supporting the delivery of the organisation's higher education provision are given adequate opportunities for professional development

157 The College's CPD policy, which addresses staff development for both academic and professional services staff, acknowledges the particular needs of the higher education provision. Professional development requirements are identified through various means including feedback from PPDR processes and surveys of staff. Implementation of the policy is overseen by the CPD Panel; minutes of meetings, records of expenditure, lists of CPD activity and feedback from staff all provide evidence of numerous professional development opportunities for all staff involved in higher education. As mentioned, recognition of the quality of CPD was provided in 2017 by the award to the College of the Investors in People Platinum award.

Information that the organisation produces concerning its higher education provision is accurate and complete

158 In addition to its responsibility for academic and non-academic management information, HEDIG also oversees the collection and reporting of data to funding and other bodies and the publication of information concerning higher education provision. HEDIG develops and updates the Public Information Procedure and the Student Contract which are approved by HESG. In 2017 HEDIG undertook a review of the College's arrangements for

higher education public information, in light of Competition and Markets Authority requirements and the HEFCE good practice guidance for programme-level information. This led to revised processes for collecting and updating programme information, revision of the programme fact sheet and a new 'sign-off' protocol to ensure accuracy of information. On the recommendation of HEDIG, the College has created an enhanced public information webpage for higher education which includes all higher education regulations, contracts, policies, procedures and strategies.

159 In general, the College has effective processes in place to ensure that the information it produces concerning its higher education provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team noted two instances where this was not the case. A review of published information, undertaken by Marketing and the HE team, found that the cover of the HE prospectus 2016-17 could be misleading; it was consequently removed from circulation. The team also identified misleading phrasing on the College website suggesting that QAA had rated the College as one of the leading quality colleges for studying higher education in the South-West. The College acknowledges that the word 'rates' is inappropriate but at the time of writing it had not yet removed it from its online prospectus.

Equality of opportunity is sought and achieved in the organisation's activities

160 The College Higher Education Strategy states that 'South Devon College is passionate about providing excellent quality, accessible and employment focused Higher Education'. The College has a Single Equality Scheme, which is reviewed and reapproved every three years by QLTA and was last reviewed in March 2018. QTLA also receives and considers the annual Equality and Diversity Report. The Equality and Diversity Committee, chaired by the VP Curriculum, which for higher education purposes reports to HE Strategy Board, monitors the Scheme effectively. Equality impact assessments are undertaken for all policies and procedures.

161 The College is a leading participant in Next Steps South West (a HEFCE commissioned National Collaborative Outreach Programme), which aims to widen participation in higher education through outreach activity targeted at schools. Since 2013-14, the proportion of young students from low participation neighbourhoods has been sustained at 48 per cent, while the proportion of mature students has risen to 25 per cent, exceeding the target of 12 per cent. The HE Admissions Policy details the College's policies on recruitment, interviewing, entry requirements and other admissions issues and is available online to prospective and current students. It includes a commitment to treat all applicants fairly, consistently and expeditiously.

162 Students with disabilities are over-represented at the College and, following the reduction in funding for students with disability needs, the College has increased the resource allocated to the Well-being and Support Team. The team has now grown to five staff, with an increased budget to support targeted activities. The College has also developed more inclusive teaching, learning and assessment practices, supported by CPD for staff. The Well-being Team undertakes specific equality of opportunity assessment checks on a sample of assessment annually, better to support staff and identify areas for future staff development.

163 There was ample and clear evidence of the College's commitment to support and promote equality of opportunity from the Governing Body downwards. TEF split metrics and internal College monitoring of course outcomes confirm that there is no difference in outcomes for students from different demographic groups.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557 000
Website: www.qaa.ac.uk